

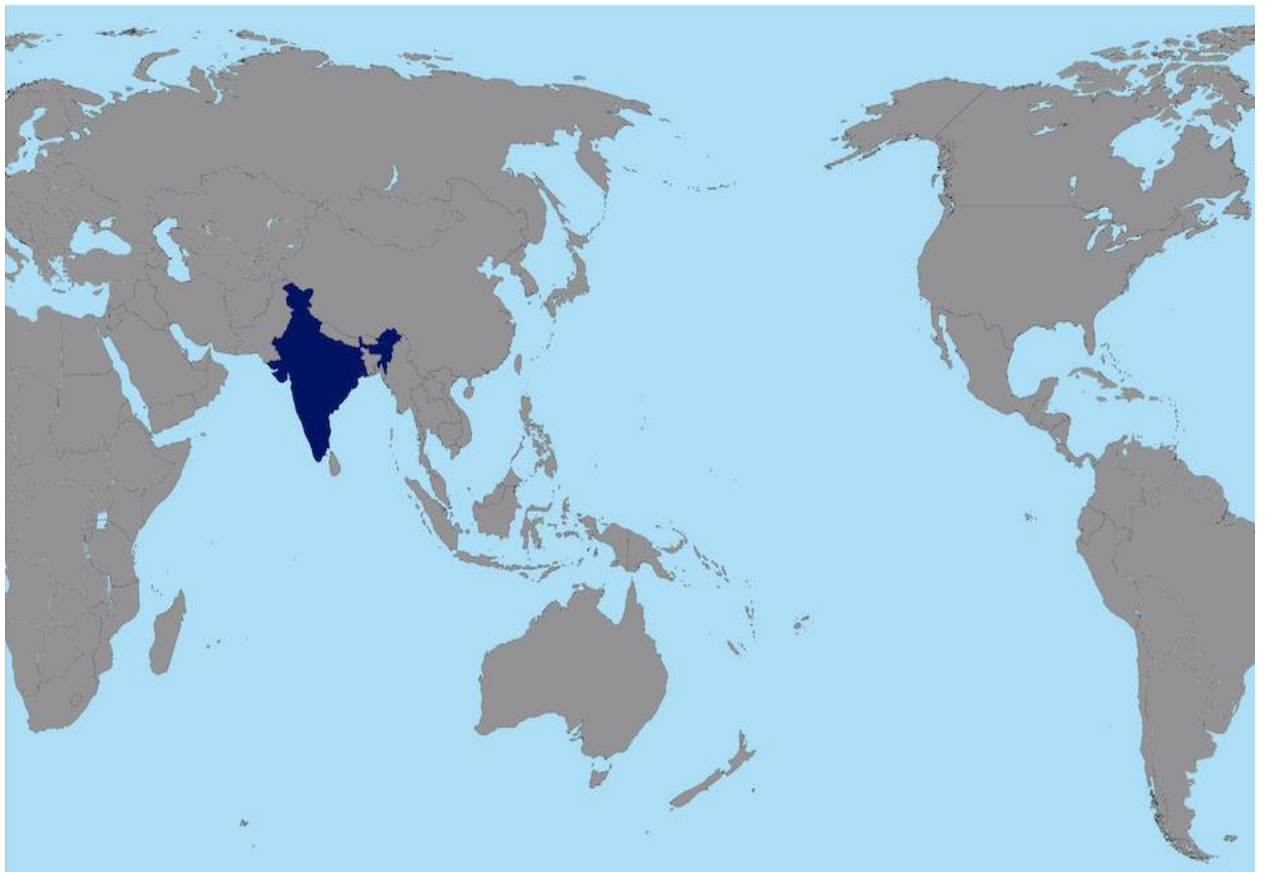


Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



DPG INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR FEBRUARY 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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Overview

The Obama administration had turned a blind eye to Chinese transgressions in the Indo-Pacific, while the Trump administration adopted a hard line. Indo-Pacific nations have closely watched the Biden administration's actions to discern signs of its outlook towards the Indo-Pacific. Indicators of a continued robust posture came by way of President Biden's statement at the Munich Security Conference, NSA Jake Sullivan's press briefing on the core thrust of US foreign policy, Secretary of State Antony Blinken's comments and his discussion with Chinese counterpart Yang Jiechi, and the holding of the third Quad Ministerial Meeting. On the other hand, there were concerns that the need for China's cooperation on climate change, and domestic priorities, would limit the US administration's bandwidth for purposeful action. In the first conversation between Presidents Biden and Xi Jinping on February 11, the Chinese leader demanded that the US give up confrontation and return to cooperation. A task force led by Ely Ratner was constituted to review US policy towards China and make recommendations in the next four months.

A military coup in Myanmar on the day the newly elected parliament of the country was convened led to large scale protests and met with international condemnation. As pro-democracy protests in Thailand also continue, it is evident that the Indian Ocean part of South East Asia has become politically unstable, along with large parts of the East African littoral and the Persian Gulf. These developments will impact on Indo-Pacific security.

COVID-19 continued taking its toll, having infected over 114 million people and killed more than 2.5 million worldwide. The US, with over 520,000 deaths remained the worst affected, followed by Brazil and Mexico. On the plus side, more than 240,000 million people worldwide, predominantly in developed countries, had received at least one dose of the vaccine. Meanwhile, the WHO team investigating into the origins of the virus appeared to accept China's narrative that transmission through the frozen food chain was a possible cause of its spread, despite the fact that not one of the over 114 million cases reported worldwide has been traced to food or food packing.

The foreign ministers of the US, France, Germany and UK reaffirmed the centrality of the transatlantic partnership in dealing with the multiple transnational challenges the world faces, including from China. The US extended its New START Treaty with Russia for another five years. France's national assembly approved a bill to strengthen government oversight of mosques and religious schools while cracking down on practices such as online hate speech and forced marriage. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Nigeria's former Finance Minister and a former senior official of the World Bank, was appointed as the first woman to lead the WTO. Technological competition in space manifested itself with probes from USA, China and the UAE all arriving at the planet Mars during the month. The US Perseverance Rover was the first to touch down and begin its exploration activity on the red planet.

Somali political leaders were unable to reach agreement on how election management bodies should be appointed or delegates selected, leading to continued political instability. A car bomb attack by Al-Shabab in Mogadishu was a warning of where things might go with a breakdown of governance. A report from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs spoke of extremely concerning reports regarding attacks against civilians, increased fighting and a dire situation with large numbers of displaced people moving to urban areas in search of assistance. Conflict between the government and the TPLF also continued in Ethiopia's Tigray Region, with reports indicating over two million people faced famine and over 4.5 million needed urgent assistance. A Russian task force from the Baltic Fleet arrived in the Red Sea, following up on the recent agreement which provided access to Port Sudan. The 37th Chinese naval taskforce assumed anti-piracy duties in the Gulf of Aden.

The US revoked the designation of Ansarallah (the Houthis) as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation despite a drone attack on Saudi Arabia's Abha airport, in recognition of the need for relief agencies to address the dire humanitarian situation in Yemen. Iran warned the IAEA that it would impose restrictions on access for its inspectors if US sanctions were not lifted by February 23, 2021, but then agreed to implement the Safeguards Agreement for another three months. The International Court of Justice rejected US objections and ruled that it had jurisdiction to hear the case filed by Iran against re-imposition of US sanctions that had earlier been lifted under the JCPOA. A rocket attack on Erbil airport in Iraq's Kurdistan region which injured a US soldier resulted in diplomatic condemnation and was followed by US airstrikes against infrastructure used by Iranian-backed militant groups in eastern Syria. Russian and Iranian ships conducted Exercise Maritime Security Belt 2021. MV Helios Ray, an Israeli-owned vehicle-carrier, was hit by explosions that tore holes on each side of the

ship above the waterline just after it had crossed the Straits of Hormuz on its way to Singapore.

The Afghanistan Study Group constituted by the US Congress called for immediate effort to extend the May 2021 withdrawal date to give time for the peace process to produce an acceptable result. NATO defence ministers were unable to decide whether to pull their personnel out of Afghanistan in response to the May deadline. Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke to both President Ashraf Ghani and Chairman of Afghanistan's High Council for National Reconciliation Dr Abdullah Abdullah, reiterating US commitment to support the peace process and a just and durable political settlement which produced a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire. India signed an MoU for the construction of the Lalandar (Shatoot) Dam and delivered an additional 500,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccine to Afghanistan.

Pakistan remained on the FATF grey list, though the watchdog acknowledged its progress in complying with the 27-point action plan. Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan visited Sri Lanka to promote bilateral cooperation. Ships and personnel from 45 countries participated in Pakistan's AMAN-21 exercise and International Fleet Review off Karachi. The PN conducted Exercise ARABIAN MONSOON 2021 with the Russian Navy, and Exercise LION STAR II with the Sri Lanka Navy. PNS Nasr visited Djibouti and Port Sudan, while Pakistan conducted the training launch of a Ghaznavi SRBM and a Babur cruise missile.

India and China disengaged their armies from the North and South Banks of Pangong Tso and began negotiations to resolve other friction points along the LAC. Foreign Ministers Jaishankar and Wang Yi telephonically reviewed the status of disengagement, but the respective read outs on their discussion were at variance. The Directors General of Military Operations of India and Pakistan agreed to strict observance of all agreements and understandings and cease firing along the Line of Control and in all other sectors.

India's Union budget allocated Rs 362,345.62 crores (\$ 50 billion) (excluding pensions) to the Ministry of Defence, including a capital outlay of Rs 135,060.72 crores (\$18.6 billion). The Government of India also accepted in principle the recommendation of the 15th Finance Commission to set up a non-lapsable fund for modernisation of the defence and internal security apparatus.

