

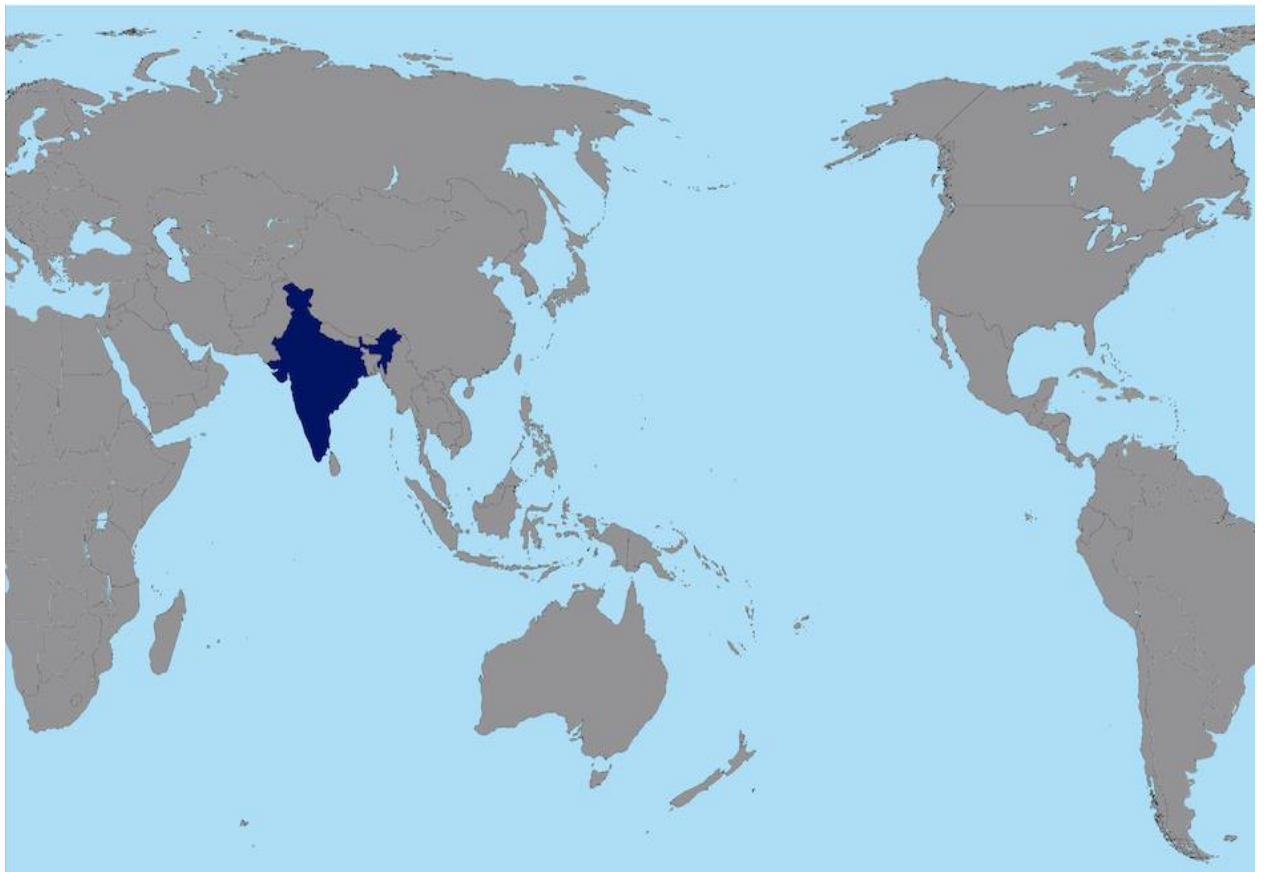


Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



DPG INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR JANUARY 2021



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Delhi Policy Group

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

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ABOUT US

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

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DPG INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

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

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DPG INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

January 2021

Overview

Joseph R. Biden Jr. was sworn in on January 20, 2021 as the 46th President of the United States, completing a leadership transition that will likely shape the future of the Indo-Pacific. Key members of his team included Antony Blinken as Secretary of State, General Lloyd Austin (Retd) as Secretary of Defense, Alejandro Mayorkas as Secretary of Homeland Security, Avril Haines as Director of National Intelligence, Linda Thomas-Greenfield as Ambassador to the UN, William Burns as Director of the CIA, Janet Yellen as the Secretary of the Treasury, Katherine Tai as the US Trade Representative, Ron Klain as the Chief of Staff and Jake Sullivan as the National Security Adviser.

The number of people infected by Covid-19 globally crossed the 100 million mark, while the number of deaths crossed 2.2 million. The emergence of more contagious variants, particularly in South Africa and the UK, generated concern both about reappearance of infections and whether the new strains would respond to vaccines. A surge of cases and hospitalisations led to increased restrictions including lockdowns and travel bans across the world. The WHO team charged with investigating the origins of the Wuhan Virus and its transmission to humans arrived in China on January 14, 2021, igniting a media war to control the narrative, with China trying to block access and spread disinformation while the outgoing Trump administration published a fact sheet on "Activity at the Wuhan Institute of Virology".

India joined the US, UK, Russia and China as a producer Covid-19 vaccines and launched the world's biggest vaccination programme. India also began supplying vaccines to countries across the world, stretching from immediate neighbours like Bhutan, Maldives, Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Mauritius to more distant nations like Morocco, Brazil, Mongolia, Canada, GCC nations, the Caricom countries and Pacific Island nations.

The IMF World Economic Outlook January 2021 reported that the global economy contracted by 3.5% in 2020, but would grow 5.5% in 2021 and 4.2% in 2022. India's economy was projected to grow by 11.5% in 2021 and 6.8% in 2022. The IMF also projected an oil price increase of around 20% in the coming year,

as demand picked up. Meanwhile, the UNCTAD Investment Trends Monitor said that global FDI collapsed 42% in 2020, falling from \$ 1.5 trillion in 2019 to \$ 859 billion in 2020. India was among the few countries which saw an increase in FDI by 13% to reach \$ 57 billion.

Addressing the UN Security Council on January 12, 2021, India's External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar proposed an eight-point action plan to credibly address the menace of terrorism. Meanwhile, the US State Department amended the designations of Lashkar-i-Jhangvi and ISIL Sinai Peninsula as Foreign Terrorist Organisations (FTO) to include their additional aliases. It also maintained the FTO designation of Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and others.

Uganda's presidential and parliamentary elections on January 14, 2021 resulted in incumbent President Yoweri Museveni, who has ruled the country since 1986, being declared re-elected. China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited five African countries including Tanzania and Seychelles from January 05-09, 2021, carrying a message of cooperation in tackling the pandemic and infrastructure cooperation through BRI projects.

The GCC member states and Egypt signed the Al-Ula Declaration, ending their three-year long dispute with Qatar and bringing all together in ensuring the political and economic stability of the region. Oman's ruler Sultan Haitham bin Tariq Al Said issued a new basic law, including the appointment of a crown prince for the first time and emphasising the role of the state in guaranteeing more rights and freedoms for citizens including equality for women. Two suicide blasts in Baghdad killed at least 32 and wounded an additional 110 people. Saudi Arabia reported having thwarted an attempted attack on Riyadh by Houthi militia from Yemen using a drone or missile.

Even as peace talks stalled in Afghanistan, the Pentagon announced that US force levels had dropped to 2,500 personnel. Terrorism continued taking its toll, with security personnel and female judges falling victim to it. Ten Chinese nationals arrested in Kabul for operating a terror cell last month were quietly pardoned and flown back to China. India's National Security Adviser Ajit Doval made an unscheduled visit to Afghanistan and held extensive discussions with the government.

Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) Chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman and other opposition leaders declared that the opposition's struggle against the government was a "jihad" which would continue till "rulers stopped oppressing the poor". Violence in Pakistan continued unabated, with 11 coal miners from the Shia Hazara community being blindfolded and executed in Baluchistan. The US State Department expressed deep concern at the Pakistani Supreme

Court's decision to acquit those involved in Daniel Pearl's kidnapping and murder and any proposed action to release them. It offered to prosecute Ahmad Omar Saeed Sheikh in the US for his horrific crimes against an American citizen.

The India-France Annual Strategic Dialogue, the Inaugural India-EU Maritime Security Dialogue, the India-Nepal Joint Commission Meeting, the inaugural India – South Korea consultation on global issues, the 13th India-Vietnam Defence Security Dialogue and the 5th India-Singapore Defense Ministers' Dialogue took place during the month. External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar visited Sri Lanka from January 05-07 and discussed COVID cooperation, economic recovery, investment and maritime security and safety with Sri Lanka's leadership. A military contingent from Bangladesh participated in India's Republic Day Parade for the first time. The outgoing US Ambassador to India, Kenneth Juster, expressed considerable satisfaction with the achievements of the last few years in growing the India-US relationship.

The US Defense Secretary, Foreign Secretary and National Security Adviser reached out to their Indian counterparts telephonically and highlighted India's role as a pre-eminent US partner in the Indo-Pacific while pledging to sustain the bilateral defence partnership. Official readouts of statements also indicated that the US was still committed to the Free and Open Indo-Pacific. The US Ambassador to the UN (Designate) was, however, ambivalent about permanent seats for India, Germany and Japan on the UN Security Council, describing this as a matter for discussion.

