

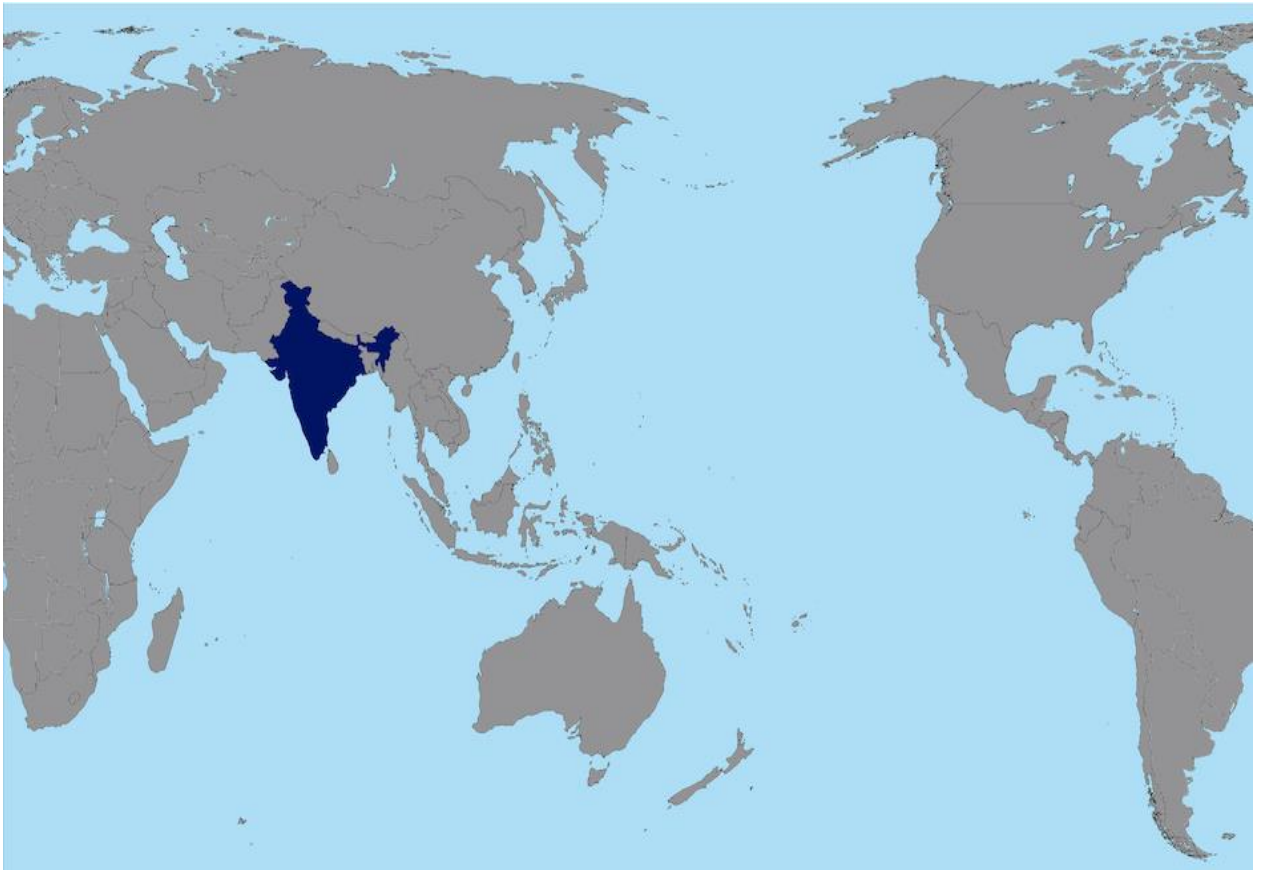


# Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



## DPG INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR NOVEMBER 2020



Volume I, Issue 11 | November 2020

Delhi Policy Group

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

[www.delhipolicygroup.org](http://www.delhipolicygroup.org)



# Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power

## DPG INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

Volume 1, Issue 11

November 2020

### ABOUT US

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

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

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

### 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 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](mailto:anushka@dpg.org.in). To subscribe, please [click here](#).

© 2020 by the Delhi Policy Group

#### Delhi Policy Group

Core 5A, 1st Floor,  
India Habitat Centre,  
Lodhi Road, New Delhi- 110003.  
[www.delhipolicygroup.org](http://www.delhipolicygroup.org)

DPG INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR  
Volume 1, Issue 11  
November 2020

Contents

Overview .....	1
The Global Scene .....	5
Indo-Pacific Competition .....	8
East Africa .....	11
West Asia .....	12
South Asia .....	15
South East Asia .....	24
East Asia .....	30
Southern and Western Pacific .....	38
USA .....	41

## DPG INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

November 2020

### Overview

Though official results of the 59<sup>th</sup> US presidential election are yet to be declared, media forecasts give victory to the Joe Biden - Kamala Harris combine with 51.0% of the popular vote, as against 47.1% for the Donald Trump – Mike Pence team. President Trump filed lawsuits in a number of states seeking to overturn election results, but authorised the General Services Administration to do what was necessary to enable a smooth transition. The Electoral College will cast its votes on December 14, 2020, with media projections giving 306 of them to Biden and 232 to Trump.

The month witnessed the 37<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit and other ASEAN-centric meetings, culminating in the 15<sup>th</sup> East Asia Summit from November 12-14, 2020. Outcomes included adoption of the Ha Noi Declaration, as well as Leaders' Statements on Marine Sustainability; Epidemics Prevention and Response; Women, Peace and Security; and Steady Growth of the Regional Economy. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, involving EAS partner nations other than India, the US and Russia, was signed on November 15, 2020. Other major international summits during the month included the 20<sup>th</sup> Summit of the SCO Council of Heads of State chaired by Russia on November 10; the 12<sup>th</sup> annual BRICS summit chaired by Russia on November 17; and the 15<sup>th</sup> G20 Summit chaired by Saudi Arabia from November 21-22, 2020. Due to the pandemic, all summits were held virtually.

Covid-19 had infected a cumulative total of over 63 million people and killed nearly 1.5 million by November 30, 2020. The US, India and Brazil, with over 13.9 million, 9.5 million and 6.3 million reported cases respectively, continued to be the worst affected. Developed nations including the US, UK, Italy, Russia and Germany experienced a spike in infections due to the virus' second wave even as China claimed it had more or less vanquished the virus within its borders. Meanwhile, the WHO probe into the origins of the virus meandered along, with China continuing to obfuscate and tailor the narrative to prevent a meaningful outcome. A number of vaccines, claiming different degrees of effectiveness, were in the final stages of trials, with the developed world reported to have cornered 50% of the production and the first vaccinations expected to commence in December 2020.

China's increasing grip over multilateral organisations became evident once again with the re-election of its candidate to the International Court of Justice for a nine-year term beginning in February 2021. Elections to six more bodies, including the ICAO, IFAD, UNESCO, UNIDO, UPU and UNWTO will be held before December 2021, and unless concerned nations can find ways to overcome backroom deals and coercion, China will continue to be elected to leadership positions enabling it to shape global rules in these bodies.

The 24<sup>th</sup> edition of Exercise Malabar, including Australian participation for the first time, was conducted during the month in two phases in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea. Germany's defence minister announced that her country would deploy a warship to patrol the Indian Ocean next year. Netherlands joined France and Germany in outlining a new strategy for the Indo-Pacific. UK announced an increase in defence spending by over £24.1 billion over the next four years, raising expenditure to 2.2% of the GDP. It also announced plans to deploy the HMS Queen Elizabeth Carrier Task Group to the Indo-Pacific in 2021.

Amid reports of deep concern over voting irregularities and election violence, John Magufuli commenced his second term as the President of the Republic of Tanzania. Ethiopia's Tigray region erupted in internal conflict, with the impact spilling over into neighbouring Sudan and Eritrea, threatening to destabilise all of East Africa. President Putin reportedly accepted the Russian government's proposal to create a logistics centre for the Russian Navy in Sudan. The UN Security Council voted to prevent the sale of components for IEDs to Somalia, due to the risk of their being diverted to Al-Shabab extremists. Kenya finalised a free trade agreement with UK, breaking away from the East African Community's preference for collective negotiations next year and raising prospects of undermining the EAC's customs union.

The assassination of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, the head of Iran's nuclear programme, and a clandestine meeting between Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu, Saudi Arabia's Prince Mohammed bin Salman and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, portended changing power equations in the Gulf region. The UAE reformed the nation's Islamic personal law to make the country a more attractive destination for foreign direct investment and tourism. The US State Department notified the Congress of its decision to approve the sale to the UAE of nearly \$ 23.5 billion worth of military equipment, including 18 MQ-9B Reaper UAVs and 50 F-35A Lightning fighter aircraft. The GCC-India Political Dialogue was held virtually on November 03, 2020. External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar visited Bahrain and UAE from November 24-26, 2020.

The situation in Afghanistan continued to deteriorate, with terror attacks and a Taliban offensive aimed at reclaiming Kandahar even as President Trump fired Secretary of Defense Mark Esper and raised fears that he would accelerate the withdrawal of US troops. Pakistan announced granting of provincial status to Gilgit-Baltistan and released a dossier claiming that Indian diplomats in Afghanistan were running dissident terror groups in Pakistan, a claim that was strongly rebutted by both Afghanistan and India. Russian Special Forces were in Pakistan for a two-week counter-terrorism exercise Druzhba-5, while France declined a request from Pakistan to upgrade its Mirage III and Mirage V aircraft as well as Agosta 90B submarines.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi spent Diwali with Indian troops at Longewala and IAF personnel at Jaisalmer. India's Foreign Secretary outlined India's vision of the Indo-Pacific in an address to the UK think tank Policy Exchange. India conducted the 9<sup>th</sup> Indo-Thai CORPAT in the Andaman Sea, as well as Exercises SITMEX 20 and SIMBEX 20.

Three Rafale aircraft and the 9<sup>th</sup> P-8I were inducted by the Indian military during the month, while two Predator UAVs on lease added to India's surveillance capability. India's fifth Scorpene class submarine, to be named INS Vagir, was launched and is expected to become fully operational next year. The indigenous Quick Reaction Surface-to-Air Missile System was successfully flight tested, while reports indicated that integration of the indigenous ASTRA BVRAAM with the Tejas fighter would be tested shortly.

The Bangladesh and US navies participated in the sea phase of Exercise CARAT Bangladesh 2020.

Myanmar's ruling National League for Democracy decisively won the national elections held on November 08, 2020. Another US-built facility at Cambodia's Ream Naval Base was demolished. The Indonesian Navy detained three Malaysian vessels for fishing illegally inside Indonesia's EEZ and announced the shifting of its combat squad to the Natuna Sea to better defend its maritime resources. Malaysian naval vessels intervened to prevent China's Coast Guard ship 5402 browbeating a chartered drilling vessel from operating in Luconia Shoal, inside Malaysia's EEZ, in the South China Sea, and the government of Melaka terminated an agreement with the main developer of the China-financed Melaka Gateway BRI project. An encounter between the Philippine Armed Forces and the Abu Sayyaf group left seven terrorists dead, while reports indicated that Philippines would soon sign an agreement with India for purchase of land-based BrahMos cruise missile batteries. The 11<sup>th</sup> Singapore-Vietnam Defence Policy Dialogue took place, while the Singapore Armed

Forces conducted tri-service Exercise Apex during the month. The Trump administration notified Congress about sale of four weapons ready MQ-9B Reaper UAVs to Taiwan and conducted the inaugural US-Taiwan Economic Prosperity Partnership Dialogue.

