

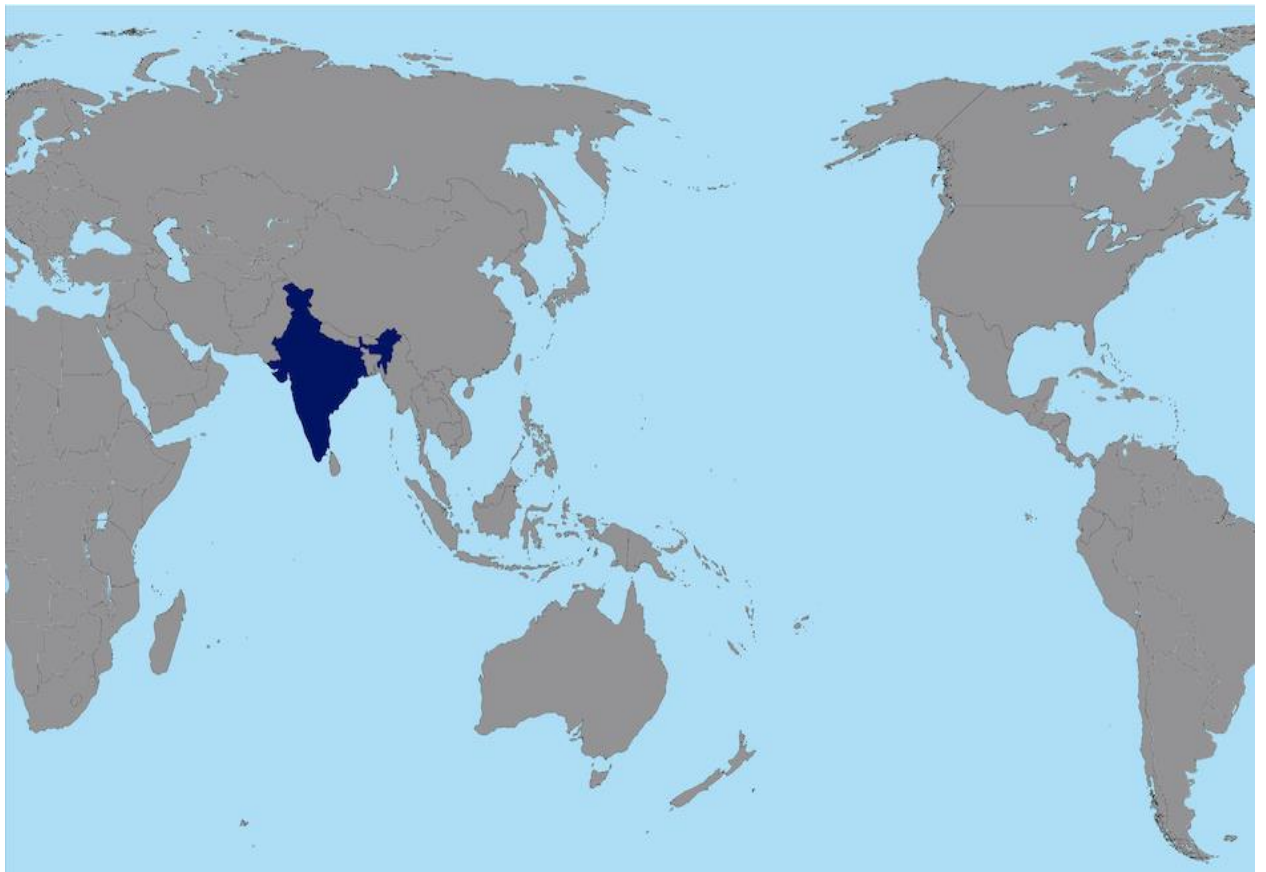


# Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



## DPG INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR JANUARY 2022



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Delhi Policy Group

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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, based on open source reports and publications. Your comments and feedback may be send at [lalit@dpg.org.in](mailto:lalit@dpg.org.in). To subscribe, please [click here](#).

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## DPG INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

January 2022

### Abstract

At the maritime frontline of the pushback against China's revisionism, three alliance-related developments continued the trend of a more robust Japan: the Australia-Japan Summit and the resultant Reciprocal Access Agreement on January 06; the meeting of the Japan-US Security Consultative Committee (2+2) on January 7; and the Japan-US Summit on January 21.

Two other bilateral 2+2 dialogues signalled Europe's increasing interest in implementing their Indo-Pacific country strategies and playing an active part in the region's security. In the first, foreign and defence ministers from France and Japan met virtually to share perspectives and strengthen cooperation on January 20. In the second, foreign and defence ministers from Australia and UK came together on January 21 and released a joint statement setting out the contours of their cooperation across eight pillars. They also established a bilateral cyber and critical technology partnership and concluded an infrastructure investment agreement.

USS Benfold conducted the first Freedom of Navigation Operation (FONOP) of 2022, demonstrating US presence and continued resolve to protest China's excessive maritime claims. While the US was politically preoccupied with Ukraine, the military focus in deterring exploitation of the distractions to create a *fait accompli* in Taiwan was evident from the unprecedented gathering of American forces in the region.

Russia, Iran and China came together for Exercise CHIRU 2022 in the Gulf of Oman. The third iteration of this exercise focused on constabulary operations, but demonstrated the intent to establish a shared security architecture for the region.

The crisis in Myanmar continued, with a visit by Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Sen to the country highlighting divisions within ASEAN. Common ground between the National Unity Government (underground) and the Tatmadaw appears increasingly hard to find, even as Myanmar sinks into an economic and humanitarian crisis.

On the other side of the Indian Ocean, the seizure of a UAE flagged vessel off Hudeidah and a drone strike on UAE's capital Abu Dhabi highlighted the continuing instability in the Arabian Peninsula. This took place as USN presence in the region declined consequent on redeployment of the USS Essex Ready Group to the South China Sea.

As January ended, Australia announced its intention of joining the proceedings initiated by the EU against Chinese coercion and discriminatory trade practices targeting Lithuania at the WTO.

## Japan's Pushback Strengthens

Japan, at the frontline of brewing pushback against China, witnessed three major alliance-related developments this month. First was the Australia Japan Summit and signing of the Reciprocal Access Agreement between Australia and Japan on January 6, 2022<sup>1</sup>. Hours later, the US – Japan Security Consultative Committee (comprising Foreign and Defence Ministers of the two countries) met virtually, leading to a joint statement<sup>2</sup>. And on January 21, President Biden and Prime Minister Kishida came together in a virtual summit<sup>3</sup>.