External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar held a virtual meeting with his counterpart from Brunei to review the status of bilateral relations. He also visited the Maldives and Mauritius, addressed budding diplomats at Russia's Diplomatic Academy and addressed the UNHRC. India's Foreign Secretary

Harsh Shringla addressed the high-level segment of the Conference on Disarmament. Senior officials from India's and concerned foreign ministries met to take stock of progress in strengthening bilateral relations between India and Qatar as well as India and Saudi Arabia. A trilateral dialogue involving senior officials from India, Australia and France took stock of progress on the outcomes of the Foreign Secretary level trilateral dialogue held in September 2020.

India hosted the biennial Aero India exhibition during the month. An IOR Defence Ministers' Conclave, a Global Chiefs of Air Staff Conclave and a seminar on Building Collective Maritime Competence towards SAGAR formed part of the event. The Indian Navy conducted its largest theatre level operational readiness exercise (TROPEX). Troops from the Indian and US Armies came together in Rajasthan for the 16th Exercise Yudh Abhyas. India's Chief of Air Staff visited Bangladesh to promote cooperation between the Air Forces, while the indigenously built INS Pralaya visited Abu Dhabi to participate in IDEX 2021 and NAVDEX 2021. Mazagon Docks delivered the third Scorpene submarine to the Indian Navy, while the DRDO conducted successful developmental launches of the indigenous Vertical Launch Short Range Surface to Air Missile.

BNS Prottoy visited Mumbai after taking part in Exercise AMAN 2021 at Karachi, and then proceeded to Abu Dhabi to take part in IDEX 2021 and NAVDEX 2021. Sri Lanka reversed its earlier decision to let India and Japan develop Colombo's East Container Terminal under a tripartite agreement signed in 2019. IAF aerobatic display teams arrived at Colombo on February 27 to participate in the Air Show scheduled as part of the 70th anniversary celebrations of the Sri Lanka Air Force.

The ISEAS State of South East Asia Survey Report 2021 identified the pandemic, unemployment and income disparity as the top three challenges facing the region. While more South East Asians preferred alignment with the US if forced to make a choice, the overwhelming majority saw China as the more influential political, economic and strategic power. Cambodia cancelled its annual Golden Dragon exercise with China. The Indonesian and French Navies conducted a joint exercise in the Sunda Straits. The Malaysia Maritime Enforcement Agency arrested four Indonesian fishermen for illegal fishing in Malaysian waters. The second of the Philippines Navy's Jose Rizal-class frigates was delivered by South Korea.

Taiwan announced a bilateral agreement with Guyana for opening offices in each other's countries, only to find that the Guyana government had

backtracked under pressure from China. Frequent intrusions by the PLAAF into Taiwan's South-western ADIZ continued unabated, with 18 incidents during the month. South Korea's new defence white paper avoided identifying North Korea as an enemy and downgraded Japan's description from a "partner" to a "neighbour". South Korea also protested the 'Dokdo Day' event hosted by Japan's Shimane Prefecture and asked Japan to abolish this annual event. South Korea's naval chief called for the acquisition of an aircraft carrier, describing it as a key strategic asset to protect maritime sovereignty and national interest.

Japan and the US agreed to extend their arrangement for cost sharing by Japan for hosting US troops by one year. The fourth UK-Japan 2 + 2 meeting resulted in the two countries agreeing to deepen security and defence cooperation, including joint exercises off Japan during the visit of the Queen Elizabeth Task Group to East Asia. Chinese Coast Guard vessels continued their incursions into the waters around the Senkaku Islands, raising the potential for confrontation when they begin enforcing provisions of China's new Coast Guard law. In response, Japan revised its interpretation of existing laws and allowed its Coast Guard vessels to fire weapons at foreign vessels attempting to land on the Senkaku Islands. JMSDF submarine Soryu collided with a commercial vessel while surfacing near Kochi port, resulting in extensive damage to its conning tower and hydroplanes.

China's Yang Jiechi spoke to members of the National Committee on US-China Relations, identifying growing economic incentives in China and setting out measures for normalisation of the relationship after the disruption caused by the Trump administration. Foreign Minister Wang Yi also spoke on this subject at the Lanting Forum, seeking a return to cooperation and accommodation. Yang Jiechi visited Qatar, Uganda, Zambia and Kuwait during the month. China and Japan held high-level consultations on maritime affairs and agreed to enhance practical cooperation to make the East China Sea a zone of peace. A week after the UK's broadcast regulator revoked the licence for CGTN to broadcast in the UK, China banned the BBC from broadcasting and reporting within China.

A Chinese fishing armada was reported off Argentina, seeking to harvest squid and other species. The same fleet had earlier prompted Chinese agreements with Pacific nations including Peru, Chile, Ecuador and Colombia to stop illegal fishing in their EEZ. China portrayed a successful missile interception test as purely defensive, but generated concern that it was testing ASAT weapons under the guise of BMD. It launched the 5560-ton Haixun-6, a large Coast Guard vessel intended for operation in the Taiwan Straits. The PLA (N)

commissioned its 72nd (and last) Type 056 corvette and shifted focus to larger platforms.

An anonymous article published by the Atlantic Council set out a comprehensive strategy for the US to tackle the burgeoning China challenge. The US officially re-entered the Paris Agreement and identified addressing the real threat of climate change as being at the centre of its domestic and foreign policy priorities. The US-China Economic and Security Review Commission was told that growing domestic pressure would result in China taking steps to resolve Taiwan's status within 3-5 years, and that China would prevail in a cross-strait military contingency even if the US intervened.

The USS Nimitz Carrier Strike Group departed the Persian Gulf and returned to the Indo-Pacific Command, exercising with the Theodore Roosevelt Carrier Strike Group in the South China Sea. At the time of writing the Nimitz CSG was approaching its home port of Bremerton, on the US West Coast and the Eisenhower CSG was moving to cover the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf. Air Force aircraft from Australia, Japan and the US participated in Exercise Cope North 2021. US forward deployed presence in Yokosuka was strengthened by the addition of USS Rafael Peralta. USN warships conducted two Taiwan Strait transits and two FONOPS in the South China Sea. Reports indicated that the US Marine Corps plans to create three new Marine Littoral Regiments and base them in the Pacific during the coming decade.

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

The Global Scene

The month began with news of a [coup in Myanmar](#) on the day the newly elected parliament was scheduled to convene. The military, led by Senior General Min Aung Hlaing [assumed control](#) of the country, declared a one-year emergency due to "election fraud" and detained Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and other politicians. [India said](#) it had noted developments with deep concern. It believed that the democratic process and the rule of law must be upheld. The US [expressed grave concern](#) and alarm, and called on the Burmese military to release all government officials and civil society leaders and respect the will of the people as expressed in the recent democratic elections. [President Biden](#) described the coup as a "direct assault on the country's transition to democracy and the rule of law" and said the US would work with partners throughout the region and in the world to support the restoration of democracy. A [joint statement](#) condemning the coup was released by the foreign ministers of

Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, UK and the US, as well as the High Representative of the EU. Indonesia and Malaysia sought a rare [special meeting](#) of ASEAN to discuss the coup. [China said](#) it hoped “all parties in Myanmar will properly handle their differences under the constitutional and legal framework and maintain political and social stability”.



Protestors confront the riot police in Naypyitaw on February 18, 2021.

Source: US Agency for Global Media

Covid-19 [had claimed](#) more than 114 million infections and killed more than 2.5 million people worldwide as the month ended. The US, with more than 29 million infections and 520,000 deaths led the pandemic's global tally. In terms of the number of death, the US was followed by Brazil, Mexico, India and the UK. The US also led in the [number of people vaccinated](#), followed by China, the UK, India and Israel.

The WHO team investigating into the origins of SARS-CoV-2 said the virus did spread extensively in Wuhan's Huanan Seafood Market and other areas, but how it was introduced into the market remained unknown. It evaluated [four hypotheses](#): direct transmission from an animal to a human, transmission to humans through an intermediary host species, transmission through the frozen food chain, and the possibility of a laboratory-related accident. It accepted that the first three required further investigation, ignoring the fact that of the over 100 million cases of COVID-19 diagnosed worldwide, not one

outside China has been [traced to food or food packaging](#). It opined that the laboratory accident hypothesis did not warrant further investigation, because laboratory accidents were extremely rare and unlikely. Insofar as animal origins were concerned, the Chinese member of the team explained that the viruses so far seen in bats or pangolins were not sufficiently similar to SARS-CoV-2 to identify them as the direct progenitor of the virus. Minks and cats were also potential hosts. He also said studies indicated that the virus had been in circulation in several regions, including other countries, before the first case was reported in Wuhan, and that there was no evidence to indicate the virus was circulating in Wuhan before substantial transmission was reported in the second half of December 2019.

Reports indicate that [China refused](#) to provide WHO investigators raw, personalised data on 174 cases of COVID-19 identified from the early phase of the outbreak in Wuhan, forcing them to rely on the Chinese analysis on how and when the coronavirus first began to spread. The US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan [expressed deep concern](#) about the way in which the early findings of the COVID-19 investigation were communicated and questioned the process to reach them. He said that it was imperative that the report be independent, with expert findings free from intervention or alteration by the Chinese government.

