

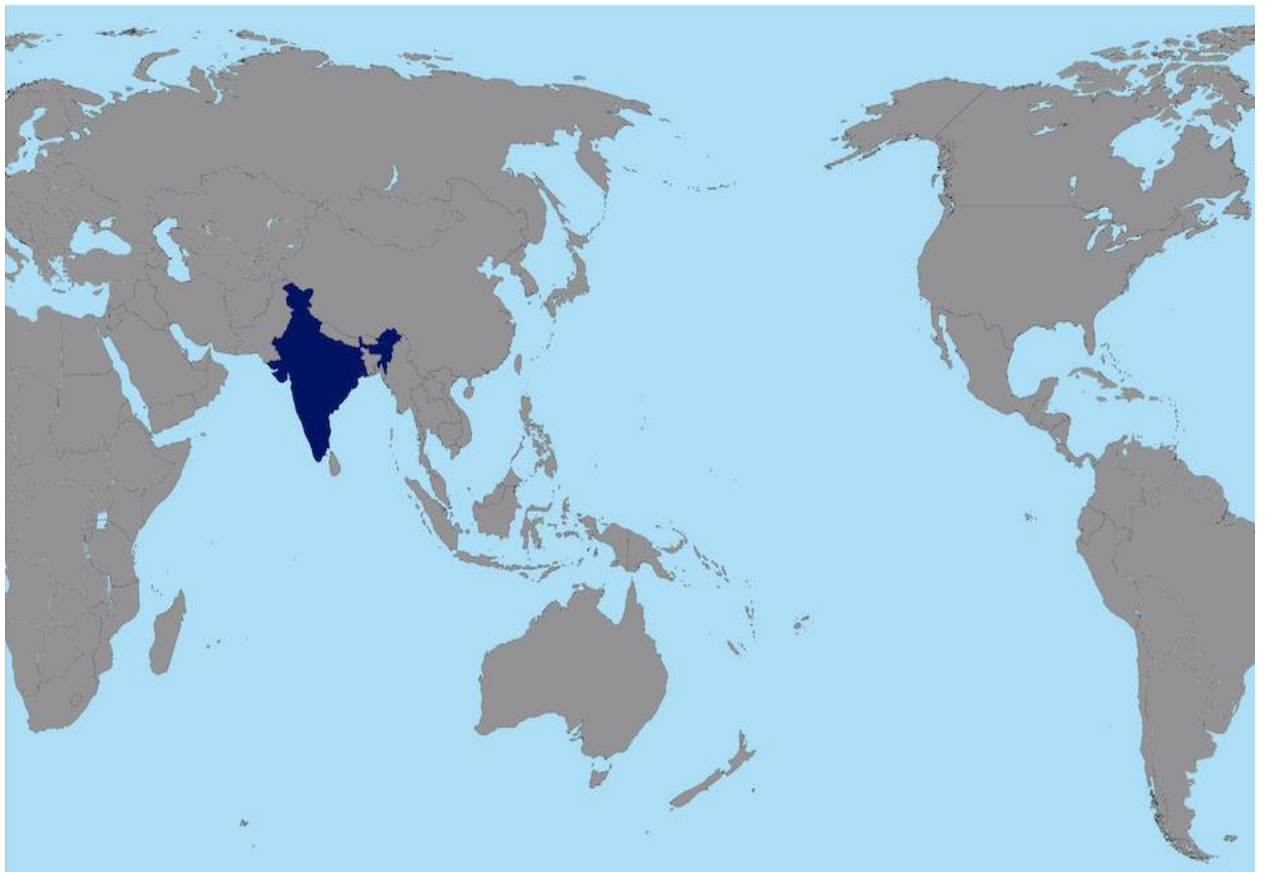


# Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



## DPG INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR MARCH 2022



Volume III, Issue 3 | March 2022

Delhi Policy Group

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

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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

March 2022

### Abstract

The war in Ukraine was the centrepiece of global attention. As the month drew to a close, there were some indications of possible moves towards negotiated peace, but the conflict continued to prevail and outcomes remain highly uncertain. The Western bloc met at Brussels on March 24 for an extraordinary NATO summit, a summit meeting of the European Council and a meeting of G-7 leaders. However, unprecedented Western sanctions have thus far not impacted Russia's policies and pursuit of armed aggression against Ukraine.