The 2+2 joint statement and the Summit readout both included ritual mention of the commitment of both countries to the Free and Open Indo-Pacific; recognition of the US-Japan alliance as the cornerstone of regional peace, security and stability; the determination to strengthen joint capabilities to tackle regional security challenges; confirmation that commitments under Article V of the Mutual Defence Treaty covered the Senkaku Islands; support for deeper cooperation between Japan, South Korea and the US; support for ASEAN centrality and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific; and the need to augment security cooperation with Southeast Asian partners. Urgent challenges included geopolitical tensions, COVID-19, (China's) arbitrary and coercive economic policies and the climate crisis. Others were identified as attempts to change the status quo through coercive or predatory means short of armed conflict; North Korea's continued development of nuclear and missile capability; and China's activities in the East and South China Seas and violation of human rights in Xinjiang and Honk Kong. There was expression of concern

<sup>1</sup> For an analysis of this, see Lalit Kapur, "The Australia Japan Summit", <https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/publication/policy-briefs/the-australia-japan-summit.html>

<sup>2</sup> Joint Statement of the US-Japan Security Consultative Committee ("2+2"), <https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-of-the-u-s-japan-security-consultative-committee-22/>

<sup>3</sup> Japan – US Summit Video Teleconference Meeting, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/na/na1/page1e\\_000372.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/na/na1/page1e_000372.html)

at China's efforts to undermine the rules based order and associated political, economic, military and technological challenges. Both sides reviewed progress on their Quad Summit commitments.

A new Special Measures Agreement covering the period 2022 – 2026 was signed<sup>4</sup>. This covers Japan's funding of labour costs for 23,178 workers, the annual cost of utilities, procurement of training equipment and material amounting to 20 billion Yen over the five year period, and funding of approximately \$ 1 billion for annual training relocation costs, including to Alaska. There was commitment to strengthen and reinforce information security and cyber security practices and infrastructure; renewal of commitment to a secure, stable and sustainable space domain; and to joint investments that accelerate innovation and ensure the alliance maintains its technological edge in critical and emerging fields, including artificial intelligence, machine learning, directed energy, quantum computing and counter-hypersonic technology. There was agreement on accelerating bilateral work on force realignment efforts, including consolidation of US facilities in Okinawa and the relocation of approximately 4000 Marine Corps personnel from Okinawa to Guam beginning 2024<sup>5</sup>. The newly confirmed US Ambassador to Japan, Rahm Emanuel, who is yet to take up his appointment, was also present for the meeting.

At the Summit, the big takeaway was President Biden's acceptance of Prime Minister Kishida's invitation to visit Tokyo in late spring and stated intention to hold the second Quad in-person summit at the same time. The two leaders also endorsed the Joint Statement of the Japan – US Security Consultative Committee. Prime Minister Kishida expressed his determination to reinforce Japan's defence capabilities by reformulating the National Security Strategy, the National Defence Programme Guidelines, and the mid-term defence programme, drawing encouragement from President Biden. The leaders launched a ministerial level Japan – US Economic Consultative Committee (an economic 2+2 comprising the US Secretaries of State and Commerce, Japan's Foreign and Industry ministers). PM Kishida explained his "New Form of Capitalism" and welcomed the US Indo-Pacific Economic Framework. The leaders committed to working closely together to deter the Russian aggression in Ukraine.

Despite irritants at the local level (language and culture issues; lack of transparency, accountability and trust between US bases and the local

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<sup>4</sup> Signing of New Special Measures Agreement (SMA), [https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e\\_003077.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_003077.html)

<sup>5</sup> Joint Statement of the US – Japan Security Consultative Committee ("2+2"), Op Cit.

municipalities and prefectures hosting them; differences in pandemic and quarantine facilities between US forces and their hosts; hesitation on the US side to share information relating to, for example, infected US personnel working alongside Japanese personnel, inhibiting contact tracing)<sup>6</sup>, a strong political consensus will ensure that the Japan – US alliance continues to grow. This must be juxtaposed with the recent Australia – Japan Summit resulting in a Reciprocal Access Agreement as well as the increased engagement with US and France. Taken together, they are a strong signal to China of the emerging hard security regional architecture and the gathering momentum of opposition to its revisionism.

The Taiwan issue is critical. In the event of any action by China, Japan's nearby Islands (Yonaguni, for example, is barely 110 Km from the East Coast of Taiwan but is over 550 Km from Okinawa) become exposed. Moreover, any US intervention in the Taiwan Straits will necessitate usage of military elements based in Japan. It could be expected that China would target and neutralize these facilities before trying to seize Taiwan. So as tension builds up across the Taiwan Straits, Japan has voiced its concern and chosen to enhance deterrence aspects, rather than trying to find other alternatives. Reports indicate that the US and Japan are formulating a joint operation plan to deal with a Taiwan contingency. Part of this may include the deployment of seven unmanned MQ-9 Reaper drones and about 100 USAF personnel for maintenance to the JMSDF's Kanoya Air Base in Kyushu, about 1100 Km from Taipei<sup>7</sup>.

Although it is the US desire to solidify Japan – South Korea – US cooperation, political compulsions arising from the comfort women issue, competing claims to the Liancourt Rocks (Dokdo Island), and Japan's decision to release radioactive water from the Fukushima plant inhibit this. South Korea is also unnerved by Japan's increasing military expenditure and proposed revisions to the Constitution, with some considering a militarized Japan a greater threat than China. President Biden's encouragement of Japan's increased military spending and revision to its national defence guidelines will draw similar reaction from Seoul: South Korea had already increased its military spending last year and looks likely to do so again.

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<sup>6</sup> Robert D Eldridge, "Fix structural problems now or face SOFA revision later"  
<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2022/01/19/commentary/japan-commentary/u-s-japan-sofa-agreement/>

<sup>7</sup> Japan Weighs Deploying US spy drones to MSDF base in Kyushu,  
<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2022/01/29/national/japan-us-drones-deploy-nansei-islands/>

There is also dichotomy in the economic outlook of the two countries<sup>8</sup>. Discussion regarding the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework or Kishida's New Form of Capitalism does not hide the fact that the US withdrew from the TPP and displays no intention of joining the CPTPP. China is Japan's largest trading partner. Restrictions by the US on trade with China and counter-restrictions imposed by China impact Japanese companies. The influential business lobby would prefer to continue earning profits from the Chinese market, forcing a difficult political choice on Japan's leaders. Unless Tokyo see congruence on trade and investment policies, however, the dissonance between its security compulsions and economic interests will continue to temper Japan's outlook towards China.