Japan and the US began formal negotiations on a new host nation support agreement. Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison travelled to Tokyo on November 17, 2020 for a summit with Japanese Prime Minister Suga, and announced the in-principle decision to conclude a Reciprocal Access Agreement with Japan which will enable operation of the ADF and JSDF in each other's countries. Japan's Defense Ministry announced plans to build two new Aegis destroyers in place of the abandoned plan to introduce the Aegis Ashore BMD system.

China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Tokyo a week after PM Morrison and met Prime Minister Suga and his counterpart Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi, essentially to assess Japan's stance after assumption of office by PM Suga. At a joint press conference with Motegi, Wang Yi surprised his host by blandly asserting that the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands belonged to China. He followed up by visiting South Korea before returning home.

Just two days before Jack Ma's Ant group was scheduled to raise \$ 37 billion from the world's largest public offering of shares, China's financial regulator suspended the IPO sending shock waves through financial markets and calling into doubt China's commitment to the transparency needed in open markets. The US State Department removed the East Turkistan Islamic Movement from its terrorist exclusion list, causing a strong backlash from China. In a show of technological prowess, China launched the Chang'e lunar mission to retrieve rock samples from the moon. China's Central Military Commission released an outline on improving the joint combat capabilities of the PLA and ordered all levels of the armed forces to study and implement it. China also announced that it would allow its Coast Guard to use weapons against vessels indulging in illegal activities in waters it controls if they fail to obey orders. A report claimed that the DF-26B and DF-21D ballistic missiles China launched into the South China Sea in August this year successfully struck a moving vessel, thus validating their anti-carrier capability. The Standing Committee of China's National People's Congress passed a resolution empowering the Hong Kong government to disqualify legislators opposing China's policies, resulting in the disqualification of four pro-democracy legislators with immediate effect. Foreign Ministers of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and US joined hands in condemning China's actions as a clear breach of its commitments under the legally-binding, UN-registered Sino-British Joint Declaration.

China's undeclared economic offensive against Australia gathered pace, with Australian products such as coal, seafood, red wine, copper, timber, sugar and barley being held up by Chinese customs. China's embassy in Canberra sought to generate economic pressure on the Australian government by publicising 14 disputes impacting bilateral economic relations. Indonesia gained at Australia's expense, signing a deal to sell China \$ 1.467 billion worth of thermal coal in 2021. Australia released parts of the Afghanistan Inquiry Report, alleging 55 incidents of war crimes by Australian Special Forces in Afghanistan between 2005 and 2016, and announced the appointment of a special investigator to assess the crimes. A post on Twitter by China's spokesman on the subject sparked outrage in Australia and resulted in PM Morrison demanding an apology.

The US Department of State released a report titled "The Elements of the China Challenge", identifying a ten-step process to ramp up diplomatic pressure on Beijing. USS John Finn used an advanced SM-3 Block IIA missile to successfully intercept and destroy an ICBM-representative target during a flight test on November 16, 2020. US Navy Secretary Kenneth Braithwaite announced his recommendation to reactivate the 1<sup>st</sup> Fleet for operations at the intersection of the Pacific and Indian Oceans. The USN maintained a continuous presence in the South China Sea during the month, while USS John S McCain conducted a Freedom of Navigation operation to challenge Russia's expansive maritime claims in the Sea of Japan.

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

## The Global Scene

The Corona virus pandemic continued to rage, having [infected a cumulative total](#) of over 63 million people and killed nearly 1.5 million by the end of November 2020. The US led the global tally, with nearly 13.9 million infections, over 270,000 deaths and well over 100,000 new cases being reported daily. India followed with nearly 9.5 million infections and 138,000 deaths. Brazil, with nearly 6.4 million infections was the third worst impacted country. Russia and France had each experienced over 2.2 million infections, while Spain, UK, Italy, Argentina, Colombia, Mexico and Germany had all topped the one million infections mark. As the month ended, the number of infections in nations including the US, UK, Russia, Italy, Germany, Poland, Iran, South Africa, Pakistan, Canada and Ukraine was trending upwards due to a resurgence of the virus. China, on the other hand, claimed that the virus had nearly vanished within its borders, with only a handful of new cases being reported daily.





Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Serum Institute of India, Pune, on November 28, 2020. Source: PMO

A [30-second coronavirus detection test](#) being developed jointly by India and Israel is being calibrated by the Israeli team after testing was completed in India, according to reports. The test, once released, has been billed as “good news for the entire world”. Meanwhile, a number of vaccines, claiming different degrees of effectiveness, were reported to be in the final phase of trials, with some hoping that they would be ready for distribution [before Christmas 2020](#). After phase 3 trials, [Pfizer-BioNTech claimed](#) that its vaccine was 95% effective across race, gender, age and ethnicity demographics beginning 28 days after the first dose. [Moderna Inc claimed](#) that its mRNA-1273 vaccine had achieved an efficacy of 94.5% in the first interim analysis of the Phase 3 study. [AstraZeneca Plc](#) claimed that its AZD1222 vaccine showed an efficacy of 90% when given as a half dose followed by a full dose one month later. It had the added advantages of costing a fraction of the price of vaccines produced by competitors, and being the only one that could be stored at normal refrigerator temperatures of 2-8°C for at least six months. Russia’s [Sputnik V](#) also claimed 91.4% effectiveness and had entered into an agreement with Hyderabad-based [Hetero Biopharma](#) to manufacture 100 million doses annually in India. Prime Minister Narendra Modi [visited India’s vaccine production hubs](#) in Ahmedabad, Hyderabad and Pune to review progress with the ZyCov-D, Covaxin and AstraZeneca vaccine production in India and obtain a first-hand understanding of the preparations, challenges and roadmap in India’s endeavour to vaccinate its citizens.

The WHO probe to trace the origins of Covid-19 threatened to turn into a sham following the holding of the [first video conference](#) between the WHO and Chinese experts. [China's spokesman said](#), "Origin tracing is a scientific matter that requires international research and cooperation between scientists across the globe ... This is an ongoing process that may involve many countries and places. We hope that all relevant countries will adopt a positive attitude and cooperate with the WHO like China does, making contributions to global origin-tracing and anti-epidemic cooperation". On a specific question about when the WHO visit would take place, he said, "If there is any information, we will release it in due course". Meanwhile, one study reported that COVID – 19 was circulating [in Italy](#) since September 2019 and [entered China](#) through imported meat or seafood products. Another, preceded by China [suspending fish imports](#) from India's Basu International for one week after claiming it had detected the novel coronavirus on three samples taken from the outer packaging of frozen cuttlefish, indicated that the virus had [originated in India](#) in summer 2019. More such studies are expected surface as the probe into the origins of the virus moves ahead.

The International Maritime Organisation's Safety Committee approved plans to get the [IMO to include a public list of all ports where crew changes are possible](#), as well as highlighting crew change regulations in individual countries. This information will enable shipping companies to plan crew changes from ports that permit repatriation to the home country. Such a list is presently maintained [by private companies](#), but without warranty for its accuracy.

The [UN Security Council](#) and the [UN General Assembly](#) elected five judges to the International Court of Justice for nine-year terms beginning on February 06, 2021. Four of the judges elected, from China, Slovakia, Uganda and Japan, are currently serving members of the court. The fifth judge elected was Mr Georg Nolte, from Germany. The Chinese judge, Ms Xue Hanqin, is currently the court's vice-president, having been a member since June 29, 2010. She has also served as China's Ambassador to ASEAN and to the Netherlands. Elections to six more bodies, including the ICAO, IFAD, UNESCO, UNIDO, UPU and UNWTO will be held before December 2021, and unless concerned nations can find ways to overcome backroom deals and coercion, China will continue to be elected to leadership positions enabling it to shape global rules in these bodies.

The terror menace reared its head again in Western Europe, when a 20-year old Islamist extremist who was imprisoned but released early from jail last year went on a [shooting spree in Vienna](#) on November 02, 2020, killing at least four people and injuring another 22 before being 'neutralised' by Austrian Special

Forces. The attack was condemned by European and world leaders, including Presidents Trump, Putin and Macron, Chancellor Merkel, Prime Minister Boris Johnson. European leaders described [Islamist terror](#) as their common enemy. Meanwhile, [SEAL Team 6](#) of the US Special Forces carried out a [successful operation](#) to rescue an American citizen held hostage by a group of armed men in Northern Nigeria. [President Trump said](#) "Today's operation should serve as a stark warning to terrorists and criminal thugs who mistakenly believe they can kidnap Americans with impunity".



SEAL Team 6 Deploying for Hostage Rescue Operations in Nigeria

Source: Asia Times

## Indo-Pacific Competition

Speaking at a dialogue on [Geostrategic Challenges and Opportunities in the Indo-Pacific](#) organised by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute on November 05, 2020, Germany's Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer spoke of her country's intention to "expand security and defence cooperation with those who share our values in the region". She said Germany planned to send naval vessels to patrol Indian Ocean trade routes next year and it was discussing with the Australian Defence Force the possibility of placing liaison officers aboard Australian naval vessels.

The Netherlands joined France and Germany in outlining a [new strategy for the Indo-Pacific](#), according to a report. The strategy calls for a greater focus on

Asia in view of the EU's increasing economic and trade partnerships with the region and China's growing assertiveness. It singles out [concerns over the South China Sea](#), where the growing rivalry between China and the US threatens to destabilise this critical transportation corridor. It proposes that the EU be given an advisory or observer role at the ongoing Code of Conduct negotiations, and that the EU must express itself more strongly on developments that violate UNCLOS. It also calls for [deepening of EU ties with regional powers](#) like Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, Japan and India, as well as Southeast Asian nations like Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia and Vietnam.



An F-35B lands on board HMS Queen Elizabeth. The carrier and accompanying ships will be deployed to Asia in 2021. Source: British Ministry of Defence

In a speech to the House of Commons on November 19, 2020 regarding the UK's integrated review of foreign, defence, security and development policy, [Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced](#) that the UK would increase its defence spending by £24.1 billion over the next four years, raising it to 2.2% of the GDP. He added that the international situation was now more perilous and intensely competitive that at any time since the Cold War, and extending British influence required a once-in-a-generation modernisation of the armed forces. Among the initiatives he announced were plans for eight Type 26 and five Type 31 frigates, development of multi-role research vessels and Type 32 frigates, deployment of the HMS Elizabeth carrier task group to the Mediterranean, Indian Ocean and East Asia in 2021, forward deployment of more naval assets so as to protect the shipping lanes that supply the nation,

establishment of a new centre dedicated to Artificial Intelligence, establishment of a new RAF Space Command to launch British satellites from Scotland commencing 2022, establishment of a National Cyber Force and the procurement of a new fighter system for the RAF.



Ships from the Australian, Indian, Japanese and US Navies, led by the submarine INS Khanderi and aircraft carriers USS Nimitz and INS Vikramaditya, participate in the Arabian Sea in Phase II of Exercise Malabar 2020 on November 17, 2020. Source: US INDO-PACOM.

The 24<sup>th</sup> edition of Exercise Malabar, with [participation from Australia](#) for the first time, was conducted in two phases in November 2020. [The first phase](#), in the Bay of Bengal from November 03 – 06, witnessed the participation of IN Ships Ranvijay, Shivalik, Sukanya, Shakti and the submarine Sindhuraj, as well as USS John S McCain, HMAS Ballarat and JMSDFS Onami with their integral helicopters, and Hawk, Dornier, P-8I aircraft. [Exercises conducted](#) included surface, anti-submarine and anti-air operations, as well as cross-deck flying, seamanship evolutions and weapon firings. [China's spokesperson](#) said, "We hope the relevant countries' military exercise could be conducive to regional peace and stability, instead of working the opposite way".

