

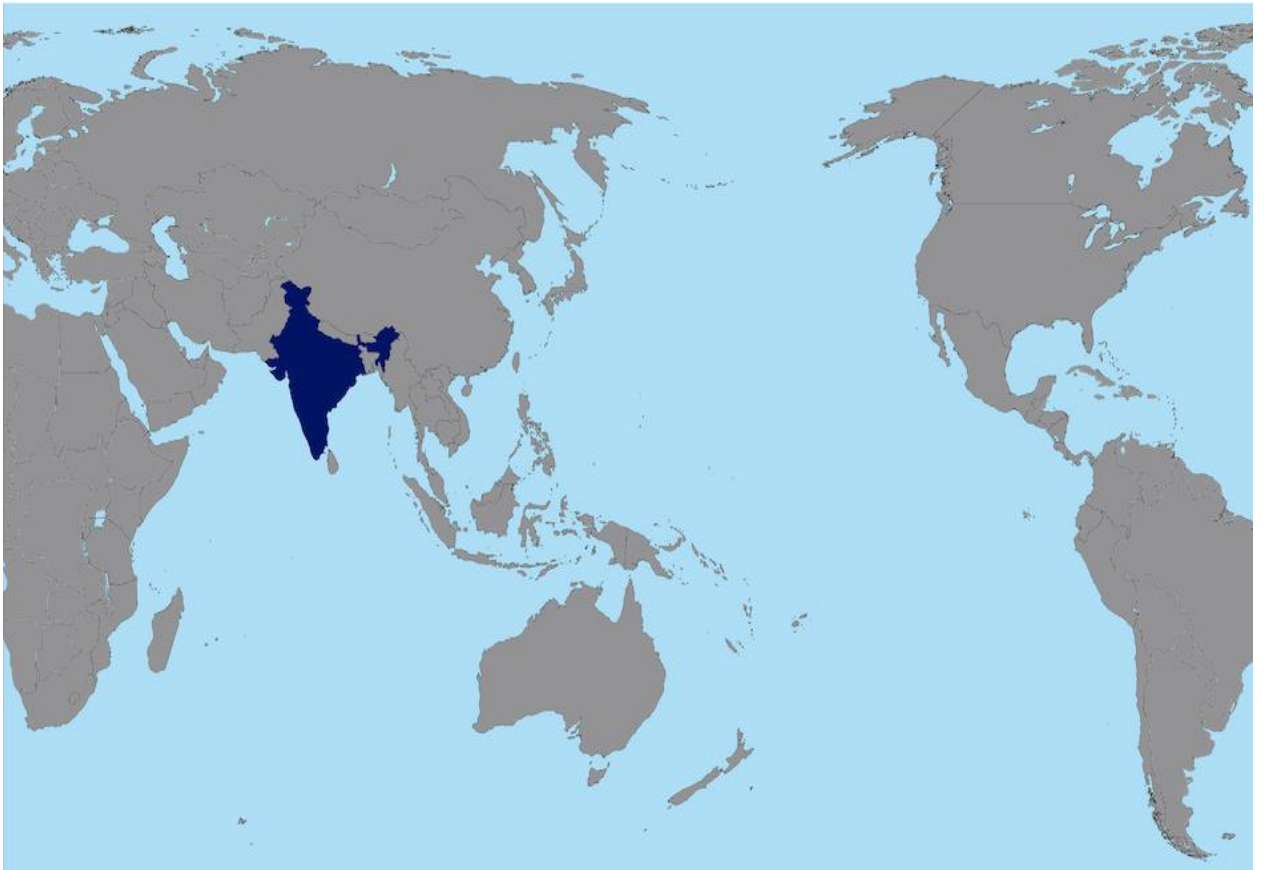


Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



DPG INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR OCTOBER 2020



Volume I, Issue 10 | October 2020

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.

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DPG INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

This publication is a monthly analytical survey of developments and policy trends that impact India's interests and define its challenges across the extended Indo-Pacific maritime space, which has become the primary theatre of global geopolitical contestation. It is authored by Cmde. Lalit Kapur (Retd.), DPG Senior Fellow for Maritime Strategy, with the assistance of a team of DPG Research Associates comprising Anushka Nair, Angana Guha Roy, Antara Ghosal Singh and Libni Garg, based on open source reports and publications. Your comments and feedback may be addressed to Anushka Nair at anushka@dpg.org.in. To subscribe, please [click here](#).

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DPG INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

OCTOBER 2020

Overview

Covid 19 infected over 12 million in October, raising its total impact list to more than 45 million people. This included POTUS and FLOTUS. The former was hospitalised and returned to the White House after treatment; the latter convalesced at the White House. Over 180,000 people died due to the disease during the month. 170 vaccine candidates were under development, with eight reported to be close to completing the final stage of testing. The IMF World Economic Outlook October 2020 projected a contraction of 4.4% in the global economy during the current year due to the impact of the virus.

China, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia were elected to the UNHRC for the period 2021 – 2023. Honduras ratified the Treaty on Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons on October 24, 2020, triggering its entry into force 90 days hence, despite none of the world's nuclear powers being a signatory. Japan and India joined the Five Eyes in calling on communication service providers to embed safety of the public in their system design and build backdoors to enable the law enforcement apparatuses to bring to justice those using their platforms for sexual exploitation and abuse of children, violent crime, and terrorist propaganda and terrorist attack planning. The UK House of Commons Defence Committee found that the presence of Huawei equipment in British networks increased the risk of cyber attack by individuals and authoritarian states such as Russia and China, thus justifying Huawei's designation as a high-risk vendor. The Swedish Post and Telecom Authority banned usage of equipment from Huawei and ZTE by carriers bidding for frequencies in an upcoming auction for 5G spectrum and directed that existing equipment from these companies in 5G telecommunications infrastructure be replaced by January 1, 2025. The UN announced that the Treaty on Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons would enter into force in January 2021, three months after being ratified by the 50th state.

The Indo-Pacific construct continued to gather momentum and belie Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's belief that it was "so much sea foam". Foreign ministers from the Quad countries met in Tokyo during the month, decided on concrete areas of cooperation and announced regularisation of their annual meeting. India invited Australia to participate in Exercise Malabar 2020 and

Australia accepted the invitation with alacrity. Christophe Penot, till recently the French Ambassador to Australia, assumed charge as the first French Ambassador to the Indo-Pacific. China continued to rant against the Indo-Pacific and the Quad even while denying they had a future. It warned that it may detain American nationals unless the Justice Department stops prosecution of Chinese military-affiliated scholars in the US. It also warned Canada to stop granting asylum to Hong Kong democracy activists if it was concerned about the health and safety of the 300,000 Canadian citizens who live in Hong Kong and announced that it was considering stopping recognising BN (O) passports as valid travel documents, an action that would close the path the British government has opened for its overseas citizens in Hong Kong to emigrate and seek UK citizenship.

As the US shifted focus from terror and the Atlantic to authoritarianism and the Indo-Pacific and opinion in Western Europe and the US coalesced on the need to effectively counter a sullen and unresponsive China, terror and the manipulation of religious emotions for political purposes reared their head in Western Europe and the Middle East. A speech by President Macron following the barbaric beheading of a teacher led a personal attack using unacceptable language by President Erdogan of Turkey, prompting a statement of support for the French President from India. Pakistan's National Assembly voted to recall its envoy to France, forgetting that the post has been vacant for the last three months. Meanwhile, the FATF, at its meeting from October 21 – 23, 2020, decided to retain Pakistan on its grey list, along with Indo-Pacific countries such as Cambodia, Mauritius, Myanmar, Uganda, Yemen and Zimbabwe. It also retained North Korea and Iran on its black list.

Commemorating the 20th anniversary of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, Minister Wang Yi spoke of the leap in China-Africa relations from a "new type of partnership" to a "comprehensive strategic and cooperative partnership. Sudan joined the UAE and Bahrain in normalising its relations with Israel, while the European Union agreed to help Mozambique combat the insurgency in the Cabo Delgado region. Reverend Wavel Ramkalawan was sworn in as the fifth President of Seychelles.

Fighting intensified in Yemen, impeding relief efforts and calling into question the continued survival of the region's inhabitants. As the UN arms embargo on Iran came to an end, the US announced sanctions on 18 major Iranian banks and five Iranian entities to deprive Iran of funds to carry out its support for terror activities and to punish it for spreading disinformation and attempting to undermine US elections. Delegations from Bahrain, Israel and the US met in

Manama to sign an agreement committing the three to advance a strategic agenda for peace and prosperity in the Middle East.

President Trump tweeted that all US troops should be out of Afghanistan by Christmas, while the US launched air strikes against the Taliban in Helmand province. Attacks by militants in Ormara and North Waziristan (FATA) left 20 security personnel dead. Pakistan notified a ban on TikTok due to its “immoral/indecent content”, even as reports emerged that it was preparing to sell two islands off Karachi to China. Pakistan’s naval chief announced that the Pakistan Navy would add over 50 vessels, including 20 major warships, to its fleet.

The standoff in Eastern Ladakh continued, with a stalemate on the sequence of withdrawal from areas occupied by the two sides. India’s Army Chief and Foreign Secretary visited Myanmar together to boost bilateral ties, while Deputy Secretary Stephen Beigun visited India and spoke of a pattern of security partnerships very different from the alliance structure that had characterised the Cold War. The 13th India – Japan Foreign Ministers’ Strategic Dialogue took place after the Quad ministers meeting in Tokyo. The India US 2 + 2 ministerial held towards the end of the month resulted in the signing of BECA and a comprehensive joint statement which will provide the template for evolution of the bilateral relationship in the years ahead. India tested a range of indigenously developed weapons and commissioned the fourth of its stealth corvettes under Project 28, while the indigenous aircraft carrier (INS Vikrant) commenced its basin trials. The Indian Navy announced that the first phase of Exercise Malabar 2020 would be held in the Bay of Bengal from November 03 – 06, 2020, while the second phase would be held in the Arabian Sea from November 17 – 20, 2020.

South East Asia witnessed a flurry of visits, with China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi undertaking a tour of Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia and Thailand; Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide visiting Vietnam and Indonesia and signalling greater purpose in contributing to regional security as well as facilitating arms transfers; Australian Defence Minister Linda Reynolds visiting Japan, Singapore, Brunei and the Philippines; and Indonesia’s Defence Minister Prabowo Subianto visiting the US. Indonesia and Singapore agreed to establish a reciprocal green lane enabling travel between the two countries. Cambodia demolished a US built tactical headquarters at Ream Naval Base, raising concern that it was preparing to host PRC military assets at the base. The Indonesia Navy seized three Vietnamese fishing vessels operating illegally in the Natuna Sea, while the Malaysia Maritime Enforcement Agency detained 60 Chinese nationals and six Chinese fishing vessels for trespassing into

Malaysian waters. Myanmar put on display the submarine it recently acquired from India in a naval exercise, while the Philippines lifted a moratorium on petroleum exploration in the South China Sea.