Japan – US Summit pm January 21/22, 2022. Source: Cabinet Public Affairs Office Japan

Expectations from the next Quad Summit included review of the commitment to manufacture a billion vaccine doses and deliver them not just to Southeast Asia but also elsewhere. Considerable progress has been made on infrastructure steps the four partners could take together and these are expected to be announced. A formal announcement on establishment of the Quad Educational Initiative to bring students from partner countries to American universities is also expected. Initiatives have been taken to deal with

<sup>8</sup> Japan needs 'smart' economic security,  
<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2022/01/25/commentary/world-commentary/smart-economic-security/>



countries suffering from debt traps, as also to cooperation in space, maritime domain awareness and fishing<sup>9</sup>.

For India, notwithstanding its strategic partnership with both, there is little benefit in joining the emerging hard security architecture in the Western Pacific. India's focus must remain on the Indian Ocean, and on enhancing trade relations with both. Kishida's and Biden's initiatives in this regard will thus be of considerable interest.

## Euro Pacific Developments

Two high level dialogues highlighted the increasing European turn to the Indo-Pacific during the month. In the first, Japan's Foreign and Defence Ministers, Hayashi Yoshimasa and Kishi Nobuo, met through tele-conference with their French counterparts, Jean-Yves Le Drian and Florence Parly. In the second, Australia's Foreign and Defence Ministers Marise Payne and Peter Dutton met their British counterparts, Elizabeth Truss and Ben Wallace for the Australia UK Ministerial Consultations.

The France – Japan 2 + 2 took place on January 20. The ministers confirmed they would strengthen bilateral security and defence cooperation and would raise their cooperation in the Indo-Pacific to a higher level. They confirmed the importance of enhancing resilience of their respective supply chains and agreed to enhance cooperation in recognizing and sharing information on economic security risks. They reaffirmed their intent to cooperate in cyber and critical and emerging technologies, as well as on addressing safety and security issues in outer space.

In the Indo-Pacific, they agreed to encourage cooperation in support for the peacekeeping operations training centre in Djibouti and towards the realisation of a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific through frameworks such as the Japan-France Comprehensive Maritime Dialogue and the Japan-France Working Group on the Indo-Pacific. They vowed to work more closely together to strengthen involvement of the EU in the Indo-Pacific and reaffirmed their support for the centrality and unity of ASEAN as well as for the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP).

The ministers shared concerns on a variety of regional issues and hot spots, including attempts to unilaterally change the status quo through use of force in the East and South China Seas and in the Taiwan Straits. They expressed

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<sup>9</sup> Background Press Call by Senior Administration Officials on President Biden's Meeting With Prime Minister Kishida of Japan, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/01/21/remarks-by-president-biden-on-increasing-the-supply-of-semiconductors-and-rebuilding-our-supply-chains-2/>

strong concern about the humanitarian situation in Hong Kong and Xinjiang, on North Korea's advancing nuclear and missile development activities, and the situations in Ukraine and Iran. They also discussed events in Afghanistan and Africa and agreed to work closely together towards a successful 10<sup>th</sup> NPT Review Conference.

The Australia UK Ministerial Meeting took place on January 21 in the 2+2 format and resulted in the AUKMIN 2022 Joint Statement<sup>10</sup>. Separately, the two foreign ministers agreed on a cyber and critical technology partnership<sup>11</sup> and an infrastructure investment agreement<sup>12</sup>.

The joint statement comprised cooperation across eight pillars: progressing the bilateral strategic partnership, deepening strategic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, supporting regional stability through a positive vision and posture, defending international rules and norms and liberal democratic values, strengthening resilience at home and overseas, taking meaningful action to counter climate change, modernizing and strengthening the multilateral system, and strengthening defence and deterrence and countering malign threats. The joint statement provides a report card of bilateral activities, commitments and outlook across these pillars, including support by UK and Australia towards India's 'Infrastructure for Resilience Island States (IRIS)' initiative and the UK's support for Australia's work with the Quad. They agreed to a new Strategic Infrastructure and Development Dialogue to support close collaboration on infrastructure investments in the Indo-Pacific. Australia committed to supporting the UK's deployment of HMS Spey and Tamar to the region. Both committed to joint activity to build resilience to disinformation in the Indo-Pacific in close partnership with like-minded countries. They agreed to improve cooperation in cyber and cyber training through further exchanges of specialist cyber personnel and participation in each other's cyber exercises. They also agreed to convene a fourth Australia-UK Defence Industry Dialogue and to undertake a series of tabletop exercises testing and improving each government's capacity to respond to critical issues in the Indo-Pacific.

The cyber and critical technology partnership acknowledges the significant impact of both on societies, invokes the commitment to work with trusted partners to challenge malign actors who use technology to undermine freedom

<sup>10</sup> AUKMIN 2022 Joint Statement, <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/marise-payne/media-release/aukmin-2022-joint-statement>

<sup>11</sup> Statement on the UK-Australia Cyber and Critical Technology Partnership, <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/marise-payne/media-release/statement-uk-australia-cyber-and-critical-technology-partnership>

<sup>12</sup> UK and Australia team up to encourage clean, reliable and transparent infrastructure investment partnership in the Indo-Pacific, <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/marise-payne/media-release/uk-and-australia-team-encourage-clean-reliable-and-transparent-infrastructure-investment-indo-pacific>



and democracy, and sets out the goal of technology being used to uphold and protect liberal democratic values and to benefit their societies, economies and national security. It commits the two nations to intensifying cooperation around four pillars: tackling malign actors; promoting their vision for technology internationally, strengthening global technology supply chains; and harnessing technology to solve global challenges. The first initiatives under this partnership are increasing deterrence by raising the costs for hostile state activity in cyberspace including coordination of respective cyber sanctions regimes; strengthening the resilience and response capabilities of Indo-Pacific countries to malicious cyber activity through joint capacity building; developing an action plan on global standards setting across critical technologies; and advancing the women in cyber agenda.

The infrastructure investment partnership is intended to foster closer cooperation to offer clean, reliable and transparent finance for investment in infrastructure that meets the needs and priorities of Indo-Pacific partners. It includes a new 'Strategic Infrastructure and Development Dialogue' and commits the US to mobilize up to £ 8 billion of UK-backed financing per year by 2025. This includes relaunch of the UK Development Finance Institution British International Investment, which is to be expanded in the Indo-Pacific through injection of new capital and a new investment strategy to finance projects from ports to renewable energy and digital sectors.