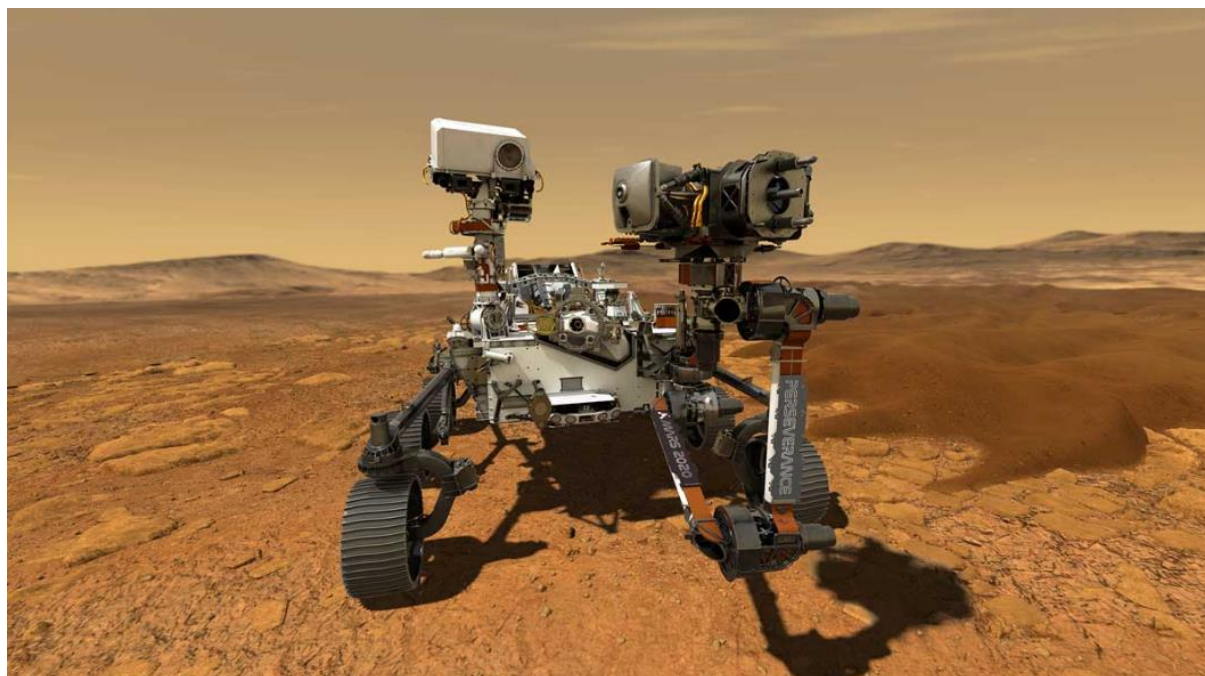
WHO Director General Tedros Ghebreyesus spoke out against [vaccine nationalism](#) as a major barrier to achieving worldwide vaccination at the scale required to end the pandemic. He said that rich countries with just 16% of the world's population had already bought 60% of the world's vaccine supplies to vaccinate 70% of their population by mid-year, while WHO's COVAX was struggling to purchase enough doses to cover just 20% of the population of lower-income countries by 2021. Allowing the majority of the world's population to go unvaccinated would not only perpetuate illness and the pain of lockdowns, but also spawn new virus mutations including more contagious variants which could result in a steep rise in cases.

Speaking at the UNSC open debate on implementation of resolution 2532 (2020), India's External Affairs Minister Dr. S Jaishankar proposed [nine points](#) for the collective consideration of the world to put the pandemic decisively behind and emerge more resilient. These included vaccination to slow the virus's ability to infect new people and mutate further; collaboration on genomic surveillance to track virus mutations and variants; effectively addressing public resistance to vaccines; improving public health infrastructure and building capacity; stopping vaccine nationalism and encourage internationalism; strengthening of the COVAX facility; resuming

immunisation programmes across the world; stopping of disinformation campaigns taking advantage of the pandemic; and proactively preparing for the next pandemic.

A Joint Statement from the Foreign Ministers of the US, France, Germany and UK reaffirmed the [centrality of the transatlantic partnership](#) in dealing with the security, climate, economic, health and other challenges the world faces. It encompassed Iran and its full return to the JCPOA, de-escalation of tensions in the Gulf Region and working closely together to end the war in Yemen, the ISIS challenge in Iraq and Syria, global challenges posed by China and climate change, strengthening of NATO and cooperation to end COVID-19.

The US [extended the New START Treaty](#) with the Russian Federation for five years, till February 05, 2026. The treaty ensures verifiable limits on the number of ICBMs, SLBMs and heavy bombers maintained by both sides. It also said it would pursue arms control to reduce the dangers from China's modern and growing nuclear arsenal.



The Perseverance Rover on Mars, February 2021.

Source: NASA

Missions from three countries reached Mars during the month, signifying the growing spread of technology and increase in competition in space. The first to arrive was the [UAE's Al-Amal](#) (Hope) mission which [entered orbit](#) on February 9, making the UAE the first Arab nation to reach Mars. Even as the Hope Mission began sending back photographs, China's Tianwen-1 mission arrived and began surveys prior to landing a rover on the planet in May or June.

The last to arrive was the US mission, but it landed the [Perseverance Rover](#) via a sky crane on February 18 to hunt for signs of habitable environments and past microbial life.

France's National Assembly voted 347-151 to [approve a bill](#) that aims to strengthen government oversight of mosques and religious schools and crack down on practices such as online hate speech and forced marriage. President Macron believes these practices are rooted in an ideology that aims to build a parallel society where religious rules override civil laws and undermine the values of liberty, equality, fraternity and separation of religion and the state. The bill now awaits a vote by the Senate.

The World Trade Organisation unanimously appointed Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Nigeria's former finance minister and a former Director General of the World Bank, as its first female leader. The appointment, which had been blocked by the Trump administration, offered a fresh start for the WTO to revive its influence over global economic rules. The WTO has been hobbled by US-China trade tensions, global tariff wars and the Trump administration's hostility towards it.

Indo-Pacific Competition

The first conversation between Presidents Joe Biden and Xi Jinping took place on February 11, 2021. The two countries summarised the two-hour conversation differently. The [US account](#) said President Biden affirmed his priorities of protecting the American people's security, prosperity, health, and way of life, and preserving a free and open Indo-Pacific. It also mentions fundamental concerns about Beijing's coercive and unfair economic practices, crackdown in Hong Kong, human rights abuses in Xinjiang and increasingly assertive actions in the region, including towards Taiwan. It makes no mention of China's action on its borders with India. [China's account](#), on the other hand, specifies that Taiwan, Hong Kong and Xinjiang are China's internal affairs concerning China's sovereignty and territorial integrity and the US should respect China's core interests and act prudently. It seeks management of differences and improvement in China-US relations based on the spirit of no conflict, no confrontation, mutual respect, treating each other as equals and striving for win-win cooperation.

The third Quad Ministerial Meeting was held on February 18, 2021. The four foreign ministers discussed cooperation on the multiple challenges facing the existing global order, including in the Indo-Pacific. There was substantial commonality with regards to the challenges and preserving ASEAN centrality

in the media releases published after the meeting. There were also nuanced differences. The [Japanese readout](#) was perhaps the most forthright. Foreign Minister Motegi Toshimitsu identified “unilateral attempts to change to status quo” as a challenge and said that the four countries are deeply committed to reinforcing a free and open order based on the rule of law. He made a specific reference to China’s Coast Guard Law, saying that “the four ministers concurred strongly in opposing unilateral and forceful attempts to change the status quo in the context of the East and South China Sea”. He identified quality infrastructure, maritime security, counter-terrorism, cyber security, humanitarian assistance / disaster relief, education and human resource development and response to COVID-19 and climate change as the challenges discussed, and welcomed the pro-active efforts of other countries, including in Europe, towards a Free and Open Indo-Pacific. The [Australian readout](#) stopped short of any mention of China or Europe and identified countering disinformation as an area of cooperation. India’s [media release](#) covered much the same ground. It spoke of the strong case for the Quad countries to work closely together to ensure that the direction of change remains positive and beneficial to all, ASEAN cohesion and centrality (Japan mentioned ASEAN unity, the others only mentioned centrality), and commitment of all to upholding a rules-based international order, underpinned by respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, rule of law, transparency, freedom of navigation in international seas and peaceful resolution of disputes. The [US release](#) was the shortest among the four. It restricted commitment of the four ministers to cooperation in COVID-19 response and recovery and climate change, while saying other challenges discussed included “countering disinformation, counterterrorism, maritime security, the urgent need to restore the democratically elected government in Burma, and the priority of strengthening democratic resilience in the broader region”. It made common cause with India in making a specific mention of support for territorial integrity. All four ministers agreed to sustain the dialogue.

Reports indicate that the Quad countries are working to arrange the [first meeting](#) of their leaders after the Biden administration settles in.

A Chinese fishing armada was reported to be off the [Argentine EEZ](#) seeking to harvest squid and other species. The same armada had prompted an agreement between Peru, Chile, Ecuador and Colombia to adopt steps to fight illegal fishing of the shores of South America last year. Argentina was said to be negotiating a fishing agreement with China.

The French nuclear submarine Emeraude and support ship Seine sailed [through the South China Sea](#) to demonstrate, according to the French Defence

Minister, the capacity of the French Navy to deploy in distant waters in support of Australian, American and Japanese strategic partners. The minister said that France has EEZs in the Indo-Pacific region and intends to protect its sovereignty and interests there.

East Africa

The fifth round of talks aimed at resolving the [electoral impasse](#) in Somalia failed to reach agreement on a [procedure](#) to select a new President. The term of Somalia's parliament ended on December 27, 2020, while that of President Mohamed Farmajo ended on February 08, 2021. Two of Somalia's five states have objected to issues including how electoral management bodies should be appointed and delegates selected. The US Embassy on Somalia [urged](#) speedy resolution and asked national and regional leaders to put aside the search for political advantage and instead act in the interest of the people of Somalia.

A [car bomb attack](#) by Somalia's Al-Shabab on January 31, 2021, on the Afrik Hotel in Mogadishu resulted in the death of nine personnel, including four attackers, and injury to over 10 civilians. The attackers crashed the explosive-laden car into the entrance gate of the hotel and then invaded it, opening fire on staff and patrons inside. The hotel is known to be a gathering place for Somali government officials.

Differing narratives about the reasons underlying Ethiopia's operations in the Tigray region emerged during the month. One, authored by [Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed](#), projected operations against the TPLF as necessary to protect Ethiopia from internal and external enemies and construct a peaceful multi-racial, multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. The other, [by a professor](#) at the European University Institute, sought immediate intervention by the UN Security Council due to the failure of the state to prevent or alleviate activities such as genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. Continuing conflict, meanwhile, has led to over 2 million people facing famine and more than 4.5 million needing assistance.



