

US Promises More Aid to the Pacific Islands

The United States promised members of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) key development and infrastructure aid packages of \$200 million at their second annual summit in Washington. The Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare skipped the summit in an apparent snub. While Sogavare's absence demonstrates his government's preference for China despite US inroads (such as reopening an embassy), US engagement with the Pacific Islands is key to contain China. The US spent most of the early 20th century expanding from the North American continent in order to secure herself in her hemisphere. In the Pacific the US made numerous security alliances with the small Pacific Islands as it came to see them as stepping stones for anyone who wanted to challenge the US. The US used the Japanese actions during WW2 to complete its dominance of the Pacific. But as the Cold War began the US came to neglect the Pacific as it focused on Eurasia and the Atlantic. In the last decade as the US was busy in the Muslim world and China used its economic heft to develop economic relations with the Island and is now agreeing defence deals, with the Soloman Islands agreeing to a Chinese military presence. The Pacific Ocean will be a key battleground between the two powers.

Egypt Presidential Election Set for December

The chair of Egypt's National Election Authority said a presidential vote will take place on 10-12 December 2023 with a possible run-off on 8-10 January 2024 if no candidate takes 50%, in the first nationwide election since 2018. Al-Sisi may not win the first round of elections outright due to widespread discontent over the state of the economy, but his control of the media, political system and security forces ensures that he would win the runoff. However, Egypt's ongoing economic struggles and the prospect of al-Sisi's continued leadership could foment a viable opposition movement and even an uprising that aims to repeat the successful 2011 revolution. Though several opposition figures have already announced they are running, all have complained of harassment by security forces, and few observers expect them to be able to campaign freely or fairly. In 2019, Egypt's presidential terms were extended from four years to six years, meaning the next term will end in 2030.

'Israel' Softens on Saudi Nuclear Enrichment

US and 'Israeli' officials are working on a plan for a Saudi civilian nuclear program that would allow Saudi Arabia to enrich uranium on its own soil, which is a key demand of Saudi Arabia amid negotiations over 'Israeli'-Saudi normalization. The Jewish entity's Foreign Minister Eli Cohen also suggested that a framework for normalisation might be ready by early 2024. However, the Knesset and Congress remain skeptical, as it is unclear how safeguards on Saudi nuclear enrichment would work. Additionally, some forces in Congress and the Knesset continue to oppose other concessions to Saudi Arabia associated with normalisation, including an American security pact for Riyadh and concessions to the Palestinians. 'Israeli' opposition leader Yair Lapid said 'Israel' should oppose any Saudi nuclear enrichment program, as Saudi Arabia eventually could use this capability to develop nuclear weapons. On Sept. 20, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman once again threatened to acquire a nuclear weapon should Iran get one, though he said Saudi Arabia preferred neither country to have such weapons.

Pakistan to Evict over 1 million Afghan Refugees

Pakistan has decided to send back all the illegal Afghan refugees in a major policy decision, which is seen in the context of ongoing tensions between the two countries. Official sources said that the caretaker federal cabinet, through a circulation summary, approved the decision to repatriate as many as 1.1 million Afghan refugees residing in Pakistan illegally. Sources say as many as 400,000 Afghans entered Pakistan illegally since the return of the Afghan Taliban to Afghanistan in August 2021, adding that there have been another 700,000 Afghans identified who have been living in the country illegally. The cabinet gave authorities the go-ahead to make arrangements for sending all these Afghans back to their homeland. The crackdown against the illegal Afghan refugees came against the backdrop of simmering tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan on the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Afghan Taliban's reluctance to launch a crackdown against the TTP. Pakistan is frustrated that despite repeated demands the Afghan Taliban are reluctant to take action against the TTP. Last week, a Pakistani delegation led by special envoy on Afghanistan Ambassador Asif Durrani visited Kabul to press upon the Taliban government to take action against the TTP.