Taiwan said it had spent over \$ 900 million in scrambling its fighters to intercept intruding Chinese aircraft since the beginning of the year. The US administration notified Congress of its plan to sell Taiwan a range of military equipment, prompting the announcement of sanctions by China on the companies concerned, while Taiwan's National Day celebrations led to an upsurge of support for it in New Delhi and an unsavoury incident in Fiji. North Korea unveiled the world's largest road-mobile liquid-fuelled ICBM and a new SLBM. Amidst increasing intrusions into its waters by the PRC Coastguard, Japan renamed the Senkaku Islands as Tonoshiro Senkaku. Japan also moved towards a framework for SDF personnel to protect Australian Defence Force assets, launched the first of its Taigei-class submarines and announced its intention to sign an agreement to facilitate export of defence equipment and technology to Vietnam. JMSDF ships exercised with Australian, Canadian and US forces in the South China Sea. In China, President Xi Jinping prepared his people for coming conflicts and stoked nationalist flames in an inflammatory speech on the 70th anniversary of China's entry into the Korean War. The fifth plenary session of the 19th Communist Party Central Committee highlighted China's achievements during the 13th Plan period, set development targets for the 14th Plan (2021 – 2025) as well as long-term targets till 2035 and identified 12 steps to attain these goals. China filed a spectrum application with the International Telecommunication Union for two constellations comprising 12,992 satellites in low earth orbit, as part of its plans for a global 5G communications network.

Australia experienced an unannounced ban on its coal and cotton exports to China, while its parliament planned to debate whether it should withdraw from the 2020 Beijing winter Olympics. Australia also announced plans to counter disinformation campaigns by authoritarian states and action to secure supplies of critical minerals and technology in a bid to reduce reliance on China. Defence Minister Linda Reynolds announced that the ADF would not extend its annual deployment of ships to the Middle East beyond December 2020 so as to focus its assets in the Indo-Pacific. In a referendum, New Caledonian voters rejected the option of independence from France by a narrow margin. The US announced that it was investigating the feasibility of basing its Coastguard cutters in American Samoa to counter the PRC's IUU fishing.

In the US, Secretary of Defense Mark Esper outlined his Battle Force 2045 plan, which targets a force of over 500 manned and unmanned ships by 2045. He

also visited Bahrain, affirmed the importance of the US-Bahrain security relationship and their shared commitment to advancing stability and security in the Arabian Peninsula. Assistant Secretary of State Robert A Destro of the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour was concurrently designated as the US Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues and welcomed the head of Tibet's government-in-exile in his office. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo visited Sri Lanka, Maldives, Indonesia and Vietnam after his visit to India. The purpose of all visits was to highlight democratic freedoms, commonalities and bilateral cooperation in various fields, bring out the challenges posed by the CCP's predatory and opportunistic actions and the threat this posed to regional stability and security, and build stronger bilateral cooperation. The US Justice Department arrested five people, including three Chinese nationals, for their alleged involvement in trying to force a US resident to return to China as part of its 'Operation Fox Hunt', intended to target dissidents and critics of President Xi Jinping living abroad. USS John McCain entered the waters near the Paracel Islands for a Freedom of Navigation Operation, while USS Barry conducted a transit of the Taiwan Straits and the USS Ronald Reagan carrier group exercised in the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. Exercise Keen Sword 2020, involving Canadian, Japanese and US forces and led at the Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff level, got underway.

An elaboration of these and other Indo-Pacific developments in October 2020, with relevant links, is contained in the succeeding paragraphs.

The Global Scene

COVID-19 continued its spread unabated [infecting over 12 million people](#) and killing over 180,000 in the month of October alone. The United States led the tally with a total of over 9 million infections and 230,000 deaths since the pandemic began. India had moved into second place with over 8 million infections and 125,000 deaths. Brazil was in third place with nearly 6 million infections and 160,000 deaths. Russia, France, Spain, Argentina and Colombia had all crossed the one million infection mark, with UK and Mexico closing in on that figure. The disease changed society and the way people live, with [projections indicating](#) that it would definitely emerge as one of the leading causes of death worldwide.

Among those directly impacted were [President Trump](#) and the first lady, Melania Trump. Both tested positive for the corona virus. The former was hospitalised at the Walter Reed Medical Center and [returned to the White House](#) three days later as doctors said that there was no evidence that a live virus that

he could transmit to others was still present. The latter [convalesced at the White House](#).

A [report indicated that](#) 170 vaccine candidates were under development, with 26 being tested on humans and eight of them close to completing the final stage of testing. Some of these were expected to be usable in 2021. Manufacturing challenges, however, mean that it will be possible to cover the world population only by 2023. Meanwhile, two months after approving Sputnik-V, the world's first COVID-19 vaccine in August 2020, [Russia accorded regulatory approval](#) for a second vaccine, EpiVacCorona. [Reports quoted President Putin](#) as saying that a third vaccine would be registered in the near future.

The IMF [World Economic Outlook of October 2020](#) projected a contraction of 4.4% in the global GDP in 2020 followed by a growth of 5.2% in 2021 and then 3.5% into the medium term. According to its projections, the pandemic would reverse progress made since the 1990s in reducing global poverty and would increase inequality, sending 90 million people below the poverty line. It would also result in a significant increase in the stock of sovereign debt, with the smaller tax base increasing difficulty in servicing debt obligations and necessitating support from the international community through debt relief, grants and concessional financing. The report said that governments would need to consider raising progressive taxes on more affluent individuals and those relatively less affected by the crisis (including increasing tax rates on higher income brackets, high-end property, capital gains and wealth) as well as changes to corporate tax rates to ensure firms pay taxes commensurate with profitability.

EU officials said that the [Eurozone's GDP shrank by 12.1%](#) on account of the pandemic. The EU as a whole experienced a contraction of 11.9%. Spain was the worst impacted, with its economy shrinking by 18.5%. Portugal, France and Italy followed with a contraction of 14.1%, 13.8% and 12.2% respectively. The German economy shrank by 10.1%. Countries are not expected to reach the pre-pandemic levels of GDP before 2022.

A dysfunctional geographic quota based system led to [the election of China, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia](#) along with Nepal and Uzbekistan as three of the [13 Asia-Pacific region members](#) of the [UN Human Rights Council](#). The newly elected states will hold office from 2021 – 2023. Though China (139 votes) received the lowest support among the 15 new members elected to the UNHRC, this did not prevent its [spokesperson from claiming](#) that the election shows that "the international community highly recognises the progress China's human

rights cause has made and China's active participation in global human rights governance" and "The Chinese Government attaches great importance to the promotion and protection of human rights, pursues the concept of people-centred human rights, and is now on track of a human rights path with Chinese characteristics".

India and Japan joined Australia, Canada, New Zealand, UK and the US (all members of the Five Eyes) on October 11, 2020, in calling on technology companies to address [serious concerns on their usage of end-to-end encryption](#) and embed safety of the public in their system design, thereby enabling the companies themselves to act against illegal content and activity and facilitate the investigation and prosecution of offences and thus safeguard the vulnerable. The seven governments effectively called for backdoors not only in encrypted instant messaging applications, but also for device encryption, custom encrypted applications and encryption across integrated platforms. Australia became the first country in the world to pass a law compelling communication providers to assist in accessing encrypted communication in December 2018.



US Navy P-8 at Port Blair for Refuelling on September 25, 2020.

Source: Twitter @Livist

In a report on [the security of 5G](#), the UK House of Commons Defence Committee found that the "UK and its allies face many malicious cyber attacks from both rogue individuals and state-sponsored attacks from states such as Russia and China". It added, "There is currently a lack of global rules regulating

international cyber attacks and the government should be working with allies to formulate a system to provide accountability for perpetrators". The report asked why the government was not deploying a cyber-attack capability to deter aggressors. It also concluded that Huawei was owned by the state and cited an expert witness who calculated that the Chinese Government had subsidised Huawei with around \$ 75 billion over the last three years, enabling the firm to sell their hardware at "a ridiculously low price point", while acknowledging the Huawei claim that it did not gain unfair market advantage through receipt of state aid or other government funds.

The [Swedish Post and Telecom Authority](#) said that the four wireless carriers bidding for frequencies in an upcoming spectrum auction for new 5G networks must not use equipment from Huawei or ZTE. Further, if they plan to use existing telecommunications infrastructure from their 5G networks, they must rip out and replace products from Huawei and ZTE latest by January 1, 2025. The authority also said that if central functions are dependant on staff or functions placed in foreign countries, such dependencies must be phased out and replaced by functions or staff placed in Sweden by January 1, 2025. It said that these licence conditions were based on assessments made by the Swedish Armed Forces and the Swedish Security Service.