Map Showing Humanitarian Access to Tigray Region as of January 19, 2021.
 Source: UN OCHA Situation Report of February 19, 2021

A [report from the United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#) (OCHA) said humanitarian response remains drastically inadequate compared to the sheer magnitude of needs across the region. It expressed concern about reports of attacks against civilians and increased fighting and the presence of armed actors which hindered humanitarian response. The [US expressed grave concern](#) about the reported atrocities and overall deteriorating situation and sought the immediate withdrawal of Eritrean forces and Amhara regional forces from Tigray. It also called on the African Union and other international partners to help address the worsening situation.

The 37th Chinese naval escort taskforce took over [escort duties](#) in the Gulf of Aden from the 36th taskforce on January 31, 2021. The force [comprises](#) the destroyer Changsha, the frigate Yulin and the supply ship Honghu. Apart from naval personnel, it also carries special operation troops.

Just over a month after Sudan agreed to provide Russia [access to Port Sudan](#) for 25 years, the Steregushchiy-class corvette Stoiky and the oiler Kola from the Baltic Fleet transited the Suez Canal and entered the Red Sea for a [long-distance deployment](#). The two ships [entered Chabahar](#), in Iran, on February 16 for

[Exercise Maritime Security Belt 2021](#) with the IRGC Maritime Force, the second time the Russian Navy has exercised with Iranian ships. China projected the exercise as a [signal of Moscow's support](#) to Iran at a time when US pressure on the country was building up.

West Asia

The Biden administration released the declassified version of an intelligence report that found that Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman had approved the 2018 killing of journalist Jama Khashoggi. President Biden [spoke with King Salman](#) bin Abdulaziz al-Saud on February 25, 2021, while Secretary of State [Antony Blinken spoke to his Saudi counterpart](#), Faisal bin Farhan al-Saud. Though the press readouts of the conversations (hyperlinked above) don't mention anything about the report, it is likely to have been the focus of discussion.

Iran's Atomic Energy Organisation had warned the IAEA that in order to comply with the act passed by its parliament, it would [impose restrictions](#) on access of IAEA inspectors from February 23, 2021 if sweeping US sanctions imposed on it by the Trump administration were not lifted, effectively walking out of the last major component of the 2015 JCPOA. This would have severely limited the IAEA ability to monitor Iran's nuclear work. However, [an IAEA news release](#) indicated that Iran compromised temporarily by agreeing to implement fully and without limitation its Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement as before for a period of three months.

Two French Tripartite class mine hunters [arrived Abu Dhabi](#) on board a chartered vessel on February 07, 2021. The ships will be deployed for mine clearance in the Gulf area.

The International Court of Justice rejected the six objections raised by the US and [ruled that](#) because of Article XXI, paragraph 2 of the [1955 treaty of Amity, Economic Relations and Consular Rights](#) between the US and Iran, [it has jurisdiction](#) to hear the case filed by Iran instituting proceedings against the United States to re-impose sanctions and restrictive measures which were earlier lifted in connection with the JCPOA of July 14, 2015. The US spokesman [expressed disappointment](#) at the court's decision, but observed that the judgement was a preliminary ruling, not a decision on the merits. He said that in the next phase, the US would explain why Iran's claim had no merit.

Iran's Atomic Energy Organisation [warned the IAEA](#) that in order to comply with the act passed by its parliament, Iran would stop implementation of voluntary measures as envisaged in the JCPOA as of February 23, 2021. In order

to enable continuance of verification activity, Iran agreed to implement fully and without limitation its Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement as before for a period of three months. Iran had earlier warned that it would [impose restrictions](#) on access of IAEA inspectors if sweeping US sanctions imposed on it by the Trump administration were not lifted, thus walking out of the last major component of the 2015 JCPOA. The restrictions would have severely limited the IAEA ability to monitor Iran's nuclear work.

Reports indicate that Iran's Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) conducted a '[surgical strike](#)' in Pakistan's Balochistan Province on February 02, 2021 and freed two of Iran's border guards who had been held captive by the 'Jaish-ul-Adl' organisation since October 2018. The soldiers were successfully transferred back to Iran.

A [rocket attack](#) struck Erbil city in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq on February 15, 2021. [An analysis indicates](#) 28 rockets may have been fired, with over a dozen landing in the densely populated city. Two rockets landed on Erbil airport, killing one foreign contractor and injuring five others, plus a US soldier. The Chinese consulate was also hit. The Saraya Awliya al Dam, an Iraqi militia with ties to the Iran backed militia Asaib Ahl al-Haq, claimed responsibility. The US [condemned](#) the attack and followed up with [airstrikes against infrastructure](#) used by Iranian-backed militant groups in eastern Syria. The reprisal after deliberation indicated that the US would act to protect American and Coalition personnel, but desired to de-escalate the overall situation in both eastern Syria and Iraq.

MV Helios Ray, a vehicle-carrier registered in the Isle of Man but owned by a Tel Aviv based company, was [hit by an explosion](#) that left holes on both sides of the vessel's hull above the waterline. The incident occurred at about 2040 GMT on February 26, 2021, shortly after the vessel had crossed the Straits of Hormuz on its way to Singapore. The cause of the explosion was not known. However, initial reports said it could be due to asymmetric activity by the Iranian military.

South Asia

The Afghanistan Study Group, co-chaired by Senator Kelly A Ayotte, General Joseph F Dunford Jr (Retd) and Ms Nancy Lindborg, submitted its final report to Congress on February 3, 2021. The [bi-partisan report](#) recommended: an immediate diplomatic effort to extend the May 2021 withdrawal date to give the peace process sufficient time to produce an acceptable result; recognition that a key objective of the ongoing US military presence is to help create conditions

for an acceptable peace settlement; continued basic support for the essential institutions of the Afghan state, including security institutions, while continuing to message that the support is not open-ended and is conditioned on progress in the peace talks; continued support for members of the Afghan civil society that had been instrumental in securing essential gains in rights, education and health; re-emphasis on diplomacy and negotiations, including a long-term regional diplomatic strategy; and the harnessing and coordination of international support for a post-agreement Afghan state.

Afghanistan received [500,000 doses](#) of AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine from India on February 7, 2021. India's and Afghanistan's Foreign Ministers signed the [MOU for the construction of Lalandar](#) (Shatoot) Dam on February 09, 2021. The Dam will provide safe drinking water to Kabul city, provide irrigation water to nearby areas, rehabilitate the existing irrigation and drainage network, aid in flood protection and also provide electricity to the region. It will be the second Dam to be built by India in Afghanistan, after the Salma Dam which was inaugurated in June 2016.

NATO defence ministers met in Germany on February 18, 2021, but were [unable to decide](#) whether to pull out of Afghanistan in response to the May 01 deadline. Germany's defence minister Heiko Maas was earlier [reported](#) to have said that Germany's military deployment in Afghanistan as part of NATO should be extended. Russia's special envoy for Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov meanwhile called for the establishment of an inclusive and transitional [coalition government](#) to lead and control peace talks.

A [survey](#) conducted by Pajhwok Afghan News shows that the Afghan government controls 297,000 Km² (46%) of Afghan territory, as against 337,000 Km² (52%) controlled by the Taliban. The balance about 18,000 Km² was not under the control of either. However, 59% of the population lived in areas under government control.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with [Afghan President Ashraf Ghani](#) on February 18, 2021 regarding the ongoing review of US strategy in Afghanistan. He reiterated US commitment to support the peace process, aiming for a just and durable political settlement and a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire. He subsequently spoke with [Dr Abdullah Abdullah](#), Chairman of Afghanistan's High Council for National Reconciliation on the same lines.

Pakistan became the [first recipient](#) of Chinese vaccine aid when 500,000 doses of the Sinopharm vaccine arrived by military aircraft in Islamabad on February 01, 2021. China said it would provide vaccine aid to 13 countries including

Nepal, Brunei, the Philippines, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, Sri Lanka, Mongolia, Palestine, Belarus, Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe and Equatorial Guinea in the first phase, and 38 more developing countries in the second phase. It had also begun exporting vaccines to other foreign partners, including the UAE, Morocco, Indonesia, Turkey, Brazil, Chile and Serbia.

The FATF [retained Pakistan on its grey list](#) during its plenary from February 22 – 25, 2021. It said Pakistan had largely addressed 24 of the 27 items under the action plan. It sought work on the remaining three items: prosecuting persons and entities acting on behalf or on the direction of designated persons or entities; demonstrating that prosecutions result in effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions; and demonstrating effective implementation of targeted financial sanctions against all 1267 and 1373 designated terrorists. Other Indo-Pacific countries on the grey list include Cambodia, Mauritius, Myanmar, Uganda, Yemen and Zimbabwe. North Korea and Iran continue to remain on the [black list](#).



Participants in the India US Executive Steering Group Meeting at New Delhi, February 22-24, 2021. Source: PIB

Ships and personnel from [45 countries](#) participated in the 7th [Exercise AMAN-21](#), hosted by the Pakistan Navy from [February 11-16](#), 2021. The exercise is targeted at combating non-traditional security threats. An [international fleet review](#) took place as part of the exercise. [On completion](#), ships of the Pakistan and Russian Navies conducted Exercise ARABIAN MONSOON 2021, while ships of the Pakistan and Sri Lanka navies conducted Exercise LION Star II.

