



# Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



## India's Proximity Archives December 20, 2023



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**Delhi Policy Group**

Core 5A, 1st Floor, India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi- 110003

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### ABOUT US

Founded in 1994, the Delhi Policy Group (DPG) is among India's oldest think tanks with its primary focus on strategic and international issues of critical national interest. DPG is a non-partisan institution and is independently funded by a non-profit Trust. Over past decades, DPG has established itself in both domestic and international circles and is widely recognised today among the top security think tanks of India and of Asia's major powers.

Since 2016, in keeping with India's increasing global profile, DPG has expanded its focus areas to include India's regional and global role and its policies in the Indo-Pacific. In a realist environment, DPG remains mindful of the need to align India's ambitions with matching strategies and capabilities, from diplomatic initiatives to security policy and military modernisation.

At a time of disruptive change in the global order, DPG aims to deliver research based, relevant, reliable and realist policy perspectives to an actively engaged public, both at home and abroad. DPG is deeply committed to the growth of India's national power and purpose, the security and prosperity of the people of India and India's contributions to the global public good. We remain firmly anchored within these foundational principles which have defined DPG since its inception.

### India's Proximity Archives

India's Proximity Archives covers major developments in South Asia, East Asia, Southeast Asia, West Asia, China, and Central Asia of strategic relevance to India, compiled from open-source media. The research team includes Angana Guha Roy, Ph.D., Shreyas Deshmukh, Sanket Joshi, Anshita Shukla and Jayantika Rao T.V, Research Associates. Your comments and feedback can be addressed to Sanket Joshi at [sanket@dpg.org.in](mailto:sanket@dpg.org.in).

### Cover Image:

**South Asia** - Pakistan Chief of Army Staff General Asim Munir met with US Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken in Washington on December 15, 2023. Source: [The News](#)

**Southeast Asia** - Japan's Prime Minister Kishida with leaders of ASEAN countries at the Commemorative Summit for the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation held in Tokyo on December 17, 2023. Source: [ASEAN/Official Website](#)

**West Asia** - US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin convened a virtual meeting with representatives from 43 countries, NATO, and the EU to discuss the increased Houthi threat to maritime security in the Red Sea, December 19, 2023. Source: [Official X Handle/Secretary of Defence Lloyd J. Austin III](#)

**Central Asia** - Joint photo session for heads of delegations taking part in the meeting of the CIS Council of Heads of Government on December 18, 2023. Source: [Government of Russia](#)

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## South Asia

by

Shreyas Deshmukh

Pakistan Army Chief, General Syed Asim Munir, is on an official [visit to the US](#) from December 10. During his visit, he [held meetings](#) with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin, and Gen. Michael Erik Kurilla, the Commander of the US Central Command (Centcom). In a news briefing on December 18, US State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller said Pakistan is a "major non-Nato ally of the United States and a Nato partner". Further, he said, "We look forward to partnering with them on regional security and defence cooperation." In the meetings, Pakistan and the US [agreed to enhance cooperation](#) on matters related to counter-terrorism and defence collaboration, according to ISPR's statement.

The Maldives government has decided to [not renew an agreement](#) with India that allowed India to conduct hydrographic surveys in Maldivian waters. The agreement was signed in 2019 during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the Maldives when President Ibrahim Solih was in power. Maldives' Under Secretary for Public Policy Mohamed Firuzul on December 14 said that, as part of the new [government's roadmap](#), all bilateral and diplomatic agreements with other countries that would put the country's sovereignty in danger will be revoked.

On the backdrop of upcoming general elections political violence is intensifying in Bangladesh. On December 19, protesters [set a train ablaze](#) killing four people, amid a countrywide strike called by the opposition party BNP. "Apart from setting fire to trains, parts of the railway line are being removed at several places," said Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujan. The Government has [deployed](#) 148 platoons of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) along with 422 patrol teams of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) to maintain law and order across the country.

### Other Developments

[Nepal's nod to Dhaka's proposal on trilateral energy cooperation](#)

[Russia doubles gas exports to Afghanistan](#)

[Pakistan and China have signed several memoranda of understanding \(MoUs\) for a hefty investment of USD10 billion in four major export-oriented sectors.](#)

[Pakistan Federal cabinet approves Pakistan's first-ever National Space Policy](#)

## Southeast Asia

by

Anshita Shukla

The [Commemorative Summit for the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation](#) was convened in Tokyo, Japan on December 17. The meeting was co-chaired by Prime Minister Kishida of Japan and President Joko Widodo of Indonesia. During the Summit, President Widodo highlighted two priority areas of the ASEAN - strengthening food and energy security and accelerating digital transformation. The leaders reaffirmed their "respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, settlement of differences or disputes by peaceful means and renunciation of the threat or use of force", according to the joint statement.