The Biden administration sent a budget request of \$ 5.792 trillion for FY 2023 to Congress, including military expenditure of \$ 773 billion, \$ 30.7 billion above what was enacted for FY 2022. The US Department of Defense transmitted its National Defense Strategy to Congress, prioritising the PRC challenge in the Indo-Pacific, followed by the Russia challenge in Europe and other challenges from North Korea and Iran. Other challenges addressed by the strategy included violent terrorist organisations, climate change and other transboundary threats, including pandemics.

China announced a proposed defence budget of 1.45 trillion Yuan (about \$ 230 billion) for FY 2022, marking a 7.1% increase over the previous year's budget.

The virtual Quad summit on March 3 weathered differences between the partners on their reactions to the Ukraine crisis, maintaining the Quad focus on the Indo-Pacific. Australian PM Scott Morrison acknowledged that while all Quad members were concerned by what is happening in Europe, the Quad was set up to focus on strategic, developmental and humanitarian issues in the Indo-Pacific.

Japan's PM Kishida Fumio visited New Delhi on March 19-20 for his first bilateral visit abroad and the 14<sup>th</sup> India-Japan summit. The two leaders reviewed the evolution of bilateral economic and security relations, setting a public and private investment target of ¥ 5 trillion (\$ 42 billion) by Japan in India over the next five years.



The second India – Australia Summit was held virtually on March 21, with Australia displaying greater sensitivity towards India's stand on the Ukraine crisis than Japan. Bilateral relations continue to progress across the board, with the early conclusion of an India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement on the cards.

Australia announced its intention of building another submarine base on its East Coast involving an investment of over \$ 10 billion on March 7. The base will provide an alternative to HMAS Stirling, near Perth, where Australian submarines are presently based. Increased visits by Indian and Japanese warships to the region were among the reasons cited for the new base.

Three developments related to US-China ties commanded interest during the month. In the first, US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan met China's Yang Jiechi at Rome on March 14, essentially to highlight the consequences of certain actions with respect to the Russia-China alignment. In the second, US President Joe Biden held a virtual conversation with President Xi Jinping on March 18 with much the same theme. In the third, China's foreign minister Wang Yi made a brief visit to New Delhi on March 25, allowing for an extensive dialogue on bilateral and other issues but resulting in no breakthrough on the border standoff.

Russia stepped up military activity around disputed islands and suspended peace treaty negotiations with Japan in retaliation for the latter's economic sanctions.

USS Ralph Johnson transited the Taiwan Straits on March 17, hours before the virtual conversation between Presidents Joe Biden and Xi Jinping. The transit was not publicised on the websites of the US Navy, the Indo-Pacific Command or the Pacific Fleet, but China nonetheless accused the US of hyping up the event.

A flurry of ballistic and cruise missile launches by North Korea, including one of a new ICBM capable of reaching the entire continental United States, generated condemnation from the US and its Asia-Pacific allies. As part of the US response, USS Abraham Lincoln carried out carrier-aircraft based exercises in the Yellow Sea.

Yoon Seok-youl of the South Korean People Power Party was elected the country's new President on March 9. He will assume office in May, with closer South Korea-US ties likely in the years ahead.

## The Quad Virtual Summit

"We've reinvigorated the Quad partnership with India, Japan and the United States, with a new Leaders' Dialogue that met again this past week to discuss the implications of the war in Europe specifically for a free and open Indo-Pacific", said Prime Minister Scott Morrison<sup>1</sup>. He elaborated "Of course, all Quad members are concerned about what's happening in Europe. But the Quad wasn't set up to focus on Europe. The Quad was set up to focus on strategic issues, on humanitarian issues, economic development issues in the Indo-Pacific. And so President Biden and Narendra, Prime Minister Modi, and Prime Minister Kishida and I had a very lengthy conversation about why it's so important that a price is paid for this aggression"<sup>2</sup>. The words make clear that the 70 minute Quad virtual summit on March 3, 2022 successfully weathered differences between the partners on their reaction to Russia's action in Ukraine.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Prime Minister Scott Morrison, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and President Joseph Biden at the Quad Virtual Summit on March 03, 2022. Source: Cabinet Public Affairs Office, Japan

According to their joint statement, the leaders "convened to reaffirm their commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific" and "reaffirmed their dedication

<sup>1</sup> Transcript of PM Scott Morrison's Virtual Address to Lowy Institute, March 7, 2022,

<https://www.pm.gov.au/media/virtual-address-lowy-institute>

<sup>2</sup> Q&A at Morrison's Lowy Address, March 7, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/qa-lowy-institute>



to the Quad as a mechanism to promote regional stability and prosperity”<sup>3</sup>. They agreed to stand up a “new humanitarian assistance and disaster relief mechanism which will enable the Quad to meet future humanitarian challenges in the Indo-Pacific and provide a channel for communication as they each address and respond to the crisis in Ukraine”<sup>4</sup>.