The [second phase](#) of Exercise Malabar 2020 was [conducted in the Arabian Sea](#) from November 17-20, 2020. IN participation comprised IN ships Vikramaditya, Kolkota, Chennai, Talwar and Deepak with their integral aircraft and helicopters, the indigenously built Scorpene class submarine INS Khanderi and P-8I and IL-38 maritime reconnaissance aircraft. USN participation included US ships Nimitz, Princeton and Sterett, with integral aircraft and P-8A

maritime reconnaissance aircraft. HMAS Ballarat [and JS Murasame](#) represented Australia and Japan respectively.

## East Africa

The UN Security Council voted 13-0 to prevent the [sale or shipment to Somalia of components of improvised explosive devices](#) due to the risk of their being used in attacks by al-Shabab extremists. China and Russia abstained.

Ethiopia's [Tigray region erupted in conflict](#) between government forces and insurgents on November 04, 2020, killing hundreds and pushing thousands of refugees into neighbouring Sudan. Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, who was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize in 2018 for the peace pact with Eritrea, accused the rebel Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) of treason and terrorism. The conflict resulted in the [TPLF targeting two airports](#) in Ethiopia's Amhara region with rockets and [attacking Asmara airport in Eritrea](#) on November 14, 2020, claiming that Ethiopian soldiers were using the Eritrean airport to attack Tigray. The [US strongly condemned these attacks](#) as a blatant attempt by the TPLF to cause regional instability. Even as Ethiopia [claimed capture of Mekelle](#), the capital of the Northern Tigray region on November 29, 2020, rockets fired by the rebels [continued to hit Asmara](#). The conflict, which carries the potential of destabilising all of East Africa, has been identified as amongst President-elect [Biden's top foreign policy challenges in Africa](#).

President John Magufuli was inaugurated as [president of the United Republic of Tanzania](#) for a second and final term on November 05, 2020, winning 84% of the total valid votes. The election was, however, marred by violence, detention of opposition candidates, media crackdown, intimidation of political leaders by the security apparatus and disqualification of opposition candidates from participation in many places. International observers said that his re-election came through irregularities and lacked credibility. The US [expressed deep concern](#) on credible reports of "significant and widespread voting irregularities, internet interruption, arrests and violence by security forces both in mainland Tanzania and on Zanzibar". It called on the Government of Tanzania to uphold the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all, and said it would consider action, including visa restrictions, as appropriate, to hold accountable those found to be responsible for human rights abuses and interference in the election process.

[South Africa](#) (along with Columbia and Cuba) signed instruments of accession to [ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation](#) on November 10, 2020, broadening its prospects for cooperation with ASEAN.

UK and Kenya finalised negotiations on a [trade deal enabling tariff-free access](#) for exporters from both countries to each other's markets. Bilateral trade between the two countries is worth \$ 1.8 billion every year. Members of the East African Community have argued that the deal could [undermine established trade relationships](#) in East Africa because the EAC operates under a common external tariff, which would not apply to the new deal. Kenya wants the deal before the end of the year to avoid losing access to the UK market due to Brexit, while the EAC wants a stopgap arrangement for Kenya before beginning negotiations with UK as a bloc in 2021. The deal could undermine the EAC's customs union, exposing Kenya to barriers from the EAC countries.

President Putin is reported to have accepted the Russian government's proposal to sign an agreement for the creation of a [logistics centre for the Russian Navy in Sudan](#). An agreement to this effect was [reportedly signed](#) with Khartoum earlier this month. The agreement permits Russia to station four of its warships at the facility.

## West Asia

The [India-GCC Political Dialogue](#) was held virtually on November 03, 2020. Partner nations reviewed bilateral ties and expressed satisfaction at their close cooperation even during the pandemic. India said it had ensured supply chains from India to the Gulf had not been disrupted despite the lockdown; sought the return of its professionals to the Gulf through travel-bubble arrangements; and exchanged views on regional and international issues of mutual concern. Both sides affirmed their commitment to reform multilateral institutions to reflect the realities of the 21st century and to work together to address contemporary challenges such as the Covid-19 pandemic, climate change, sustainable development and terrorism.

The UAE [announced overhaul of the nation's Islamic personal laws](#) on November 07, 2020. The revised laws contain a provision for non-Emiratis to have their personal affairs governed in accordance with the law of their home country and liberalise existing laws in areas such as divorce, separation and inheritance; suicide and good Samaritans; harassment and assault including criminalising honour killings; alcohol consumption; cohabitation for unmarried couples; and judicial procedures. The revision, effective immediately, is intended to ensure that the UAE continues "to be a destination for foreign direct investment and people from around the world". The divide in the Islamic world could not be starker. While Saudi Arabia and the UAE are moving away from fundamentalism, Turkey and Pakistan appear to be moving in the other direction.

The [UAE temporarily stopped issuing visas](#) to citizens of Pakistan, Afghanistan, Algeria, Iraq, Iran, Kenya, Libya, Lebanon, Syria, Somalia, Tunisia, Turkey and Yemen over security concerns. The nature of the concerns was not specified.

The US State Department notified the Congress of its intention to approve the sale to the UAE of [18 weapons-ready MQ-9B remotely piloted aircraft](#) and associated equipment for an estimated cost of \$ 2.97 billion; [50 F-35A Joint Strike Fighters](#) and associated equipment estimated to cost \$ 10.5 billion and a [variety of munitions](#) for the aircraft valued at about \$ 10 billion on November 10, 2020. The approval [was stated to be](#) "recognition of the deepening US relationship and the UAE's need for advanced defense capabilities to deter and defend itself against heightened threats from Iran".

[Reports indicate](#) that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu flew clandestinely to the city of Neom in Saudi Arabia on November 22, 2020, [and met](#) Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Mossad chief Yossi Cohen was also reported to have attended the meeting. Saudi Arabia's foreign minister [denied that any such meeting took place](#). Secretary of State Michael Pompeo [acknowledged that he had met MBS at Neom](#) on November 22, but was non-committal Netanyahu's presence, while [Israel's Education Minister](#) described the meeting as an incredible achievement.

The governments of the US and the State of Kuwait held the fourth US-Kuwait Strategic Dialogue in Washington DC on November 24, 2020. The [Joint Statement](#) issued on completion talks of the two countries reaffirming their commitment to promote the stability and security of the region.

External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar [visited Bahrain](#) from November 24-25, 2020. His visit included calls on the HRH Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince, Deputy Supreme Commander and Prime Minister of Bahrain; HH Shaikh Ali bin Khalifa Al Khalifa, the Deputy Prime Minister; and H.E. Dr Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani, the Foreign Minister. The visit resulted in the countries agreeing to further strengthen ties in the fields of defence and maritime security; space technology; trade and investment; infrastructure; IT; FinTech; health; and hydrocarbon and renewable energy.

External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar [visited the UAE](#) from November 25-26, 2020. He called on the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and held discussions with his counterpart HH Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan. Both sides reviewed their cooperation on various facets of their comprehensive strategic partnership including trade, investment, infrastructure, energy, food security and defence. EAM and the



UAE Foreign Minister discussed recent regional and international developments and agreed to continue coordination on various multilateral issues.



External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar meets Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, in the UAE on November 26, 2020. Source: @DrSJaishankar

The US [sanctioned four entities](#) located in the People's Republic of China and in Russia for supporting Iran's missile programme. The entities included China's Chengdu Best New Materials Company, Ltd, and Zibo Elim Trade Co; as well as Russia's Nilco Group and JSC Elecon.

The head of Iran's nuclear programme, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, was [assassinated in a terror attack](#), possibly involving a suicide bomber, in Damavand, east of Tehran, on November 27, 2020. Reports indicate that Fakhrizadeh was injured in the attack and died later in hospital. Iran's foreign minister said that indications pointed to Israeli involvement in the attack. Iran's Foreign Minister wrote to the UN Secretary-General and the UNSC claiming serious indications of Israeli responsibility and reserving the right of Iran to defend itself, while Iran's Supreme Leader vowed retaliation. [One report said](#) that Iran's nuclear programme was long past the point when it is dependent on a single individual, so the assassination of Fakhrizadeh had to be for political reasons, rather than to stop the programme. It identified two possible motives: to jeopardise

potential improvements in relations between Iran and the incoming Biden administration; and to encourage Iran to retaliate.

## South Asia

Three terrorists [laid siege to Kabul University](#), taking hostages, killing at least 19 people and wounding more than a dozen, according to reports. The terrorists were killed after Afghan security forces and US troops acted to root them out. The Taliban denied responsibility and blamed the Islamic State. India [strongly condemned the attack](#) and said it stood in solidarity with those who lost their sons and daughters in this heinous act. Meanwhile, the [US condemned](#) the assassination of Abdul Wase Ghafari, father Kabul's Mayor Zarifa Ghafari.

The Taliban launched an offensive aimed at [reclaiming Kandahar](#), resulting in large numbers of casualties to both sides as well as to civilians and the displacement of thousands.

President Trump's [dismissal of Defense Secretary Mark Esper](#) on November 09, 2020 raised fears that the US will accelerate the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan. Such an action would set up a clash with the nation's top military leadership and also [complicate President-elect Biden's pledge](#) to leave a small number of troops in the country to guard against terror attacks. Meanwhile, the Taliban called upon President-elect Biden to [stick to its February peace agreement](#), describing it as the "most reasonable and effective tool" for ending the war in Afghanistan.

Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi and military spokesman Maj Gen Babar Iftikhar [made public a dossier](#) containing "irrefutable proof" of India's sponsoring terror in Pakistan on November 14, 2020, and called on the world to stop India to preserve the region's peace and security. The dossier, made public before Prime Minister Imran Khan's expected visit to Kabul and shared with the UN, OIC, members of the UNSC and other world capitals, claimed that India's diplomats, military and intelligence officials had been working with Pakistan-centric terrorist groups based in Afghanistan. [India responded by saying](#), "the so called claims of 'proof' against India enjoy no credibility, are fabricated and represent figments of imagination. This desperate attempt will find few takers as the international community is aware of Pakistan's tactics and proof of its terror sponsorship has been admitted by none other than its own leadership". India's spokesman cited the fact that Osama bin Laden was found in Pakistan, that Pakistan's PM glorified him as a 'martyr' from the floor of Parliament and admitted the presence of 40,000

terrorists in Pakistan, and its Science and Technology Minister proudly claimed the involvement and success of Pakistan in the Pulwama terror attack.

Afghanistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs strongly [rejected the Pakistani military's claims](#) that Afghan soil was used for terror attacks against Pakistan. The response came after [Pakistan's military spokesman had claimed](#) that Indian diplomats in Afghanistan, including the Indian Ambassador in Afghanistan and the Indian Consular office in Jalalabad had detailed discussions with collaborators to provide financial support to the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan and dissident Baloch elements, and have regularly been supervising terrorising terrorist activity.

Speaking at the Afghanistan 2020 Conference at Geneva on November 24, 2020, EAM [Dr S Jaishankar announced](#) an agreement between Afghanistan and India to build the Shatoot Dam, to provide safe drinking water to the two million residents of Kabul. The agreement builds on the 202 Km long transmission Phul-e-Kumri transmission line which provides electric power to the city. He also announced Phase-IV of the High Impact Community Development Plan, which includes around 150 projects in Afghanistan worth \$ 80 million. The speech provides an overview of India's development portfolio in Afghanistan, which now adds up to more than \$ 3 billion covering around 400 projects spread across all 34 provinces of Afghanistan.