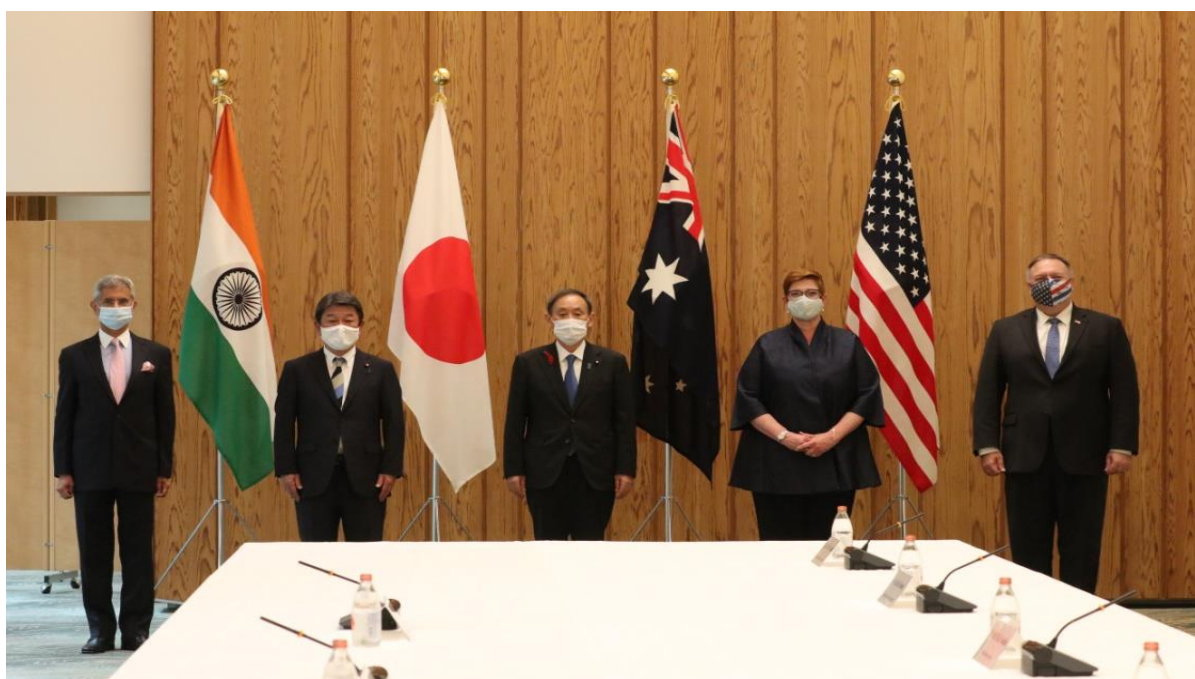
Following receipt of ratification by Honduras on the 75th anniversary of the ratification of the UN Charter, the United Nations announced that the [Treaty on Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons](#) had received the requisite minimum 50 ratifications and would [enter into force](#) on January 22, 2021. The treaty was approved by the UN General Assembly on July 7, 2017. It is noteworthy that the world's nine nuclear powers did not participate in the negotiations for the treaty. The Trump administration has written to treaty signatories saying that they made a strategic error and urged them to rescind their ratification.

Addressing the final plenary of the Valdai Discussion Club on October 22, 2020, [President Putin provided his view](#) on a wide range of global issues, including dealing with the pandemic and its impact on the world and Russia, the need for a strong state to deal with it and similar crises and what makes a state strong, civil society and nationalism, the shape of a new order in a changing world and the need for both multilateral and minilateral formats, global problems such as international stability, fighting terrorism, combating poverty, expanding healthcare cooperation, environmental concerns and climate change, the need to ensure that the digital space operates securely and without fail, arms control etc. On being asked if it is possible to conceive of a military alliance between China and Russia, he said, "It is possible to imagine anything. We have always

believed that our relations have reached such a level of cooperation and trust that it is not necessary, but it is certainly imaginable, in theory”.

Indo-Pacific Competition

Tokyo hosted the second meeting of foreign ministers from ‘Quad’ countries on October 06, 2020, signalling Japan’s continued commitment towards the Indo-Pacific and the Quad mechanism after its change of leadership. Opening statements of ministers from [India](#) and the [US](#), as well as press releases from [Australia](#), [India](#), [Japan](#) and the [US](#) indicated discussion on a broad agenda ranging from the post-COVID19 international order and collective solutions to global challenges to strategic developments across the Indo-Pacific and promotion of a strategic balance in the Indo-Pacific, including ways to enhance cooperation in diverse areas such as maritime security, cyber security and data flows, counter-terrorism, quality infrastructure, resilient supply chains and cyber-enabled systems. There was no joint statement on completion. However, a broad agreement on maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific, a commitment to ASEAN-centrality, a rules-based order underpinned by the rule of law, freedom of navigation in international seas, respect for territorial integrity and state sovereignty and the peaceful resolution of disputes without resorting to coercion was visible. Ministers appreciated the value of the meeting and agreed to hold such meetings regularly. It appears evident that a partnership that can balance China’s power asymmetry in the Indo-Pacific is being constructed.



The QUAD Foreign Ministers with Japanese Prime Minister Suga in Tokyo

Source: Flickr/@meaindia

Immediate response came in the form of [a rhetorical statement](#) from the Chinese Embassy in Tokyo, which continued the established approach of attacking Secretary of State Michael Pompeo personally for spreading lies and slander about China. The statement talked about multilateral cooperation upholding “the spirit of openness, tolerance, and transparency, instead of engaging in closed and exclusive small circles” and not targeting or harming the interests of third parties. Subsequent response from [China’s spokesperson](#) after the national holidays (October 01 – 08) said “The interests of all countries are so inextricably intertwined that organising closed and exclusive cliques will not help enhance mutual trust and cooperation, especially when the international community is now in the depth of major and urgent tasks of fighting the pandemic and reviving the world economy. We hope that relevant countries will bear in mind the common interests of all countries and mankind and focus on beating the virus with collective efforts while creating a peaceful environment and cooperation opportunities for regional and global economic recovery”.



Ships from the Indian and US Navies and the JMSDF Exercise in the Bay of Bengal during Malabar 2017. Malabar 2020 will also include ships of the Royal Australian Navy. Source: US PACFLT/Flickr

[India’s Ministry of Defence announced](#) that in light of increased cooperation with Australia, Malabar 2020 will see the participation of the Australian Navy. A [joint media release](#) from Australia’s Foreign and Defence Ministers confirmed participation and described the exercise as a milestone opportunity for the Australian Defence Force, which showcased the deep trust between four

major Indo-Pacific democracies and their shared will to work together on common security interests, including upholding peace and stability across the Indo-Pacific region. The exercise this year has been planned on a non-contact, at sea format. [China's spokesperson observed](#), "We noticed this development. China believes that military cooperation between countries should be conducive to regional peace and stability", perhaps losing sight of the fact that regional peace and stability in the face of continued Chinese coercion was a dim prospect without the Quad. The [Global Times](#), meanwhile, reported that the exercise was about New Delhi flaunting its ties with other military powers and that "it is absolutely impossible to formalise the Quad into a NATO-like alliance, or Asian NATO".

Christophe Penot, till recently the French Ambassador to Australia, was appointed as [France's first Ambassador to the Indo-Pacific](#). He will be based on Paris and is expected to travel widely throughout the region. Calls for inclusion of [France in the Quad gained traction](#) following the appointment.

China is [reported to have warned](#) through multiple channels, including the US embassy in Beijing, that it may detain American nationals in China unless the Justice Department stops prosecution of Chinese military-affiliated scholars in the US. Anticipating such action, the US State Department had last month issued a [travel advisory](#) to its citizens to reconsider travel to the PRC, including Hong Kong, due to Covid-19 and arbitrary enforcement of local laws [to gain bargaining leverage over foreign governments](#). The PRC has already arrested or charged Australian, Canadian and Swedish citizens on what the governments of those countries say are false allegations. It separately [warned Canada to stop granting asylum](#) to democracy activists from Hong Kong if it is concerned about the "health and safety" of 300,000 Canadian citizens who live there. Its spokesman also said that China will consider "[stopping recognising BN \(O\) passports](#) as valid travel documents", a move that would effectively close the option of Hong Kong's BNO citizens using the path the British government has opened for them to emigrate and seek UK citizenship.

Canada's Defence Minister chaired a [videoconference of defence ministers from the Five Eyes nations](#) on October 15-16, 2020. Ministers discussed how the Five Eyes might increase cooperation to address shared global security challenges, shared their respective engagement strategies in the Indo-Pacific region and identified ways to better coordinate efforts.

As US focus shifted from terror and the Atlantic to authoritarianism and the Indo-Pacific and opinion in Western Europe and the US coalesced on the need to effectively counter a sullen and unresponsive China, moving aggressively to

make the most of its opportunity and establish itself as the dominant power in Eurasia, terror and manipulation of emotions sparked by political Islam reared their head in Western Europe. A visionary and transformational [speech by President Macron](#) was directed towards combating Islamist separatism that had taken root in France. He described his target as restoration of the republic's principles, including gender equality and human dignity, against a conscious, theorised, political-religious project designed to indoctrinate the people and create societal divisions. His plan and words were conflated with divergent opinions following the brutal beheading of school teacher Samuel Paty and led to President Erdogan saying that Islamophobia in Europe had reached levels comparable to treatment of Jews before the Second World War, calling for a boycott of French products, [questioning Macron's mental health](#) and saying he ought to be examined, prompting a statement from India [deploring personal attacks on President Macron](#) using unacceptable language. Pakistan's National Assembly, meanwhile, [passed a resolution](#) seeking recall of Pakistan's Ambassador to France, losing sight of the fact that the post has been vacant for the last three months. Reaction from the Arab world remained muted.

East Africa

Commemorating the 20th anniversary of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, Foreign Minister [Wang Yi talked of](#) the leap of China-Africa relations from "A new type of partnership" to "a new type of strategic partnership" and to "a comprehensive strategic and cooperative partnership". The speech reflects China's ambitions for Africa and its role in building a community with a shared future for mankind.

Following normalisation of relations between Israel, the UAE and Bahrain, [Israel and Sudan agreed to normalise their relations](#) on October 23, 2020. The two countries will [soon begin negotiations](#) on cooperation agreements in agriculture, economy, trade, aviation, migration issues and other areas of mutual benefit.

The European Union agreed to [help Mozambique combat the insurgency](#) that has ravaged the Cabo Delgado region. The EU will help with "logistics for training and technical training in several and specific areas, as well as assistance in addressing humanitarian challenges, including medical services dealing with the corona virus outbreak" in return for verifiable commitments that Mozambican security forces will respect human rights in its operations and hold violators accountable.

Reverend Wavel Ramkalawan was sworn in as the [fifth President of Seychelles](#) on October 26, 2020. Outgoing President Danny Faure was present at the swearing-in ceremony. Mr Ramkalawan had won the elections held two days earlier, securing 54.9% of the valid votes cast.

INS Airavat departed Mumbai on October 24, 2020, carrying 270 MT of [food aid for the people of Sudan, South Sudan, Djibouti and Eritrea](#). The ship will visit Djibouti, Massawa, Port Sudan and Mombasa before returning to India.

West Asia

Fighting intensified in Yemen, with clashes erupting around Hodeidah port and the Marib region east of Sana'a, impeding relief efforts and calling into question the continued survival of inhabitants. An estimated 7.4 million Yemenis don't know where their next meal will come from, more than 12 million are in acute need of assistance to obtain drinking water and over two million children require acute treatment for malnutrition, which can cause stunted growth and impact mental development, [according to a report](#).

[Saudi Arabia plans to boost its production capacity](#) by over 1 million barrels per day so that it can pump out as much of its vast oil reserves as possible when demand picks up, before a shift to cleaner energy in the years ahead makes oil all but worthless, according to a report. Meanwhile, falling oil revenue forced the Sultanate of Oman deciding to [impose a 5% Value Added Tax](#) from April 2021. Essential food items, medical care, education and financial services will be exempted. UAE and Saudi Arabia had introduced a VAT in 2018.