The standoff between India and China in Eastern Ladakh continued, with both holding fast to their established positions during the 9th Military Commander level meeting on January 25, 2021. There were reports of minor clashes between Indian and Chinese border personnel in Sikkim's Naku La Region, which were downplayed as a local incident. A Chinese soldier who strayed across the border in Eastern Ladakh was handed over to the PLA. India began the process of strengthening its posture on the China border, shifting a Corps from the western to the northern border for this purpose. External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar identified mutual respect, mutual sensitivity and mutual interest as the three determinants and set out eight propositions to stabilise the India-China relationship.

The French Air Force joined the IAF in conducting large-scale Exercise DESERT KNIGHT 2021 at Air Force Station Jodhpur. The Indian Navy conducted the biennial pan-India coastal defence Exercise SEA VIGIL. The Indian Armed Forces conducted Exercise KAVACH and AMPHEX -21. Indian Navy personnel

joined members of the US, Australian, Canadian and Japanese armed forces in Exercise Sea Dragon at the Andersen Air Force Base, Guam. The Union Cabinet approved the procurement of 73 LCA Tejas Mk-1A fighter and 10 LCA Tejas Mk-1 trainer aircraft involving a cost of Rs 46,898 crores, with completion of deliveries being scheduled for 2028. Three additional Rafale aircraft arrived in India towards the end of January, strengthening the IAF. Unconfirmed reports indicated that the 'Fishhook' underwater surveillance network had been extended to the A&N Islands, strengthening India's ability to monitor movements of PLA (N) submarines in the region.

China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Myanmar, Indonesia, Brunei and the Philippines. Indonesia's Foreign Minister expressed serious concern about intensifying great power competition in the Indo-Pacific and identified advancing concrete cooperation on the AOIP, establishing a regional partnership strategy on Africa, and prioritizing territorial sea negotiations with Malaysia as her priorities for 2021. Indonesia intercepted Chinese survey ship Xiang Yang Hong 03 near the Sunda Straits as the vessel had switched off its AIS transponder and was running 'dark'. It also seized two tankers that were transferring oil from an Iranian to a Chinese vessel. Meanwhile, Malaysia arrested two boats containing 16 Vietnamese fishermen for encroaching in Malaysian waters without a license.

China's largest transport aircraft, the Y-20, landed on Fiery Cross Reef, marking a step towards its operationalisation as a full-fledged air base. Japan joined the UK, USA, France, Germany, Australia, Malaysia and the Philippines in formally rejecting China's position on the drawing of territorial sea baselines in the South China Sea. The US imposed visa restrictions on PRC individuals responsible for or complicit in large scale reclamation, construction or militarisation of disputed islands.

The Taiwan – US relationship strengthened during the final days of the Trump Administration, with the holding of a politico-military dialogue and lifting of contact guidelines to regulate the interaction of US officials with their Taiwanese counterparts. Taiwan's representative in the US was invited to participate in President Biden's inauguration ceremony for the first time in over four decades, indicating continued US support for Taiwan. As the Theodore Roosevelt Carrier Strike Group entered the South China Sea through the Bashi Channel for routine operations, China responded by sharply ramping up incursions by PLAAF aircraft into Taiwan's ADIZ, ignoring US calls for restraint and deploying DF-26 IRBM launchers in its coastal areas as a clear signal to the US of the stakes involved.

Relations between South Korea and Japan were adversely impacted as the Seoul Central District Court ruled that Japan should pay \$91,800 each to 12 'comfort women' victims of the World War II period. Japan's Prime Minister observed that sovereign states are immune from the jurisdiction of foreign courts and the issue had in any case been settled under a 1985 bilateral agreement. South Korea also protested Japan's reiteration of "unjust" claims over Dokdo Islands in the Japanese Foreign Minister's foreign policy speech in the Diet. Meanwhile, South Korea finalised a defence budget of about \$ 48 billion for 2021, an increase of 5.4% over last year. It was also reported to be considering tests of its first SLBM in 2021.

Delivering a special address at the World Economic Forum Virtual Event which stressed multilateralism, President Xi Jinping identified four major challenges facing the world and four steps towards building a shared future for mankind. Hong Kong police launched a crackdown on "subversion" under the new National Security Law, leading to a joint protest from Australia, Canada, UK and the US. China's foreign minister identified six focal areas for China's diplomacy in 2021, while China issued a white paper on "China's International Development Cooperation in the New Era". China also announced sanctions on 28 officials of the outgoing Trump administration and cleared a controversial Bill that authorizes its Coast Guard to use all necessary means to prevent threats from foreign vessels.

China said that its GDP expanded 2.3% in 2020, exceeding the 100 trillion Yuan (\$ 14.42 trillion) mark for the first time and making China the only major economy to post growth in 2020. China's trade also expanded 1.9% to 32.16 trillion Yuan (about \$ 5 trillion) despite a worldwide slump. China announced an ambitious space programme, including lofting a manned 90 ton station into space this year, developing a new rocket with a capacity of 140 tons, testing a rocket powered by a hybrid solid and liquid fuel engine, and launching a solar probe in 2022. It unveiled a prototype locomotive using high temperature superconducting maglev technology with a designed speed of 620 Kph. China's legislature adopted a revised National Defence Law which came into effect on January 01, 2021, and released regulations on the management of military officers and to guide the work of CPC Committees in the Armed Forces.

The outgoing Trump administration went into a flurry of last minute activity. A classified US Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific prepared in 2018 was prematurely declassified so as to communicate to the American people as well as allies and partners the enduring commitment of the US to keep the Indo-Pacific free and open into the future. The annual US Intellectual Property Report, the National Maritime Cyber Security Plan and the implementation

plan associated with the national strategy to secure 5G were released. Executive orders prohibited certain future transactions involving software applications connected with China, and directed the promotion of small modular reactors for national defence and space exploration. The outgoing Secretary of State determined that the PRC had committed crimes against humanity and genocide against Muslim Uyghurs and other ethnic groups in Xinjiang. The Pentagon shifted Israel from the European Command to the Central Command Area of Responsibility and released a strategic blueprint for the Arctic. The Chief of Naval Operations released his Navigation Plan, setting out priorities for shaping the Navy, while the UK and US agreed to position a detachment of USMC and USN personnel and equipment, including F-35B Lightning II fighters and USS The Sullivans, as part of a combined UK-US Carrier Strike Group led by HMS Queen Elizabeth, which reached Initial Operation Capability on January 04, 2021.

An elaboration of these and other Indo-Pacific developments in January 2021, with relevant links, is contained in the succeeding paragraphs.

The Global Scene

Joseph Robinette Biden Jr. was sworn in as the 46th President of the United States on January 20, 2021, completing a leadership transition that will likely shape the future of the Indo-Pacific. His [inaugural address](#) covered a once-in-a-century virus stalking the country, racial justice, a cry for survival from the planet and a rise in political extremism as the continuing challenges facing the country, and of national unity as the bedrock requirement to prevail over them. It committed to repairing alliances and engaging with the world once again, leading not by the example of power but by the power of example, and of being a strong and trusted partner for peace, progress and security. [Key members of his team](#) included Antony Blinken as Secretary of State, General Lloyd Austin (Retd) as Secretary of Defense, Alejandro Mayorkas as Secretary of Homeland Security, Avril Haines as Director of National Intelligence, Linda Thomas-Greenfield as Ambassador to the UN, William Burns as Director of the CIA, Janet Yellen as the Secretary of the Treasury, Katherine Tai as the US Trade Representative, Ron Klain as the Chief of Staff and Jake Sullivan as the National Security Adviser. Among Biden's initial actions was restoring US ties with the [World Health Organisation](#) and [rejoining](#) the Paris Climate Accord. He is [expected to rejoin](#) the JCPOA with Iran and the UN Human Rights Council, and has already indicated his desire [to extend](#) the New START treaty by five years, the Open Skies Treaty and the Arms Trade Treaty in the coming days.



President Joe Biden delivers his inauguration speech at the Capitol, January 20, 2021.

Source: Reuters

Speaking to the press at his [first press conference](#) after assuming charge, Secretary of State Antony Blinken committed to truth and transparency in the White House briefing room. Responding to questions, he said his immediate focus was the question of sanctions on the Houthis in Yemen. Other subjects covered during the briefing included Russia (the possibility of sanctions on Russia if harm came to protestors or Mr Alexey Navalny); the Middle East (understanding commitments made to secure the Abrahams Accords, including arms sales); Afghanistan (he said Mr Khalilzad had been asked to continue his work); Iran (determining if Iran was in compliance with the JCPOA and then working to build a stronger agreement to deal with other problematic issues) and restoring US leadership in the world.

Responding to a question during his first press conference on how he would [cooperate with China on climate change](#) when he also said it was engaged in genocide, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that the relationship with China had adversarial, competitive and cooperative aspects, and included climate change as one of the cooperative ones. In response, China's [spokesman stressed](#) that unlike flowers that can bloom in a greenhouse despite the winter chill, US-China cooperation in specific areas was closely linked with bilateral relations as a whole.

The first interactions between the Biden administration and India occurred on January 27, 2021, when [General Lloyd Austin](#) spoke telephonically to [Shri Rajnath Singh](#) and pledged to sustain progress in the bilateral defence partnership. [NSA Jack Sullivan](#) also spoke to India's NSA [Ajit Doval](#) and discussed the "importance of continuing close cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region, promoting regional security, and renewing efforts to collaborate on global challenges, including COVID-19 and climate change". On January 29, 2021, [Secretary of State Anthony J Blinken](#) spoke to Minister of External Affairs Dr S Jaishankar and underscored India's role as a pre-eminent US partner in the Indo-Pacific and the importance of working together to expand regional cooperation, including through the Quad. Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the US Ambassador to the UN (Designate) was, however, ambivalent about permanent seats for India, Germany and Japan on the UN Security Council, describing this as a matter for discussion during her [confirmation hearing](#). Three previous administrations have publicly supported India's bid to the permanent seat.