More than two years after assuming office in August 2018, Prime Minister Imran Khan visited Kabul for the first time on November 19, 2020, even as intra-Afghan talks remained stalled. At a joint press conference with the Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, [he said](#), "My idea of choosing this time to come was to assure you that Pakistan will do everything, whatever is possible to help reduce this violence and move towards ceasefire". [President Ashraf Ghani described the visit](#) as "historic" and said that it delivers a special message to the entire Afghan nation. He said that it was the common objective of the two nations to "take a leap of faith to overcome the distrust that has haunted our relationship". He reiterated that "embracing a constructive politics, a politics of engagement and inclusive politics is the way to future". This happened as [demonstrators protesting the visit](#) took to the streets of Kabul, terming Pakistan a "producer, sponsor and exporter of terrorism", denouncing Pakistan's hypocritical policy. Similar protests were also reported in other Afghan provinces.

Pakistan announced the granting of [provincial status to Gilgit Baltistan](#) on November 01, 2020. [India protested](#) "the attempt by Pakistan to bring material changes to a part of Indian territory, under its illegal and forcible occupation". It reiterated that Gilgit-Baltistan was an integral part of India by virtue of the

legal, complete and irrevocable accession of Jammu and Kashmir to the Union of India in 1947, and that Pakistan had no locus standi on territories illegally and forcibly occupied by it. Pakistan's action is bound to increase international scrutiny of Pakistan's questioning India's abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019. Meanwhile, violence and demonstrations [were reported](#) in Gilgit, Skardu and Chilas on November 23, 2020, as workers of the Pakistan People's Party protested unofficial results following Gilgit-Baltistan's elections.

A contingent of [Russian Special Forces was in Pakistan](#) for the two week counter-terrorism exercise Druzhba-5 during the month. The exercise included drills and procedures for hostage rescue, cordon and search operations, heli-rappelling and sky diving, according to a [release from DG ISPR](#).

An anti-terrorism court in [Pakistan convicted JuD chief Hafiz Saeed](#) and sentenced him to 10 years imprisonment in a terror financing case. Malik Zafar Ibal, Yahya Mujahid, and Abdul Rehman Makki were also given six month sentences.

France [reportedly declined](#) a request from Pakistan to upgrade its 150+ Mirage III and Mirage V fighter aircraft, an air defence system and the three Agosta 90B class submarines. It told Qatar, which also operates Rafale aircraft, not to allow Pakistan-origin technicians to work with the aircraft over concerns that they could leak technical information. The decision was attributed to Imran Khan's criticism of President Macron's defence of the right to mock religion following the murder of Samuel Paty.

Speaking at the [SCO Summit](#) 2020 on November 10, Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted India's close cultural and historical ties with SCO nations and strong resolve to deepen connectivity with the region, while carrying forward with the core principles respecting each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity. He said India's focus as a non-permanent member of the UNSC from 2021 would be bringing about changes in the global governance process. He deprecated repeated attempts to unnecessarily bring bilateral issues into the SCO agenda, in violation of the SCO Charter and Shanghai spirit.

Speaking at the opening ceremony of the 12<sup>th</sup> BRICS Summit on November 12, 2020, [Prime Minister Narendra Modi](#) drew attention to the crisis facing the multilateral system because of its inability to evolve with time. He said institutions like the UNSC, WTO, IMF and WHO must reform to regain credibility and effectiveness. He expressed happiness at the finalisation of the BRICS counter-terrorism strategy and explained India's comprehensive reform process under its 'Self Reliant India' campaign.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi on an Arjun tank with Indian troops at Longewala, November 14, 2020. Source: Narendramodi.in

India [called on the Government of Pakistan](#) to “give up its obfuscation and dilatory tactics in discharging its international obligations in the Mumbai terror attacks trial”. India’s spokesperson said, “Several other countries have also called upon Pakistan to expeditiously bring the perpetrators of the dastardly terror attacks to justice. It is a matter of serious concern that, despite its own public acknowledgement as well as the availability of all necessary evidence, including that shared by India, Pakistan is yet to show sincerity in delivering justice to the families of 166 victims from 15 countries across the globe, even as we near the 12th anniversary of 26/11 attacks”.

Speaking to India soldiers at Longewala on the occasion of Diwali, [Prime Minister Narendra Modi said](#) that history had proved that only nations that had the ability to fight invaders remained safe and were able to progress. India does not seek confrontation, but will stand its ground if confronted. The world was troubled by expansionist forces, and expansionism was, in a way, a mental disorder that reflected 18<sup>th</sup> century thinking.

In another address to [Air Force Personnel at Jaisalmer](#) as he spent Diwali with them, Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke of India’s growing global influence, the laudable performance of the Indian Armed Forces, DRDO and para-military

forces in dealing with current challenges, and reforms to procurement procedures to speed up military modernisation.

While Prime Minister Modi spent Diwali with troops on the frontline as has become his hallmark, the External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar represented India at the 15<sup>th</sup> East Asia Summit, held virtually on November 14, 2020. He [noted the growing interest in the Indo-Pacific](#) as an integrated and organic maritime space, with ASEAN as its centre. Appreciating the synergy between ASEAN's Outlook and India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative, he said India was equally positive about the Indo-Pacific policies announced by other nations. He also expressed concern about actions and incidents in the South China Sea that erode trust in the region, and said that the Code of Conduct negotiations should not be prejudicial to the legitimate interests of third parties and should be fully consistent with UNCLOS.

India's Defence Minister Shri Rajnath Singh held [discussions with](#) General Ngo Xuan Lich, the Vietnamese Defence Minister, through video-conference on November 27, 2020. An implementing arrangement for hydrographic cooperation enabling sharing of hydrographic data and assisting in production of navigational charts by both sides was signed in their presence.

Outlining India's vision of the Indo-Pacific in a [talk to the UK think tank Policy Exchange](#) on November 03, 2020, Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla elaborated on where India is geographically placed in the Indo-Pacific; why it sees the region as so crucial to global prosperity and security and India's rise; how India works in the region and which institutions and platforms it finds most convenient; and who were India's key partners. He outlined the evolution of India's Indian Ocean Policy; the seven pillars of its Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative (maritime security; maritime ecology; maritime resources; capacity-building and resource sharing; disaster risk reduction and management; science, technology and academic cooperation; and trade connectivity and maritime transport); and actions taken to build on these pillars. He expressed satisfaction at the commonality between India's outlook and that of the Indo-Pacific visions of France, Germany and the Netherlands, and hoped that the UK would finalise its Indo-Pacific strategy soon.

National Security Adviser Shri Ajit Doval travelled to Colombo on November 27-28, 2020, to participate in the [4<sup>th</sup> NSA level meeting on Trilateral Maritime Security Cooperation](#) between India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives, hosted by Sri Lanka. The [dialogue has been revived](#) after a gap of six years. Mauritius, Seychelles and Bangladesh were also present as observers, albeit virtually.

The External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar [visited the Republic of Seychelles](#) on November 27-28, 2020. He congratulated President Ramkalawan on his recent election victory, discussed the centrality of Seychelles to India's Indian Ocean vision of SAGAR, as well as it being part of India's Neighbourhood First Policy with him, and conveyed an invitation for President Ramkalawan to visit India in 2021.

In a significant step to improve the ease of doing business in the IT industry, the Government of India released new [guidelines for Other Service Providers \(OSPs\)](#) on November 05, 2020. The new guidelines eliminate the requirement for prior registration of OSPs along with frequent reporting obligations, publication of network diagrams, penal provisions, restrictions of work from home, etc. OSP companies support the front offices of every type of business on earth. The new guidelines [eliminate the "inspector raj"](#) in this sector and indicate that the government is intent on making changes that will actually make a difference in improving the business environment.



An IF Rafale fighter aircraft. Source: IAF

In the fourth such action since June 2020, India ordered [blocking of access to another 43 Chinese apps](#) based on inputs from the India Cyber Crime Coordination Centre regarding their use for engaging in activities prejudicial to the sovereignty and integrity of India, defence of India, security of state and public order. China's spokesperson expressed [China's serious concern](#) over India's claim, describing them as "a glaring violation of market principles and

WTO rules that severely harm the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese companies”.

[General Robert Kibochi](#), Chief of Defence Force, Kenya, visited India from November 02 – 06, 2020. During his visit, he met the Raksha Mantri, National Security Adviser, Service Chiefs and officials from the Ministry of Defence. He also visited Agra, Mhow and Bengaluru.

As part of India's humanitarian outreach to countries impacted by the pandemic and natural calamities, [INS Airavat delivered](#) 100 MT of food aid to Sudan at Port Sudan on November 02, 50 MT to Eritrea at Massawa on November 06, 50 MT to Djibouti on November 12, and 70 MT to South Sudan via Mombasa on November 20, 2020.

The 8<sup>th</sup> round of the [India-China Corps Commander Level Meeting](#) was held in Chushul on November 06, 2020. Both sides held candid, in-depth and constructive views on disengagement along the LAC and agreed to continue exercising restraint and avoid misunderstanding and miscalculation; maintain dialogue and communication and take discussions forward for settlement of outstanding issues so as to jointly maintain peace and tranquillity in the border areas. They also agreed to have another round of meeting soon.

An [unprovoked ceasefire violation](#) along the Line of Control in north Kashmir on November 15, 2020, left four soldiers, a BSF jawan and at least four civilians dead. At least 6-8 Pakistani soldiers were killed in retaliatory firing, according to media reports.

Special Forces from India's three services conducted joint exercise '[Bull Strike](#)' on Teressa Island, in the Nicobar Group of Islands, on November 03 & 05. Activities exercised included an amphibious landing in coordination with a paradrop by the SF, action by MARCOS of the Indian Navy and Special Heliborne Operations by the Army's Ghatak Platoons.

The ninth edition of the [India-Thailand Coordinated Patrol](#) was conducted in the Andaman Sea from November 18 – 20, 2020. INS Karmuk and HTMS Kraburi, along with Dornier Maritime Patrol Aircraft from both navies, participated.

[Exercise SITMEX-20](#), the second edition of the [India Singapore Thailand Exercise](#), was conducted in the Andaman Sea on November 21-22, 2020. IN ships Kamorta and Karmuk, RSNS Intrepid and Endeavour, and HTMS Kraburi represented the three navies. Apart from improving interoperability between the navies, SITMEX aims to strengthen mutual confidence and develop



common understanding and procedures so as to enhance overall maritime security in the region.

[SIMBEX-20](#), the 27<sup>th</sup> edition of the India-Singapore bilateral maritime exercise, was [conducted in the Andaman Sea](#) from November 23-25, 2020. IN participation included the destroyer Rana, corvettes Kamorta and Karmuk, submarine Sindhuraj and P-8I MR aircraft. RSN participated with RSNS Intrepid with its integral S70B helicopter and RSNS Endeavour. The ships carried out advanced surface, anti-air and ASW exercises including weapon firings during the three days of intensive joint operations. SIMBEX, which started in 1994, is one of the [RSN's longest-running bilateral exercises](#).

In a move towards integration of the armed forces and eventual creation of theatre commands, the GOI formally approved the [creation of joint logistics nodes](#) at Mumbai, Guwahati and Port Blair. The nodes will handle requirements of small arms ammunition; rations; fuels, oil and lubricants; general stores; civil hired transport; aviation clothing, and spares and engineering support for the three services to ensure cost-effectiveness in operations. Similar nodes will come up in other parts of the country in due course.

The second batch of [three Rafale aircraft arrived in India](#) on November 04, 2020, after a non-stop eight hour flight from France including refuelling three times mid-air en route.