The 13-year old UNSC arms embargo on Iran came to an end on October 18, 2020. The US [announced sanctions on](#) 18 major Iranian banks on October 08, 2020, thereby "further depriving the Islamic Republic of Iran of funds to carry out its support for terrorist activities and nuclear extortion that threatens the world". The sanctions will take effect following a 45-day wind down period, which provides foreign companies doing business with the banks time to cease their activity or face secondary sanctions. The announcement added, "Our maximum economic pressure campaign will continue until Iran is willing to conclude a comprehensive negotiation that addresses the regime's malign behaviour". The US also [imposed sanctions on five Iranian entities](#) for "efforts to spread disinformation and undermine our elections" and placed other Iranian entities on a terror watch list, to prevent foreign interference in the election process. On October 30, 2020, the US also [announced sanctions on](#) three Iranian, one Chinese and one Singapore based company as well as on their principal executive officers

for knowingly engaging in significant transactions for the purchase, acquisition, sale, transport or marketing of petroleum products from Iran.

Delegations from [Bahrain, Israel and the US](#) met in Manama on October 18, 2020 to sign an agreement committing the three to advance a strategic agenda for peace and prosperity in the Middle East. A Joint Statement issued from the White House on October 19, 2020 says the three nations are aligned in their views on the challenges, threats and opportunities present in the region.

Secretary of Defense [Mark Esper visited Bahrain](#) on October 28-29, 2020, and met HM King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, as well as the Commander-in-Chief of the Bahrain Defence Force. Both parties reaffirmed the importance of the US-Bahrain security relationship and shared commitment to advancing stability and security in the Arabian Peninsula, particularly in the face of Iranian malign influence.

South Asia and Indian Ocean Island Nations

[Reports indicate](#) that Covid-19 had pushed another 5 million people in Afghanistan into food shortages, dramatically worsening the humanitarian situation and raising the number hit by severe food insecurity to an estimated 17 million.

In a move that appeared to catch his own administration off guard, [President Trump tweeted](#) on the 19th anniversary of insertion of US troops into Afghanistan that all US troops should be out by Christmas. The Pentagon has long opposed a complete drawdown on the grounds that it would allow terror groups like Al Qaeda or the Islamic State to reconstitute and launch attacks against the US homeland or allies. Abdullah Abdullah, the head of Afghanistan's High Council for National Reconciliation, said the tweet has [given the Taliban the upper hand](#) in ongoing peace negotiations. General Mark Milley, Chairman of US Joint Chiefs of Staff, said that [drawdown plans are condition-based](#). Meanwhile, the US [launched rare air strikes against the Taliban](#) in Helmand province after a large-scale offensive saw insurgents take over key military bases and close in on a provincial capital.

In Pakistan, rebel [attacks by Baloch insurgents](#) in the Ormara and North Waziristan areas on October 14 & 15, 2020, left 20 security personnel, including a Pakistani Army Captain, dead. The Baloch Raji Ajoi Sangar (BRAS) and Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), both banned militant organisations, claimed responsibility. In another incident in the Bara Tehsil of Khyber tribal district, four NATO Humvees being withdrawn from Afghanistan on trailers were,

intercepted, [sprinkled with petrol and set ablaze](#). Authorities said they had no clue about who had carried out the attack.

Pakistan joined countries having issues with TikTok, the Chinese-owned social media platform, when its Telecommunication Authority [notified a ban](#) due to complaints about its immoral / indecent content. India had banned the app on June 29, 2020. A ban imposed by the Trump Administration has been held up due to a legal injunction. On the other hand, Pakistan's government, through the Pakistan Island Development Authority Ordinance, took over control of Bundal and Bhuddo islands, located off Karachi, from the Sindh government. The move was reported to be in preparation to [sell the islands to China](#) and drew [severe condemnation from the opposition](#) in Sindh and Balochistan provinces. The ordinance is reported to be a clear [violation of Pakistan's constitution](#) and infringement of the federal powers of the Sindh government.

The FATF, at its meeting from October 21-23, decided to [keep Pakistan on its grey list](#), along with Indo-Pacific countries such as Cambodia, Mauritius, Myanmar, Uganda, Yemen and Zimbabwe. It also retained North Korea and Iran on its black list (of high risk jurisdictions subject to a call for action by all FATF members). On Pakistan, it took note of the significant progress made on 21 of the 27 action plan items. As all action plan deadlines had expired, the FATF strongly urged Pakistan to swiftly complete its full action plan by February 2021. The Asia Pacific Group on Money Laundering had earlier [retained Pakistan on its "Enhanced Follow Up" list](#) for meagre progress on the technical recommendations of the FATF to fight money laundering and terror financing.

Pakistan will reportedly [add over 50 vessels](#), including 20 major ships, to its fleet as part of an ambitious modernisation plan to improve its capabilities, according to its outgoing Chief of Naval Staff in his farewell address. Admiral Zaffar Mahmood Abbasi handed over command of the Pakistan Navy to Admiral Amjad Khan Niazi on October 07, 2020.

Pakistan's first [metro line was inaugurated](#) on October 25, 2020 and began commercial operations in Lahore a day later. The 27 Km line built under CPEC, is expected to transport 250,000 people every day.

India's Ladakh border standoff continued, despite the seventh round of talks at the Senior Commander level. A stalemate exists on the sequence of withdrawal from areas that have been occupied by the two sides. China wants India to first vacate the heights it has occupied along the Kailash range in Chushul and on the north bank of Pangong Tso before it withdraws. India's stand, however, is that the FIFO (first in first out) principle should be followed, and since China violated border protocols and began the standoff by occupying features, it must

withdraw before India does so. Meanwhile, [China's spokesperson said](#), "China doesn't recognize the so-called "Ladakh Union Territory" illegally set up by India or the "Arunachal Pradesh", and opposes infrastructure building aimed at military contention in disputed border areas", completely ignoring the infrastructure developments made by China in disputed areas. He added, "The Indian side has been stepping up infrastructure building and military deployment along the border with China. This is the root cause of tensions". [India's spokesperson](#) responded that India has created infrastructure for improving the livelihood and economic welfare of its people, as also to meet India's strategic and security requirements. He added, "The Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh have been, are, and would remain an integral part of India. China has no locus standi to comment on India's internal matters". On Arunachal, he said, "Arunachal Pradesh is an integral and inalienable part of India. This fact has also been clearly conveyed to the Chinese side on several occasions, including at the highest level". Meanwhile, a PLA soldier identified as Corporal Wang Ya Long [was apprehended](#) after he strayed across the LAC in the Demchok sector of Eastern Ladakh on October 19, 2020. He was provided medical assistance including oxygen, food and warm clothes, and [returned to Chinese officials](#) at the Chushul Moldo Meeting Point on October 20, 2020.

[The 13th India – Japan Foreign Ministers' Strategic dialogue](#) took place in Tokyo on October 07, 2020. The ministers reviewed progress in the India-Japan Special Strategic and Global Partnership, welcomed the finalisation of the text of their bilateral cyber-security agreement, exchanged views on regional and global issues and underscored the need for India and Japan to work together for the benefit of the Indo-Pacific. Japan agreed to be the lead partner in the connectivity pillar of the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative and jointly take the vision of the two countries for the region forward.

The Union Cabinet approved the signing of a [Memorandum of Cooperation in the field of cyber security](#) between India and Japan. The two countries committed to an open, interoperable, free, fair, secure and reliable cyberspace environment and to promote the Internet as an engine of innovation, economic growth, and trade and commerce that would be consistent with their respective domestic laws and international obligations, and with their wide-ranging strategic partnership.

Deputy Secretary of State Stephen E Beigun [visited India](#) from October 12-14, 2020 to review the [gamut of engagements](#) under the India-US Comprehensive global Strategic Partnership and prepare ground for the forthcoming 2 + 2 meeting. During his [keynote address](#) at the India-US Forum, he expressed

immense optimism regarding the future possibilities of the India-US relationship, with cooperation spanning defence and security, mutual law enforcement support, trade and investment, energy, scientific and technological collaboration, educational links, strengthening and reforming international organisations and combating the pandemic. He said, "We also recognise that the United States cannot assume that a global post-WWII alliance structure, designed to address the challenges and threats of the Cold War, can endure without rejuvenation. To sustain the free and open order, our strategic relationships need to reflect the geopolitical realities of today and tomorrow. ... security partnerships the United States and our partners explore today do not necessarily need to follow the model of the last century of mutual defence treaties with a heavy in-country US troops presence. ... India has a strong and proud tradition of strategic autonomy. We do not seek to change India's traditions. Rather we want to explore how to empower them and India's ability to defend its own sovereignty and democracy and to advance Indian, interests, across the Indo-Pacific region".



US Secretary of State Michael R Pompeo and Secretary of Defense Mark T Esper at the National War Memorial, New Delhi, October 27, 2020.

Source: MEA/Flickr

The India US 2 + 2 meeting took place on October 27, 2020. The [State Department Fact Sheet](#) on the eve of the Secretary of State's departure talked of a relationship rooted in the democratic tradition and growing in new strategic dimensions, acknowledged India as a regional and international leader, spoke

of the strengthening defence and security cooperation and of people-to-people ties creating an unbreakable bond of friendship. China, on the other hand, [described the event](#) as “more an opportunity for both countries to preen for their own benefit rather than a substantive occasion which will have lasting benefits”. EAM Dr S Jaishankar met Secretary of State Pompeo on October 26. The [ministers agreed](#) that the US-India [Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership](#) is critical to the security and prosperity of both countries, the Indo-Pacific and the world. The Defence Ministers also [met on October 26](#), reviewed bilateral cooperation and [discussed](#) how to take it ahead. The meeting on October 27 saw the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-spatial Cooperation (BECA), the fourth of the foundational agreements, being signed.