Taken together, the two dialogues are indicative of greater European interest in Indo-Pacific security and willingness to call out China for its coercive actions, including in the East and South China Seas, Taiwan Straits, Hong Kong and Xinjiang. The interest extends to calling out China's Western Pacific proxy in North Korea, but not to the Indian Ocean proxy, Pakistan. Geographical and capacity constraints will limit the extent that France and UK can do in the maritime domain to occasional symbolic deployments, but much more is possible in the Cyber domain, infrastructure financing, setting the rules for critical emerging technologies, and combating common challenges like the Covid-19 pandemic and climate change, as well as in international organisations. It remains to be seen whether China reads the signals and moderates its behaviour, or discounts them as mere rhetoric and continues with its coercive revisionism.

Two statements by the Australian and UK ministers are of interest. First is their commitment of support for a rules-based multilateral trading system, with the WTO at its core. Australia even announced its intention to include itself in the

WTO proceedings initiated by the EU against China regarding discriminatory trade practices imposed on Lithuania<sup>13</sup>.

The Trump administration's scepticism about the WTO and its block on the filling of vacancies on its appellate body, which posed impediments to unilateral imposition of countervailing and anti-dumping measures by the US, had crippled its functioning. Katherine Tai, the current US trade representative, had affirmed the Biden administration's commitment to supporting the WTO, but sought reforms to restore the trade body's relevance to working people. The WTO had on January 26 authorised China to suspend concessions or other obligations up to \$ 645.121 million per annum against the US<sup>14</sup>. How this will impact the future actions of the US, and consequentially Australia and the UK, remains to be seen.

The second is their commitment to cooperate on counterterrorism and addressing evolving challenges, including in Afghanistan, presented by terrorism and violent extremism in all its forms. There is a dichotomy between this commitment and the continued assistance of both countries to Pakistan.



Australia's Defence Minister Peter Dutton and Foreign Minister Marise Payne with UK Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs Elizabeth Truss and Secretary of State for Defence Ben Wallace at the Admiralty House, Sydney on January 21, 2022. Source: UK FCO.

<sup>13</sup> Initiation of WTO proceedings by the European Union against China, <https://www.trademinister.gov.au/minister/dan-tehan/media-release/initiation-wto-proceedings-european-union-against-china>

<sup>14</sup> WTO's WT/DS437/ARB dated, January 26, 2022, Decision by the Arbitrator: United States – countervailing duty measures on certain products from China, [https://www.wto.org/english/tratop\\_e/dispu\\_e/437arb\\_e.pdf](https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/dispu_e/437arb_e.pdf)

## The USS Benfold FONOP

Just over a week after the US State Department released its Limits of the Seas Study on the South China Sea, USS Benfold (DDG 65) carried out the first Freedom of Navigation Operation (FONOP) of 2022 on January 20<sup>15</sup>. The FONOP, conducted in the vicinity of the Paracel Islands (described as Xisha Qundao by the People's Republic of China) had two UNCLOS-related objectives. First, it challenged China's 1996 claim of its right to draw straight baselines enclosing the entire Paracel group of islands and claiming the entire region as China's territorial waters. The Paracel group does not fulfil the conditions prescribed by UNCLOS for the drawing of straight baselines. China's actions, therefore, contravene UNCLOS. Second, islands of the group are claimed by the PRC, Vietnam and Taiwan, all of which require permission or advance notification before military vessels conduct an innocent passage through the region. This requirement is not in compliance with UNCLOS: Article 24 specifically prohibits coastal states from imposing requirements on foreign ships which have the practical effect of denying or impairing the right of innocent passage. The FONOP challenged the requirement imposed by the PRC, Vietnam and Taiwan.

China was predictably incensed. Its military spokesperson Senior Colonel Wu Qian stated that USS Benfold had "trespassed into China's territorial waters of the Xisha Islands without the Chinese government's permission"<sup>16</sup>. He reiterated that the Xisha Islands were China's inherent territory and China's 1996 law on the territorial sea and contiguous zones contained clear stipulations on the entry of foreign warships into China's territorial waters. USS Benfold's action was thus not a FONOP, but "a serious provocation that violates China's sovereignty and endangers peace and stability in the South China Sea"<sup>17</sup>. He urged the US side to "correctly understand the situation and immediately stop such provocative actions"<sup>18</sup>. In response, the US 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet described the PRC statement about USS Benfold's actions as false. It highlighted that the FONOP was conducted entirely in accordance with international law. It went on to describe the PRC's statement as misrepresenting "lawful US maritime operations and assert(ing) its excessive and illegitimate maritime claims at the expense of its Southeast Asian

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<sup>15</sup> 7th Fleet Destroyer Conducts Freedom of Navigation Operation in the South China Sea, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/2906028/7th-fleet-destroyer-conducts-freedom-of-navigation-operation-in-south-china-sea/>

<sup>16</sup> MND spokesperson slams US destroyer's entering Chinese waters, [http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2022-01/20/content\\_4903346.htm](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2022-01/20/content_4903346.htm)

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

neighbours in the South China Sea". It added, "Nothing PRC says otherwise will deter us"<sup>19</sup>.

FONOPs by the USN have been pretty regular during 2021. At least six dedicated FONOPs have been conducted in the South China Sea during the year, including two by USS Benfold. Apart from these, USN ships exercised in the South China Sea numerous times. Both the USN rationale for these operations and China's response have become predictable, reminiscent at times of the "strategic restraint" exhibited in South Asia. So what is it that the FONOPs achieve?

First and foremost, they demonstrate both US presence and the continuing resolve to protest China's excessive maritime claims. The nature of these patently illegal claims has been examined separately<sup>20</sup>. This demonstrates to Southeast Asian nations, including claimant states in the South China Sea, that they do have a choice other than succumbing to China's asymmetric power and buying peace irrespective of the cost. The defeatism that was evident when the Obama administration appeared to have effectively conceded the Scarborough Shoal to China in 2021, leading to the Filipino ambassador to the US saying "We were shortchanged"<sup>21</sup> has changed. Revocation of the decision to suspend the Visiting Forces Agreement and the decision to go ahead with the Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement, as well as official completion of the Cesar Basa Air Base north of Manila are indicators of the Philippines returning to the US side.