India's [ninth Boeing P-8I Neptune](#) arrived at the Naval Air Station, Goa on November 18, 2020. This is the first of four additional aircraft ordered in July 2016. The remaining three will be handed over in 2021.



The Future INS Vagir being launched at MDL on November 11, 2020. Source: PIB

Smt Vijaya Shripad Naik [launched the fifth of India's Scorpene](#)-class submarines at Mazagon Docks Limited, Mumbai, on November 11, 2020. To be named INS Vagir, the submarine is expected to complete trials and commission in an year's time. Two submarines of the class, INS Kalvari and Khanderi, are already in service, while two more, named Karanj and Vela are at different stages of sea trials. The last submarine, Vaghsheer, is under construction.

[Reports indicated](#) that the Indian Navy had inducted two Predator drones on a one-year lease for surveillance in the Indian Ocean. The drones can also be deployed along the LAC in Ladakh. A case for induction of 18 more such drones in being processed.

Two months after the Defence Ministry withdrew its RFP for procuring four LPDs at a cost of Rs 20,000 Crores, [reports indicated](#) that the Indian Navy could be forced to cut the number of vessels it seeks to buy to two in view of the budgetary crunch. The cut in funding has forced the Navy to rethink its long-term plan to build a 200-ship fleet by 2027 and reduce the number to 175 ships.



Test launch of the Indigenous Quick Reaction Surface to Air Missile from Integrated Test Range, Chandipur, November 17, 2020. Source: PIB

The DRDO carried out successful tests of the [indigenous Quick Reaction Surface to Air Missile System](#) from the Integrated Test Range at Chandipur on November 13 and 17, 2020. Both tests met all their objectives.

[Reports indicate that](#) the indigenous Astra BVRAAM will soon be tested from the Indigenous Tejas fighter. The all-weather ASTRA, produced by Bharat Dynamics Limited, currently has a range of 100 Km. The Mk-2 version of the missile, with a range of 160 Km, will be tested in the first half of next year, while the Mk-3, with a range of 35 Km, is under development.

India began a series of [live missile tests](#) of the 290 Km range supersonic Brahmos cruise missile in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands on November 24, 2020, even as reports indicated that a test of the 400-Km range missile in September was successful, and work was in progress to test an 800 Km range missile next year and one with 1,500 Km range after that. Other improvements in the pipeline include enhancing its speed from the current Mach 2.8 to Mach 5.

Naval Dockyard Visakhapatnam completed the [refit of Maldivian Coast Guard Ship Huravee](#) and handed it back to the Maldives on November 25, 2020. The ship, originally INS Tillanchang, was gifted to the Maldives in 2006.

India's Foreign Secretary visited Maldives on November 09-10, 2020. Speaking at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [he appreciated](#) President Solih for the Maldives' "India First" foreign policy, spoke of the MoUs for High Impact Community Development Projects, cooperation in sports and a US\$ 100 million grant for the Greater Male Connectivity Project signed during his visit, and said India would support the candidature of Maldives Foreign Minister Abdulla Shahid for Presidency of the 76<sup>th</sup> session of the UN General Assembly next year.

The Bangladesh and US Navies participated in the sea phase of Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training ([CARAT\) Bangladesh 2020](#) on November 07.

## South East Asia

The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (RCEP) was ceremonially signed on November 15, 2020. A [Joint Statement](#) by the Heads of State/Government of ASEAN countries, Australia, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand said, "In light of the adverse impact of the pandemic on our economies, and our people's livelihood and well-being, the signing of the RCEP Agreement demonstrates our strong commitment to supporting economic recovery, inclusive development, job creation and strengthening regional supply chains as well as our support for an open, inclusive, rules-based trade and investment

arrangement". The agreement encompasses all members of the East Asia Summit less India, Russia and the US. The [official summary](#) of the agreement describes it as modern, comprehensive, high-quality and mutually beneficial, while providing a synopsis of its 20 chapters.

The 37<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit took place on November 12, 2020. [The Chairman's Statement](#) provides a comprehensive overview of ASEAN's activities and achievements during the last year. One paragraph in the statement is devoted to the aspirational goal of promoting peace, stability, security, safety, and freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea and progress towards this goal. Another notes "serious concerns raised by some leaders on developments, including land reclamations, activities and serious developments in the area, which have eroded trust and confidence, increased tensions, and may undermine peace, security and stability in the region". The statement reiterates the need to pursue peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with universally recognised principles of international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS.

The [17<sup>th</sup> ASEAN-India Summit](#) was held via videoconference on November 12, 2020. It expressed satisfaction at the progress in ASEAN-India dialogue relations, reiterated the commitment to enhancing cooperation in various areas and to maintaining ASEAN Centrality, resolved to enhance collaborative effort in tackling transnational crime and reiterated the importance of the AOIP as a guide to ASEAN's engagement in the wider Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean. Leaders also discussed issues of common interest and concern, including events in the South China Sea and reaffirmed the importance of upholding international law, non-militarisation and self-restraint in the conduct of all activities by claimant and other states.

Speaking at the [India – ASEAN virtual summit](#) on November 12, 2020, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that Indian and ASEAN's strategic partnership was based on our shared rich historical, geographical and cultural heritage and ASEAN was the nodal centre of India's Act East Policy from the very beginning. He also said that there is ample closeness between India's Indo Pacific Oceans' Initiative and ASEAN's Outlook on Indo Pacific, and that India firmly believed that a cohesive and responsive ASEAN is essential for Security and Growth for all in the Region. He [reiterated India's offer](#) of a \$ 1 billion Line of Credit to support ASEAN connectivity. ASEAN leaders acknowledged India's contribution towards promoting peace and stability in the region, welcomed India's support to ASEAN centrality and welcomed the adoption of the new ASEAN-India Plan of Action 2021-2025.

The 15<sup>th</sup> East Asia Summit was convened through video-conference on November 14, 2020. The [Chairman's Statement](#) speaks extensively of strengthening multilateralism and an international order anchored in international law and the importance of "having free flowing constructive dialogue on strategic issues amongst leaders at the EAS in order to reinforce strategic trust and address common challenges". It covers advancing cooperation in environment and energy; education; finance; regional and global health issues and pandemics; management of natural disasters; ASEAN connectivity; economic cooperation and trade; food security; maritime cooperation and other areas. The content of this statement on the South China Sea is identical in all respects to the content in the Chairman's Statement for the 37<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit. [India was represented](#) at the summit by its External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar.

Heads of State/Government of the East Asia Summit adopted the [Ha Noi Declaration](#) on November 14, 2020. The declaration acknowledges that the region faces "unprecedented challenges, including growing tensions as well as current and emerging non-traditional and transboundary challenges" and emphasises the EAS, sitting at the apex of the ASEAN-centred regional architecture, will continue to be a Leaders-led forum for dialogue on broad strategic, political and economic issues of common concern with the aim of promoting peace, stability and economic prosperity in East Asia.

Apart from the Ha Noi Declaration, EAS leaders also adopted Leaders' Statements on [Marine Sustainability](#); [Epidemics Prevention and Response](#); [Women, Peace and Security](#); and [Steady Growth of Regional Economy](#).

President Trump appointed Maj Gen Eldon P Regua (Retd.) to be the [representative of the US to ASEAN](#), with the rank and status of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, on November 24, 2020. He will replace [Ambassador Nina Hachigian](#), who has been in office since September 2014.

The Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative reported that another US built facility at Cambodia's Ream naval base [had been demolished](#), as revealed by recent satellite imagery. The facility was built in 2017. Cambodia also awarded the Metallurgical Corporation of China a \$ 405 million contract to design and construct the airfield for [Cambodia's new airport at Phnom Penh](#), leaving the current French operator of the city's existing airport facing an uncertain future. The overall \$ 1.5 billion price tag for the new airport is being bankrolled by China.

[China will buy thermal coal worth \\$ 1.467 billion from Indonesia](#) in 2021, according to an announcement by the Indonesian Coal Mining Association.

This was expected to increase Indonesian coal exports to China by 200 million tonnes, in 2021, with the target quantity for exports being reviewed annually. The news came in even as China blocked import of Australian coal.

The Indonesian Navy reported [capturing three Malaysian flagged fishing vessels](#) resulting in the detention of 11 Myanmar and six Thai nationals and over 16 tons of fish on November 08, 2020. The vessels were fishing inside Indonesia's EEZ in the Malacca Strait without the requisite documentation. Indonesia's navy chief was also reported to have said that the navy would move its combat squad's headquarters to the [Natuna Islands](#) to protect Jakarta's territorial interests near the South China Sea in the wake of incursions by Chinese and Vietnamese fishing boats into Indonesian waters. The move was intended to enable easier enforcement of Indonesia's sovereignty at sea.

The government of the Malaysian state of Melaka [terminated an agreement with the main developer of the \\$ 10.5 billion Melaka Gateway Project](#), raising doubts about the future of this and other BRI projects. The termination came as the developer failed to complete the maritime initiative contracted for in October 2017, which was to include port facilities, economic parks and tourist attractions on three artificially constructed islands. The developer, KAJ Development, had tied up with three Chinese companies for the project, including PowerChina, the main financial backer. The termination notice also required the developer to return the project site to the state government.

The China Coast Guard (CCG) and Royal Malaysian Navy were reported to be involved in a [standoff over hydrocarbon exploration](#) at the Luconia Shoal, 44 nautical miles off the coast of Sarawak in the South China Sea. The incident involves the Chinese vessel CCG 5402, which approached close to a chartered drill ship on November 19, presumably warning it to cease operations. Malaysia quickly deployed two naval vessels to shadow CCG 5402 and prevent further interference. Reports indicate that CCG 5402 has withdrawn for the time being.

Myanmar's ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) led by Aung San Suu Kyi claimed victory in the country's elections held on November 08, 2020. The party [reportedly won 396 seats](#) of the 476 seats contested in the upper and lower houses of parliament ([166 seats are filled by nomination](#) from the military under Myanmar's constitution), more than the 322 needed to form the next government. [Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated](#) Daw Aug San Suu Kyi and the NLD for the victory, describing the successful conduct of the elections as another step in the ongoing democratic transition of Myanmar. However, the disenfranchisement of the Rohingya has led observers to [question the credibility](#) of the election.

A report indicates that India and the Philippines are looking to sign an agreement on the [purchase by Philippines of the BrahMos cruise missile](#) during the planned summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Rodrigo Duterte in February next year, making the Philippines the first overseas customer for the weapon system jointly developed by India and Russia. The missile will equip the Philippines Army's first Land Based Missile System Battery, which was activated in October 2019, giving it an area denial capability. Thailand, Indonesia and Vietnam are other potential customers.

Seven members of the Philippine Abu Sayyaf Group were [reported killed](#) following an encounter with the Philippine Armed Forces at sea near Sulare Island, in Sulu province, on November 03, 2020. The group was reported to be planning to conduct kidnapping activity in Mindanao when they were intercepted and their boat sunk in an exchange of fire.

Plans to [deploy Filipino fishermen as militia forces](#) in the South China Sea were held in abeyance as the Philippines' government said "we are not at war with China". Presidential National Security Advisor Hermogenes Esperon said he preferred forces that were better equipped while noting that some fishermen are already serving as unarmed volunteer sea patrols in coastal areas. This happened even as the Philippines Foreign Minister directed the country's mission in the UN to [vote for China's candidate](#) to fill one of the five seats at the International Court of Justice, for which elections were held in November, helping the Chinese candidate in her victory.

The [Philippine Navy took delivery](#) of eight Scan Eagle UAVs from the US, augmenting its ISR capability. The equipment was donated by the US under its Maritime Security Initiative programme.