In his [opening remarks at the 2 + 2](#), the EAM identified the fact that we now inhabited a more uncertain world with much greater stresses and sharper fault lines, necessitating that security be given greater salience in foreign policy. He also spoke of the need to uphold a rules-based international order, and the ability of India and the US to make a real difference when it comes to regional and global challenges. The [Joint Statement](#) on conclusion set out a comprehensive overview of the state of India-US Relations and their future direction. The shared vision for the Indo-Pacific and Global Leadership encompassed the joint commitment to “maintaining a free, open, inclusive, peaceful, and prosperous Indo-Pacific built on a rules-based international order, underpinned by ASEAN centrality, rule of law, sustainable and transparent infrastructure investment, freedom of navigation and overflight, mutual respect for sovereignty, and peaceful resolution of disputes”. It “welcomed the growing understanding on the Indo-Pacific among like-minded countries and reaffirmed that closer India-U.S. cooperation will support shared interests in promoting security and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond. It also spoke of strengthening Quad cooperation through expanded activities, discussed collaboration for sustainable, transparent and quality infrastructure development in the Indo-Pacific and spoke of the shared interest in promoting a sovereign, peaceful, united, democratic, inclusive, stable and secure Afghanistan. The statement extensively covered advancing the bilateral defence and security partnership.

The [press statement following the ministerial](#) described the performance of the relationship in the last few years as exceptionally positive, with political consultations and cooperation, defence exchanges and trade, economic interaction and commerce all having grown, the partnership in science, technology and innovation stronger and energy security clearly enhanced. It said that the Indo-Pacific region was a particular focus of talks. Both sides

reiterated the importance of peace, stability and prosperity for all countries in the region. This was possible only by upholding the rules based international order, ensuring freedom of navigation in the international seas, promoting open connectivity and respecting the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all states. It said that a multi-polar world must have a multi-polar Asia as its basis.



Indian and US Foreign and Defence Minsters at Hyderabad House for their 2 + 2 Ministerial on October 27, 2020. Source: MEA/Flickr

India's Chief of Army Staff and Foreign Secretary [visited Myanmar together](#) on October 04-05, 2020. Both sides agreed to further strengthen their partnership in connectivity projects, capacity building, power and energy, to deepen economic and trade ties, further facilitate people to people and cultural exchanges, and to broad-base their defence exchanges across all the three services.

In the backdrop of the continuing standoff with China in Eastern Ladakh, reports emerged regarding growing support in India for formal discussions regarding an [India – Taiwan trade](#) deal with Taiwan, an action that would be a significant change of policy for India and would certainly annoy China. [China's spokesperson said](#) that the one-China principle serves as the political foundation for China to develop relations with any other country, the Indian

side should earnestly abide by the one-China principle and handle the Taiwan question prudently and properly.

The fourth and last of India's stealth ASW corvettes under Project 28, INS Kavaratti, was [commissioned at GRSE Kolkotta](#) by General MM Naravane, Chief of the Army Staff, on October 22, 2020. INS Vikrant, India's largest indigenously built warship, [began basin trials](#) in October, with sea trials scheduled to commence in December 2020. On the other hand, the Indian Navy [cancelled the contract](#) awarded to Reliance Naval Engineering Limited to build naval offshore patrol vessels due to prolonged delay in delivery and withdrew the RFP to build four LPDs due to the [reported emergence](#) of a single-vendor situation.



Chief of Army Staff General MM Naravane Commissions INS Kavaratti at GRSE Kolkata, October 22, 2020. Source: Indian Navy

The 8th edition of the annual Indian Navy – Sri Lanka Navy [exercise SLINEX-20](#) took place off Trincomalee from October 19-21, 2020. IN ships Kamorta and Kiltan and SLN ships Sayura and Gajabahu participated. Earlier, the IN had once again conducted a [PASSEX with USS Ronald Reagan](#) off Kochi on October 12, 2020.

[Media reported](#) that the Indian Navy had announced that the first phase of Exercise Malabar 2020 would be held in the Bay of Bengal from November 03 – 06, 2020, while the second phase would be held in the Arabian Sea from

November 17 – 20, 2020. IN Ships Ranvijay, Shivalik, Sukanya, Shakti and Sindhuraj, along with USS John S McCain, HMAS Ballarat and JMSDF Ship Onami were expected to participate in the first phase, along with integral helicopters and P-8I, Dornier and Hawk aircraft.

India's quest for indigenisation of advanced defence technology received a boost with the successful tests of indigenously developed weapons such as a [laser guided anti-tank guided missile](#) on October 01, 2020; the 600 Km range [Supersonic Missile Assisted Release of Torpedo](#) (SMART) on October 05, 2020, the 250 Km range [RUDRAM anti-radiation missile](#) from a Su-30 MKI on October 09, 2020, the [BrahMos missile](#) from INS Chennai on October 18, 2020 and the final user trials of the [Nag Anti-tank Guided Missile](#) on October 22, 2020. Reports indicated that on October 30, 2020, the [IAF tested an air-launched Brahmos](#) to strike a ship target 4,000 Km away using a Su-30 MKI fighter and mid-air refuelling.



Brahmos missile tested from INS Chennai, October 18, 2020

Source: PIB

The Indian public's unhappiness with China's actions on India's borders in Ladakh became evident when India's media [ignored the Chinese Embassy letter](#) telling the Indian media not to refer to Taiwan as a country or Tsai Ing-wen as its President and helped the hashtag #TaiwanNationalDay go viral, while hanging banners with the Taiwanese flag outside China's embassy in New Delhi. Taiwan thanked friends from around the world and particularly India for celebrating Taiwan's National Day.

The 4th [Japan-Sri Lanka Dialogue on Maritime Security, Safety and Oceanic Issues](#) was held virtually on October 01, 2020. Sri Lanka highlighted the need to further strengthen bilateral and multilateral cooperation for a rule-based maritime order as a vital element for stability and prosperity in the region, and noted the need for quality infrastructure development as a prerequisite to achieve its vision to position itself as a trade and maritime hub of the Indian Ocean region.

Following his visit to India, Secretary of State Michael R Pompeo visited Sri Lanka from October 27-28, 2020. His [meeting with President Gotabaya Rajapaksa](#) witnessed reaffirmation of the US commitment to a strong, sovereign Sri Lanka and advancement of shared interests in the Indo-Pacific. Secretary Pompeo stressed the importance of strengthening democratic governance, human rights protections and fundamental freedoms to ensure long-term stability and prosperity. Both sides agreed to remain in contact on issues of mutual concern, including counterterrorism cooperation and post-pandemic recovery. [Secretary Pompeo's joint press conference](#) with Foreign Minister Gunawardena witnessed the latter stating, "As a sovereign, free, independent nation, Sri Lanka's foreign policy will remain neutral, non-aligned and friendly. Conscious of the opportunities and responsibilities that come with our strategic location, we see the importance of maintaining the freedom of navigation in our seas and airspace, also protecting sea lines of communication and the undersea cables. We believe all countries should adhere to and respect international law, including UNCLOS". In his response, Secretary Pompeo said, "The United States seeks to strengthen our partnership with democratic, peaceful, prosperous and fully sovereign Sri Lanka". He said a good part of the bilateral discussion had involved cooperation in defeating the pandemic that came from Wuhan, China. He also spoke of wide-ranging discussion on security cooperation (between the US and China) which helps keeps some of the world's most vital sea lanes open. Highlighting that the US seeks a strong, sovereign Sri Lanka as a powerful partners for the US and a beacon for a free and open Indo-Pacific, Secretary Pompeo pointed to the contrast with what China seeks. "We see from bad deals, violations of sovereignty and lawlessness on land and sea, that the Chinese Communist Party is a predator", while the US comes as a friend and partner.

Secretary Pompeo's visit to the Maldives on October 28, 2020, saw him announcing the [US decision to open an Embassy in the Maldives](#) with a resident US Ambassador. He [discussed strengthening US-Maldives cooperation](#) to advance the shared goals of both in the Indo-Pacific with President Ibrahim Solih. His [joint press conference](#) with Maldivian Foreign Minister Abdullah Shahid saw him conveying the message of seeking

partnership with a sovereign, democratic and prosperous Maldives, progress in bilateral economic and security cooperation, the CCP's continuing lawless, threatening, predatory and extractive behaviour and the challenges it posed to the region and the differences in America's outlook and objectives in the region.

In a landmark event, opposition candidate Wavel Ramkalawan defeated incumbent Danny Faure to win the [Seychelles presidential elections](#) conducted from October 22 – 24. Ramkalawan secured 54.9% of the votes cast and was sworn in as President on October 26, 2020.

South East Asia

Indonesia and Singapore agreed on the establishment of a [reciprocal green lane](#) enabling travel between the two countries for citizens and residents. Travel is expected to commence by the end of October.

In what was seen as a tit-for-tat action following US accusations against Cambodian military officers related to the coastal development project at Dara Sakor, Cambodia [reportedly demolished](#) a US built Tactical Headquarters of the National Committee for Maritime Security at its Ream Naval Base. The [Pentagon expressed concern](#) "that razing the facility may be tied to Cambodia government plans for hosting People's Republic of China (PRC) military assets and personnel at Ream Naval Base" and sought clarification. Cambodia denied such plans. Chinese presence at Ream would enable the PLA (N) to establish control over the Gulf of Thailand, strengthen its control over the South China Sea and reduce the distance to the critical Malacca Straits by over 1000 Km. It would, however, complicate Phnom Penh's relations with Hanoi and ASEAN.

Despite opposition from human rights organisations, Indonesia's Defence Minister [Subianto visited the US](#) from 15 – 19 Oct 20 at the invitation of Dr Mark Esper. The visit drew attention because he had been denied entry into the US during the Clinton, Bush and Obama administrations due to atrocities committed by troops led by him as Commander of Indonesia's Special Forces. The [Joint Statement](#) on the meeting speaks of a shared desire "to enhance bilateral military-to-military activities and work together on maritime security". A Memorandum of Intent was signed to advance work towards recovering remains of US personnel lost in Indonesia during WW II. Indonesia is reported to be interested in several US-made weapon systems, such as Chinook heavy-lift helicopters, MV-22 Osprey and F-16 Fighting Falcon aircraft and the F-35 Lightning. Prabowo Subianto [left for Vienna and Paris](#) on conclusion of his visit to the US.

The Indonesian Navy [seized two Vietnamese fishing vessels](#) on October 02, 2020, and [one more on October 08, 2020](#), for fishing illegally in the Indonesian EEZ in the Natuna Sea. The vessels were taken to Indonesia's naval base in the Riau Islands for further investigation.

The Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency said it had [detained 60 Chinese nationals](#) and six Chinese-registered fishing vessels for trespassing into Malaysian territorial waters off Johor on October 09, 2020.



UMS Minye Thienkhathu, ex-INS Sindhuvir, at sea for Ex Bandoola
Source: Janes.com

The Myanmar Navy [put on display](#) its newly acquired submarine, UMS Minye Theinkhathu (formerly INS Sindhuvir) in its ongoing Fleet Exercise Bandoola which began on October 15, 2020. Although India's [MEA had said](#) "India will be delivering a Kilo-Class submarine INS Sindhuvir to the Myanmar Navy" in a briefing on October 16, [reports indicate](#) that the submarine was actually transferred around February/March 2020.