India's Defence Minister Rajnath Singh [announced](#) in the Rajya Sabha on February 11, 2021 that India and China had reached an agreement on disengagement in the North and South Bank of Pangong Tso, and had also agreed to convene the next Senior Commanders' Meeting on completion of disengagement to address and resolve other issues. Troops had begun [synchronised disengagement](#) the previous day in accordance with the consensus reached in the 9th Corps Commander Level Meeting. India's Ministry of Defence stated that India had [not conceded](#) any territory as a result of the agreement, but had enforced observance and respect for the LAC and prevented any unilateral change in status quo. Reports indicate that before the commencement of the Chinese New Year on February 12, the PLA [had withdrawn](#) more than 200 main battle tanks to [Rutog military base](#), about 100 Km from Moldo. Shortly thereafter, China acknowledged for the first time that it had suffered casualties during the Galwan Valley clash on June 16, 2020 and [awarded the honorary titles](#) of "Heroic Regiment Commander in Defending Country and Border" and "Border-defending Hero" to two of them, a move seen as stoking nationalism in order to contain political criticism over the withdrawal.

The [10th round](#) of the [China-India Corps Commander Level Meeting](#) was held at the Moldo/Chushul border meeting point on February 20, 2021. The two sides positively appraised the smooth completion of disengagement of frontline troops in the Pangong Tso area and noted that it provided a good basis for resolution of other remaining issues along the LAC in the Western Sector. They also agreed to push for a mutually acceptable resolution of the remaining issues in a steady and orderly manner, so as to jointly maintain peace and tranquillity in the border areas.

EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar and his Chinese counterpart Foreign Minister Wang Yi [discussed the situation](#) along the LAC in Eastern Ladakh and bilateral relations telephonically on February 25, 2021. The EAM said that once disengagement is completed on all friction points, the two sides could also look at broader de-escalation of troops in the area and work towards restoration of peace and tranquillity. The two ministers agreed to remain in touch and establish a hotline.

Speaking to budding diplomats at the Diplomatic Academy of the Russia Ministry of Foreign Affairs on February 17, 2021, the External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar said India would like to [work closely with Russia](#) to bring about a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific region, which embraces all in a common pursuit of progress and prosperity. He reiterated India's SAGAR outlook and the seven pillars of the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative: maritime

security; maritime ecology; maritime resources; capacity building / resource sharing; disaster risk reduction and management; science, technology and academic cooperation; and trade connectivity / transport.



Indian and US Army soldiers in Rajasthan during Exercise Yudh Abhyas 2021. Source: ADGPI/Twitter

The Foreign Ministers of India and Brunei held a virtual meeting to review the status of [India-Brunei relations](#) on February 18, 2021. The External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar thanked his counterpart for Brunei's support to India's space programme by facilitating the relocation of ISRO's existing Telemetry, Tracking and Command Station to a new site, India's candidature to various international bodies and on the subject of international terrorism. The two ministers agreed to boost trade and investment in areas related to agriculture, food processing, ICT, ITeS, S&T, education, automotives, healthcare and pharmaceuticals, construction, textiles and garments, jewellery, leather goods and tourism.

Addressing the high level segment of the [Conference on Disarmament](#) on February 22, 2021, Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla reiterated India's commitment to universal, non-discriminatory and verifiable nuclear disarmament and the complete elimination of nuclear weapons. He also reiterated India's support for the immediate commencement of negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty and prevention of an arms race in outer space. He said India was a responsible nuclear weapon State, committed to maintaining credible minimum deterrence, a policy of no-first use, and non-use against non-nuclear weapon states.

On being asked about India's reaction to Japan's reported reluctance to invite India to an [expanded G-7 Summit](#) to be held later this year in the UK, and similar reservations from some European diplomats, India's spokesperson said that as per his information, the media reports were inaccurate.

The Fourth Foreign Office Consultations between [India and Qatar](#) were held virtually on February 01, 2021. Officials reviewed the gamut of bilateral relations, including political, energy, trade, investments, defence, food security, health, science and technology, consular, community and cultural issues.

The inaugural senior official meeting of the Committee on Political, Security, Social and Cultural Cooperation under the aegis of the [India-Saudi Arabia Agreement](#) for Strategic Partnership Council was held virtually on February 03, 2021. Both sides agreed to establish Joint Working Groups for regular dialogue covering political, consular, Haj, defence, security, culture, health and education aspects. Discussions were also held under the Committee on Economy and Investment.

The Senior Officials' [India-France-Australia dialogue](#) was held on February 24, 2021. Officials took stock of progress on the outcomes of the Foreign Secretary level trilateral dialogue held in September 2020, including maritime security, HADR, Blue Economy, Protection of the Global Maritime Commons, Combating IUU fishing and cooperation in multilateral for a. They also discussed next steps on furthering trilateral cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.

The 24th edition of the [India-USA Executive Steering Group](#) met at New Delhi from February 22-24, 2021, to enhance the engagement in diverse fields. A 12 member US team attended the meeting in person, while 40 others attended virtually from different locations in the US. The Indian team comprised 37 officers.

The Directors General of Military Operations of India and Pakistan agreed to [address each other's core issues](#) and concerns which have a propensity to disturb the peace and lead to violence. They agreed to strictly observe all agreements and understandings and cease firing along the Line of Control and in all sectors with effect from midnight February 24/25, 2021 in the interests of achieving a mutually beneficial and sustainable peace along the borders.



Indian Naval Warships at Sea during Exercise TROPEX 2021

Source: Indian Navy

India's Union Budget for 2021-22 focused on [six pillars](#): Health and wellbeing; Physical and financial capital and infrastructure; Inclusive development for an aspirational India; Reinvigorating human capital; Innovation and R&D; and Minimum government and maximum governance. The total [outlay for the Ministry of Defence](#) (excluding pensions) was pegged at Rs 362,345.62 crores (\$ 50 billion), approximately 1.63% of the GDP. The total capital outlay for Defence was Rs 135,060.72 crores (\$18.6 billion). Of this, Rs 36,481.9 crores (27.24%) was earmarked for the Army, 33,253.55 crores (24.6%) for the Navy and Rs 53,214.77 crores (39.4%) for the Air Force. The noteworthy aspect was an increase over revised estimates of Rs 3268.62 crores for the Army, as compared to a decline of 4289.33 crores for the Navy and Rs 1840.64 crores for the Air Force. The [budgetary allocation](#) of the Ministry of External Affairs was Rs 18,154.73 crores, an increase by Rs 3,154.73 crores over revised estimates for 2020-21. This included a capital expenditure of Rs 1490.75 crores (up Rs 134.85 crores over the RE) and a provision of Rs 2124.2 crores for aid to countries. GOI also [accepted in principle](#) the [recommendation](#) of the 15th Finance Commission to set up a non-lapsable fund, to be called the Modernisation Fund for Defence and Internal Security. To be used for capital investment to modernise the defence services and central and state police forces as well as welfare of soldiers and para-military personnel, the fund's sources of incremental funding will be transfers from the Consolidated Fund of India, disinvestment proceeds of DPSEs, proceeds from monetisation of surplus defence land and receipts from transfer of defence land to State Governments and for public projects.

India hosted the biennial Aero India exhibition during the month. The event included the [IOR Defence Ministers' Conclave](#) on February 04, 2021, in which 26 countries participated and shared views on enhancing regional cooperation. It also included a [Global Chiefs of Air Staff Conclave](#) themed 'Leveraging Aerospace Power for Security and Stability'. The conclave's three sessions discussed disruptive technologies and innovations; air power in the Indo-Pacific region; and air power and aerospace strategy. Participants from [40 countries attended](#). Alongside, the Indian Navy conducted a [seminar on Building Collective Maritime Competence towards Security and Growth for All in the Region \(SAGAR\)](#). The seminar was attended by defence ministers, service chiefs, delegations from friendly foreign countries, academia, diplomats and media personnel attending Aero India 2021.

The Indian Navy's [largest theatre level](#) operational readiness exercise (TROPEX 21), designed to test the Navy's concept of operations in various conflict scenarios and demonstrate the ability to carry out long range strike in the IOR, was conducted during the month. It included live firing of missiles and torpedoes. Lessons from the exercise [will provide planners](#) accurate assessment to fine tune force structuring requirements, war-fighting concepts, operational logistics, and material and training imperatives.

The 16th edition of the Joint India – US [Exercise Yudh Abhyas](#) ended on February 21, 2021. The exercise brought together personnel from India's 11th JAK Rifles and the US 2-3 Infantry Battalion. It sharpened the tactical skills of the personnel through rigorous battle drills, combined manoeuvres with mixed squads, hands on familiarisation with each others' vehicles and weapons and stress shoots. The teams focused on counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations and associated missions.

The Defence Acquisition Council [accorded approval](#) on February 23, 2021, for the purchase of 118 Arjun Mk-1A tanks for the Indian Army, Nag anti-tank guided missiles and Arudhra medium power radars. Meanwhile, Mazagon Docks Limited [delivered](#) the third Scorpene-class submarine to the Indian Navy on February 15, 2021. The submarine is expected to commission as INS Karanj in March this year.



Test Launch of Indigenous VLSRSAM from ITR Chandipur, February 22, 2021

Source: PIB

India's Chief of Air Staff [visited Bangladesh](#) from February 22- 26, 2021, to enhance existing professional ties and explore avenues for further military cooperation.

Operational forces of the Indian Navy witnessed a change of guard, with Rear Admiral Atul Anand taking over as Flag Officer Commanding Maharashtra Naval Area ([FOMA](#)) on February 22, Rear Admiral Tarun Sobti taking over as Flag Officer Commanding Eastern Fleet ([FOCEF](#)) on February 23, and Rear Admiral Ajay Kochhar assuming charge as Flag Officer Commanding Western Fleet ([FOCWF](#)) on February 24, 2021.

INS Pralaya, a Veer-class corvette built by Goa Shipyard Limited, [was in Abu Dhabi](#) to participate in IDEX 21 and NAVDEX 21 from February 21 – 25, 2021 to display the capabilities of India's shipbuilding industry and its image as a shipbuilder. The 560-ton ship is capable of a range of surface warfare missions.

The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) conducted [two successful developmental launches](#) of the Vertical Launch Short Range Surface to Air Missile (VL-SRSAM) from the Integrated Test Range at Chandipur on February 22, 2021. These tests mark a further step towards fielding a proven indigenously developed SRSAM system on board Indian Navy ships.