Vaccines supplied by India form part of a vaccination drive in Bhutan, January 20, 2021. Source: MEA Photogallery

As January ended, the number of people who had been infected by Covid-19 globally [exceeded](#) 103 million, while the number of deaths crossed 2.2 million. USA alone had recorded over 26 million infections and 450,000 deaths. The emergence of [more contagious variants](#), particularly in South Africa and the UK, generated concern both about reappearance of infections and whether the

new strains would respond to vaccines. A surge of cases and hospitalisations led to increased restrictions including lockdowns and travel bans in the UK, South Africa, Japan, Thailand, the Netherlands, Indonesia, Singapore, India and China, among others. [Beijing directed](#) that inbound travellers undergo an observation period of 21 days followed by seven days of health monitoring, as there had been cases of inbound travellers being confirmed as Covid-19 positive after 14 days of isolated observation.

India joined the US, UK, Russia and China as a producer Covid-19 vaccines when its Drug Controller General cleared approval for the use of Covidshield, produced by the Serum Institute of India in collaboration with Oxford University and AstraZeneca, and Covaxin, indigenously developed by Bharat Biotech, for “restricted use in emergency situation”, triggering the world’s biggest vaccination programme. As of January 30, 2021, more than 3.7 million healthcare workers had already [been vaccinated](#). Just four days after it began vaccinating its own citizens, India also began [supplying vaccines](#) to countries across the world, stretching from immediate neighbours like Bhutan, Maldives, Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Mauritius to more distant nations like Morocco, Brazil, Mongolia, Canada, GCC nations, the Caricom countries and Pacific Island nations. Significant parts of these supplies were through grants. Meanwhile, Brazil’s Butantan Institute reported that the [efficacy of](#) China’s Sinovac Biotech vaccine was just 50.4%, barely meeting the threshold for regulatory approval.

The WHO team charged with investigating the origins of the Wuhan Virus arrived in China on January 14, 2021. As late as January 28, the [WHO was still negotiating](#) access and support, as well as the chance for the team to engage fully with their Chinese counterparts, with China’s Health Minister. China has strongly opposed an independent investigation it could not control, consistently stifled domestic criticism and blocked its scientists from publishing independent studies into the causes of its outbreak, pushed its own narrative by and spread disinformation about the source of virus, and zealously deflected attention from its overall lack of transparency. Even as the WHO team was quarantined in their hotels, the US State Department [made a statement](#) and released a [fact sheet](#) on “Activity at the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV)”. The fact sheet said the virus could have emerged from human contact with infected animals, but could also be the result of a laboratory accident. It called out the CCP’s deadly obsession with secrecy and control at the expense of public health in China and in the world. It also alleged that several researchers at the Wuhan Institute of virology had become sick in autumn 2019, with symptoms consistent with Covid-19 and common seasonal illnesses and the CCP had denied access to these researchers, thus preventing investigation. It also

alleged that starting in 2016, the WIV had conducted experiments involving RaTG13, the bat coronavirus which was 96.2% similar to SARS-CoV-2 and sought access for WHO investigators to records of WIV's work on this and other bat coronaviruses. Finally, it said that WIV had collaborated with China's military since at least 2017 and diverted funding provided by international donors towards secret military research. The fact sheet sought transparency from Chinese authorities to investigate these and other issues.

The IMF World Economic Outlook [January 2021](#) projected that the global economy contracted by 3.5% in 2020, but would grow 5.5% in 2021 and 4.2% in 2022. It projected that oil prices in 2021 would rise just over 20% from their low base in 2020, but would still remain well below the average price for 2019. India was projected to grow by 11.5% in 2021 and 6.8% in 2022. World trade volume for goods and services was projected to grow by 8.1% in 2021 and 6.3% in 2022.

The UNCTAD [Investment Trends Monitor](#) said that global FDI collapsed 42% in 2020, falling from \$ 1.5 trillion in 2019 to \$ 859 billion in 2020. Developed countries were the hardest hit, with flows to Europe drying up completely and those to the US decreasing by 49%. FDI in China rose by 4% to \$ 163 billion, while that to India rose by 13% to \$ 57 billion due to investments in the digital sector. Global FDI flows were expected to remain weak in 2021.

India's External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar addressed the UNSC open debate on threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts on January 12, 2021. He proposed an [eight-point action plan](#) for the UN to credibly address the menace of terrorism and ensure effective action. The plan encompassed summoning the political will to unhesitatingly combat terrorism; not countenancing double standards, reforming the working methods of committees dealing with sanctions and counter-terrorism to ensure transparency, accountability and effectiveness and eliminating the practice of placing blocks on listing requests without assigning reason; discouraging exclusivist thinking, ensuring enlisting and delisting individuals and entities under the UN sanctions regime was done objectively; recognising and addressing linkages between terrorism and transnational organised crime; remedying weaknesses in anti-money laundering and counter-terror by the FATF; and ensuring adequate funding to UN counter terrorism bodies from the UN regular budget.

Speaking at the UN Security Council debate on "[Challenges of Maintaining Peace and Security in Fragile Contexts](#)", India's Foreign Secretary, Harsh Vardhan Shringla, said fragile states had a direct negative spill over effect on neighbours, including from refugee flows, safe havens for terrorists, organised

crime, epidemics, weapon trafficking etc. He focused on the African continent and said that African countries, particularly in the Sahel, Central Africa and Horn of Africa continued to face complex challenges in this regard. He also spoke of the bonds between India and Africa and the action India was taking to foster its development partnership with Africa.

The US Department of the Navy [released](#) a 28-page [strategic blueprint for the Arctic](#) on January 5, 2021, to provide strategic guidance on how it will apply naval power in the Arctic Region in the years ahead. The Chief of Naval Operations also [released](#) his [Navigation Plan](#) on January 11, 2021, focusing on training to make USN sailors the best trained and educated force in the world; delivering on time maintenance; delivering a more lethal and better connected fleet, and enhancing the capacity of the fleet with manned and unmanned platforms.

Indo-Pacific Developments

Reports indicated a [new trilateral grouping](#) was taking shape in the Indo-Pacific, with India, Japan and Russia planning to hold a meeting in the near future as part of their emerging partnership. The focus of this group would be to explore trilateral cooperation to exploit the resource-rich Russian Far East.

Acting US Secretary of Defense Chris Miller and UK Secretary of State for Defence Ben Wallace co-signed the [Joint Declaration for the Carrier Strike Group 2021 deployment](#). The declaration enables the deployment of USMC and USN personnel and equipment, including a detachment of USMC F-35B Lightning II aircraft and USS The Sullivans (DDG-68) as part of the UK-US combined carrier strike group, led by HMS Queen Elizabeth. The action was [endorsed](#) by Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin during his telephone call with UK Secretary of State for Defence Ben Wallace. The Queen Elizabeth carrier strike group was reported by the British Ministry of Defence to have reached [Initial Operation Capability](#) on January 4, 2021. It is expected to deploy in the Indo-Pacific in summer 2021.

Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, hosted [maritime patrol aircraft and personnel](#) from the US and Indian navies, JMSDF and the Australian and Canadian Air Forces for Exercise Sea Dragon from January 14-28, 2021. The exercise, intended to achieve anti-submarine warfare interoperability, includes 125 hours of in-flight training ranging from tracking simulated targets to the final problem of [finding and tracking USS Providence](#), a Los Angeles Class nuclear submarine. Aircrew from the countries concerned built plans and discussed tactics, capabilities and equipment of their respective nations during the

exercise. Meanwhile, a [report indicated](#) that Germany was considering sending a naval frigate to Japan as part of its new focus on the Indo-Pacific.



Participants from the RAAF, JMSDF, IN, RCAF and USN pose for a photo on the conclusion of Exercise Sea Dragon at Guam, January 28, 2021.

Source: US Indo-Pacific Command

East Africa

Landlocked Uganda's presidential and parliamentary elections on January 14, 2021 resulted in incumbent President Yoweri Museveni, who has ruled the country since 1986, being [declared re-elected](#). Mr Museveni won about 59% of the vote, with opposition leader Robert Kyagulanyi getting about 35%. The opposition leader called on Uganda's development partners [not to recognise the results](#) as they were marred by widespread irregularities. UN officials had earlier [warned](#) that free and fair elections were unlikely. The US State Department had [expressed deep concern](#) about the many credible reports of security force violence during the pre-election period and election irregularities during the polls. Uganda accused the US of meddling in its internal politics and supporting the opposition National Unity Platform Party after the US ambassador attempted to meet the opposition leader, who was placed under [de facto house arrest](#). China, meanwhile, was quick to [congratulate](#) Museveni for his victory.

Continuing the 31-year old tradition of Beijing's top diplomat visiting Africa at the beginning of each year, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited [Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Botswana, Tanzania and Seychelles](#) from

January 04-09, 2021. In a meeting with [Seychellois President](#) Wavel Ramkalawan, he offered deepening bilateral cooperation in environmental protection, Blue Ocean and tourism, as well as marine aquaculture, marine scientific research and shipping transportation. He also said China's diplomacy has always been based on the principle of [equality between big and small countries](#) and described the China-Seychelles relationship as a model in this regard. In [Tanzania](#), he obtained a commitment that Tanzania will always support China's position on Taiwan, Xinjiang, Tibet, Hong Kong and the South China Sea. Discussions included strengthening of the Forum for China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) as well as deepened cooperation in infrastructure, health, education, agriculture, fishery and other fields. He said [China and Africa](#) have worked closely on eight major initiatives, including industrial promotion, infrastructure connectivity, trade facilitation, green development, capacity building, health care, people-to-people exchanges, and peace and security. Over 1100 Chinese projects were ongoing in Africa, with nearly 100,000 Chinese technicians and engineers continuing to work despite the pandemic.