India's Foreign Secretary and Chief of Army Staff [visited Myanmar](#) from October 04 – 05, 2020, reflecting acknowledgement by New Delhi of who controls the levers of power in Myanmar. They met State Counsellor Day Aung San Suu Kyi and Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing. The COAS also met Vice Senior General Soe Win, Deputy Commander-in-Chief, Myanmar Armed Services, while the FS met U Soe Han, Permanent Under Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Myanmar. Both sides agreed to strengthen their partnership in connectivity, capacity building, power and energy, to deepen economic and trade ties, further facilitate people to people and cultural exchanges, and broad base their defence

exchanges across all three services, as well as to deepen cooperation to overcome the pandemic.

President Duterte was reported to have [lifted a moratorium](#) on petroleum exploration in the South China Sea imposed in 2014, opening up prospects for three projects including a possible joint venture with China to resume. He said he would [seek to uphold the 2016 award](#) of the Permanent Court of Arbitration. Lifting of the moratorium is [seen as](#) part of Duterte's efforts to move ahead with a potential joint oil exploration deal with China, whose broad contours were agreed upon in 2018. [China's spokesperson said](#), "China and the Philippines have reached consensus on joint exploration of oil and gas resources in the South China Sea and set up relevant consultation and cooperation mechanisms. We hope the two sides will work together for new progress in the joint exploration".

The State Railway of Thailand, China Railway and China Railway Design [signed an agreement](#) on October 28, 2020, for building part of the roughly 253Km long initial segment from Bangkok to the Thai province of Nakhon Ratchasima high-speed rail line, part of Beijing's plan to build a line connecting Kunming to Laos, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia under the Belt and Road Initiative. The [\\$ 1.62 billion deal under Contract 2.3](#) covers the railway system, electrical, signalling and communication systems, procurement of train carriages, personnel training, the operation and maintenance works and technology transfer.

Speaking on the [Mekong River, Mekong Sovereignty and the Future of South East Asia](#), David Stillwell, the Assistant Secretary of the State Department's Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, talked of the "terrible consequences of upper riparian water control, with increasing and devastating impact on the lives of tens of millions for whom the Mekong represents life itself. Concern about this had led the US to launch the Lower Mekong Initiative in 2019, which had resulted in the commitment of over \$ 3.5 billion of assistance from the US government and more from private sector financing. He then dilated on the objectives of the Mekong-US Partnership launched last month, the impact of droughts generated by China's upstream dams, other challenges facing the region and how the US was helping.

Prime Minister Suga visited [Hanoi](#) and Jakarta ending 21 October. He delivered a speech on "[Building Together the Future of the Indo-Pacific](#)" at the Vietnam-Japan University in Hanoi, wherein he introduced himself at length and then focused on ASEAN and Japan helping each other as friends in Asia; improving connectivity and the resilience of supply chains; the role of Human Resources

Development to solidify partnerships; and the commonalities between ASEAN's AOIP and Japan's FOIP. His [opening statement](#) at the press conference in Jakarta covered the assistance provided by Japan to ASEAN and vice versa during different disasters, the commonality between ASEAN's Outlook on the Indo-Pacific and Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific and Japan's support for the AOIP; enhancing connectivity between Japan and ASEAN and the intention to coordinate with Indonesia for early resumption of travel; diversification of Japan's production bases to build resilient supply chains; and enhancing infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific. He said there had been some movement backwards in the South China Sea and Japan opposed all action that heightens tensions in the South China Sea. He emphasised the importance of all parties involved to make efforts towards peaceful settlement of disputes grounded in international law, without using force or coercion.



Japan's Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide and Indonesia's President Joko Widodo at their summit meeting in Jakarta, October 20, 2020. Source: Kantei, Japan

Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide and his Vietnamese counterpart Nguyen Xuan Phuc [agreed to](#) resume cross-border travel between their countries and to promote cooperation on supply chains, apart from sharing "the view that Japan and Vietnam will contribute to the peace and development of the Indo-Pacific region". The leaders also [exchanged documents](#) relating to grant assistance. Speaking to reporters, Suga called Vietnam a [cornerstone of efforts to realise a free and open Indo-Pacific](#) and said the countries had agreed in principle on a pact that would enable Japan to export defence equipment and technology, including patrol planes and radars, to Vietnam.

Reports indicated that [Japan plans to sign an agreement](#) to allow it to export defence equipment and technology to Vietnam, as part of its design to strengthen defence capabilities Indo-Pacific nations. The agreement

essentially requires the recipient country to agree to abide by the [three principles](#) it put into place to regulate transfer of defence equipment and technology in 2014. Although Japan has reportedly signed this agreement with [nine countries](#) so far, its only export deal for a finished product has been its \$ 100 million air defence radar [contract with Philippines](#). Tokyo is reported to be negotiating with [Indonesia and Thailand](#) for a similar agreement.

China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi undertook a whirlwind tour of [Cambodia](#), [Malaysia](#), [Laos](#) and [Thailand](#), participants along with Vietnam in the [Mekong-US partnership launched last month](#), from October 11-15, 2020. In Cambodia (seen as [China's unofficial representative](#) in ASEAN) on October 11 & 12, [he met](#) Prime Minister [Hun Sen](#), Deputy PM [Hor Namhong](#) and Foreign Minister [Prak Sokhonn](#). He promised further cooperation in the fight against COVID-19, priority supply of vaccines, import of more Cambodia agricultural products and cooperation in areas such as artificial intelligence, 5G, big data and cloud technologies, and [witnessed the signing of](#) Cambodia's first ever bilateral free trade agreement. China and Cambodia [agreed to establish](#) a 'fast lane' and a 'green lane' for movement of personnel and logistics between the two countries.

In Malaysia, [he discussed](#) cooperation in tackling COVID-19; facilitating cross border essential business and official travel to revitalise trade and investment cooperation and the establishment of a 'green lane' for industrial supply chains and food supplies; cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative; formulation of the five year programme for economic and trade cooperation for the year 2021-2025; the China-Malaysia Quinzhou Industrial Park and the Malaysia-China Kuantan Industrial Park; cooperation in agriculture, livestock, fisheries, e-commerce, innovation and science and technology; and trade in commodities including increased import of palm oil and its products by China. On South China Sea issues, the [joint statement](#) reflects that both underscored the importance of maintaining peace, security and stability, as well as freedom of navigation in and overflight above the sea. Both also emphasised peaceful resolution of disputes through friendly consultation and negotiation in accordance with international law including UNCLOS. Both also agreed to work on the full and effective implementation of the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties at Sea (DOC) and to intensify progress towards the early conclusion of an effective and substantive Code of Conduct (COC). Both also agreed to uphold multilateralism, oppose trade protectionism and unilateralism, uphold the purpose and principles of the UN Charter and multilateral trading regimes under the WTO, and to promote an open, inclusive, balance and win-win globalisation that benefits all. In [a joint press meeting](#) thereafter, Wang Yi said that the "Indo-Pacific Strategy" was in essence aimed

at building an Indo-Pacific NATO underpinned by the Quadrilateral Mechanism involving the US, Japan, India and Australia. It was intended to stoke geopolitical competition in a bid to maintain the dominance and hegemonic system of the United States. If continued, he said it would mark the beginning of danger and wind back the clock of history.

In Laos, Wang Yi [met the Lao President](#), the [Prime Minister](#) and the Foreign Minister during his visit. [Areas of cooperation discussed](#) included COVID-19 and jointly building the Belt and Road, increased Chinese assistance to Laos reduction of tariffs for products imported by China from Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar, a 'green channel' for personnel exchanges and cargo transportation, and appreciation of firm support from Laos on safeguarding China's legitimate rights and interests and in building the Laos-China community of shared future.

In Thailand, [he discussed](#) revitalisation of bilateral exchanges and activities through expediting a fast track arrangement to facilitate essential short-term travel for businesspersons and specialists and gradual opening up of the tourism sector; establishment of a 'green lane' to facilitate cross-border transportation of goods; facilitating travel for Thai students to return to China to continue their studies; enhancing cooperation in research and development of a COVID vaccine; and resumption of commercial flights with his counterpart. Discussions also encompassed sustainable use of the Mekong-Lancang River, the Thailand-China high speed railway project, the geopolitical landscape in the South China Sea as well as support for multilateralism and an international system with the UN at its core.

Secretary of State Michael Pompeo visited Jakarta on October 29, 2020. He [met President Joko Widodo and discussed](#) ways in which Indonesia and the US can work together to promote a prosperous, secure and democratic Indo-Pacific region. His [joint press conference](#) with Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi saw the latter speaking about agreement to enhance the bilateral strategic partnership while respecting differences. Areas of agreement included strengthening cooperation in the health and economic sectors, as well as strengthening defence capabilities and military procurement to achieve minimum essential force, training and exercise, intelligence sharing and maritime security cooperation in the region and promoting Indo-Pacific cooperation that is open, inclusive, transparent and rules-based so as to maintain the South China Sea as a stable and peaceful sea with respect for international law. Secretary Pompeo spoke about cooperation to address the pandemic that started in Wuhan; common democratic shared values, economic cooperation, the rejection of the CCP's unlawful claims in the South

China Sea and the need to pursue this in multilateral settings and counter-terror cooperation. His [speech at a public event](#) organised by the Nhadlatul Ulama thereafter focused on democracy and the religious freedoms it permitted, the threat that the authoritarian CCP posed to people of all faiths, including Muslims, Buddhists, Christians and Falun Gong practitioners, and the need for people to defend their unalienable rights and traditions of tolerance.

Secretary of State Pompeo rounded off his South and South East Asia tour by visiting Hanoi on October 30, 2020. [He met](#) Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc, his counterpart Pham Binh Minh and Minister for Public Security To Lam. “We look forward to continuing to work together to build on our relationship and to make the region – throughout Southeast Asia, Asia and the Indo-Pacific – safe and peaceful and prosperous”, he said, while seeking sincere cooperation in support of a peaceful region and progress in trade and investment ties. Unlike in other countries, [there was no public mention of China](#).



Secretary of State Michael Pompeo with Vietnam's Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc and others after their meeting at the Government Office in Hanoi, October 30, 2020.

Source: Reuters

East Asia

Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden has, in an op-ed published in the Chinese language World Journal, said his policy will include deepening ties with Taiwan, which [he described as](#) “a leading democracy ... and a shining example of how an open society can effectively contain COVID-19.”