BNS Prottoy, a China built Type 056 missile corvette from the Bangladesh Navy, [visited Mumbai](#) on February 14 & 15, 2021. The ship had earlier participated in AMAN 2021 at Karachi, and was proceeding to Abu Dhabi to take part in IDEX 2021 and NAVDEX 2021.

The Sri Lanka government announced the decision of its cabinet to overturn the tripartite agreement signed with India and Japan in 2019 to develop Colombo's East Container Terminal. Sri Lanka decided that the East terminal would be [completely owned and operated by the Sri Lanka Port Authority](#), as against the earlier deal whereby 49% of the operations at the port were to be controlled by Japan and India. More than two-thirds of the transshipment at the port is tied to India, making it an important trade and connectivity link. It also decided to develop the West Container Terminal of the port on the basis of developing and operating it as a public-private partnership and return it within 35 years with parties nominated by India and Japan. India said its High Commissioner in Colombo was in discussion with the Government of Sri Lanka including on the importance of [adhering to international commitments](#). [Japan regretted](#) the Sri Lanka Government's decision. The Indian Air Force aerobatic display team [arrived at Colombo](#) on February 27, to participate in the Air Show planned early next month as part of the 70th anniversary celebrations of the Sri Lanka Air Force.



BNS Prottoy arriving Mumbai, February 14, 2021. Source: Indian Navy

Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan visited Sri Lanka on February 23-24, 2021. The [joint statement](#) issued on the occasion covers cultural cooperation including religious tourism, avenues for enhancing bilateral trade and investment, defence cooperation (Pakistan announced a new \$ 50 million line of credit for Sri Lanka) and sports cooperation.

India's External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar and a delegation of senior Indian officials visited [The Maldives](#) on February 20-21, 2021. The Joint Press Statement on the visit speaks of India gifting an additional 100,000 doses of COVISHIELD vaccine to Maldives along with \$ 250 million for budget support, resumption of regular flights under the Air Travel Bubble established in August 2020, financing the development of Hanimaadhoo Airport and Addu Gan Airport under an \$ 800 million line of credit as well as other infrastructure projects. India reiterated its support for the Maldives candidature for the Presidency of the 76th session of the General Assembly in September 2021. The two ministers agreed to enhance cooperation on regional maritime security including combating terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. A number of other MoUs were also signed, including an agreement to develop, support and maintain a Maldives National Defence Force Coast Guard Harbour at Sifvaru.



External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar speaking at the Ekuveni Stadium in the Maldives, February 20, 2021. Source: MEA Photo Gallery

Speaking to the press during his [visit to Mauritius](#) on February 22, 2021, External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar expressed satisfaction at the fact that all five developmental projects announced for Mauritius by India in 2017, including Phase I of the Metro Express, the new Supreme Court Building, the new ENT hospital, the supply of electronic tablets for Mauritian school children and the construction of 956 social housing units had been completed. He announced that India had entered into a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement with Mauritius, its first such agreement with an African country. India would provide a Dornier aircraft and an Advanced Light Helicopter Dhruv on lease to Mauritius on gratis basis for two years to help shore up its capabilities to patrol and monitor its EEZ, and a special US\$ 100 million Line of Credit had been signed to enable procurement of defence assets from India.

South East Asia

The annual ISEAS [State of Southeast Asia survey report 2021](#) was released on February 10, 2021. The survey found that Southeast Asia ranks the pandemic, unemployment and income disparity as the top three challenges facing the region. The top concerns about ASEAN were that it is slow and ineffective in coping with fluid political and economic developments; it is becoming an arena for competition among major powers and members may become pawns;

and it is unable to overcome the challenges of the pandemic. Singapore and Vietnam are the countries seen as having provided the best leadership to ASEAN, while China, Japan and the EU are seen as having provided the most help to the region. If forced to align with one or other great power, 61.5% of the respondents would align with the US, up from 53.6% the previous year, while only 38.5% would prefer China, down from 46.4% the previous year. China is seen as the most influential economic power in the region, as well as the most influential political and strategic power, generating anxiety among 88.6% of the respondents about Beijing's strategic clout in the region. 46.3% of respondents saw China as a revisionist power that intends to turn Southeast Asia into its sphere of influence. More than 40% of respondents felt that ASEAN needs to articulate its outlook on the Indo-Pacific more clearly to remain relevant. Trust in the US as a strategic partner has grown in anticipation of the Biden Administration elevating US engagement with the region. ASEAN's top concerns over the South China Sea were China's militarisation and assertive action, China's encroachment on the maritime zones of littoral states, and the US-China military confrontation. The EU and Japan were seen as the most trusted partners in hedging against US-China rivalry. A majority of respondents felt that ASEAN should discuss Mekong River issues in its agenda. In an indicator of how the region perceives India's Act East Policy, India was at the bottom amongst ASEAN's dialogue partners in all areas covered by the survey, above only Russia. Doubts about India were most prevalent in Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei and Indonesia, while the strongest support came from Myanmar, Vietnam and the Philippines.

A [statement from the ASEAN Chairman](#) on developments in Myanmar recalled the purpose and principles enshrined in the ASEAN Charter, including adherence to the principles of democracy, the rule of law and good governance, respect for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. It reiterated that political stability in ASEAN member states was essential for achieving a peaceful, stable and prosperous ASEAN Community and encouraged the pursuance of dialogue, reconciliation and the return to normalcy in accordance with the will and interests of the people of Myanmar.

The [UN Security Council expressed deep concern](#) at the declaration of the state of emergency imposed in Myanmar and arbitrary detention of members of the Government. It called for immediate release of all those detained, including Aung San Suu Kyi and President Win Myint. Members of the UNSC emphasised the need for continued support of the democratic transition in Myanmar and called for safe and unimpeded humanitarian access to all people in need, including through the re-establishment of UN relief flights. President Biden, meanwhile, [announced action](#) to prevent Myanmar's military leaders from

improperly accessing \$ 1 billion in Burmese government funds held in the US and issued an [Executive Order](#) enabling the imposition of sanctions on military coup leaders, their business interests and close family members.



KRI Bung Tomo and INS Talwar participate in a PASSEX in the North Arabian Sea, February 18, 2021. Source: Indian Navy/Twitter

Indonesia's Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi undertook [extensive shuttle diplomacy](#) to find a solution to the developing situation in Myanmar. Her interlocutors included Brunei (the current ASEAN chair), counterparts in Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam; foreign ministers from Australia, China, India, Japan, US and UK, the special envoy of the UN Secretary General, and the Australian Prime Minister. She also met Myanmar's current Foreign Minister in Bangkok. Indonesia appears to be pushing for an action plan that would keep the military junta to its [promise of holding elections](#), with monitors to ensure they are fair and inclusive. The objective was to prevent bloodshed and help the military to honour its commitment to hold a new election and hand over power to the winner. Passionate and continuing opposition to the coup raises the prospects of long-term instability, which threatens the economic and strategic interests of all in the region, including China, India, Japan and ASEAN countries.

A report indicates that an [average of five unregistered flights every night](#) have been transporting unknown goods and personnel from Kunming to Yangon. The report says the transponders of the aircraft are turned off, nor are they registered as arrivals at Kunming airport. The aircraft have, however, been

tracked based on data sent from the engines via satellite. Moreover, airport workers in Yangon have posted photos on Twitter of nightly arrivals and departures. The report speculates that either the aircraft are bringing in Chinese troops and cyber specialists to help the Tatmadaw control access to information and the internet, or they are bringing in weapons and associated stores for the Tatmadaw.

Cambodia [decided to cancel](#) its annual Golden Dragon exercise with China, originally scheduled on March 13-27, 2021, due to the need to cut spending due to heavy flooding that devastated the country's infrastructure and food supply last year, as well as the ongoing pandemic. Other reports opined that the cancellation was a subtle [signal to the US](#) that Cambodia is ready for a reset in its relations with Washington and the financial reason was a facade, since the cost of the exercise was borne by China.

The Indonesian and French Navies conducted a [joint exercise](#) in the Sunda Strait on February 07, 2021. Three Indonesia warships, two French frigates and the SSN FS Emeraude took part in the exercise. INS Talwar and the Indonesian Navy's KRI Bung Tomo participated in a [PASSEX](#) in the North Arabian Sea on February 18, 2021. The Indonesian ship had earlier participated in [Exercise AMAN-21](#) and the International Fleet Review at Karachi.



Aircraft from the Theodore Roosevelt and Nimitz Strike Groups fly in formation in the South China Sea, February 2021. Source: Indo-Pacom

The Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency [arrested](#) four Indonesian fishermen for encroaching and fishing illegally in Malaysian waters off Pulau Jarak, Lumut.

The second of the Philippines Navy's Jose Rizal-class frigates [was delivered](#) by South Korea's Hyundai Heavy Industries a month ahead of the contracted date of March 06, 2021. The ship is expected to commission around April 2021. Meanwhile, reports indicated that The Philippines was in the final stages of signing a contract with Israel for the [acquisition](#) of Shaldag-class Mk V patrol boats and the transfer of technology for their local manufacture. Nine new boats are expected to be acquired/built.

Ships from the Singapore and PLA navies held a [joint exercise](#) in the waters near Singapore on February 24, 2021. The exercise was in the nature of a PASSEX with ships of the 36th PLA (N) escort task force returning from the Gulf of Aden.

Pro-democracy protests in Myanmar sparked a renewal of [similar protests](#) in Bangkok, calling for restoration of democracy in both countries. Prominent human rights advocates had earlier described Thailand's '[lese majeste](#)' laws as anti-democratic and a violation of human rights. Thai premier Prayut Chan-o-cha easily overcame a [no-confidence vote](#) in parliament. Reports indicated that the Thai premier had received a [letter from Myanmar's new junta leader](#) asking for help to support democracy.