The Singapore Armed Forces conducted [tri-service Exercise Apex](#) from November 02 – 04, 2020, involving participation of the Special Operations Task Force; Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Explosive Defence Group personnel, RSN Endeavour, multiple Super Puma helicopters and a Heron 1 UAV in an interdiction operation. The exercise focus was preventing and managing a terrorist attack from the sea, through the use of a hijacked vessel.



Singapore's Special Operations Task Force capturing a "hijacked" vessel during Exercise Apex, November 04, 2020. Source: Reddit.com

The 11<sup>th</sup> [Singapore – Vietnam Defence Policy Dialogue](#) was held on November 06, 2020, co-chaired by Lt Gen Nguyen Chi Vinh, Vietnam's Deputy Minister of National Defence and Mr Chan Heng Kee, Singapore's Permanent Secretary (Defence). The two sides exchanged views on international and regional security issues of mutual interest, discussed matters in support of Vietnam's Chairmanship of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) and ADMM-Plus, and reviewed bilateral cooperation initiatives.

Thai Prime Minister General Prayut Chan-o-cha delivered the keynote address at the [ASEAN Business and Investment Summit 2020](#). He emphasised the significant role of technology and innovation in reinforcing COVID-19 recovery efforts and proposed three new concepts, namely promoting "New Economic Models" that seek to thrive in the balance between economic growth, technological advancement, social equality and environmental sustainability; exploring the "New Engine of Growth", by using science, technology and innovation to maximise the strength of the ASEAN economy; and building a "New Economic Ecosystem" through the development of digital infrastructure accessible to all and promoting comprehensive digital trade connectivity.

Even as India-Vietnam defence cooperation gathered momentum, [India's pepper was reported](#) to have suffered sharp erosion in domestic price, allegedly



due to unrestricted import of Vietnamese pepper via Nepal and Sri Lanka. Starting with just 48 tonnes in 2015, pepper imports were reported to have reached 5,930 tonnes in 2019. Farmers associations in South India asked the government to restrict pepper imports through designated ports, prohibit export oriented units selling imported pepper in the domestic market and fix a high minimum value-addition requirement for re-exports.

US National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien said that the US attaches importance to, and wants to promote a [comprehensive partnership with Viet Nam](#) in a stable and sustainable manner. The comments were made during his official visit to Vietnam from November 20-22, 2020.

## East Asia

North Korea is assumed to have between 15 and 60 nuclear warheads approximately 650 ballistic missiles capable of threatening South Korean cities, according to a [study by the Institute for National Strategic Studies](#). The report also said that a majority of North Korea's 1.2 million soldiers are forward deployed in the Demilitarised Zone and continue to pose a conventional threat to South Korea.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga spoke telephonically with US President-elect Joe Biden on November 12, 2020. [Speaking to reporters at a press conference](#) thereafter, he said that he had conveyed to the President-elect that the Japan-US alliance was indispensable for the peace and prosperity of both the region surrounding Japan, where the security environment is becoming increasingly severe, as well as the international community. He said that President-elect Biden affirmed his commitment to apply article 5 of the Japan-US Security Treaty to the Senkaku Islands, and also said that he looked forward to further strengthen the Japan – US alliance and achieve peace and stability of the Indo-Pacific region. The [Biden transition team readout](#) of the conversation, however, makes no mention of the Senkakus, although it does state that the President-elect underscored his deep commitment to the defence of Japan and expressed his strong desire to strengthen the alliance even further in new areas.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison travelled to Tokyo on November 17, 2020, for a one-day visit. The two countries reached in principle accord on a [Reciprocal Access Agreement](#), making Australia only the second country after USA to have such a commitment from Japan, to facilitate greater and more complex practical engagement between the ADF and the ASDF and provide a clear framework for how the two defence forces would operate in each other's countries. A [Joint Statement](#) reaffirming the Special Strategic Partnership

between Tokyo and Canberra was also issued. The statement welcomed the continued commitment of the US to the Indo-Pacific and stressed the importance of close cooperation to contribute to the peace and stability of the region. It expressed serious concern about the situation in the South and East China Seas and called for the Code of Conduct in the former to be consistent with international law and not prejudice the rights of non-parties under international law. With a view to contributing to the peace, stability and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific, the leaders identified a number of steps to elevate bilateral security and defence cooperation. [China's spokesperson said](#), "China deplors and firmly rejects the press statement released after the talk between Australian and Japanese leaders which launched groundless accusations against China and grossly interfered in China's internal affairs. We urge relevant countries to grasp the situation and stop the wrongdoings of undermining China's sovereign rights and interests and interfering in China's internal affairs".



Prime Ministers Scott Morrison and Yoshihide Suga address the press in Tokyo on November 17, 2020. Source: Reuters

Japan and the US [began formal negotiations](#) on a new host nation support agreement to replace the existing agreement that expires on March 31, 2021.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga joined ASEAN Heads of State/Government for the 23<sup>rd</sup> ASEAN-Japan Summit on November 12, 2020. The [Joint Statement](#) committed to supporting ASEAN Community building and enhancing further the ASEAN-Japan Strategic Partnership for peace, stability and prosperity in the region; strengthening cooperation through full and effective

implementation of the ASEAN-Japan Revised Implementation Plan; supported principles of strengthening ASEAN Centrality, openness, transparency, inclusivity, a rules-based framework, sovereignty, respect for international law such as UNCLOS etc.; and sought to further reinforce practical cooperation in the four areas outlined in the AOIP, namely maritime cooperation, connectivity, UN SDG 2030 and economic and other possible areas of cooperation.

[Japan appointed](#) veteran diplomat Kenji Kanasugi, who has served as the senior deputy foreign minister for economic affairs, as its ambassador to Indonesia from November 17, 2020. Shingo Yamagami, a former director-general of the foreign ministry's Economic Affairs Bureau, was appointed as the ambassador to Australia the same day.

[Japan's Defense Ministry is planning](#) to build two new Aegis destroyers in place of the abandoned plan to introduce the Aegis Ashore ground-based ballistic missile defense system, according to reports. The plan includes an addition of 500 personnel to the JMSDF, raising retirement age of officers up to the rank of Captain by two years, improving work conditions and assigning female officers to Aegis destroyer missions.

Following bilateral consultations on the sidelines of the East Asia Summit, the governments of South Korea and the United States released a fact sheet covering cooperation between the [US Indo-Pacific Strategy and ROK's New Southern Policy](#). The fact sheet encompasses cooperative action to enhance economic prosperity, invest in human capital and champion good governance, and ensuring peace and security.

China's State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi [visited South Korea](#) on November 26, 2020. He met President Moon Jae-in and his counterpart Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha, among others. [Discussions focused on](#) a visit by President Xi Jinping to Seoul "when the COVID-19 situation stabilises and conditions are created" and efforts to bring to a formal end to war on the Korean Peninsula and "achieve complete denuclearisation and permanent peace". Reports indicated a [ten-point consensus](#), including launch of a 2+2 dialogue on diplomatic and security affairs and another dialogue on maritime affairs; speeding up connections between the Belt and Road Initiative and the national development strategy of Seoul; peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula, implementation of the RCEP and conclusion of the second phase of the China-South Korea Free Trade Agreement.

The Trump Administration [notified Congress](#) on November 03, 2020 about the proposed sale to Taiwan of four weapons-ready MQ-9B Reaper drones at an

estimated cost of \$ 600 million. As before, [China's spokesperson](#) called on the US to respect the one-China principle and cancel its arms sale plans to avoid further damage to China-US relations and cross-strait peace and stability. The US followed up by conducting the [Inaugural US-Taiwan Economic Prosperity Partnership Dialogue](#) on November 20, 2020 and committing to further dialogues to "strengthen the US-Taiwan economic relationship, further magnify the two societies' respect for democracy, and strengthen our shared commitment to free markets, entrepreneurship and freedom".

The US, on November 02, 2020, [strongly condemned](#) the arrest of eight pan-democratic politicians in Hong Kong, including five sitting members of the Legislative Council, calling it a clear abuse of law enforcement for political purposes. [China's spokesperson](#) responded by saying that "The HKSAR authorities' fulfilment of duty in accordance with law allows no smears". The US followed up by [designating four PRC and Hong Kong officials](#) as having been involved in implementing the PRC imposed national security law and thus threatening the peace, security and autonomy of Hong Kong. The designation bars these four officials from travelling to the US and blocks their assets within US jurisdiction.

The government of Hong Kong [suspended extradition and legal treaties with Ireland and the Netherlands](#) in retaliation for similar actions by these nations in objection to Beijing's national security law. The two countries had earlier joined Britain, the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Germany and Finland in suspending extradition treaties with Hong Kong.

China's National People's Congress Standing Committee [passed a resolution](#) empowering the Hong Kong government to disqualify anyone who supports independence, refuses to recognise Beijing's sovereignty over Hong Kong, seeks help from foreign countries to interfere in the affairs of the region or other acts that endanger national security without going through court on November 11, 2020. Minutes later, the Hong Kong government [disqualified four sitting pro-democracy legislators](#) with immediate effect. Following this, the entire democratic opposition in Hong Kong's Legislative Council announced their intention to resign. The US State Department [condemned China's resolution](#), describing it as trampling on the rights of the people of Hong Kong to choose their elected representatives as guaranteed by the Basic Law and further exposure of Beijing's blatant disregard for its international commitments under the Sino-British Joint Declaration. [US NSA Robert O'Brien](#) said that Beijing's actions leave no doubt that the CCP has flagrantly violated its international commitments under the Sino-British Joint Declaration and its promises to the people of Hong Kong, and the US would

continue to use power granted to it to identify and sanction those responsible for extinguishing Hong Kong's freedom. Germany, UK and Australia also condemned China's action.

Foreign Ministers of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the US issued a [Joint Statement](#) on November 18, 2020, expressing serious concern at China's imposition of new rules to disqualify elected legislators in Hong Kong and thus undermining Hong Kong's autonomy, rights and freedoms. They described China's action as a clear breach of its international obligations under the legally-binding, UN-registered Sino-British Joint Declaration. [China's spokesperson](#) "deplored and firmly opposed the relevant country's finger-pointing over China's Hong Kong affairs", describing it as a flagrant violation of international law and basic norms governing international relations.

Just two days before Jack Ma's Ant Group was scheduled to raise \$ 37 billion from [world's largest initial public offering](#) (IPO) of shares valued on November 05, 2020 in Shanghai and Hong Kong, China's Financial Stability and Development Committee (the financial regulator) suspended the IPO. The expected raising was well in excess of [ARAMCO's \\$ 25.6 billion](#) in December 2019, or Alibaba's \$ 25 billion in 2014. The suspension wiped roughly \$ 76 billion in value for Alibaba Group Holdings, which owns about a third of Ant. The group had prospered as a technology platform not governed by banking sector regulations, despite its array of financial products. The event raised questions about the [viability of Hong Kong and Shanghai](#) as premium financial centres and about China's commitment to the kind of transparency needed in open capital markets. Subsequent [reports indicated that](#) President Xi Jinping personally made the decision to halt the IPO after Jack Ma infuriated government leaders by a speech on October 24, 2020, criticising Beijing's campaign to control finance risks. Beijing's decision was seen as displaying diminishing tolerance for big private businesses that have amassed capital and influence and could challenge his rule. Global [capital inflows into Chinese assets](#) surged last year after China removed the ceiling on foreign investor's purchases of stocks and bonds. According to one analyst, Chinese assets are particularly attractive to international investors, who will have no choice but to adapt to the peculiar regulatory environment in China in their search for returns in the pandemic impacted world.