Citing a report to Taiwan's parliament, Reuters reported that Taiwan has [spent over \\$ 900 million](#) in scrambling its fighters 2,972 times to intercept Chinese aircraft crossing the mid-line of Taiwan Strait since January 2020. The number of 4.132 sorties cited in [an earlier report](#) takes into account training and regular patrol missions. The figures speak of increasing costs being imposed and of greater confidence in China's ability to overcome Taiwan using force.

The Trump administration notified Congress of its plans to sell to Taiwan 11 [High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems \(HIMARS\)](#) launchers and related equipment, [135 AGM-84H Standoff Land Attack Missiles](#) – Expanded Response (SLAM-ER) and 6 [MS-110 external recce pods](#) for its F-16 aircraft. These are in addition to the deal to sell 66 F-16 fighter aircraft. [China's spokesperson said](#) "the action seriously violates the one-China principle and the provisions of the three China-US Joint Communiqués, seriously interferes in China's internal affairs and seriously harms China's sovereignty and security interests". He urged the US to immediately cancel all arms sales plan and cut military ties with Taiwan. He added, "China will make a legitimate and necessary reaction in the light of the development of the situation". On October 26, he said that China had decided to "[sanction US companies involved](#) in arms sales to Taiwan, including Lockheed Martin, Boeing Defense, Space & Security (BDS) and Raytheon, as well as individuals and entities who played an egregious role in the process". On the same day, the Trump administration notified the Congress of its decision to sell [100 Harpoon Coastal Defence Systems](#), along with associated equipment.

China's heavy-handed treatment of global media was evident in a letter from the Embassy of China in India ahead of Taiwan's National Day [directing Indian media](#). The letter reminded Indian media that there is only one China and according to universal consensus, the Government of the PRC is the sole legitimate government of all of China including Taiwan. The [letter went on to say](#) that all countries having diplomatic relations with China should honour the "one China" principle and stressed, "Taiwan shall not be referred to as the Republic of China or the leader of China's Taiwan region Taiwan region as 'President' to avoid sending wrong signals to the general public. In response to a question on the subject, the spokesperson in [India's MEA said](#) that India had a free media that reports on issues as it sees fit. India has not formally endorsed the 'One China' principle, and India's late Foreign Minister, Sushma Swaraj, had pointedly nudged her counterpart Wang Yi to acknowledge the 'One India' principle if it expected such recognition.

India's media responded by highlighting the 109th Taiwan National Day celebrations on October 10, 2020. Posters were put up near China's Embassy

wishing Taiwan a happy national day. A TV channel broadcast an [interview with Taiwan's Foreign Minister Joseph Wu](#). [China's embassy at New Delhi protested](#), stating that the Taiwan question concerns China's core interests and China's red line on the Taiwan question cannot be challenged. Taiwan, meanwhile, said it was proud to see its flag flying high and thanked Indian friends who had "[expressed congratulations and support](#)". [China's Global Times](#), on the other hand, said that the actions will only exasperate already soured India – China ties and urged India's ruling party to give up its irrational behaviour and to realise it was playing with fire". Chinese analysts said that India's provocation on this issue will cause an irreversible impact on China-India ties.



North Korea's new ICBM at the parade on October 10, 2020.

Source: The Korea Herald

North Korea [celebrated the 75th anniversary](#) of the founding of the ruling Workers' Party with a traditional military parade, including the display of what is [reported to be](#) the world's largest road-mobile, liquid-fuelled ICBM reported to be an evolution of the Hwasong-15 with about the same range (giving it the ability to strike anywhere in the continental US), but with thrice the payload. Also on display was the Pukguksong-4 SLBM, again apparently bigger than its predecessor Pukguksong-3. Both new missiles are, however, yet to be tested.

Ishigaki city, in Japan's Okinawa Prefecture, followed through on its June assembly resolution and officially changed the name of the Senkaku Islands to [Tonoshiro Senkaku](#) on October 01, 2020. In response, China launched a [digital museum of the Diaoyu Islands](#), intended to prove the viewers the "indisputable

fact that the Diaoyu islands are China's inherent territory and China has indisputable sovereignty" over them.

Chinese Coast Guard vessels and fishing boats continued to [intrude into Japan's territorial waters](#) in the Senkaku Islands for prolonged periods, and to harass Japanese fishing vessels operating in the region. The intrusions [were seen as](#) movement towards China's long-term goal of establishing a situation of de facto co-administration of the Senkaku Islands, as a stepping stone towards vying for sole administration in the future, as well as China's diplomatic and security test to see how PM Suga would deal with the situation. [Japan lodged strong protests](#), both through its Embassy in Beijing and to China's Embassy in Tokyo. [China's spokesperson](#), meanwhile, said "Diaoyu Dao and its affiliated islands are China's inherent territory. Patrolling and carrying out law enforcement activities in the relevant waters are also China's inherent right. The Japanese side should respect this.

Japan and Australian foreign ministers Toshimitsu Motegi and Marise Payne met bilaterally in Tokyo on October 07, 2020 [and discussed](#) security, defence and economic cooperation. They affirmed the need to deepen their cooperation and widen its scope to tackle contemporary challenges. They also discussed ways to resume travel between the two countries while maintaining preventive measures against the spread of COVID-19 and exchanged views on cooperation in the Pacific Islands region and in international organisations.

Defence Ministers of Australia and Japan met in Tokyo on October 19, 2020. Apart from expected objectives in support of a free and open Indo-Pacific, their [joint statement](#) specifically mentions their "strong opposition to destabilising or coercive unilateral action that could alter the status quo and increase tension in the East China Sea" and "intent to coordinate closely on the security environment in this region", as well as strong opposition to "any attempt to unilaterally change the status quo by coercion in the South China Sea" and resolve to enhance "maritime activities in the South China Sea, to maintain a free and open, secure, inclusive and prosperous region". The ministers also reaffirmed their commitment to deter, disrupt and ultimately eliminate evasion of sanctions by North Korea, including through illicit ship-to-ship transfers and direct shipment of sanctioned goods. They agreed to enhance bilateral and multilateral cooperative activity in the Indo-Pacific as well as to enhance interoperability through increasing the complexity and sophistication of bilateral exercises and operations, including testing of air-to-air refuelling; placement of an Australian Liaison Officer at the Japan Ground Self Defence Force; driving bilateral space and cyber cooperation in areas of mutual benefit, deepening defence science and technology collaboration, including new joint

research in the areas of hydro-acoustics and ground vehicle autonomy, and to grow industry-to-industry engagement. Significantly, they “instructed their officials to commence necessary coordination to create a framework to protect Australian Defence Force assets by SDF personnel under Article 95-2 of the SDF Law. They resolved to work together towards finalising a reciprocal access agreement and reiterated their commitment to active trilateral defence cooperation and exchanges with the United States, while coordinating closely in Indo-Pacific defence-related fora, including the Japan Pacific Islands Defense Dialogue and the South Pacific Defence Minister’s Meeting.

Japan and UK signed their [Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement](#) on October 23, 2020, providing the UK with a gateway to the Asia-Pacific and possible future access to the Trans-Pacific Partnership. The agreement will enter into force after domestic ratification.

[Japan will propose](#) a provisional one-year rather than the normal five year agreement to share the costs of hosting the nearly 54,000 US troops that provide forward presence on Japanese soil. The current agreement expires at the end of March 2021. Tokyo normally pays around \$ 1.9 billion per year, an amount President Trump wants quadrupled. With the outcome of elections uncertain, Tokyo prefers to wait till it negotiates a long-term agreement.



The First of the New Taigei Class Submarines being launched by Mitsubishi Heavy Industries at Kobe on October 14, 2020. Source: Japan Today

Mitsubishi Heavy Industries launched the first of Japan’s [Taigei Class attack submarines](#) on October 14, 2020. Slightly larger than the preceding Soryu Class, Taigei is about 100 tons heavier, carries more advanced systems and a crew of

70, and utilises Lithium-ion battery propulsion technology. It is expected to enter service in March 2022. Japan is expanding its submarine force from 16 to 22 boats.

JMSDF ships Kaga, Ikaguchi and the Soryu-class submarine Shoryu conducted [anti-submarine exercises in the South China Sea](#) on October 09, 2020. The ships called at Cam Ranh Bay thereafter to replenish supplies. USS John McCain, HMAS Arunta and JS Kirisame came together for [multinational exercises on the South China Sea](#) on October 19, 2020. Operations included surface, sub-surface and air defence exercises, as well as other events to strengthen regional maritime security cooperation. Japanese [F-35 aircraft also trained with USS America](#) in the Western Pacific on October 19-20, 2020.

[Exercise Keen Sword](#), a biennial high-level training exercise involving the US Indo-Pacific Command and the JSDF, began in mainland Japan and Okinawa on October 26, 2020. The exercise, designed to enhance Japan-US combat readiness and interoperability, will run till November 5. It includes ships and aircraft from the US, Japan and Canada.



Japanese F-35 aircraft conduct operations with USS America on October 20, 2020.

Source: US Navy Photo Gallery

A [speech by President Xi Jinping](#) on the 70th anniversary of China's entry into the Korean War appeared designed to stoke nationalistic fervour while distorting history and China's actions under his watch. It called on the people

to emulate the patriotism of their forebears in combating present-day threats to China's interests posed by foreign aggressors. He stressed that China's victory in "the [war to resist US aggression and aid Korea](#) will forever be engraved in the history of the Chinese nation and the history of peace, development and progress of mankind". The war, he said, "safeguarded the peaceful life of the Chinese people, stabilised the situation in the Korean Peninsula and upheld peace in Asia and the world". [It demonstrated that](#) the Chinese people will always defy brutal suppression with an iron-like spirit, and that any country, however, powerful, will be defeated if it stands against the trend of the world's development, bullies the small and the weak, pursues a regressive agenda, or engages in aggression and expansion. China's victory, in which more than 197,000 Chinese personnel sacrificed their lives, had laid a foundation for its status in Asian and international affairs. He called upon the Chinese people to carry forward the same spirit in the new era and strive to achieve national rejuvenation. Notwithstanding his distortion of history, the reality today is that the PLA of today is not the battle hardened army Mao had 70 years ago, nor are the conditions the same.