By continuing with FONOPs despite China's repeated threats and protest and reiterating that it will not be deterred, the US is showing up the shallowness of China's power, as well as the lack of confidence on the part of its leadership. China is time and again forced to hide behind a façade of empty threats while exercising "strategic restraint", something that other claimant nations will not have failed to note. US presence also enables littoral nations to protest China's excessive maritime claims, as has been done by Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam. A related impact could be in enabling resistance to

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<sup>19</sup> 7th Fleet Destroyer Conducts Freedom of Navigation Operation in the South China Sea, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/2906028/7th-fleet-destroyer-conducts-freedom-of-navigation-operation-in-south-china-sea/>

<sup>20</sup> Lalit Kapur, "The US State Department's "Limits of the Seas Study" on China's Claims in the South China Sea", <https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/publication/policy-briefs/the-us-state-departments-limits-of-the-seas-study-on-chinas-claims-in-the-south-china-sea.html>

<sup>21</sup> Jim Gomes, "Philippine Diplomat to China: Don't turn shoal into island", April 12, 2016, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2016/04/12/1572446/philippine-diplomat-china-dont-turn-shoal-island>

Chinese pressure to impose a Code of Conduct that would effectively endorse China's illegal claims.

Finally, FONOPs contribute towards preventing incremental gains for China through the establishment of customary behaviour and exercise of jurisdiction over most of the South China Sea. A comprehensive US strategy towards China is still work in progress, but some of the military contours are becoming visible. These include: -

- The Pacific Deterrence Initiative to bolster US defences against a Pearl Harbour type of Chinese attack and diversify US bases.
- Strengthening of the US-Japan-Australia trilateral and the Australia-Japan bilateral, as is evident from the just concluded Reciprocal Access Agreement.
- The incorporation of Britain into the scheme (through AUKUS and the recent exchanges between the UK and Japan) and the intent to involve NATO and other European countries in the region.
- The continued presence of substantial USN forces in the Western Pacific. At the time of writing, these include three Carrier Strike Groups (the Ronald Reagan, Carl Vinson and Abraham Lincoln Strike Groups) as well as the USS America Expeditionary Strike Group and the USS Essex Amphibious Ready Group.

These actions may not resolve current problems, but will enable holding the line till a comprehensive strategy is evolved and tested.



Ships of the USS Essex ARG and USS Carl Vinson CSG in the South China Sea on January 13, 2022. Source: Indo-Pacific Command

## The Dragon, The Bear and the Persian Cat's Tango

The third maritime exercise between ships of the Chinese, Iranian and Russian navies took place in the Gulf of Oman from January 18-22, 2022<sup>22</sup>. Exercise CHIRU-2022 involved 15 ships: the destroyer Urumqi and the logistic support vessel Taihu from the PLA (N); the cruiser Varyag, destroyer Admiral Tributs and tanker Boris Butoma from Russia's Pacific Fleet, and 11 assorted vessels from Iran's Navy and Revolutionary Guards.

Earlier, the Russian flotilla had sailed from Vladivostok, over 11000 Km away, in December 2021, heading for a maritime rendezvous with ships of Russia's Baltic and North Sea Fleets in the Eastern Mediterranean in February 2022. It had called at Kochi en route and exercised with India's Western Fleet ships in the Arabian Sea thereafter<sup>23</sup>. The ability of two vintage ships, both more than 32 years old<sup>24</sup>, to undertake such a long voyage towards the end of their service life speaks of the maintenance standards of Russian Navy. Sustaining a presence in the Indian Ocean would, however, be difficult for Russia, more so as the support infrastructure at its recently acquired base in Port Sudan has yet to be built.

In contrast, China has sustained a continuous presence in the Horn of Africa, ostensibly for an anti-piracy mission, for over a decade. Its ships are relatively new (Urumqi, for example, was commissioned in 2018), and the base in Djibouti, together with access to a large number of ports in the region, enables prolonged presence operations. The exercise indicates the intent to expand its area of operations to cover the Gulf of Oman and the Straits of Hormuz, a crucial maritime waterway. This will generate concern amongst strategic planners responsible for regional security.

The exercise content was reported to be fairly basic, including gun firing, joint manoeuvres, search and rescue operations and Vessel Boarding Search and Seizure (VBSS) operations. Helicopters and special units from Iran's Navy also participated in the VBSS operation. The exercise concept, however, indicates a desire on the part of the countries involved towards eliminating dependence on Western navies (which otherwise provide constabulary capabilities in the region) and developing independent (and competing) capabilities. Such exercises enable the countries concerned to familiarize themselves with each

<sup>22</sup> Ships of Russia, Iran and China have worked out the organization of rescue at sea and countering piracy during the CHIRI-2022 exercise in the Arabian Sea,

<https://eng.mil.ru/en/structure/forces/navy/news/more.htm?id=12404625@egNews>

<sup>23</sup> Indian Navy PASSEX with the Russian Navy, <https://indiannavy.nic.in/content/indian-navy-passex-russian-navy>

<sup>24</sup> Varyag was commissioned in 1989, while Admiral Tributs was commissioned in 1985.



other as well as with the region, develop interoperability, show the flag and provide the region a competing regional security mechanism. That this is the third exercise by the three countries in the Gulf of Oman indicates moves towards consolidation of the partnership.

Iran's Foreign Minister, Hossein Amirabdollahian, had visited Beijing during the preceding week<sup>25</sup>, reportedly to discuss the 25-year deal between China and Iran. Iran is presently an observer in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO); the process of giving it full member status started in September 2021. The exercise coincided with the visit of Iran's President, Ebrahim Raisi, to Moscow<sup>26</sup>. It thus indicated the emergence of a new continental China – Iran – Russia axis, which could conceivably expand to include Pakistan at a future date.



Ships from the Chinese, Iranian and Russian Navies exercise in the Gulf of Oman on January 22, 2022. Source: Global Times

## Pacifying Myanmar

A year after the Myanmar army ended a five-year old power-sharing experiment with Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD), arrested senior NLD leaders and declared a state of emergency, the domestic backlash it sparked continues even as a pandemic-induced humanitarian and economic disaster unfolds in the nation. The World Bank says economic output has contracted by 18% in the year ended September 2021 due to the

<sup>25</sup> China meeting Gulf, Iran Turkey foreign ministers in quick order, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/china-meeting-gulf-iran-turkey-foreign-ministers-quick-order-2022-01-11/>

<sup>26</sup> A New Chapter for Iran and Russia, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/01/21/iran-russia-relations-raisi-putin/>

surging pandemic and clashes with the military<sup>27</sup>. These clashes have resulted in the death of over 1400 civilians, while the number arrested is around 10,000. The Army too has bled, with 1300 soldiers killed and 463 injured in clashes in October 2021<sup>28</sup>.

The 2020 elections saw the NLD win 396 seats in the two houses of parliament (166 seats of the total 664 seats are reserved for military appointees). The Army backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) won only 33 seats, leading to allegations of widespread voter fraud. These were rejected by the national election commission due to lack of evidence. The Army, however, sought to delay seating the new parliament till the election results could be reviewed. When this demand was not agreed to, the Army seized power, generating widespread international condemnation.