The China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation and China Railway Construction Limited were awarded a \$ 1.32 billion contract to build a 341 Km long [railway line](#) connecting the Lake Victoria port city of Mwanza to Isaka, before eventually connecting to Dar es Salaam. The signing of the agreement was witnessed by Tanzanian Foreign Minister Palamagamba Kabudi and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

The US imposed [visa restrictions on Tanzanian officials](#) responsible for or complicit in undermining Tanzania's October 2020 general elections. It urged the Tanzanian government to reverse course and hold accountable those responsible for the flawed election, violence and intimidation.

The US Under Secretary of Defense for Policy [visited Mozambique](#) on January 8, 2021. He met Mozambique's Defence Minister Jaime Neto and Minister of the Interior Amade Miquidade and offered US support to counter terrorism and prevent violent extremism in Northern Mozambique.

While the African Union – United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) officially ended on December 31, 2020 and the Government of Sudan took over responsibility for protection of civilians in the area, [violence returned](#) to West and South Darfur resulting in the death of at least 250 people and the displacement of over 100,000. Managing the situation is seen as a test for the Abdalla Hamdok government.

China [postponed Kenyan debt repayments](#), amounting to \$ 245 million, a week after the Paris Club agreed to delay \$300 million due to be paid back in the first half of 2021. The debt rescheduling comes as a relief for the pandemic-scarred economy.

West Asia

The GCC member states and Egypt signed the Al-Ula Declaration on January 5, 2021, bringing to an end the three-year long dispute the other GCC states had with Qatar and bringing all together in ensuring the political and economic stability of the region. The [official text](#) of the declaration speaks of the hopes and aspirations of the region's people to restore collaboration among GCC member states to its natural path and the strengthening of relations between Egypt and GCC member states. The [UN Secretary General welcomed](#) the declaration as recognition of the importance of unity among the GCC states and aims to strengthen regional security, peace, stability and prosperity. The [US too welcomed](#) the declaration as a positive step towards restoring Gulf and Arab unity.

Oman's ruler Sultan Haitham bin Tariq Al Said issued a [new basic law](#) on January 11, 2021, including the appointment of a crown prince for the first time and emphasising the role of the state in guaranteeing more right and freedoms for citizens including equality for women. [Another decree](#) defined the prerogatives, conditions for membership and rights and duties of members of the Council of Oman.



A USAF B-52 flies with Royal Saudi Air Force F-15SA aircraft over the CENTCOM Area of Responsibility on Jan 27, 2021. Source: US CENTCOM

Forces assigned to the Bahrain Defence Force and US Naval Forces Central Command participated in a [joint anti-terrorism exercise](#) in the 5th Fleet Area of Operations on January 12-13, 2021. The UAE Presidential Guard and the US Marine Corps' Special Purpose Marine Air – Ground Task Force completed a week-long [training engagement](#) in the UAE. Qatar Emiri Air Force Rafale aircraft [integrated for the first time](#) with USAF KC-135 Stratotankers during a week-long air-to-air refuelling exercise at Al Udeid Air Base, in Qatar. A USAF B-52 Stratofortress from Barksdale Air Force Base, LA, flew with Royal Saudi Arabian Air Force F-15SAs during a bomber task force mission over the US Central Command Area of Responsibility on January 27, 2021.

The United States increased the scope of State Department administered [sanctions related to metals](#) used by Iran's nuclear, ballistic missile and military programmes, prohibiting the transfer of 15 specific metals to Iran. It also [sanctioned seven entities and two individuals](#) for activities connected with proliferation of WMD, including the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Line; PRC-based Jiangyin Mascot Special Steel Company, UAE based Accenture Building Materials and others, for having transferred or sold to Iran special steels used for Iran's missile programme. Another set of entities was sanctioned for activities related to [conventional arms proliferation by Iran](#).

The Pentagon announced that the [US force level in Iraq](#) had dropped to 2,500 personnel on January 15, 2021, reflecting improvement in Iraq's capability to manage the threat from ISIS. The reduced force level was considered sufficient to provide support to Iraqi partners.

The [redeployment of USS Nimitz](#) from the Persian Gulf was halted following threats issued by Iranian leaders against President Trump and other US government officials. The Pentagon directed the ship to remain in the Central Command area of operations.

In a speech at the National Press Club on January 12, 2021, US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo [accused Iran](#) of hosting Al-Qa'ida and spoke of substantial evidence proving this, including a letter from Osama bin Laden found during the Abbottabad raid that said, "Iran is our main artery for funds, personnel and communication ... There is no need to fight with Iran unless you are forced to". He said AQ had centralised its leadership inside Iran and is partnering that country in spreading terror worldwide.

The third Senior Officials Meeting of the [Arab-India Cooperation Forum](#) took place virtually on January 12, 2021. The officials discussed regional and international issues of mutual concern; the need for political solutions to regional issues and crises in the Middle East; and the need for cooperation in

combating terrorism and ensuring freedom of navigation and maritime security.

A meeting of the [India-Oman Strategic Consultative Group](#) took place in New Delhi on January 14, 2021. Both sides reviewed the entire spectrum of India-Oman relations and agreed to pursue various agreements and MoUs in the concerned fields. They looked forward to trade and investment linkages gaining momentum once normalcy returned after Covid-19; discussed intensifying cooperation in health and food security; and exchanged views on regional developments and global issues of mutual interest.

Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates were both designated as '[Major Security Partners](#)' of the United States on January 15, 2021. Both states host large numbers of US personnel and are committed to combating violent extremism across the region. Two days earlier, the US had signed an MoU establishing a [US Trade Zone in Bahrain](#), to act as a hub for regional trade, manufacturing, logistics and distribution by US companies to the GCC and beyond.

Two [suicide blasts in Baghdad](#) on January 21, 2021, killed at least 32 and wounded an additional 110 people. The first suicide bomber feigned illness in a crowded market and exploded an explosive belt as people gathered around him. The second attacker detonated his bomb as people gathered around the victims of the first attack. The Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attacks, the first in Baghdad for over three years.

Saudi Arabia reported having [thwarted](#) an attempted attack on Riyadh by Houthi militia in Yemen using a drone or missile on January 23, 2020. The attempted attack occurred even as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the US would revisit the designation of Yemen's Houthis as a [foreign terrorist organisation](#). The Houthis [denied](#) launching the strike. The US State Department [condemned](#) the attack.

South Asia

India and Pakistan [exchanged](#) a list of their nuclear installations and facilities under their Agreement on Prohibition of Attack against Nuclear Installations and Facilities on January 1, 2021. This was the 30th consecutive exchange of such lists.

Ten Chinese nationals caught in Kabul for operating a terror cell in December 2020 were [quietly pardoned](#) and flown back to China on a chartered flight. The terms of their release were not known.

The Pentagon announced that the [US force level in Afghanistan](#) had dropped to 2,500 personnel on January 15, 2021. This was done despite the provisions of Article 1215 of NDAA 2021, which prohibit usage of DoD funds to reduce the total number of US Armed Forces deployed below 4000 or the number of personnel actually deployed as of the date of enactment till submission of a report on the impact of such reduction to the appropriate congressional committees. The Pentagon also said that it was planning to further reduce force levels to zero by May 2021, based on continued demonstration by all sides of their commitment to advance the peace process. It said the US would continue to take any action necessary to ensure protection of its homeland, citizens and interests. Meanwhile, [peace talks](#) in Afghanistan stalled as negotiators waited for President-elect Joe Biden to signal whether he would stick to the troop pullout schedule.

India's National Security Adviser Ajit Doval made an unannounced visit to Afghanistan on January 13 & 14, 2021. He met President Ashraf Ghani and [discussed](#) counter-terrorism cooperation and efforts for building a regional consensus on supporting peace in Afghanistan. He [also met](#) other senior leaders, including his Afghan counterpart Hamdullah Mohib and held extensive discussions on issues of strategic mutual interest.

At least nine Afghan security personnel were killed when the Taliban attacked two police checkpoints in [Kunduz](#) on January 15, 2021. Two Afghan [female judges were killed](#) by unknown gunmen in Kabul on January 17, 2021. In [other incidents](#), two members of an Afghan militia opened fire on their fellow militiamen and killed 12 of them in Western Herat and a sticky bomb attached to a police SUV killed two policemen in Kabul. Attacks were also reported in Helmand and Kandahar. Mangal Bagh Afridi, the leader of the Lashkar-e-Islam terrorist group, [was reported killed](#) in a roadside bomb blast in Nangarhar province on January 28, 2021. Secretary of State Antony Blinken [told](#) Afghan President Ashraf Ghani that the US is reviewing the February 2020 US-Taliban agreement to determine whether the Taliban are living up to their promise to cut ties with terrorist groups, reduce violence in Afghanistan and engage in meaningful negotiations with the government and other stakeholders. The incidents demonstrate continuing violence even as the Taliban and the Afghan government engage in peace talks to end the war.

US [Secretary of State Antony J Blinken spoke to](#) Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi and discussed how to ensure accountability for convicted terrorist Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh and others responsible for the kidnapping and murder of American journalist Daniel Pearl. He also reinforced US concern about the Pakistani Supreme Court ruling and potential release of

these prisoners, and the importance of continued US-Pakistan cooperation on the Afghan peace process, support for regional stability, and the potential to expand trade and commercial ties. The US State Department had earlier published a [statement](#) expressing deep concern at the Pakistani Supreme Court's decision to acquit those involved in Daniel Pearl's kidnapping and murder and proposed action to release them, describing the decision as "an affront to terrorist victims everywhere, including in Pakistan". The statement also expected the "Pakistani government to expeditiously review its legal options to ensure justice is served", and said the US was prepared to prosecute Sheikh in the US for his horrific crimes against an American citizen.

Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman has, in a public meeting, declared that the opposition's [struggle against the government is a jihad](#), and pledged that this would continue till "rulers stopped oppressing the poor". He was joined by the PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and other opposition leaders in the meeting.

Eleven coal miners from the Shia Hazara community were blindfolded, tied up and then [executed](#) in the Mach coal field area of Balochistan on January 03, 2021. The IS claimed responsibility for the terrorist attack. The event prompted [widespread protest](#) by Hazaras across Pakistan.

Pakistan [claimed](#) to have successfully flight-tested the Shaheen-III ballistic missile, with a range of 2750 Km and an impact point in the Arabian Sea. Unconfirmed reports, however, claimed that the [test had failed](#), with the missile breaking up shortly after launch.

Following the example of the Indian Navy's Mission Sagar, [PNS Nasr](#) reached Djibouti with a load of 50 tons of rice for the people of Djibouti on January 22. The ship is scheduled to visit Sudan, Benin, Niger and Kenya in due course. The second Type 054 frigate was launched by Hudong Zhonghua Shipyard in Shanghai on January 30, 2021. The day also marked the completion of 70 years of [Pakistan – China relations](#).

Responding to a question about India in the Advance Policy Questions for his confirmation, Defense Secretary [Lloyd Austin said](#), "My overarching objective for our defense relationship with India would be to continue elevating the partnership. I would further operationalize India's "Major Defense Partner" status and continue to build upon existing strong defense cooperation to ensure the U.S. and Indian militaries can collaborate to address shared interests. I would also seek to deepen and broaden our defense cooperation through the Quad security dialogue and other regional multilateral engagements".

India and France held their [annual strategic dialogue](#) on January 7, 2021. Subjects discussed included counter-terrorism, cyber security, defence cooperation, maritime security, regional and global issues and cooperation in the Indo Pacific region. France [reportedly offered](#) to shift 100% of its assembly line for Panther medium utility helicopters as well as 70% of the assembly line for Rafale fighters to India with full transfer of technology. Forward movement was also reported on the Jaitapur nuclear power plant pricing issues, and India said it would consider the French offer of six Airbus 330 multi-role transport tankers. France also invited the Indian Navy to participate in the European Maritime Awareness in the Straits of Hormuz, join in trilateral naval exercises with UAE, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and Australia, and use facilities at the French base in Djibouti.

Speaking at the VIF after his interaction for the India-France strategic dialogue, Emmanuel Bonne, the French President's Diplomatic Adviser, described Beijing as not just a competitor but also a strategic rival. He said that [safeguards](#) have been put in place in the EU's Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) with China to ensure that unlike RCEP, China could not manipulate Europe. He also described French relations with Pakistan as being at a historic low, and hinted at an India-Australia France trilateral meeting on the sidelines of this year's Raisina Dialogue to boost the Indo-Pacific partnership.

External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar [visited Sri Lanka](#) from January 5-7, 2021. [He met](#) President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, Foreign Minister Dinesh Gunawardena and several other ministers and opposition leaders. According to a [statement](#) from the Sri Lanka Foreign Minister, subjects discussed included COVID cooperation, economic recovery, investments in different sectors of the Sri Lanka economy, maritime security and safety, as well as ensuring that the aspirations of minority Tamils are addressed.

The inaugural [India – EU maritime security dialogue](#) was conducted through video-conferencing on January 20, 2021. Officials from both sides shared perspectives on developments in the maritime security environment, regional cooperation activities, developments of mutual interest and opportunities for cooperation.



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Sri Lanka Foreign Minister Dinesh Gunawardena address the Press in Colombo on January 06, 2021. Source: Sri Lanka Foreign Ministry

The sixth meeting of the [India-Nepal Joint Commission](#), co-chaired by foreign ministers from the two countries, took place on January 15, 2021. The joint commission reviewed all aspects of cooperation between the two countries and explored ways of strengthening the traditionally close and friendly ties. Nepal's Foreign Minister Pradeep Kumar Gyawali [called on Raksha Mantri](#) Shri Rajnath Singh in New Delhi the next day. He expressed Nepal's desire to deepen bilateral relations and thanked the Raksha Mantri for all the assistance provided by India to Nepal. Both ministers expressed their satisfaction at the excellent bilateral military-to-military cooperation.

The first Korea-India high-level [consultation on global issues](#) took place on January 7, 2021. The discussions included India's plan as a non-permanent member of the UNSC for the 2021-2022 term; key agendas of the UNSC including the Korean Peninsula issue; preparations for the 2021 UN Peacekeeping Ministerial to be held in Korea in December 2021; and recent challenges to multilateralism and future prospects. The two sides agreed to hold such consultations on a regular basis.

The 13th India-Vietnam [Defence Security Dialogue](#) took place virtually on January 12, 2021. Participants discussed the plan of action that emanated from the Virtual Summit between India and Vietnam's Prime Ministers in December 2020 as well as new areas of cooperation.

The 5th [India – Singapore Defence Ministers' Dialogue](#) was conducted through video-conference on January 20, 2021. The two ministers witnessed the

signing of the Implementing Agreement on Submarine Rescue Support and Cooperation between the two navies. They also conveyed their support towards the early conclusion of agreements to facilitate conduct of live firings and to establish reciprocal arrangements for the cross-attendance of military courses. A [joint statement](#) was issued on the occasion.

Delivering his [farewell address](#), US Ambassador to India Kenneth Juster spoke of the significance of the Indo-Pacific and the achievements in the US-India strategic relationship during the last four years with satisfaction. He addressed diplomatic cooperation and the Indo-Pacific region, defence and counter-terrorism, economic and commercial, the energy partnership, health and biomedical innovation and people-to-people relations in his address.

Delivering the introductory remarks at the [India-France-Japan Workshop on the Indo-Pacific](#) on January 19, 2021, Foreign Secretary Shri Harsh Vardhan Shringla said the Indo-Pacific had become the 21st century's locus of political and security concerns and competition, of growth and development, and of technology incubation and innovation. He spoke of the various areas of maritime security cooperation between India and France, and India and Japan, and looked for concrete suggestions from the workshop to infuse life into the pillars of India's Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative.

Delivering the [keynote address](#) at the 13th All India Conference of China Studies, External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar identified mutual respect, mutual sensitivity and mutual interest as the three determinants of the future of the India-China relationship. He also set out eight broad propositions to stabilise the relationship: adherence to past agreements in their entirety; strict observance and respect for the LAC; maintenance of peace and tranquillity in border areas; recognition that a multi-polar Asia is an essential constituent of a multi-polar world; reciprocity in relationships; pursuit of aspirations by both with sensitivity; management of divergences and disputes; and taking the long view. While appreciating the importance India attaches to relations with China, its [spokesman said](#) that the border issue should not be linked with bilateral relations.

The Indian Army said it had [apprehended a Chinese soldier](#) in Ladakh after he transgressed into the Indian side South of Pangong Tso on January 09, 2021. The soldier was [returned](#) to the PLA on January 11.

Reports indicate that the Indian Army has [decided](#) to strengthen its posture on the China border. The [new posture](#) includes allocation of the Mathura-based 1 Corps, comprising the Allahabad based 4 Division and the Bareilly based 6 Mountain Division, to Northern Command for the Eastern Ladakh region. In

the central sector, the Dehradun based 14 Division is being converted into a Mountain Division for deployment in Uttarakhand. Two brigades in the Himachal Pradesh – Ladakh border region will also come under the Lucknow based Central Command. The Panagarh-based 17 Mountain Strike Corps has now been officially designated as the strike formation for the Sikkim and north-eastern borders, instead of for the entire China border as was the case till now.

The [9th round](#) of the China-India Corps Commander Level Meeting took place on the Chinese side of the Moldo-Chushul border meeting point on January 24, 2021. The two sides agreed to push for early disengagement of the frontline troops and to continue dialogue. A report indicated there had been a [30% reduction](#) in troops by both sides.

The biennial pan-India coastal defence [Exercise Sea Vigil](#) was coordinated by the Indian Navy on January 12 and 13, 2021. The exercise [covered](#) India's entire coastline and EEZ and encompassed contingencies ranging from peace to war. Over 110 Indian Naval and Coast Guard assets participated, along with units from the Marine Police and Customs.

The Air Forces of India and France conducted a bilateral air exercise [Desert Knight-21](#) at Air Force Station Jodhpur from January 20-24, 2021. This [first exercise](#) of its kind featured missions including large force engagements and use of combat enablers such as AWACS, AEW&C aircraft and tanker transports. French participation included Rafale fighters, Airbus A-330 tanker transports and A-400M tactical transports. The IAF fielded Mirage 2000, Su-30MKI and Rafale fighters, as well as IL-78 tankers and AWACS and AEW&C aircraft.

Exercises AMPHEX-21 and KAVACH, involving the three Indian Armed Forces and the Coast Guard were [conducted by](#) the Andaman and Nicobar Command from January 21-25, 2021. The exercises included maritime strikes by Jaguar aircraft, para drops at Car Nicobar by commandoes, amphibious assaults, and other multi-domain high intensity defensive and offensive manoeuvres.

The union cabinet [approved the procurement](#) of 73 LCA Tejas Mk-1A fighter and 10 LCA Tejas Mk-1 Trainer aircraft involving a cost of Rs 46,898 crores on January 13, 2021. About 500 India companies will work with HAL for this procurement. [Deliveries](#) are expected to begin in January 2024, with all aircraft to be delivered by December 2028.