Czech defence exporter Omnipol announced the [sale of 12 L-39NG](#) trainer aircraft to Vietnam on February 15, 2021. Included in the contract are aircraft spares, equipment for ground-based training and specialised airport systems. The aircraft will be delivered between 2023 and 2024.

East Asia

Taiwan [announced](#) on February 04, 2021, the opening of a Taiwan Office in the Cooperative Republic of Guyana. [China's spokesman](#) called on Guyana the same day to abide by the one-China principle, refrain from any form of official exchanges and establishment of official institutions with Taiwan and take concrete action to correct the error and eliminate the negative effects. [The next day](#), Taiwan expressed its deep regret at the unilateral decision of the Guyana government to terminate the bilateral agreement on the mutual establishment of offices less than 24 hours after the accord was announced, due to pressure from the Chinese government.

Taiwan's media has reported that the country will [upgrade](#) its six La Fayette-class frigates with new air defence, combat and electronic warfare systems. Meanwhile, frequent intrusions by the PLAAF into Taiwan's South-western ADIZ continued unabated, with at least [18 incidents during the month](#).

Representatives of the US, Japan and South Korea held their first [trilateral meeting](#) to exchange views on North Korea related challenges. They shared their assessment of the current situation in North Korea and stressed the importance of continued close cooperation and coordination. Meanwhile, a report indicated that North Korea [hacked](#) Pfizer Inc for information on its COVID-19 vaccine and treatments. North Korea continues to officially claim it has no cases of COVID-19.

South Korea released its [2020 Defence White Paper](#) on February 24, 2021. The paper avoided identifying North Korea as an enemy and downgraded Japan's description from a "partner" to a "neighbour". Also, [South Korea protested](#) the "Dokdo Day" event hosted by Japan's Shimane Prefecture on February 22, 2021, as well as participation in it by a high-level Japanese Government official. It reiterated that Dokdo was an integral part of Korean territory and Japan must stop making unjustified claims over it. It also sought immediate abolition of the annual event.

Admiral Boo Suk-jong, South Korea's Chief of Naval Operations called for the [acquisition of a light aircraft carrier](#) to boost the country's defence capabilities, and said it would be a key strategic asset to protect maritime sovereignty and national interest. South Korea has already announced plans to construct a carrier indigenously.

The fourth [UK-Japan 2+2 meeting](#) took place on February 3, 2021. The two countries agreed to enhance cooperation towards the realisation of a free and open Indo-Pacific. They agreed to deepen security and defence cooperation through coordination of joint exercises during the visit of HMS Queen Elizabeth and her strike group to East Asia; a Maritime Security Agreement to further security cooperation between the JMSDF and the RN; capacity-building for developing countries in the Indo-Pacific; promoting cooperation in preventing ship-to-ship transfers by North-Korea related vessels; and defence equipment and technology cooperation. Other areas of cooperation identified were cyber and economic security issues and response to human security issues, as well as climate change. They also agreed to take the lead on international initiatives towards a post COVID-19 world order and rules. A [joint statement](#) was released on the occasion. Meanwhile, Japan and the US [broadly](#)

[agreed](#) to extend their current arrangement whereby Japan shares the cost for hosting forward-deployed US troops for another year on February 10, 2021.

Two Chinese Coast Guard vessels [entered the waters](#) around the Senkaku Islands on February 6, 2021. The incident generated concern as this was the first incursion after China's new Coast Guard law, which allows usage of military weapons to enforce China's jurisdiction, came into effect on February 01, 2021. China's Coast Guard has greater numbers, staying power and weapon capability than that of the Coast Guard of any other nation, leaving Japan mulling over response option as and when [China begins enforcing](#) its disputed claims in the East and South China Seas. China's spokesman said that the Diaoyu Island and its affiliated islands were [inherent Chinese territory](#), and patrol and law enforcement activity by China Coast Guard in these waters was a legitimate and lawful measure to safeguard sovereignty. Meanwhile, Japan was reported to have [changed its interpretation](#) of existing laws and said its Coast Guard vessels could directly fire weapons at foreign vessels aiming to land on the Senkaku Islands.

JMSDF submarine Soryu was reported to have [collided](#) with commercial bulk carrier Ocean Artemis off the coast of Shikoku as it was surfacing on February 08, 2021. The collision resulted in warping of the submarine's conning tower, near breakage of the starboard hydroplane and damage to the mast antenna array, including the periscope and communications antennae. The submarine sailed under own power to Kochi port. The damage is expected to take about an year to repair.

Japan's Ground Self Defense Force plans to acquire three [transport vessels](#) to be able to move troop of its Amphibious Ready Deployment Brigade as well as ammunition, fuel and provisions to troops deployed on remote islands consequent on the increased threat of occupation by China of islands it claims. One of them will displace about 2000 tons, while the other two will be of around 400 tons.

Japan announced that the French frigate FS Prairial would engage in [monitoring and surveillance activities](#) against illicit maritime activity, including ship-to-ship transfers with North Korean-flagged vessels in contravention of UNSC resolutions, in the waters surrounding Japan including in the East China Sea till early March 2021.

China's top diplomat Yang Jiechi held a virtual conversation with board members of the [National Committee on US-China Relations](#) on February 2, 2021. He accused the Trump administration of adopting misguided policies towards China and damaging the bilateral relationship. He called for

establishing a new type of international relations, characterised by mutual respect, fairness, justice and win-win cooperation, and for building a community with a shared future for mankind. He held out the prospect of China's imports topping \$ 22 trillion in the coming decade, providing an ever growing market for other countries around the world. He also called for the two sides to return the relationship to the course of sound and steady development through the adoption of four measures: seeing China as it is; restoring normal interactions; proper management of differences and broadening of mutually beneficial cooperation. Yang Jiechi visited also Qatar, Uganda, Zambia and Kuwait from February 19-23, 2021. The visit was [intended to](#) consolidate friendship, promote coordination of development strategies and deepen cooperation in various areas including the BRI.



USAF, JASDF and RAAF aircraft participate in Exercise Cope North 2020 at Andersen Air Base, Guam, on February 19, 2020. Source: Indo-Pacific Command

Describing China as a country that always upholds and promotes people's democracy at the [Lanting Forum](#), State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi called for bringing China-US Relations back to the right track. He said bilateral relations had run into their biggest difficulties due to the previous US administration having taken various measures to suppress and contain China for its own political purposes. He said China was always committed to protecting and promoting human rights and sought to settle differences through dialogue and negotiation. He also said that China always practices

win-win cooperation and promotes multilateralism. He called on the new US administration to keep pace with the time, see clearly the trend of the world, abandon biases, give up unwarranted suspicions and move to bring its China policy back to reason. Towards this end, he advocated mutual respect and non-interference in each other's internal affairs, stepping up dialogue and properly managing differences, restarting mutually beneficial cooperation and resumption of bilateral exchanges in all areas.

China and Japan held their 12th [High-level Consultations on Maritime Affairs](#) on February 3, 2021. Both sides agreed to fully implement the consensus reached by heads of the two countries and the four-point consensus, properly manage differences and conflicts through dialogue, promote practical cooperation in the maritime field and make the East China Sea a sea of peace, cooperation and friendship. The two sides agreed to enhance local cooperation between the China Maritime SAR Centre and Japan's Coast Guard and carry out SAR exercises; support cooperation between the two Coast Guards on combating maritime crime and promote exchanges between law enforcement officers, promote exchanges concerning maritime environment protection, exchanges between maritime personnel of the two foreign ministries, and cooperation in combating illegal fishing, promoting eel resource management and conserving fishery resources in the North Pacific.

A week after UK's broadcast regulator Ofcom [revoked the licence](#) for China Global Television Network (CGTN) to broadcast in the UK, China's State Film, TV and Radio Administration [banned the BBC](#) from broadcasting and reporting in the country after finding that BBC's reports about China seriously violated broadcast guidelines, including the requirement that the news should be truthful and fair, and should not harm China's national interests. The BBC expressed disappointment. The US spokesman [condemned](#) the PRC decision.

The first [Shanghai International Commercial Aerospace Exhibition](#) will be held at Shanghai's Hongqiao International Airport from September 15-19, 2021 and biennially thereafter. The exhibition will feature an aeroengine forum, a superalloy industry summit, a commercial aircraft conference, a commercial aerospace financial and technological symposium and a business-matching workshop for small aerospace enterprises in the Yangtze River Delta. The exhibition will replace the Beijing Airshow, and is intended as China's answer to the Paris Air Show.

China announced that all venues for the Beijing Winter Olympic Games in 2022 will be provided reliable [green electricity](#). It also announced that six more cities

reached a [GDP of 1 trillion Yuan](#) in 2020, bringing the total number of such cities in China to 23.

China's Tianwen-1 probe entered an elliptical [orbit around Mars](#) on February 10, 2021, after a 202 day space voyage, a [polar orbit](#) on February 15 and a [parking orbit](#) on February 24. The probe will survey potential landing sites preparatory to landing a rover in May or June. China also announced its astronauts had started receiving intensive training for [space flights](#) in preparation for building the nation's space station. The station named Tiangong is expected to become fully operational in 2022 and to operate for about 15 years. It said that it would conduct the maiden flight of the [Long March 6A](#) carrier rocket in 2021.

China said it had successfully conducted a land-based mid-course [missile interception test](#) within its territory on February 4, 2021. Media reports claimed the goal was to demonstrate capabilities to intercept an IRBM during the midcourse portion of its flight, and as such, the test was purely defensive. Such interceptors can, however, also [double up as anti-satellite weapons](#). The US has, in the past, accused China of testing ASAT weapons under the guise of BMD tests.