A number of reasons have been adduced for the Army's actions, notwithstanding the constitutional safeguards that effectively give it a veto power over the civilian government's actions. These range from fears about the NLD's symbolic moves to reform the constitution (and thus marginalize the Army) to Senior General Min Aung Hlaing's political ambitions and desire to extend his tenure. The situation General Hlaing seeks is similar to that Pakistan, where a government propped up by the Army rules the country. The National Unity Government, comprising elected lawmakers who were deposed in the coup, has established a government in exile, launched a defensive war against the military junta and designated it as a terrorist organisation.

Predictably, international response has been shaped not by principles, but the priority attached by the responder to different regional objectives. On the one side are Western nations, who have put their complete weight behind the National Unity Government and isolating the military. For them, the priority is return to democracy; alleviating the human suffering Myanmar is experiencing counts for less. Double standards are evident from the fact that these countries are happy to find ways to work with army-ruled Pakistan or terrorist-ruled Afghanistan for geopolitical reasons, but find a military-ruled Myanmar unacceptable. On the other hand are Myanmar's neighbours and those with a substantial people-to-people, economic and geopolitical stake in the country, including India, Japan, ASEAN and China, who prioritise alleviating suffering and finding a workable solution to the crisis.

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<sup>27</sup> World Bank Global Economic Prospects, January 2022, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/36519/9781464817601.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> "Myanmar Junta Loses 1,300 Soldiers Killed Over Last Month: NUG", November 11, 2021, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-junta-loses-1300-soldiers-killed-over-last-month-nug.html>

As a neighbour, Myanmar is critical for India. First, it abuts India's under-developed north east. It is vital for India's efforts to enhance connectivity with these otherwise isolated states (through, for example, the Kaladan multi-modal transport project) as well as to build connect overland with ASEAN, through the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway. Second, is the objective of denying insurgent groups operating in Nagaland and Manipur shelter across the border; this cannot be done without Myanmar's cooperation. Third, it is necessary to balance China's influence in Myanmar. It may be recalled that it was the military junta's discomfort with China's domination that led it into opening up to India, and indeed giving democracy a chance. Thus, subordinating these geopolitical considerations over returning Myanmar to a fledgling democracy does not appear a wise solution.

India thus must continue its outreach to both sides in Myanmar, as was evidenced by Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla's visit in December 2021<sup>29</sup>. The Foreign Secretary emphasised return to democracy, release of detainees and prisoners, resolution of issues through dialogue, cessation of violence, and humanitarian support for people of Myanmar. He handed over one million doses of vaccines to Myanmar's Red Cross and announced a grant of 10,000 tons of rice and wheat to Myanmar. He was, however, not permitted to meet Aung San Suu Kyi.

India has rightly chosen to let ASEAN take the lead in handling the Myanmar crisis, while preserving its own bilateral linkages. Following the coup, Brunei-led ASEAN called a special meeting, attended by Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, in which a five point consensus was arrived at. The consensus encompassed immediate cessation of violence in Myanmar; constructive dialogue among all parties concerned to arrive at a peaceful solution in the interests of the people; mediation to be facilitated by an envoy of ASEAN's chair; the provision of humanitarian assistance by ASEAN; and a visit by the special envoy to Myanmar to meet all parties concerned. However, the visit by the then ASEAN special envoy turned out to be a non-starter as permission was not accorded for him to meet State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi.

Myanmar's State Administration Council declared a ceasefire and issued its own five point roadmap towards fresh elections<sup>30</sup>. This sought reconstitution of Myanmar's Union Election Commission; effective management of COVID-

<sup>29</sup> Visit of Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla to Myanmar, December 22-23, 2021, <https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/34723/Visit+of+Foreign+Secretary+Shri+Harsh+Vardhan+Shringla+to+Myanmar+December+2223+2021>

<sup>30</sup> Five Point Road Map of the State Administration Council, 8 August 2021, <https://cdn.myanmarseo.com/file/client-cdn/2021/08/8-8-20211.pdf>

19; actions for economic recovery; emphasis on achieving enduring peace for the nation in line with the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement; and finally, after achieving the objectives of the state of emergency, fresh elections would be held in line with the 2008 constitution and power transferred to the winning party. The gulf between the ASEAN plan and the stated objectives of the military junta resulted in Myanmar's effective suspension from ASEAN and the absence of its representatives at the ASEAN and associated summits in 2021.

At the end of the October ASEAN Summit, Cambodia took over chairmanship of the Association. Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Sen, now the ASEAN Chair, named Prak Sokhonn, his Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, as ASEAN's new special envoy for Myanmar<sup>31</sup>. Reports indicate that he had said he would eschew the hard line that saw Myanmar excluded from the October Summit<sup>32</sup>. He then decided to visit Myanmar<sup>33</sup>, thus becoming the first Head of Government to do so after the coup. The visit itself took place on 07-08 January, 2022<sup>34</sup>. The Joint Press Release indicates that Senior General Min Aung Hlaing extended the ceasefire till the end of 2022. He urged all parties to end acts of violence and exercise restraint, a move that was supported by Prime Minister Hun Sen. He also invited the ASEAN special representative to join the ceasefire talks. Other aspects discussed were limited to setting up facilities for COVID-19 vaccinations and provision of humanitarian assistance to Myanmar's citizens. Hun Sen was, however, not allowed to meet Aung San Suu Kyi, who has since been sentenced to a further four years in prison<sup>35</sup>, in addition to a four-year sentence awarded earlier.

Indonesia's President was quick to respond. In a telephonic conversation with PM Hun Sen, he conveyed that ASEAN's approach towards Myanmar should be based on the five-point consensus, which should not be linked to the five-point roadmap proposed by Myanmar's State Administration Council. He conveyed

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/indonesian/hun-sen-asean-envoy-12152021195904.html>

<sup>32</sup> <https://thediplomat.com/2021/12/cambodian-pm-nominates-top-diplomat-as-asean-envoy-on-myanmar/>

<sup>33</sup> Samdecch Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo HUN SEN Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia, will lead a high delegation to visit the Republic of the Union of Myanmar from 07 to 08 January 2022, <https://www.mfaic.gov.kh/posts/2022-01-05-Press-Release-Samdech-Akka-Moha-Sena-Padei-Techo-HUN-SEN--Prime-Minister-of-the-Kingdom-of-Cambodia--will-lead-a-h-15-09-43>

<sup>34</sup> Joint Press Release On the Visit of Samdecch Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo HUN SEN Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia to the Republic of the Union of Myanmar 07-08 January 2022, [https://www.mfaic.gov.kh/files/uploads/TSRQN2KFYUHS/JOINT\\_PRESS\\_RELEASE\\_ENG\\_o\\_n\\_the\\_Visit\\_of\\_STPM\\_to\\_Myanmar\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.mfaic.gov.kh/files/uploads/TSRQN2KFYUHS/JOINT_PRESS_RELEASE_ENG_o_n_the_Visit_of_STPM_to_Myanmar_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> Aung San Suu Kyi Sentenced to Four Years in Prison, January 10, 2022, <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/01/10/asia/suu-kyi-conviction-walkie-talkies-intl-hnk/index.html>

that the Myanmar military must provide access for the ASEAN Chair's Special Envoy to immediately communicate with all parties in Myanmar. He also said that as long as there was no significant progress on implementation of the Five Point Consensus, ASEAN should maintain the decision that Myanmar's representation at ASEAN meetings be at the non-political level<sup>36</sup>.