The amphibious assault phase of Exercise Amphex – 21 in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands on January 24, 2020. Source: Indian Navy

The [third batch](#) of three Rafale aircraft arrived in India on January 27, 2021, after a 7000 Km + flight with in-flight refuelling by UAE Air Force tanker aircraft, raising the number available to 11. The aircraft will be inducted into the Golden Arrow Squadron in Ambala.

An [unconfirmed report](#) indicates that India has quietly linked the Andaman and Nicobar Islands with the 'fish-hook undersea sensor chain used by the US and Japan to monitor the movements of Chinese ships and submarines in the Pacific. The report says India has set up a network of seabed-based surveillance sensors from Indira Point to Sumatra. P-8I aircraft also receive inputs from these sensors.

Bangladesh [approved the procurement](#) of 30 million doses of Covidshield vaccine from India on January 07, 2021. The action is indicative of the continually improving ties between India and Bangladesh. Two million doses were [handed over](#) on January 21. Another million doses were reported to have [reached Nepal](#), while Bhutan and Maldives also received their initial consignments.



The Bangladesh contingent participating in Republic Day Parade on January 26, 2021.
Source: PIB

A Bangladesh Armed Forces contingent comprising 122 personnel [participated](#) in India's Republic Day Parade on January 26, 2021. India and Bangladesh are scheduled to jointly celebrate the 50th anniversary of the war of 1971, which led to the founding of Bangladesh.

The India – Japan investment project at Colombo Port was reportedly [approved](#) by Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. Sri Lanka will hold a 51% stake in the project, while Indian and Japanese companies will collectively hold the remainder.

The inaugural [US-Maldives Defence and Security Dialogue](#) took place in Male on January 05, 2021. The two sides agreed to operationalise the Security and Defence Relationship Framework signed in September 2020, with a focus on exercises, logistics, information sharing and professional military education.

South East Asia

China's Foreign Minister [Wang Yi visited Myanmar, Indonesia, Brunei and the Philippines](#) from January 11 – 16, 2021. In Myanmar, which is the [ASEAN coordinator for China](#) from 2021 – 2024, China claims to have reached [political consensus on 12 areas](#) impacting China-Myanmar relations: an action plan on building a China-Myanmar community with a shared future; stepping up anti-pandemic cooperation; deepening the alignment of their national developmental strategies and building the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC), the Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone, new Yangon city and

the China – Myanmar Border Economic Cooperation Zone; implementing the five-year plan for China-Myanmar trade and economic cooperation; enhancing people-to-people exchanges; working together to elevate China-ASEAN relations; deepening Lancang-Mekong cooperation; pushing for establishment of a China-ASEAN community of cyber security in support of China's global initiative on data security; adhering to the five principles of peaceful co-existence; maintaining peace and stability in the border areas; and China's support to Myanmar on the Rakhine State issue. China and Myanmar signed an MoU to conduct a feasibility study of a railway linking Mandalay to Kyaukpyu. In Indonesia, China spoke of a [five point consensus](#) encompassing winning against Covid; writing a new chapter of development and aligning the Belt and Road Initiative with Indonesia's vision of Global Maritime Fulcrum; taking forward regional cooperation and development; working with South China Sea littoral states to promote full and effective implementation of the DOC and conclusion of the COC; and jointly upholding the principle of multilateralism. The two countries signed an MoU on developing cybersecurity capacity building and technical cooperation, as well as on China-Indonesia cooperation on the "Two countries, Twin Parks". The theme of discussions in [Brunei](#) was also Covid-19 cooperation and building BRI connectivity. In the Philippines, [China said](#) it would do its utmost to help the Philippines fight the pandemic and offered to donate 500,000 doses of Covid-19 vaccines. China also supported the Philippines in its "Build, Build, Build" programme and offered accelerated cooperation based on the Philippines' needs, and firmly supported the Philippines in safeguarding its sovereignty and national dignity. The two countries signed the Philippines – China Agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation granting 500 million RMB to finance livelihood projects, infrastructure facilities and feasibility studies for major projects.



China's State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi holds talks with Indonesian Foreign Minister in Jakarta, January 13, 2021.

Source: China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The [annual press statement](#) of the Indonesian Foreign Minister expressed serious concern about intensifying great power competition and called on the powers to forego rivalry and promote collaboration. It said Indonesia would advance concrete cooperation in the context of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific and would establish a regional partnership strategy on Africa. It also said that Indonesia would prioritise formalising the outcome of territorial sea negotiation with Malaysia in the Sulawesi and Southern Malacca straits segments and begin negotiation for other segments including EEZ delimitation; finalise the partial agreement with Palau on the EEZ segments concluded in the 2019-2020 negotiations; begin negotiations with Philippines for the continental shelf; and continue EEZ negotiations with Vietnam. As a matter of principle, Indonesia would reject claims that are not based on international law including UNCLOS 1982.

Indonesia is [reported](#) to have outfitted patrol vessels of BAKAMLA, its maritime security agency, with 30 mm remote-controlled stabilised naval guns to deal with incursions by Chinese and Vietnamese fishing boats in its EEZ, particularly around the Natuna Islands. Bakamla is a civilian force and has till recently been equipped only with small arms.

Indonesia's [BAKAMLA intercepted](#) Chinese survey ship Xiang Yang Hong 03 near the Sunda Straits during the week commencing January 11, 2021. The research vessel had switched off its AIS transponder and was running 'dark',

contravening Indonesia's requirements for transiting the Straits. It claimed that its AIS was malfunctioning, and was escorted out of Indonesian waters. Its activities have been linked to China's efforts to gather oceanographic data for operations by its submarines.

Indonesia's BAKAMLA [seized two tankers](#) detected transferring oil from the Iranian-flagged MT Horse to the Panama-flagged MT Freya, resulting in an oil spill. [China sought information](#) about the 25 Chinese nationals aboard MT Freya, and guarantees for their health, safety, legitimate rights and interests.

The Royal Malaysian Navy received its second Littoral Mission Ship '[Sundang](#)' at Wuchong Port, Shanghai, on January 14, 2021. The Keris class large patrol vessel displacing about 700 tons was built by China Shipbuilding and Offshore International Company and forms part of an initial four-ship programme. Two more vessels built locally in Malaysia are presently undergoing trials. The plan calls for the eventual construction of 14 more ships in Malaysia.

Malaysia's Maritime Enforcement Agency [arrested](#) 16 Vietnamese fishermen from two boats encroaching in Malaysian waters on the east coast of peninsular Malaysia without a license. Vietnam's Ministry of Foreign Affairs [asked Malaysia](#) to ensure humane treatment for the fishermen and provide evidence to prove that they were indeed encroaching to enable it to investigate and deal with the boat owners.

China and Myanmar agreed to [accelerate the construction](#) of the China Myanmar Economic Corridor to boost bilateral ties. The declaration followed a meeting between China's State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Myanmar's Commander-in-Chief Defense Services Min Aung Hlaing on January 12, 2021.

The Republic of Singapore Navy held the inauguration ceremony of its new '[Maritime and Security Response Flotilla](#)' on January 26, 2021. The flotilla will initially operate four Sentinel class vessels and two tugs. It will be provided purpose-built vessels, which are still in the design concept stage, by 2026.

China's biggest transport plane, the Y-20, is reported to have [landed on Fiery Cross Reef](#) towards the end of December 2020. The Xi'an Y-20 can carry a 66 ton payload. The report observed that this was a step towards full operationalisation of the Fiery Cross Reef as an airbase, a development that would place all major cities in the Philippines within China's air strike range. Meanwhile, [China's defence spokesman said](#) the South China Sea should neither be an arena for major power wrestling nor a sea dominated by warships.

He was responding to reports regarding the deployment of HMS Queen Elizabeth in the region in 2021.

Japan joined the UK, France, Germany, Australia, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines and the US in [rejecting China's position](#) that "drawing of territorial sea baselines by China on relevant islands and reefs in the South China Sea conforms to UNCLOS and general international law", when it presented a Note Verbale to the United Nations on January 19, 2021. It also sought that freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea be guaranteed, in accordance with the PCA award of July 12, 2016 and pointed out that China had protested the overflight of Japanese aircraft in the airspace surrounding Mischief Reef and attempted to restrict the freedom of overflight in the South China Sea.

In order to protect and preserve a free and open South China Sea, the US imposed [visa restrictions](#) on PRC individuals responsible for or complicit in large scale reclamation, construction or militarisation of disputed islands in the South China Sea. It also added the China National Offshore Oil Corporation Limited to its Entity List in light of the PRC's campaign of coercion against other claimants of South China Sea oil and gas resources.

East Asia

The US and Taiwan held a [political-military dialogue](#) through video conference on January 07, 2021. China expressed its [strong opposition](#) to dialogue, describing it as a violation of the one-China principle and three China-US joint communiqués and lodged a protest.

The US State Department on January 09, 2021, announced the [lifting of all 'contact guidelines'](#) previously issued by it to regulate the interaction of US diplomats, service members and other officials with their Taiwanese counterparts. It said that the US had imposed these restrictions unilaterally in an attempt to appease the Communist regime in Beijing. They would no longer apply. It also announced that Kelly Craft, its Ambassador to the UN would [visit Taiwan](#) from January 13-15 to reinforce the US government's strong and ongoing support for Taiwan's international space. The trip was, however, [suddenly cancelled](#) due to the "upcoming presidential transition". The cancellation was seen as an indication of the incoming administrations "[pro-China bias](#)".