The US [State Department's removal](#) of the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) from its [terrorist exclusion list](#) last month prompted a backlash from China, whose [spokesman firmly opposed](#) the US decision and said that the decision exposed "the current US administration's double standard on counter-terrorism and its repulsive practice of condoning terrorist groups as it sees fit".

He added, "The US should immediately correct its mistakes, refrain from whitewashing terrorist organisations, and stop backpedalling on international counter-terrorism cooperation". The incongruity of this demand given China's molycoddling of and indeed international protection to Pakistan-sponsored terrorist organisations acting against India did not apparently strike him. Meanwhile, the [Uyghur Human Rights Project](#) welcomed the US decision and said that though the group was added to the US list in 2004, no evidence has ever been presented corroborating the Chinese government's claims. It said that the UN had a corresponding obligation to remove ETIM from its Consolidated List through a formal delisting process.

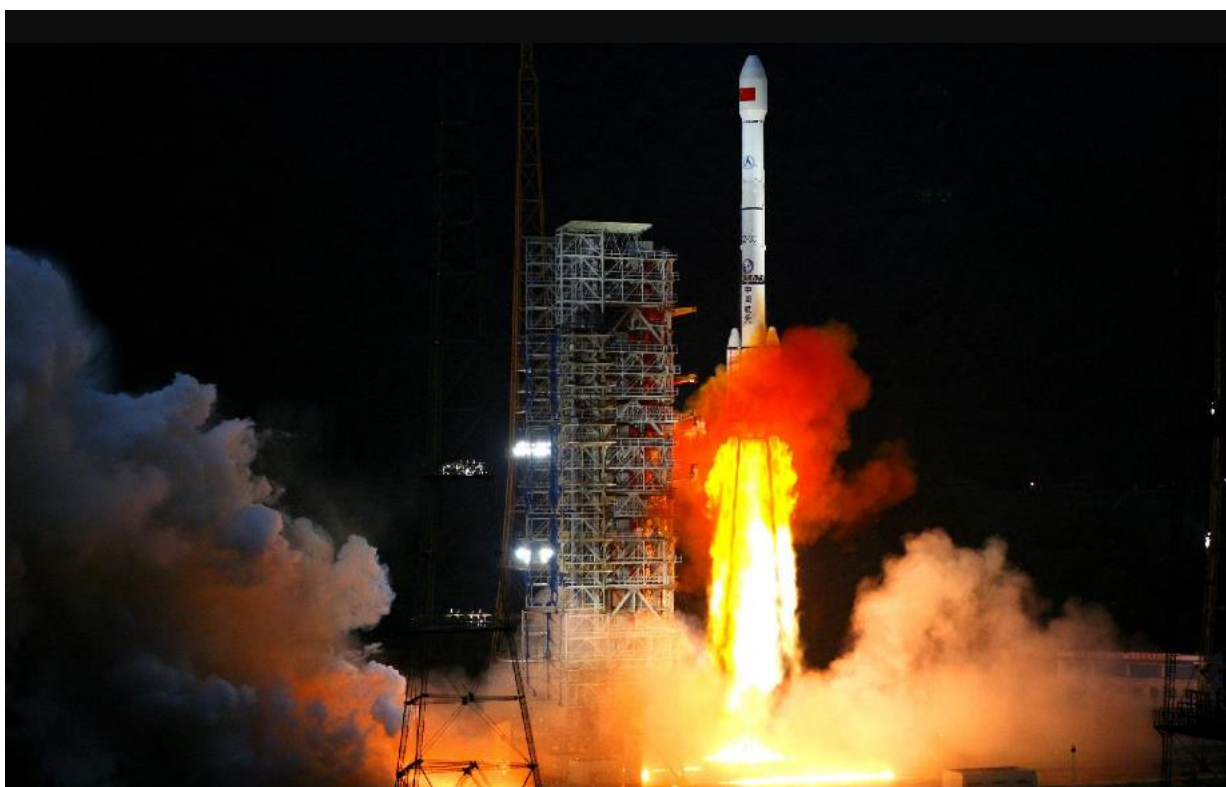
Delivering the [keynote address at the APEC CEO Dialogues](#) on November 19, 2020, President Xi Jinping unveiled a "New Development Paradigm" for mutual benefit and win-win cooperation. The plan called for expanding domestic demand as a strategic priority and ensuring smooth flow of economic activity; a thrust towards scientific and technological innovations to foster new growth drivers, and continuing to deepen reform to energise the market. The stated objective was to enable China to fully unlock its market potential and create greater demand for other countries; share more opportunities for common development with others and deepening international cooperation for shared benefits.

Speaking on "working Together for an Asia-Pacific Community with a Shared Future" at the 27<sup>th</sup> APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting on November 20, 2020, President Xi Jinping [called for the Asia-Pacific](#) to stay open and inclusive; pursue innovation-driven growth; to enhance connectivity; and to promote mutually beneficial cooperation. He said that China highly values the role of APEC and will continue to support the organisation's development.

The [Central Military Commission released](#) an outline on improving the joint combat capabilities of the Chinese PLA and ordered all levels of the armed forces to study and implement it as the fundamental basis for organising joint combat and training activities. The outline "establishes basic concepts and rules, clarifies basic responsibilities, addresses questions such as how to fight future wars from an institutional perspective and strengthens the orientation of war preparedness". Given that joint operations are hardly likely to be used in domestic territory, the outline presages China's ambition and intent of dominating the external environment.

[China launched](#) the Chang'e-5 robotic spacecraft from the Wenchang Space Launch Centre on Hainan on November 24, 2020, in the first bid by any country to retrieve samples from the lunar surface after the Soviet Union's Luna 24

mission in 1976. On entering the moon's orbit, the spacecraft is intended to deploy a lander and an ascender to the lunar surface. The lander will drill into the moon with a robotic arm scooping out soil and rocks. This material is to be transferred to the ascender, which will dock with the orbiting module and transfer the samples to a capsule which will return to earth and land in China's Inner Mongolia region in the middle of December. The lander-ascender module had separated from the orbiter-returner combination on the morning of November 30, 2020, and was [preparing to execute a soft landing](#) on the moon.



Launch of China's Chang'e-5 Moon Mission from the Wenchang Space Launch Centre on November 24, 2020. Source: CGTN

President Xi Jinping on November 28, 2020, felicitated the successful completion of the [10,000 metre sea trial of the manned submersible Fendouzhe](#) and its return to port. The submarine had set a record by diving to a depth of 10,909 metres in the Mariana Trench on November 10, apart from eight other dives to depths in excess of 10,000 metres, during its recent voyage.

As Tokyo continues to balance precariously between strengthening economic relations with China and forging alliances to uphold a rules-based international order, Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Japan on November 24-25, 2020 to assess whether Suga would change the approach towards China. Following his [meeting with Japan's Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi](#) on November 24, official Chinese media spoke of [six](#)

[decisions](#) made during the meeting. These included launching a fast track to enable business travel without the regulation 14-day quarantine; establishing an inter-departmental consultation mechanism on cooperation in food, agricultural and aquatic products, and speed up communication and coordination in the sector; establishing a climate change policy consultation mechanism; commencing preparation for the commemoration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of normalisation of China-Japan ties in 2022; holding a new round of high-level consultation on maritime affairs next month; and striving to launch the direct line under the maritime and air contact mechanism between their defense department within this year.

Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi [met Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga](#) on November 25, 2020. He said that China is willing to work with Japan to build a bilateral relationship that will meet the requirements of the new era. His thrust was for the two nations to build genuine mutual trust, properly handle sensitive issues and advance an all-round cooperation; pushing forward regional cooperation together and speeding up building of the free trade zone to as to jointly build a better future for Asia; and to make joint efforts to reform the global governance, system, make globalisation more inclusive and shoulder their due international responsibilities. A report indicates that Wang Yi proposed that fishing boats from both countries be kept away from the Senkaku Islands, but Japan dismissed the suggestion as unacceptable, with [Chief Cabinet Secretary Katsunoba Kato saying](#) that the island are "without doubt Japan's inherent territory from a historical viewpoint and under international law".



Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi meets Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga in Tokyo on November 25, 2020 Source: Xinhua.net



China will allow its Coast Guard to [use weapons against foreign ships](#) involved in illegal activities in waters it controls fail to obey orders, according to a bill under consideration by China's parliament. This is sure to raise tensions with Japan in the Senkakus and with claimant countries in the South China Sea. [Vietnam expressed its concern](#) about misuse of the legislation in the South China Sea.

A report quoted former Senior Colonel Wang Xiangsui saying that the DF-26B and DF-21D missiles it launched into the South China Sea from Qinghai and Zhejiang provinces in August 2020 [successfully struck a moving vessel](#) close to the Paracel Islands. The remarks by the former Senior Colonel were made at the Moganshan Forum, intended to discuss domestic and international issues and China's new five-year plan. Official Chinese outlets have not confirmed that the missiles did in fact hit a moving target, which is [considered unusual](#) given how important such a demonstration would be in deterring the USN from operating close to China's shores.

## Southern and Western Pacific

China's undeclared economic offensive against Australia escalated as importers were reportedly told unofficially that Australian products, including seafood, red wine, copper, timber, sugar, coal and barley [would not be cleared by customs](#) after November 06, 2020. The ban was expected to result in the Australian economy taking a hit of \$ 6 billion during the current year. Australia's trade minister described the reports as "unsubstantiated rumours", but acknowledged that his discussions with the concerned authorities were hindered due China's refusal to engage at the ministerial level. As the month came to an end, [China slapped prohibitive tariffs](#) on Australian barley and wine imports and Australia contemplated [taking China to the WTO](#). Earlier, President Xi Jinping, in his keynote speech on November 04, 2020 at the [Third China International Import Expo said](#), "We will steadfastly expand all-round opening up and explore more efficient ways to connect domestic and foreign markets and share factors of production and resources. Our aim is to turn the China market into a market for the world, a market shared by all, and a market accessible to all". The words evidently apply only to those who acknowledge China's hegemony. Australian business is experiencing the pain caused by the gulf between his word and deeds.

To a specific question about why more than 50 ships waiting off Chinese ports to [offload Australian coal](#) were unable to do so, China's spokesperson said, "Customs officials have strengthened quality, safety and environmental

inspections of imported coal to better protect the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese companies and ensure environmental safety”.

The seventh [Australia – ROK Strategic Dialogue](#) was held via video link on November 11, 2020. Both sides discussed ways to deepen collaboration under Australia’s strategy for a stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific and South Korea’s New Southern Policy. They also discussed COVID-19 related issues and cooperation in international fora.

The Second ASEAN – Australia Biennial Summit took place through videoconference on November 14, 2020. The [Joint Statement](#) reaffirmed the enduring strategic partnership between Australia and ASEAN; acknowledged that a strong, cohesive and responsive ASEAN was vital to success of the region; committed to intensifying practical cooperation to enhance resilience and shape a peaceful, stable and prosperous region for its people; and committed to convening annual ASEAN-Australia summits from 2021. The statement also elaborated on the contours of the partnership for recovery from the pandemic; for the region’s security; for economic recovery and future prosperity (including signing of the RCEP); and of the people-to-people partnership.