On the one hand, the Hun Sen visit highlights the lack of continuity in ASEAN actions, which could be viewed as a shortcoming. The de facto acceptance of Gen Hlaing's demand to reconstitute the election commission is bound to be divisive. On the other, it indicates divisions within ASEAN, as brought out by Indonesia's response. Whether Cambodia can continue with this approach will become evident if and when Myanmar is allowed to attend forthcoming ASEAN summits, including the one between ASEAN leaders and US President Joe Biden. Meanwhile, Japan's Minister of Foreign Affairs "welcomed Cambodia's active engagement as ASEAN Chair on the situation in Myanmar"<sup>37</sup>, joining India as a US ally/partner that has adopted a different approach to dealing with the situation.

A solution that returns peace and stability to Myanmar will have to find common ground between Tatmadaw and Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD. India's approach (and that of Cambodia) of leveraging links, providing succour and building goodwill, and convincing the junta that it is in their interests to move ahead through dialogue appears more promising than the dogmatic Western approach of isolation and sanctions. Wide experience, including with North Korea, Yemen, Iran and others has indicated that external powers cannot impose their will through economic sanctions, particularly as China will exploit the situation to strengthen its own position. The US and its western allies should understand that their actions are pushing Myanmar into China's arms, and should temper their statements and let regional nations take the lead in finding solutions.

Given the multiple conflicts that demand attention of the world's big powers (China's revisionism in the South and East China Seas, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Eastern Ladakh etc.; the Ukraine situation, Afghanistan, Yemen and the conflict in the Horn of Africa), there is a real risk of Myanmar being forgotten beyond the occasional symbolic statement. That would be a severe setback for

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<sup>36</sup> Indonesian President Reaffirms Importance of Swift Implementation of ASEAN Five-Point Consensus During Talks with PM Hun Sen, Januar 22, 2022, <https://kemlu.go.id/portal/en/read/3361/berita/indonesian-president-reaffirms-importance-of-swift-implementation-of-asean-five-point-consensus-during-talks-with-pm-hun-sen>

<sup>37</sup> Japan-Cambodia Foreign Ministers' Telephone Talk, January 11, 2022, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press1e\\_000242.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press1e_000242.html)

Myanmar's people and steps towards regional integration. It is time for India to redouble its efforts to find a lasting solution, one that bridges the gap between the two sides.



Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen meets Myanmar's General Min Aung Hlaing at Naypyidaw on January 7, 2022. Source: Prime Minister of Cambodia

## The January 2022 Snapshot

The UAE flagged ship *Rwabee* was seized by Houthi rebels of Hodeidah on January 2, 2022. Seven of the 11 crew on board were from India<sup>38</sup>. The Saudi led Coalition to Restore Legitimacy in Yemen said the ship was carrying medical supplies and described the Houthi act as 'piracy and hijacking'<sup>39</sup>. The UN Security Council unanimously condemned seizure of the vessel and demanded the immediate release of the vessel and its crew on January 14<sup>40</sup>. The Houthis, however, rejected the UN demand, saying that the vessel was

<sup>38</sup> Official spokesperson's response to media queries on Indian sailors on the UAE flagged ship *Rwabee* seized by the Houthis, [http://mea.gov.in/response-to-queries.htm?dtl/34750/Official\\_Spokespersons\\_response\\_to\\_media\\_queries\\_on\\_Indian\\_sailors\\_on\\_the\\_UAE\\_flagged\\_ship\\_Rwabee\\_seized\\_by\\_the\\_Houthis](http://mea.gov.in/response-to-queries.htm?dtl/34750/Official_Spokespersons_response_to_media_queries_on_Indian_sailors_on_the_UAE_flagged_ship_Rwabee_seized_by_the_Houthis)

<sup>39</sup> Piracy and Armed Hijacking of Cargo Ship "Rwabee" by Terrorist Houthi Militia: Joint Forces Command of the Coalition, <https://english.ajel.sa/news/piracy-and-armed-hijacking-of-cargo-ship-rwabee-by-terrorist-houthi-militia-joint-forces-command-of-the-coalition>

<sup>40</sup> Security Council Press Statement on Yemen, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2022/sc14765.doc.htm>

carrying military equipment for extremists<sup>41</sup>. Efforts to secure the release of the ship and her crew were continuing at the time of writing.

Three people (two Indians and a Pakistani) were killed<sup>42</sup> when drone struck three petroleum tankers in the heart of Abu Dhabi, UAE's capital, on January 17, 2022. Six others were injured. Yemen's Houthis claimed responsibility for the attack and demonstrated their ability to conduct long range strikes. In response, Saudi Arabian and aircraft struck Sana'a, Yemen's capital, killing 12 people. In another incident, UAE claimed to have shot down a ballistic missile fired at Abu Dhabi by Yemen's Houthi rebels; just hours after Israel's President began a historic visit to the country on January 30<sup>43</sup>. With Yemen's civil war exacerbated by the geopolitical interests of its regional neighbours entering its eighth year, there is little sign of a viable political solution that could overcome resistance to change, stabilise the Southern part of the Arabian Peninsula and alleviate what has been described as the worst humanitarian crisis in the world.

Australia and Japan met virtually at the summit level and signed a landmark Reciprocal Access Agreement on January 6, 2022<sup>44</sup>.

The US State Department released its "Limits of the Seas Study" on China's excessive claims in the South China Sea on January 12, 2022. The study refutes China's revised claims following the ruling of the arbitration tribunal on July 12, 2016<sup>45</sup>.