Ties between the Biden administration and Taiwan made a good start, with Bihim Hsiao, Taiwan's representative in the US, being invited by the Joint Congressional Committee to [participate in the inauguration](#) for the first time

in over four decades. The invitation was seen as an important [foreign policy signal](#) and calmed concerns that US support would reduce under the Biden administration. China's spokesperson urged the US "to abide by the one-China principle and the three China-US joint communiqués, prudently and properly handle issues relating to Taiwan and avoid undermining bilateral relations and peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait".

Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense [stated](#) that eight H-6K bombers, four J-16 fighters and one Y-8 ASW aircraft intruded into Taiwan's south-western ADIZ on January 23, 2021. It issued radio warnings, deployed air defense missile systems to monitor the activity and tasked airborne alert sorties in response. The US [State Department urged](#) the PRC to cease its attempts to intimidate neighbours, including Taiwan, and said the US would deepen ties with democratic Taiwan. It described US commitment to Taiwan as rock-solid and contributing to the maintenance of peace and stability in the region. Despite this, the intrusion was [repeated](#) on January 24, this time by two Y-8 ASW, two Su-30s, Four J-16s, six J-10 and one Y-8 Recce. While intrusions by PLA aircraft into Taiwan's ADIZ are a [daily affair](#), the scale of these two was noteworthy and was seen both as a signal of the stakes involved and as a test of the Biden administration's commitment to Taiwan. Meanwhile the US Pacific Command [announced](#) that the Theodore Roosevelt Carrier Strike Group entered the South China Sea on January 23 to conduct routine operations. [China responded](#) by deploying 16 DF-26 IRBM launchers in the Shandong province, bordering the East China Sea.



An F/A-18F Super Hornet takes off from the flight deck of USS Roosevelt on January 23, 2021. Source: US Indo-Pacific Command

Senior Colonel Wu Qian, spokesperson of China's Ministry of National Defence, said that the [Taiwan question](#) was "China's internal affair, which allows no interference from outside", and that China's military activities in the Taiwan Strait were necessary actions in response to the current security situation. He warned that those who play with fire will set themselves on fire and seeking Taiwan independence means nothing but war.

Taiwan [reported](#) that the first contact between the Biden administration and Taiwan will be a video conference by two US officials with Economics Minister Wang Mei-hua on February 05, 2021. Senior representatives from Taiwanese corporations are also expected to be present.

In North Korea, [Kim Jong Un](#) vowed at the Eighth Party Congress to expand military capabilities to better defend the country. The Supreme People's Assembly elected Jo Yong-won as the Vice Chairman of the State Affairs Commission, the country's [second most important](#) post. He was also promoted as the Chief Secretary of the Worker's Party Organisation and Guidance Department.

The Seoul Central District Court ruled that [Japan should pay](#) \$91,800 each to 12 Korean World War II 'comfort' women. The suit was filed in December 2016, and Japan had declined participation in the court's hearings. Prime Minister [Yoshihide Suga said](#) the suit must be dismissed as sovereign states are immune from the jurisdiction of foreign courts. He also said that the issue had been settled finally and completely under the 1985 Agreement on the Settlement of Problems concerning Property and Claims and on Economic Cooperation. South Korea, meanwhile, said that it [respects the court's ruling](#) and will make every possible effort to restore the honour and dignity of the "comfort women" victims.

South Korea [strongly protested](#) Japan's reiteration of "unjust claims over Dokdo, an integral part of the Korean territory, thought the Japanese Foreign Minister's foreign policy speech in the Japanese Diet on January 18" and sternly demanded withdrawal of the claims. It also urged the Japanese government to restore the honour and dignity of "comfort women" victims and continue constructive and future-oriented cooperation based on the spirit of responsibility, apology and remorse expressed by the Japanese government itself at the time of agreement on the "comfort women" issue in 2015.

South Korea finalised a [defence budget](#) of 52.84 trillion won (about \$ 48 billion) for 2021, an increase of 5.4% compared to 2020. Meanwhile, reports emerged of a possible [fourth summit](#) between President Moon Jae-in and North Korea's Kim Jong-un in 2021.

A report indicates South Korea will [conduct tests](#) of its first Submarine Launched Ballistic Missile from a new submarine to be delivered to the South Korean Navy in 2021. The SLBM is reported to have a range of 500 Km.

Japan received confirmation from the new US Defense Secretary that the [Senkakus were covered](#) by Article V of the US-Japan Security Treaty and the US remains opposed to any unilateral change of status quo in the East China Sea. The US commitment to the defence of Japan including the Senkakus and the provision of extended deterrence [was reiterated](#) in President Biden's telephonic discussion with [PM Yoshihide Suga](#) on January 27, 2021. A [similar assurance](#) was also provided by NSA Jake Sullivan and Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

The USS Theodore Roosevelt carrier strike group [conducted its first bilateral exercise](#) of 2021 with the JSDMF on January 19, 2021. US Bunker Hill, USS John Finn, JS Kongo and JS Asahi also participated.

Delivering a [special address](#) at the World Economic Forum Virtual Event, President Xi Jinping spoke of four major challenges facing today's world: stepping up macroeconomic policy coordination and promoting strong, sustainable, balanced and inclusive world economic growth; abandoning ideological prejudice and following a path of peaceful co-existence, mutual benefit and win-win-cooperation; closing the divide between developed and developing countries; and coming together against global challenges to create a better future for humanity. He said that the way to deal with these complex problems was through multilateralism and building a community with a shared future for mankind. His four steps towards this shared future were nations committing to openness and inclusiveness instead of closeness and exclusion; to international rules and law instead of seeking supremacy; to consultation and cooperation instead of conflict and confrontation; and keeping up with the times instead of rejecting change. In closing, he committed China to taking an active part in international cooperation on Covid-19; implementing a win-win strategy of opening-up; promoting sustainable development; advancing science, technology and innovation; and promoting "a new type of international relations". The evident hypocrisy in saying this while China was cracking down on political freedoms in Hong Kong, building up military presence in disputed areas, threatening smaller countries that didn't comply with China's demands, unleashing an economic blockade on Australia and indulging in wolf-warrior diplomacy escaped him.

Hong Kong police [arrested dozens](#) of activists and academics on January 6, 2021 as part of a crackdown on alleged subversion under the national security law. This included most of the pro-democracy politicians who had sought to

run for the city's aborted legislative council elections last year. A [joint statement](#) from the governments of Australia, Canada, UK and the US underscored their serious concern at the mass arrests. It described the law as a clear breach of the Sino-British Joint Declaration and said it was being used to eliminate dissent opposing political views, and called on the Hong Kong and Chinese central authorities to respect the legally guaranteed rights and freedoms of the people of Hong Kong without fear of arrest and detention. The US followed up by [designating six PRC and Hong Kong officials](#).

UK opened applications for a [British National Overseas \(BNO\) visa](#) for Hong Kong residents with effect from January 31, 2021, enabling them to stay in the UK for a period of five years, after which they could apply for settlement and British citizenship. China in response said it would [no longer recognise the BNO passport](#) as a valid travel document or for identification. The [decisions impact](#) Hong Kong's estimated 2.9 million BNO citizens eligible to move to UK, as well as an additional 2.3 million eligible dependents.

An [Op-Ed](#) by then Secretary of State Michael Pompeo on "Why China's Nuclear Build-Up Should Worry the West" drew attention to China's opaque and threatening nuclear weapons build-up. It highlighted that Beijing refused to discuss how many nuclear weapons it has, how many it plans to develop, or what it plans to do with them, making it the least transparent of the five permanent members of the UNSC. It said that China test-fired more than 220 ballistic missiles in 2020, more than the rest of the world combined. It called for the PRC to behave responsibly and honour its obligations under Article VI of the NPT, joining the US and Russia to craft a new arms control agreement covering all categories of nuclear weapons. China's spokesperson [said](#), "The US side should be sober enough to see how the 'lying diplomacy', practiced by Pompeo and the US Department of State, has dented the United States' credibility and reputation with such a force that the consequences are simply horrible". She also said that China is the only one of the world's five nuclear weapon states to follow the principle of no-first-use of nuclear weapons and called upon the US to openly make the same commitment. She also called upon the US to respond positively to Russia's call, agree to extend the New START Treaty as soon as possible and drastically reduce its nuclear arsenal.

China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi identified six areas as the [focus of China's diplomacy in 2021](#) during an interview with Xinhua and China Media Group on January 2, 2021. The areas were advancing China's development strategies and better integration of the domestic and international markets as well as between domestic and global resources; continuing to build a new type of international relations; upgrade opening up and cooperation including through high-

quality Belt and Road cooperation so as to share China's developmental dividends; proactively engaging in reform of global governance; facilitating mutual understanding between countries and better communicating to the world the CPC's strong record of governance; and working for a community with a shared future for mankind. [In another interview](#), he claimed China had made more friends in the world during 2020, deepened friendship and cooperation with all countries, made active efforts to develop relations with major powers, achieved solid progress in building a community with a shared future with neighbours, protected and advanced the interests of the developing world, shared the benefits of China's opening up, and worked for a new type of international relations.



China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi Meets Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte in Manila, January 16, 2021. Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China

A [report](#) indicated that China's Jiangnan Shipyard has stepped up construction of two new-generation aircraft carriers, both to be equipped with the most advanced electromagnetic catapult launchers. The report said that China plans to build at least four aircraft carrier strike groups by 2030.

China's State Council Information Office issued a [white paper](#) titled "China's International Development Cooperation in the New Era" on January 10, 2021. The paper, comprising eight chapters, expounds China's views on international development cooperation, the actions it has taken and plans for the future.