On the sidelines of the commemorative ASEAN-Japan Summit, Indonesian President Joko Widodo held a [bilateral meeting](#) with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida on December 16. The two sides agreed to remove trade barriers on processed fishery items, improve relations in the banking sector, collaborate on critical minerals, and the implementation of the amended Indonesia-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (IJEPA) by the first quarter of 2024. During the meeting, Japan also agreed to provide a patrol vessel worth nine billion yen (\$84 million) to the Indonesian coastguard, according to Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi.

As tensions escalate in the South China Sea, a U.S. aircraft carrier, the [USS Carl Vinson, docked in Singapore](#) on December 19. The aircraft carrier was accompanied by other vessels under America's "Carrier Strike Group One" fleet including a missile cruiser and guided missile destroyers. "This team - Carrier Strike Group One - is a powerful symbol of our resolve as a U.S. Navy to commit to free and open use of maritime commons in the face of coercion or aggression -- we're not going anywhere", stated Rear Adm. Carlos Sardiello.

### Other Developments

[Myanmar stands on humanitarian 'precipice', UN warns](#)

[Myanmar ethnic minority fighters seize town from military](#)

## East Asia

by

Anshita Shukla

The Foreign Minister of China, Wang Yi, held [a high-level meeting](#) with the Deputy Foreign Minister of the DPRK, Pak Myong Ho, in Beijing on December 18. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China stated that the two sides exchanged views on “issues of mutual interest”. Deputy Foreign Minister Pak Myong Ho underscored DPRK’s intent to “enhance coordination with China on multilateral affairs, safeguard the common interests of the two countries, and contribute to peace and stability in the region.”

South Korea and Japan reported the [launch of a solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missile \(ICBM\) by North Korea](#) on December 18. It was the second launch by Pyongyang in hours, reaching a maximum altitude of more than 6,000 km before falling into the sea west of Hokkaido outside Japan’s exclusive economic zone. The missile has the potential to travel more than 15,000 km giving it a range to hit anywhere in mainland US or Japan. South Korea’s National Security Council characterised the launch as “a destabilising act”.

China has warned companies of [countermeasures on the sale of arms to Taiwan](#) on December 18. This comes a week after the US approved a USD 300 million (S\$400 million) deal to strengthen Taipei’s joint battle command and control system. Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin stated that the US “should stop the dangerous trend of arming Taiwan, stop creating tensions in the Taiwan Strait, and stop indulging and supporting the separatist forces of Taiwan independence in their quest for achieving independence by force”.

On the sidelines of the commemorative ASEAN-Japan Summit, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida held a [bilateral meeting with the Malaysian Prime Minister](#) Anwar Ibrahim in Tokyo on December 16. The two sides agreed on a security assistance deal including a grant of 400 million yen (S\$3.7 million) to boost Malaysia’s maritime security. Under this deal, Japan will provide equipment such as rescue boats and supplies to Malaysia.

## Other Developments

[Taiwan reports another suspected Chinese weather balloon crossing Taiwan Strait](#)

[Singapore, Japan to pursue deeper ties in digital and green sectors, starting with maritime shipping](#)



## West Asia

by

Sanket Joshi

Amidst Israel's bombardment of Gaza, Yemen's Houthi rebels have escalated [attacks on commercial ships](#) in the Red Sea, which has caused major shipping companies to suspend their operations. On December 18, to ensure freedom of navigation in the Red Sea, US Defence Secretary, Lloyd Austin, announced the establishment of "[Operation Prosperity Guardian](#)", a new multinational security initiative under the umbrella of the Combined Maritime Forces. On December 19, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also discussed the importance of [ensuring the safety of maritime traffic](#) in the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb.

US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin visited Tel Aviv and met with Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defence Minister Yoav Gallant on December 18. Secretary Austin reiterated the US' unwavering commitment to Israel's security and declined to set a [timeline for Israeli military operations in Gaza](#) intended to dismantle Hamas. Moreover, Secretary Austin met with Qatar's Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani in Doha on December 19. As part of his remarks, Secretary Austin reiterated Washington's commitment to strengthening its strategic relationship with Qatar. He also thanked Qatar for its efforts to secure the [release of 110 hostages](#) held by Hamas.