In a move designed to generate pressure on the Morrison government to reverse Australia’s position on key policies, China’s embassy in Canberra [publicised 14 disputes](#) through two newspapers and one TV channel on November 18, 2020. The 14 point [list of Chinese gripes](#) included ludicrous charges such as blockage of more than 10 Chinese investment projects on opaque national security grounds in contravention of the China Australia Free Trade Agreement; banning of Huawei and ZTE from Australian 5G networks over unfounded national security concerns at the bidding of the US; Australia’s foreign interference legislation which targets China in the absence of any evidence; revoking of visas for Chinese scholars; Australia’s call for an independent inquiry into the COVID-19 virus; incessant wanton interference in China’s Xinjiang, Hong Kong and Taiwan affairs; taking the lead as the first non-littoral country to make a statement to the UN on South China Sea affairs; siding with the US’ anti-China campaign and spreading disinformation around China’s efforts to contain COVID-19; legislation to scrutinise agreements with foreign governments aimed at torpedoing Victoria’s participation in the Belt and Road; providing funding to an anti-China think tank (ASPI) for peddling lies around Xinjiang and so-called China infiltration aimed at manipulating public opinion against China; the early dawn and reckless seizure of Chinese journalists’ homes and properties without any charges and explanation; thinly veiled allegations against China on cyber attacks without any evidence; outrageous condemnation of the CCP by MPs and racist attacks against

Chinese people; and unfriendly or antagonistic reports on China by media, poisoning the atmosphere of bilateral relations. Notably, Australian participation in the Quad Dialogue and Malabar was not included in the list of Australia's transgressions. All 14 items on the list are [seen by Australia](#) as key to its national interests and non-negotiable, leaving the two countries facing the prospect of an extended diplomatic and economic dispute. [China's spokesperson had](#), a day earlier, identified Australia's wrong moves such as "mistakes" on core issues such as Hong Kong, Xinjiang and Taiwan; accusing China of intervention and infiltration activities in Australia; and political manipulation on the pandemic by calling for an independent inquiry as the root cause of the downturn in China-Australia relations. In response, Australia's [Prime Minister Scott Morrison said](#), "We will always set our own laws and our own rules according to our national interests – not at the behest of any other nation, whether that's the US or China or anyone else".

A [statement from Australia's Defence Minister Linda Reynolds](#) on November 19, 2020, acknowledged the release of parts of the Afghanistan Inquiry Report by the Chief of Defence Staff. She said accountability will be the cornerstone of her ministry's response to the inquiry report. The report found that [Australian Special Forces were responsible for dozens of unlawful killings](#), the vast majority of which involved prisoners. 39 Afghans were killed in 23 separate incidents, all under circumstances which, if accepted by jury, could constitute the war crime of murder. All those killed were non-combatants. Australian Chief of Defence Staff General Angus Campbell had earlier acknowledged having received the [report of an inquiry](#) by the Inspector-General of the Australian Defence Force into [55 alleged incidents of war crimes](#) by Australian Special Forces in Afghanistan between 2005 and 2016. He apologised unreservedly to the people of Afghanistan. Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Foreign Minister Marise Payne [also expressed deep sorrow](#) and assured their Afghan counterparts of complete investigation to ensure justice. The PM had earlier announced his decision to appoint a [special investigator to assess the crimes](#). He had also said that he would [set up an independent oversight panel](#) to give people confidence that the ADF was tackling the serious cultural issues uncovered by the inquiry.

A post on the official Chinese Government Twitter Account on November 30, 2020, posted by the Director Deputy General of its Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Lijian Zhao, sparked outrage in Australia. The post [depicts a faked image](#) of an Australian soldier cutting the throat of an Afghan child holding a sheep, together with the words, "Don't be afraid, we are coming to bring you peace". Addressing a virtual press conference on this subject, [Prime Minister Scott Morrison said](#) "The Chinese Government should be totally ashamed of this post.

It diminishes them in the world's eyes". Australia sought an apology from China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and from the Chinese Government for the "outrageous post". It also sought immediate removal of the post and had contacted Twitter to take it down immediately. The [editor of Global Times](#), meanwhile, described the image as a popular cartoon that condemns the Australian Special Forces Murder of 39 Afghan civilians and said it was ridiculous and shameless that Australia's Prime Minister had demanded that China apologize.

Australian Defence Minister Linda Reynolds announced the intention to build a new [Maritime Underwater Tracking Range](#) in Western Australia as part of the Morrison government's \$ 270 billion investment in defence capability over the next decade. The range will enable the Navy, as well as allies and partners, to fine-tune anti-submarine warfare tactics to deliver the technology edge needed in the future.

The government of Jacinda Arden appointed [Nanaia Mahuta](#), a Maori, as its [first indigenous female foreign minister](#) on November 02, 2020. Arden had led her left Labour Party to a landslide victory last month, taking 64 of the 120 seats in Parliament and becoming the first to win a majority since the country introduced its [Mixed Member Proportional](#) representation system in 1996.

Businessman Surangel Whipps Jr defeated Vice President Raynold Oilouch in the [presidential elections conducted in Palau](#) on November 03, 2020. Whipps succeeds his brother-in-law Tommy Remengesau Jr, who had narrowly defeated him in the previous election in 2016, to become the tenth President of the Republic of Palau. He has promised tax reform, a search for new sources of income, and stable relations with Taiwan and the US. The [US extended congratulations](#) to him.

## USA

The 59<sup>th</sup> US presidential election, held on November 03, 2020, aroused intense interest and scrutiny throughout the world. A record number of ballots were cast early and by mail due to the ongoing pandemic. While official results were yet to be declared, media forecasts gave 51.0% of the popular vote to the Joe Biden - Kamala Harris Democratic candidacy as against 47.1% of the popular vote to the Donald Trump – Mike Pence Republican team. The Trump team has not conceded defeat and has filed lawsuits in a number of states seeking to overturn election results. The General Services Administration (GSA), charged with managing the presidential transition process, acknowledged Biden & Harris as the winners on November 23, 2020, after officials in all 50 states said

that there was no evidence of systematic fraud or irregularity in their state. President Trump said he had instructed the GSA to do what was necessary, but had not conceded. The Electoral College will cast its votes on December 14, 2020, with media projections giving 306 of them to Biden and 232 to Trump.

President Donald Trump said on [Twitter on November 09](#), 2020 that he had ["terminated" Defense Secretary Mark Esper](#) and designated [Christopher Miller](#), Director of the National Counter Terrorism Center, as the Acting Defense Secretary. Mr [Esper's final message](#) to the DoD expressed pride in the accomplishments of the Department in light of the challenges they faced and asked personnel to stay focused on their mission, remain steadfast in their pursuit of excellence, and always do the right thing. His [letter to President Trump](#) said he accepted the decision to replace him as he served in deference to the Constitution. Acting Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, Dr James Anderson; Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Security, Mr Joseph Kernan and Chief of Staff to the Secretary of Defense, Jen Stewart, [resigned their posts the next day](#). They were replaced by Mr Anthony Tata, Ezra Cohen-Watnick and Kash Patel.



USS Nimitz in the Arabian Sea for Ex Malabar 2020. Source: US Navy Office of Information

A speech by Secretary of State Michael Pompeo on "[The Promise of America](#)" at the Ronald Reagan Institute on November 10, 2020 focused on America's founding promise and how the Trump administration had created a foreign policy of 'strength and candour". Pompeo said that US-China relations will not be dictated by exceptions carved out by the party, but by the simple and powerful standards expected of any nation with aspirations to play a role on the global stage. It demanded accountability, transparency and reciprocity from Beijing and called out its illegal claims in the South China Sea, as well as its coercion, stealing of intellectual property, ignoring of fundamental human rights and atrocities in Xinjiang, Tibet and elsewhere.

An [Executive Order signed by President Trump](#) on November 12, 2020, prohibited American companies and individuals from investing in a group of Chinese companies the US says supply and otherwise support China's military, intelligence and security services. National Security Advisor [Robert O'Brien described the action](#) as serving to "protect American investors from unintentionally providing capital that goes to enhancing the capabilities of the PLA and the PRC intelligence services, which routinely target American citizens and businesses through cyber operations, and directly threaten the critical infrastructure, economy and military of America and its allies and partners around the world". The [order comes into effect](#) on January 11, 2021 and gives investors till November 2021 to divest themselves of investments containing any of the identified Chinese securities.

National Security Adviser Robert C O'Brien represented the US at the 8<sup>th</sup> ASEAN-US Summit on November 14, 2020. The [Joint Statement](#) focuses on Human Capital Development, including education for a resilient population; healthy people for a healthy future; growing possibilities for peoples through thriving economies; and responsible and committed governments to protect the future of the people.

The US Department of State released a report titled "[The Elements of the China Challenge](#)" identifying a ten step process to ramp up pressure on Beijing and make it difficult for the incoming administration to backtrack. The report explicitly states that the CCP aims to fundamentally revise world order, placing the PRC at the centre and serving Beijing's authoritarian goals and hegemonic aspirations. The ten steps encompass securing freedom and prosperity at home; maintaining the world's most powerful and technologically sophisticated military while enhancing security cooperation with allies and partners; fortifying the free, open and rule-based international order the US led in creating after WW II; re-evaluating its alliance system and international organisations to determine their efficacy at fortifying the international order;

more effectively sharing responsibility with friends and partners and forming a variety of groupings and coalitions to address specific threats to freedom; promoting American interests by cooperating with Beijing where possible and deterring the PRC when required; educating American citizens about the scope and implications of the China challenge; training a new generation of public servants fluent in Chinese and other key languages; reforming American education; and championing the principles of freedom at every opportunity.

Former US Secretary of State [Henry Kissinger warned](#) the incoming Biden administration that unless it moved quickly to restore lines of communication with China, it risked a crisis that could see the world sliding into a catastrophe comparable to World War I. [Speaking at the](#) Bloomberg New Economy Forum, he said that military technologies would make such a crisis even more difficult to control than those of earlier eras.

The US Missile Defense Agency (MDA) and USS John Finn used an advanced SM-3 Block IIA missile, designed to provide anti-IRBM capability, to [successfully intercept and destroy](#) an ICBM representative target during a flight test on November 16, 2020. The target was launched from the Ronald Reagan Ballistic Missile Defense Test Site on Kwajalein Atoll, in the Marshall Islands, towards the ocean area Northeast of Hawaii. The MDA and the USN cooperatively manage the Aegis BMD system, which uses the Command and Control Battle Management Communications (C2BMC) network to receive tracking data, builds fire control solutions and then use ship or ground-launched missiles to destroy the incoming threat.

Speaking at the UN Naval Submarine League's Annual Symposium on November 17, 2020, US Navy Secretary Kenneth Braithwaite announced his recommendation to [set up a new numbered fleet](#) at the intersection of the Pacific and Indian Oceans, so as to have an Indo-Pacom footprint, according to a report. The Secretary was quoted as saying, "We can't just rely on the 7th Fleet in Japan. We have to look to our other allies and partners like Singapore, like India, and actually put a numbered fleet where it would be extremely relevant if, god forbid, we were to ever to get in any kind of a dust-up". He continued, "More importantly, it can provide a much more formidable deterrence. So we're going to create the First Fleet, and we're going to put it, if not Singapore right out of the chocks, we're going to look to make it more expeditionary-oriented and move it across the Pacific until it is where our allies and partners see that it could best assist them as well as to assist us." [China's spokesperson responded](#) to a question seeking his response to this development by saying that China would always be a builder of world peace

and a guardian of the international order. He said, "China's development is an opportunity, not a threat, as it will add to the world's strength for peace".

After conducting its fourth routine transit through the Taiwan Strait, USS Barry, forward-deployed at Yokosuka, returned to the South China Sea to maintain a [continuous USN presence](#) there on November 21, 2020. Meanwhile, USS John S McCain conducted a [Freedom of Navigation operation in the vicinity of Peter the Great Bay](#) in the Sea of Japan on November 24, 2020, to challenge Russia's excessive maritime claims in the bay.





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

[www.delhipolicygroup.org](http://www.delhipolicygroup.org)