The [fifth plenary session](#) of the 19th Communist Party Central Committee was held in Beijing from October 26 – 29, 2020. President Xi Jinping reported [great progress in the 13th plan period](#), with the economy expected to surpass the 100 trillion Yuan (\$ 14.9 trillion) mark in 2020, more than 55 million people having been lifted out of poverty, building of the world's largest social security system covering 1.3 billion people, the creation of more than 60 million new jobs and vigorous promotion of major country diplomacy with major achievements. The session approved the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021 – 2025), as well as a longer 15-year plan called 'Vision 2035' and set out [12 proposals to achieve these goals](#), including upholding the central role of innovation in its modernisation drive, building a modern industrial system, nurturing a strong domestic market, deepening reform comprehensively in pursuit of a high-level socialist market economy, prioritising agricultural and rural development, promoting cultural soft power, accelerating green and low-carbon development, exploring new prospects for win-win cooperation, improving the standard of living of the people, strengthening national security capabilities and increasing the capacity to deal with traditional and non-traditional security challenges, and maintaining the prosperity and stability of Hong Kong and Macao and promoting the reunification of Taiwan while maintaining a stable external environment.

Reports indicated that China has filed a spectrum application with the International Telecommunication Union for [two constellations comprising 12,992 satellites in low earth orbit](#). The constellation is intended to create a

[global 5G communications network](#). [China's first low-orbit broadband satellite](#) with a 10 gbps capacity was launched in January 2020.

The Trump Administration notified the Congress of its decision to sell South Korea [115 AIM-9X Block II Tactical Sidewinder missiles](#) along with associated training and guidance equipment estimated to cost \$ 158.1 million. Meanwhile, South Korea hosted the first [ROK – IORA Partnership Seminar](#) at Seoul on October 29, 2020. Themed “Navigating the Path to Peace and Prosperity for the People in the Indian Ocean amid Pandemic”, the seminar brought together people from government, academia and business circles of the ROK and IORA countries.

Southern Pacific

Australian Defence Minister Linda Reynolds visited [Japan](#), [Singapore](#) [Brunei](#) and the [Philippines](#) from October 18 – 23, 2020 and met her counterparts. The Singapore visit coincided with the 30th anniversary of Singapore Armed Forces training in Australia and was to discuss measures to improve bilateral cooperation. In Brunei, she announced the decision to position a resident Defence Adviser by the end of the year. The Philippines visit resulted in reaffirmation of the shared interest of the two countries in upholding maritime security in the region, including in the South China Sea and support of the right of all states to exercise freedom of navigation and overflight in accordance with UNCLOS.

Australia and the UK signed a Memorandum of Understanding to cooperate on building and delivering the [next generation of cutting edge frigates](#) on October 20, 2020. The MoU includes a pledge for information exchange to ensure sharing of shipbuilding best practices and sets out a framework for both countries to utilise the Type 26 and Hunter programmes to create jobs and contribute to the growth of both economies.

China stepped up its coercive campaign against Australia [by informally banning imports of coal supplied by Australian companies](#). BHP, an Australian company with mining interests, said that its commercial team had received requests for deferment from Chinese importers. A report had earlier indicated that Chinese steel producers and power firms had been ordered to stop importing Australian coal, and ports had been directed not to allow it to be offloaded. [Australia's trade minister said](#) that his ministry had reached out to China for clarification, but without response. “It is well known that on multiple occasions this year we have sought a ministerial dialogue with China and they have not been willing to reciprocate”, he said. The development comes in

addition to an existing ban on imports of Australian beef and barley, and appears designed to turn Australia into the poor white trash of Asia. [China's spokesperson said](#), "China's position on developing relations with Australia is consistent and clear. Sound and stable China-Australia ties serve the common interests of both, but it takes efforts from both sides. We hope Australia can work together with China for the same goal, uphold mutual respect and equality, and do more things conducive to advancing bilateral cooperation and mutual trust and in keeping with the two sides' comprehensive strategic partnership".



HMAS Ballarat and USS John S McCain operate together in the South China Sea on their way to participate in Exercise Malabar 2020. Source: US Indo-PACOM

[Australian cotton industry groups said](#) mills in China had been [verbally directed](#) to stop buying Australian cotton. Reports also indicated that China was preparing to impose a 40% tariff on Australian cotton. China buys about 65% of Australia's cotton crop, worth about \$ 800 million every year. [China's spokesperson said](#) he was not aware of the development.

A report from Australia indicates that Australia [planned to raise](#) jointly countering disinformation campaigns by authoritarian states and action to secure supplies of critical minerals and technology, in a bid to reduce reliance on China.

Australia's parliament will debate whether the federal government should support [Australia's withdrawal from the February 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics](#), on account of safety fears, concerns that the athletes could become unwilling participants in CCP propaganda and to protest against human rights abuses. The [Global Times said](#) such an action shows "their political narrow-mindedness and surrender to the US influence".

Marking an end to around 30 years of the Royal Australian Navy's deployment of RAN ships to the Middle East, [Defence Minister Linda Reynolds announced](#) that the ADF would cease the annual deployment of RAN ships to the Middle East and would not extend its commitment to the International Maritime Security Construct beyond December 2020. The move is to address an increasingly challenging strategic environment in the Indo-Pacific, closer to home.

In an event of strategic significance, New Caledonian voters narrowly rejected the option of independence from France in the [second of the three referendums](#) permitted under the 1998 Noumea Accord held on October 04, 2020. 53.2% voted to remain French, down from 56.7% in the 2018 referendum. The pro-independence groups have worked hard to boost their support. A third and final referendum is permitted in 2022 if requested by a third of the local assembly. Growing Chinese influence in the region and the fact that it is by far the largest importer of New Caledonian mineral and other products generate concern about the future. Loss of New Caledonia would generate [calls for independence from other Melanesian islands](#), not only reducing the large French EEZ in the Pacific, but also exposing Australia's North and East to China.

Reports emerged of [Chinese diplomats in Fiji gate-crashing](#) the Taiwan National Day reception in Fiji, photographing those attending the function and then assaulting a member of the Taiwan delegation who asked them to leave and beating him up so badly that he required hospitalisation. The police were called in, but refused to take the matter further when the Chinese officials claimed diplomatic immunity. Chinese pressure had last year [forced Taiwan to change the name](#) of its office in Fiji from "Trade Mission of the Republic of China (Taiwan) to the Republic of Fiji" to "Taipei Trade Office in Fiji". China's [spokesperson said](#) the report was totally untrue, but went on to say that the event severely violated the one-China principle and Taipei Trade Office staff acted provocatively against Chinese Embassy staff who were carrying out their official duties in the public area of the same hotel.

China organised a [visit by diplomats and trade and investment commissioners](#) from Samoa, Tonga, Fiji, the Federated States of Micronesia, Papua New Guinea

and Vanuatu to Guangdong Province in a bid to impress them with its growth model. It show-cased its success against COVID-19, economic and social development, reform and opening up drive.

The US announced funding of over \$ 200 million for Pacific island nations as part of its [Pacific Pledge](#). This adds to the assistance of over \$ 100 million announced last year. US National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien announced that the US Coast Guard would investigate the feasibility of [basing Fast Response Cutters in American Samoa](#) in FY 2021. The action was intended to counter the PRC's illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and harassment of vessels operating the EEZs of other countries in the Indo-Pacific. The USCG is already homeporting such cutters in the Western Pacific.

USA

Speaking at the Centre for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA) on October 06, 2020. Secretary of Defense Mark Esper outlined his long-term plan to maintain the US Navy's superiority in an increasingly interconnected world that depends on the maritime domain for trade. The proposed [Battle Force 2045](#) calls for reaching 355 Battle Force ships by 2035, and targets a balanced navy of over 500 manned and unmanned ships by 2045. The force composition includes 70 - 80 attack submarines through building three Virginia class submarines every year and investing in the future SSN(X); an aircraft carrier force of 8 - 11 nuclear powered ones and up to 6 light carriers; 140 - 240 optionally manned and unmanned surface and sub-surface vessels of all types for a variety of missions; 60 - 70 surface combatants, 70 - 90 combat logistics ships, unmanned aircraft of all types and a revised marine force design.

Assistant Secretary of State Robert A Destro of the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour was [concurrently designated](#) as the United States Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues on October 14, 2020. His mandate is to promote dialogue between the PRC and the Dalai Lama, protect the unique religious, cultural and linguistic identity of Tibetans and press for their human rights to be respected. He will also support US efforts to address the humanitarian needs of Tibetan refugees and promote sustainable economic development and environmental conservation in Tibetan communities on the plateau. A [change in the US Tibet policy was immediately evident](#) as he met Lobsang Sangay, President of Tibet's government-in-exile, in the State Department on October 15, 2020, the first time in six decades that the President of the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) was invited inside the State Department. Sangay invited Assistant Secretary Destro to [visit the CTA](#)

[headquarters at Dharamsala](#). China's spokesperson described the appointment as "[political manipulation to interfere in China's domestic affairs](#) and undermine Xizang's development and stability. He also described Mr Sangay as an anti-China separatist and said that China would take all necessary steps to safeguard its interests.

The US Department of State [designated the National Association for China's Peaceful Unification](#) (NACPU) as a foreign mission of the PRC under the US Foreign Missions Act and discontinued participation in the MoU between the US and the PRC concerning the establishment of the US-China Governor's Forum to promote sub-national cooperation. Both actions were taken to highlight that the organisations concerned were used to advance PRC propaganda, instead of advancing real people-to-people exchanges. [China's spokesperson described](#) the measures as "political manipulation driven by ideological bias".

The US Justice Department [arrested five people](#) on October 28, 2020, including three Chinese nationals in the US for their alleged involvement in an illegal scheme to force a US resident to return to China to face prosecution. Three other people were also charged, but remained at large. Those arrested were described as part of China's Operation Fox Hunt, a programme to target dissidents and critics of China's President Xi Jinping.

The [White House stated](#) that the US GDP grew 33.1% on an annualised basis during the third quarter of 2020, describing it as a super V-shaped recovery and stating that the economy was now "firing on all cylinders". It also said that the need to rebuild inventories would lead to a self-sustaining economic boom.

[USS John S. McCain](#) was reported to have entered the waters near the Paracel Islands for a Freedom of Navigation Operation, according to a report. The ship followed up by [training with JMSDF ships Kaga and Ikazuchi](#) in the South China Sea on October 12, 2020. [China demanded](#) that "the US immediately stop such provocative actions and strictly control and restrict military operations in the sea and air". In other Indo-Pacific Command activity, [USS Barry](#) conducted a routine Taiwan Strait transit on October 14, 2020 and the USS Ronald Reagan conducted [maritime security and stability operations in the Indian Ocean](#) before returning to the South China Sea for the third time this year. She was [joined there](#) by USS John S. McCain.



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