Even as the world's political focus shifted to Ukraine, US military focus remained in the Western Pacific. At the time of writing, three US Carrier Strike Groups were present in the Western Pacific: USS Ronald Reagan, undergoing winter maintenance at Yokosuka, USS Carl Vinson and USS Abraham Lincoln. The last of these was commanded by a lady officer – Capt. Amy Bauernschmidt,

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<sup>41</sup> Yemen's Houthis reject UN plea to release UAE-flagged vessel, <https://www.trtworld.com/middle-east/yemen-s-houthis-reject-un-plea-to-release-uae-flagged-vessel-53683>

<sup>42</sup> A drone attack in Abu Dhabi could mark a dangerous turning point for the Middle East, <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/01/18/middleeast/uae-abu-dhabi-houthi-yemen-explainer-intl/index.html>

<sup>43</sup> UAE shoots down missile fired by Yemen's Houthis during Israeli visit, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-a-e-shoots-down-missile-fired-by-yemens-houthis-during-israeli-visit-11643586459>

<sup>44</sup> For an analysis of this summit and the agreement, see Lalit Kapur, "The Australia-Japan Summit" <https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/publication/policy-briefs/the-australia-japan-summit.html>

<sup>45</sup> For an analysis, see Lalit Kapur, "The US State Department's "Limits of the Seas Study" on China's Claims in the South China Sea, <https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/publication/policy-briefs/the-us-state-departments-limits-of-the-seas-study-on-chinas-claims-in-the-south-china-sea.html>

the first woman to command a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier<sup>46</sup>. Other US forces in the region included the USS America Expeditionary Strike Group and the USS Essex Amphibious Ready Group, which had redeployed from the Gulf. In contrast, one aircraft carrier, the USS Harry S Truman, was in the Eastern Mediterranean, placed under NATO Command for Exercise Neptune Strike, due to run till February 4, 2022<sup>47</sup>. The media crescendo about Ukraine is eerily reminiscent of the build-up to the US intervention in Iraq to disarm that country from WMD, which were never found.

Exercise Sea Dragon<sup>48</sup>, a multilateral ASW exercise involving maritime patrol aircraft and aircrew from the US, Australia, Canada, India, Japan and ROK, was conducted from 02-20 January, 2020<sup>49</sup>. The exercise, an annual multi-national event, is conducted at Andersen Air Force Base, Guam and includes 20 hours of in-flight training involving tracking simulated targets and culminating in tracking a live USN submarine. A P-8I aircraft from the Indian Navy participated. A Chinese report observed that the exercise was intended to “showcase air-based anti-submarine strengths of the US and its allies and partners”, improve coordination and increase US arms sales, particularly P-8 aircraft, overseas<sup>50</sup>.

A Joint Statement by the leaders of the P-5 reaffirmed that “nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought”, and that nuclear weapons “should serve defensive purposes, deter aggression, and prevent war”<sup>51</sup>. The joint statement was intended as a precursor for the NPT Review Conference scheduled 04-28 January. The Conference has, however, been postponed on account of COVID-19 and has tentatively been rescheduled for August 2022.

<sup>46</sup> <https://news.usni.org/2022/01/03/abraham-lincoln-carrier-strike-group-deploys-with-marine-f-35c-squadron#more-90986>

<sup>47</sup> [https://twitter.com/jensstoltenberg/status/1484598921884282884?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw](https://twitter.com/jensstoltenberg/status/1484598921884282884?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw), welcoming USS Harry S Truman being placed under NATO Command.

<sup>48</sup> Six Indo-Pacific nations begin Exercise Sea Dragon, <https://www.c7f.navy.mil/Media/News/Display/Article/2889839/six-indo-pacific-nations-begin-exercise-sea-dragon/>

<sup>49</sup> Multilateral anti-submarine warfare exercise “Sea Dragon 2022”, <https://www.mod.go.jp/msdf/en/release/202201/20220105.pdf>

<sup>50</sup> US plan to scale up Sea Dragon exercise shows multiple strategic intentions, [http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2022-01/12/content\\_10122809.htm](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2022-01/12/content_10122809.htm)

<sup>51</sup> Joint Statement of the Five Nuclear-weapon States on Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arms Races, January 3, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/01/03/p5-statement-on-preventing-nuclear-war-and-avoiding-arms-races/>



IAC-1 Vikrant sailed for its third sea trial, intended to check the performance of sensors and of the ship under different conditions on January 9. Reports indicate that the ship remains on track for commissioning in August this year<sup>52</sup>.

Ships of the Indian Navy's Eastern Fleet and the Japan Maritime Self Defense Force conducted a maritime partnership exercise in the Bay of Bengal on January 13, 2022<sup>53</sup>. A day later, ships from India's Western Fleet exercised with the Russian Navy in the Arabian Sea<sup>54</sup>.



INS Kochi Exercises with RFS Admiral Tributs in the Arabian Sea on January 14, 2022.  
Source: Indian Navy

A series of flight tests of ballistic and cruise missiles by North Korea during the month, with the seventh on January 30, indicated a fresh push by Kim Jong-Un to demonstrate its advanced capability and raising tensions in the region<sup>55</sup>. Two of the tests were reported to be manoeuvrable hypersonic missiles. The US condemned the tests and called on the DPRK to "refrain from further

<sup>52</sup> IAC Vikrant sets sail for next set of sea trials, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1788782>

<sup>53</sup> Maritime Partnership Exercise Between Ships of the Indian Navy and Japan Maritime Self Defense Force, <https://indiannavy.nic.in/content/maritime-partnership-exercise-between-ships-indian-navy-and-jmsdf>

<sup>54</sup> Indian Navy PASSEX with the Russian Navy, <https://indiannavy.nic.in/content/indian-navy-passex-russian-navy>

<sup>55</sup> North Korea's Latest Missile Test Appears to be its Boldest in Years, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/29/world/asia/north-korea-missile-test.html>

destabilising acts". It assessed that the test did not pose an immediate threat to US personnel or territory or that of its allies and reiterated the ironclad commitment to the defence of ROK and Japan<sup>56</sup>.

Australia stated its intention of joining the EU in the proceedings it has raised against China regarding discriminatory trade practices imposed on Lithuania in the WTO<sup>57</sup>. It a victim of China's economic coercion and discriminatory and restrictive trade practices, Australia reiterated its commitment to upholding and supporting the multilateral trading system with the WTO at its core.

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<sup>56</sup> US INDOPACOM Statement on DPRK Missile Launch, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/2917020/usindopacom-statement-on-dprk-missile-launch/>

<sup>57</sup> Initiation of WTO proceedings by the European Union against China, <https://www.trademinister.gov.au/minister/dan-tehan/media-release/initiation-wto-proceedings-european-union-against-china>



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