The China Shipbuilding Industry Corporation launched [Haixun-06](#), a 5,560 ton patrol vessel intended for China's Coast Guard on February 08, 2021. The ship will be used to prevent pollution, deal with maritime incidents, carry out cross-strait exchanges and maintain national sovereignty in the Taiwan Straits when it commissions. Furthermore, the PLA (Navy) commissioned its 72nd and last [Type 056 corvette](#) in early February 2021. Analysts believe that China will now focus on building larger warships as part of its plans to build a blue-water navy.

Australia

Australia announced it will seek [re-election to the International Maritime Organisation's Council](#) for the period 2022-23 in Category B (10 states with the largest interest in international seaborne trade). It also announced that it would invest \$ 800 million to provide its army a new fleet of larger, faster and better protected [amphibious vehicles and landing craft](#) that will be able to transport land forces with enhanced speed and protection. The new vessels, to be designed and built in Australia, will be inducted from 2026.

Australia deployed a P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft in support of [Operation ARGOS](#), intended to support the goal of complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearisation of North Korea. The aircraft will operate out of Japan's Kadena Air Base and will conduct surveillance to monitor and deter illegal ship-to-ship transfers.

The United States of America

[President Biden's](#) first speech at the US State Department touched on the return of diplomacy to centre-stage in American foreign policy; Burma and the military coup; Russia and the extension of the New START treaty as well as the politically motivated jailing of Alexei Navalny, confronting China's economic abuses, coercive actions, attack on human rights, intellectual property and global governance while being ready to work with Beijing where it was in America's interest to do so; restoring America's engagement internationally and earning back its leadership position. He announced a Global Posture Review across all elements of national security, stopping planned troop withdrawals from Germany, stepping up diplomacy to end the war in Yemen including ending all American support for offensive operations including through arms sales while supporting Saudi Arabia to defend its sovereignty, territorial integrity and people, and restoring the US refugee admission programme. Actions taken by him to return democracy to Myanmar, get Mr Navalny released and confront China will be watched closely to see whether the words actually result in outcomes or remain platitudes for public consumption.

Briefing the press on February 04, 2021, National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan identified the [core strategic thrust](#) of President Biden's foreign policy as establishing a position of strength to deal with both great power competition and transnational threats. This involved five major lines of effort: investments at home to shore up foundations and the American recovery plan; revitalising America's alliances; reengaging key institutions and agreements as part of a new commitment to multilateralism; reasserting American values; and getting the global force posture right.

An [anonymous article](#) published by the Atlantic Council set out a comprehensive strategy for the US to tackle the burgeoning China threat. The strategy sought a laser-like focus on Xi Jinping, his inner circle and the Chinese political context in which they rule. It suggested seven integrated components of the US strategy, ten core organising principles, and seven core domestic tasks the US must address as part of an effective strategy to deal with China. The extent to which this suggested strategy will be adopted remains to be seen. China's spokesman [described the paper](#) as a collection of rumours and conspiracy theories intended to incite a new Cold War or ideological confrontation, and the objective of regime change in China as no more than a chimera.

[Speaking at the Munich Security Conference](#) on February 19, 2021, President Joe Biden sent a clear message: America is back, as is the trans-Atlantic alliance. He described the trans-Atlantic partnership as the cornerstone of all the US and Europe hoped to accomplish in the 21st century. He guaranteed that the US would keep faith in Article 5 and expressed support to the diplomatic process aimed at bringing an end to the 20-year old war in Afghanistan, as also commitment to ensuring that Afghanistan never again provides a base for terrorist attacks against the US, its partners and interests. He said that the world was at an inflexion point between those who argued that autocracy was the best way forward to deal with the numerous challenges and those who believed that democracy was best. He sought preparation for a long-term strategic competition with China, and the need to push back against the Chinese government's economic abuses and coercion that undercut the foundations of the international system, and the need to hold Chinese companies to the same standards as was applied to Western ones. He also talked about shaping the rules that will govern the advance of technology and norms of behaviour in cyberspace, artificial intelligence and biotechnology so that these were used to lift people up, not pin them down.

President Joe Biden announced the formation of a [China Task Force](#) in the US Department of Defense to provide a baseline assessment of department policies, programs and processes in regard to the challenge China poses. Ely Ratner, a special assistant to Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin will lead the task force, which has been given four months to develop recommendations for senior defense leaders.

The US-China Economic and Security Review Commission held a hearing on "[Deterring PRC Aggression Toward Taiwan](#)" on February 18, 2021. It was told that China was now in a position where it could prevail in a cross-strait military contingency even if the US intervenes to defend Taiwan, and that growing domestic pressure in China to resolve Taiwan's status would [ensure that action is taken](#) in the next 3-5 years.

The US Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) mandated the [wearing of masks](#) by all travellers within, into or out of the US on airplanes, ships, ferries, trains, subways, buses, taxis and ride-shares. The requirement also applies to transportation hubs. The order became effective on February 2, 2021.

One month after President Biden signed the instrument to bring the US back into the Paris Agreement, the US officially became a member again on February 19, 2021. It [identified](#) addressing the real threats from climate change as being

at the centre of its domestic and foreign policy priorities and to discussions on national security, migration, international health efforts, economic diplomacy and trade talks.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken had his first telephonic discussion with China's top diplomat, Yang Jiechi, on February 5, 2021. The [US readout](#) of the discussion claims he stressed that the US would continue to stand up for human rights and democratic values, including in Xinjiang, Tibet and Hong Kong, and the US would work with allies and partners in defence of shared values and interests to hold the PRC accountable for its efforts to threaten stability in the Indo-Pacific. [China's readout](#) claims Blinken said the US-China relations were very important and that the US was willing to develop a constructive bilateral relationship with China; that he reiterated that the US will pursue the one-China principle and abide by the three Sino-US joint communiqués. It also contains the standard preaching China has been doing, including win-win cooperation and management of differences, respecting each other's core interests, that Taiwan, Hong Kong, Tibet and Xinjiang are China's internal affairs and brook no external interference, and the call to play a constructive role in promoting peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific.

The Biden administration submitted a report to Congress on February 26, 2021, on the murder of Jamal Khashoggi in 2018. A [press statement](#) in this regard announced measures to push back against governments that reach beyond their borders to threaten and attack journalists and perceived dissidents for exercising their fundamental freedoms. Among the measures was a "Khashoggi Ban", a visa restriction that allowed the State Department to restrict grant of visas to individuals who, acting on behalf of a foreign government, are believed to have been directly engaged in serious extraterritorial counter-dissident activities. 76 Saudi individuals were sanctioned under this new provision. The statement said that while the US remains invested in its relationship with Saudi Arabia, the partnership must reflect US values. The Saudi Government "[rejected the negative](#), false and unacceptable assessment in the report pertaining to the Kingdom's leadership". However, it looked forward to "maintaining the enduring foundations that have shaped the framework of the resilient strategic partnership between the Kingdom and the United States".

Speaking at the NATO Defense Ministerial Meeting, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin welcomed recognition by NATO Allies that [China's growing influence](#) and international policies present challenges to trans-Atlantic security. He looked forward to working with them to address these challenges. He told them that the US is conducting a [thorough review](#) of the conditions of the US-

Taliban Agreement to determine whether all parties had adhered to the conditions and assured them that the US would not make a hasty or disorderly withdrawal from Afghanistan. He also told them of the US commitment to the enduring defeat of ISIS, respecting Iraq's sovereignty and ensuring long term stability.

The US Senate [confirmed](#) Kathleen H Hicks as the 35th Deputy Secretary of Defense on February 8, 2021, making her the first woman to [hold this position](#). She was [sworn in](#) on February 9, 2021.

The [USS Nimitz Carrier Strike Group](#) was reported to have departed the US Central Command Area of Responsibility (AOR) and entered the AOR of the Indo-Pacific Command on February 03, 2021. The USS Makin Island ARG remained in the Persian Gulf to provide air support for US activity in the region. The [USS Eisenhower Carrier Strike Group](#), including the cruisers USS Vella Gulf and USS Monterey and the destroyers USS Mitscher, Laboon, Mahan and Thomas Hudner deployed to cover the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf.

The USS Nimitz and USS Theodore Roosevelt Strike Groups (CSG 11 and CSG 9) conducted [dual carrier operations](#) in the South China Sea on February 9, 2021. CSG 11 was transiting through the South China Sea on its way back to its homeport in Bremerton. China's Global Times described these as having more [symbolic and political meaning](#) than military significance, in view of China possessing anti-ship ballistic missiles.

Air Force aircraft from Australia, Japan and the US converged on Andersen Air Force Base, Guam for [Exercise Cope North 2021](#). The exercise, scheduled from February 03-19, 2021, is intended to conduct large force employment and combat air forces training.

USS John S McCain conducted a routine [Taiwan Strait transit](#) on February 4, 2021, the first such transit since President Biden assumed charge. The next day the ship conducted [Freedom of Navigation](#) operations off the Paracel Islands, claimed by China, Taiwan and Vietnam, all of which require either permission or advance notification for military vessels to engage in innocent passage, in contravention of UNCLOS. The operation also challenged China's declaration of straight baselines encompassing the Paracel Islands. [China said](#) it had tracked the US destroyer and warned it off.

USS Rafael Peralta, an Arleigh Burke class destroyer, arrived at its [forward-deployed homeport](#), Yokosuka on February 04, 2021. The ship was till now based in San Diego. [USS Russel](#) conducted a Freedom of Navigation operation in the Spratly Islands on February 17, 2021. [USS Curtis Wilbur](#) conducted a

routine Taiwan Strait transit on February 24, 2021. China [denounced the destroyer's provocation](#) and said it deliberately undermined regional peace and stability.

The US Marine Corps (USMC) is reported to be looking to [create three Marine Littoral Regiments](#) over the coming decade, all based in the Pacific, to maintain a continued deterrent against China. The first of the regiments is expected to become operational in FY 2023.

Three sailors aboard the [USS Theodore Roosevelt](#) tested positive for Covid-19 on February 14, 2021. The sailors, who had not experienced any symptoms, as well as all identified close contacts were isolated on board the ship.



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