Amidst the mounting tensions in the Middle East, on December 15, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi hosted the Deputy Foreign Ministers of Saudi Arabia and Iran for the first meeting of the [China-Saudi Arabia-Iran trilateral joint committee](#). Wang Yi urged Riyadh and Tehran to remain committed to the strategic choice of reconciliation, explore opportunities for cooperation, and reject external interference. Saudi Arabia and Iran welcomed China's greater role in the Middle East.



## Other Developments

[Indian Navy Deploys Warships Off Coast of Aden to Enhance Naval Security Against Houthi Militia](#)

[India declares state mourning on death of Kuwait's Amir](#)

[COP28 in Dubai concludes with landmark UAE Consensus to transition away from fossil fuels](#)

[UN vote on Gaza delayed another day amid talks to avoid US veto](#)

[Biden's national security adviser says Israel will move to a new phase of war focusing on precisely targeting Hamas leadership](#)

## China

by

Angana Guha Roy

In a significant strategic and diplomatic blow to China, [Sri Lanka has reportedly imposed a 12-month moratorium](#) on granting permissions to foreign research vessels to operate in its waters. Reports claim, the decision was taken in a bid to prevent Chinese 'research-cum-spy' ships from docking at Lankan ports. "The government is considering a year-long moratorium on granting permission for foreign research vessels to conduct surveys in Sri Lankan waters or its exclusive economic zone (EEZ)," a senior Lankan minister stated.

Speaking at the annual ["Results of the Year" news conference](#), Russian President Vladimir Putin estimated that trade value with China may reach a record USD 230 billion this year, much higher than a previously expressed USD 200 billion target. Additionally, he stressed the depth of Russia's cooperation with China, amidst Western outcry for sanctions against the country. Referring to the state of the trade ties at a decent level, he underlined that Russia and China are steadily progressing economic ties "across the board", particularly in infrastructure construction and hi-tech industries.

Amidst the call for de-risking, reports claim that the [EU will present an "initiative" on screening outbound investments in 2024](#), as part of a package of tools aimed at de-risking its trading ties with China. The European Commission at present is working with its member states and businesses on economic security tools since June, trade chief Valdis Dombrovskis mentioned recently in a speech to the European Parliament.

### Other Developments

['Xi Jinping won't forget...': General Naravane on India-China clash in Galwan](#)

[Gansu earthquake: Over 120 killed in China's deadliest quake in years](#)

[Alibaba CEO Eddie Wu to lead Taobao and Tmall e-commerce business in latest reshuffle](#)

[Huawei to start building first European factory in France in 2024, sources say](#)

[Tentative truce shows China's influence – and its limits – in Myanmar](#)

## Central Asia

by

Jayantika Rao T.V.

The meeting of the [Council of Heads of Government of the Commonwealth of Independent States](#) (CIS) was held in Moscow on December 18. The leaders highlighted the importance of the CIS as an important platform for dialogue and interaction among participating states in many domains. Armenia who has been absent from many pro-Russian meetings was [represented by Deputy Prime Minister Mher Grigoryan](#). Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan is [scheduled](#) to take part in the upcoming council of CIS leaders meeting in Saint Petersburg on December 25-26.

The [18<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Coordinating Council for Cooperation with the European Union](#) was held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan on December 15. At the meeting, the members of the Coordinating Council and the EU delegation discussed the implementation of the Multi-year Indicative Program of the European Union for the Kyrgyz Republic for 2021-2027. The parties discussed issues of program cooperation in areas such as digital transformation, education, the rule of law and support for the justice system, green economy, as well as protection of public health, safety, and the environment. The Coordinating Council confirmed the readiness of the parties to continue active cooperation between the Kyrgyz Republic and the European Union.

Kyrgyz President Sadyr Japarov has [defended the decision to hold a closed trial](#) of dozens of politicians, journalists, and activists charged in connection with objections to a Kyrgyz-Uzbek border demarcation deal. President Japarov said an organiser of the [Kempir-Abad protest](#), "had received money from the ambassador of an unnamed country and the disclosure could break the Kyrgyz relationship with that state".

### Other Developments

[CIS Countries Sign a Statement on Cultural-Humanitarian Cooperation](#)  
[Delegation from Uzbekistan discusses developing business cooperation with Shanghai officials](#)

[Uzbekistan Gazettes Decree Ratifying Protocol Terminating 1992 Protocol on DTAs for CIS Jurisdictions](#)

[Russia's Putin expects to meet with other CIS countries' leaders during informal meeting in St. Petersburg](#)



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