China formally [opposed adverse provisions](#) against it in the US National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2021 and lodged a solemn representation to the United States in this regard. It also [announced sanctions](#) on 28 personnel of the outgoing Trump administration for having “planned, promoted and executed a series of crazy moves which have gravely interfered in China’s internal affairs, undermined China’s interests, offended the Chinese people, and seriously disrupted US-China relations. The sanctioned list includes former Secretary of State Michael R Pompeo, Assistant to the President Peter K Navarro, National Security Adviser Robert C O’Brien, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs David R Stilwell, Deputy NSA Mathew Pottinger, Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex M Azar II, Under Secretary of State for Economic Growth, Energy and the Environment Keith J Krach and Ambassador to the UN Kelly DK Craft, as well as former NSA John R Bolton and former White House Chief Strategist Stephen K Bannon. It said that these individuals and their immediate families were prohibited from entering mainland China, Hong Kong or Macao, while they and companies and institutions associated with them were restricted from doing business with China.

China’s National People’s Congress Standing Committee cleared the [Coast Guard Bill](#) on January 22, 2021, paving the way for its enactment on February 1. The law explicitly authorises the Coast Guard to use all necessary means to stop or prevent threats from foreign vessels, allows it to demolish structures built by other countries on Chinese-claimed reefs, board and inspect foreign vessels in waters claimed by China and to create temporary exclusion zones to stop other vessels and personnel from entering. The new law will directly impact all nations with whom China has maritime territorial disputes, including Japan in the East China Sea, and Taiwan, Vietnam, Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia and Indonesia in the South China Sea.

China said that its GDP [expanded 2.3%](#) in 2020, to exceed the 100 trillion Yuan (\$ 14.42 trillion) mark for the first time, making China the only major economy to [post growth](#) in 2020. [Total trade](#) expanded 1.9% to 32.16 trillion Yuan (about \$ 5 trillion) despite a worldwide slump in shipments. [Sales of new energy vehicles](#) amounted to 1.37 million units and are expected to comprise 20% of all vehicle sales by 2025. [China said](#) it would open up further to the outside world and create more opportunities for mutually beneficial cooperation across the globe. The [IMF had earlier projected](#) a growth of 1.9% for China in 2020, rising to 7.9% in 2021.

China’s National Development and Reform Commission [approved](#) an investment of \$ 8.86 billion for the construction of a new 342 Km high-speed

railway linking Xiong'an New Area in Hebei with Xinzhou in Shanxi province. The Xiong'an - Beijing line become operational in December 2020.

China said that three components of its [space station programme](#), including the Tianhe core module, the Tianzhou 2 cargo spaceship and the core scientific capsule, had passed technical and quality assessments and were ready for upcoming missions. The space station named Tiangong, with a weight of more than 90 tons, was expected to become fully operational in 2022. A new heavy lift rocket, with a [carrying capacity of 140 tons](#) into low earth orbit, was under development. Another [hybrid rocket](#), powered by a solid and liquid engine, was expected to make its maiden flight in 2021. China also [announced plans](#) to launch its first solar probe in the first half of 2022, and said that its first Mars mission Tianwen-1 would [enter Mars orbit](#) on February 10, 2021. The 5-ton probe consists of an orbiter, a lander and a rover.

China unveiled a [prototype locomotive](#) using high-temperature superconducting maglev technology enabling a designed speed of 620 kph. There was, however, no indication of when this technology would be put into commercial use. It also [launched](#) the second group of its Yaogan-31 remote sensing satellites from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre on January 29, 2021.

The Chinese Academy of Sciences identified its [top achievements](#) in 2020 as fighting Covid-19, lunar exploration, manned deep diving, commissioning of the Beidou Navigation Satellite System, the scientific expedition to the Qinghai – Tibet Plateau, commencement of operations by the Five-hundred-metre Spherical Radio Telescope, Quantum communication and computing, and identification of a chemical that causes locusts to swarm. A number of other 'achievements' were also identified.

China's legislature adopted a [revised National Defense Law](#), which came into effect on January 01, 2021. China also released regulations on the [management of military officers](#) and to guide the work of [Communist Party of China Committees](#) in the Armed Forces.

The 37th escort mission of the PLA (Navy) [departed Sanya](#) on January 16, 2021, headed for the Gulf of Aden to escort merchant traffic in the Horn of Africa. The mission comprises the Type 052D guided-missile destroyer Changsha, the Type 054A missile frigate Yulin and the Type 903 supply ship Honghu.

China successfully conducted the maiden flight of the [WJ-700](#) high altitude, high speed long endurance integrated unmanned air vehicle on January 11, 2021. The UAV, with a maximum take-off weight of 3,500 Kg and an endurance of up to 20 hours, is capable of both wide area surveillance and precision strike missions.

Southern Pacific and USA

The [Australian Army selected](#) the Boeing Apache Guardian to replace its Armed Reconnaissance Helicopter from 2025. The Australian Department of Defence [committed to investing](#) \$ 1 billion to commence the early development of advanced guided weapons to enhance Australia's maritime security. The weapons include long range missiles with a range of over 370 Km in the anti-ship role and 1500 Km in the land attack role, extended range surface-to-air missiles and advanced lightweight torpedoes.

A consignment of cyclone-relief [material from India](#) comprising shelter and hygiene kits reached Fiji on January 2, 2021. Fiji had been hit by a Category-5 cyclone in December 2020. The material was airlifted by Air India and Fiji Airways via Sydney, Australia. A second consignment was delivered on January 6, 2021.

The US National Security Adviser declassified the [United States Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific](#), which was approved in February 2018 and has provided overarching strategic guidance for implementing the 2017 National Security Strategy in the Indo-Pacific. The stated objective of releasing this publication is to provide communication to the American people as well as allies and partners the enduring commitment of the US to keeping the Indo-Pacific region free and open into the future. The document identifies US national security challenges, its enduring vital interests including in the Indo-Pacific, desired end states, objectives and lines of effort in each part of the region. Among the end states identified is "India remains pre-eminent in South Asia and takes the leading role in maintaining Indian Ocean security, increases engagement with Southeast Asia, and expands its economic, defense, and diplomatic cooperation with other US allies and partners in the region". An objective is "Accelerate India's rise and capacity to serve as a net provider of security and Major Defense Partner; solidify an enduring strategic partnership with India underpinned by a strong Indian military able to effectively collaborate with the US and our partners in the region to address shared interests".

The annual [US Intellectual Property Report](#) for 2020 was released on January 04, 2021. The report identifies the administration's [strategic approach](#) as engagement with trading partners; effective use of all legal authorities, including trade tools; expanded law enforcement action and cooperation; and engagement and partnership with the private sector and other stakeholders.

The US [National Maritime Cybersecurity Plan](#) was released on January 5, 2021. [The plan](#) unifies maritime cybersecurity resources, stakeholders and initiatives to aggressively mitigate current and near-term maritime cyberspace threats and vulnerabilities while complementing the national strategy for maritime security. It identifies government priority actions to close maritime cybersecurity gaps and vulnerabilities over the next five years.

The White House announced the finalisation of the [implementation plan](#) associated with the national strategy to secure 5G on January 15, 2021. The [40-page plan](#) focuses on four lines of effort: facilitating domestic 5G rollout; assessing the risks to and identifying core security principles of 5G infrastructure; addressing risks to US economic and national security during development and deployment of 5G infrastructure worldwide, and promoting responsible global development and deployment of 5G technology.

An Executive Order [prohibited certain future transactions](#) involving Chinese connected software applications including Alipay, CamScanner, QQ Wallet, SHAREit, Tencent QQ, VMate, WeChat Pay and WPS Office. The order also directed the US Secretary of Commerce, in consultation with the Attorney General and Director of National Intelligence, to provide a report with recommendations to prevent the sale or transfer of US user data to, or access of such data by, foreign adversaries including through the establishment of regulations and policies to identify, control and license the export of such data. Another order on [promoting small modular reactors](#) for national defense and space exploration and to produce diverse energy options for national defense needs is expected to result in the Department of Defense establishing and implementing a plan to demonstrate the energy flexibility and cost effectiveness of a small modular reactor at a domestic military installation in the near future.

Then President Trump on January 15, 2021, directed departments and agencies to review applicable laws, regulations and policies and to propose regulatory and policy changes, including potential executive action, to [minimise the procurement of PRC goods and services](#) by the Federal Government. Then Secretary of State Michael Pompeo [determined](#) on January 19, 2021, that the PRC, under the direction and control of the CCP, has committed crimes against

humanity and genocide against the predominantly Muslim Uyghurs and other members of ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang. He called on the PRC to immediately release all arbitrarily detained persons and abolish its system of internment, detention camps, house arrest and forced labour, cease coercive population control measures and end the persecution of Uyghurs and other members of religious and ethnic minority groups in Xinjiang. He also called on appropriate multilateral and relevant juridical bodies to join the US in its efforts to promote accountability for those responsible for these atrocities.

The US Department of State amended the designations of Lashkar-i-Jhangvi and ISIL Sinai Peninsula as [Foreign Terrorist Organisations](#) (FTO) to include additional aliases. It also maintained the FTO designation Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and others. It also notified Congress of its [intent to designate Ansarallah](#), sometimes referred to as the Houthis, as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation, and to designate three of leaders as Specially Designated Global Terrorists.

In a change to the Unified Command Plan, the [US shifted Israel](#) from the US European Command area of responsibility to the Central Command area of responsibility. The stated intent was to use the opportunity to align key partners against shared threats in the Middle East consequent upon the conclusion of the Abraham Accords.



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

www.delhipolicygroup.org