Individual country readouts provide clearer understanding of the different perceptions. The Australian media statement focuses extensively on not allowing “what is happening in Ukraine to ever happen in the Indo-Pacific”<sup>5</sup>. Japan’s readout says the four leaders “concurred to work closely together to respond to the situation in Ukraine”<sup>6</sup>, and “any attempt to unilaterally change the status quo by force, such as this time, must not be tolerated in the Indo-Pacific” before highlighting concurrence between the leaders “on the importance of continuing to positively contribute to the region as the Quad” and “to stand up a new humanitarian assistance and disaster relief mechanism”<sup>7</sup>. India’s readout acknowledges that developments in Ukraine were discussed, but highlights PM Modi’s emphasis on the need to return to a path of dialogue and diplomacy<sup>8</sup>. It reiterates that the Quad “must remain focussed on its core objective of promoting peace, stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region” and on “concrete and practical forms of cooperation within the Quad, in areas like Humanitarian and Disaster Relief, debt sustainability, supply chains, clean energy, connectivity and capacity building”<sup>9</sup>. This was also the tack adopted by the External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar, during the Quad Ministerial Meeting at Melbourne on February 11, 2022<sup>10</sup>.

India’s abstention in UN Security Council and General Assembly votes condemning Moscow’s action in Ukraine generated evident disappointment in the US. A State Department cable containing proposed talking points for US diplomats with Indian (and Emirati) counterparts said: “Continuing to call for

<sup>3</sup> Joint Readout of Quad Leaders Call, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/03/03/joint-readout-of-quad-leaders-call/>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Media Statement, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/quad-leaders-virtual-meeting>

<sup>6</sup> Japan-Australia-India-US (Quad) Leaders’ Video Conference, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page1e\\_000379.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page1e_000379.html)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> PM participates in virtual summit of Quad leaders, [https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news\\_updates/pms-address-at-post-budget-webinar-on-make-in-india-for-the-world/?comment=disable](https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news_updates/pms-address-at-post-budget-webinar-on-make-in-india-for-the-world/?comment=disable)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> For further details, see Lalit Kapur, “The Fourth Quad Ministerial Meeting” in the Indo-Pacific Monitor, February 2022, [https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads\\_dpg/publication\\_file/indo-pacific-monitor-3755.pdf](https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads_dpg/publication_file/indo-pacific-monitor-3755.pdf)



dialogue, as you have been doing in the Security Council, is not a stance of neutrality; it places you in Russia's camp, the aggressor in this conflict"<sup>11</sup>. The Republican chair of the India Caucus in the US Senate publicly expressed his disappointment<sup>12</sup>. Some see India's action as "a strategic miscalculation, revealing weaknesses in India's diplomatic and crisis-management abilities" and confusing "strategic ambiguity with inaction"<sup>13</sup>. Others describe it as a "strategic blunder"<sup>14</sup>. The implicit assumption in these "with us or against us" views is that in view of the growing bilateral relationship, India must follow the US lead and condemn, if not break its relations, with Russia. The virtual summit was thus primarily intended to use collective pressure on India to follow the US lead.

India did well to stand firm, redirect the focus of the partnership back to the Indo-Pacific and maintain its neutral stance on Ukraine. How will this impact Quad unity and more important, India's strategic choices in the years ahead? The answers lie in understanding the efficacy of the oft-used "with us or against us" argument in the prevailing geopolitical environment; whether Ukraine results in diversion of US attention back to Europe; and the impact of India's stance on the developing India-US relationship.

The "with us or against us" argument has a long history. It has been attributed to Jesus ("Whoever is not with me is against me"<sup>15</sup>), Lenin, Mussolini and Hitler, among others, during the period between the two World Wars. George Orwell used it in his essay, saying "If you hamper the war effort of one side you automatically help that of the other. Nor is there any real way of remaining outside such a war as the present one"<sup>16</sup>. More recently, it was used by Hillary Clinton and George Bush in the lead up to the war in Iraq. It worked in bipolar post-war Europe, dividing it between communism and democracy in the bipolar world of that era.

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<sup>11</sup> "Russian Invasion of Ukraine Strains US's Strategic Ties With India", The Wall Street Journal, March 5, 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/russian-invasion-of-ukraine-strains-u-s-s-strategic-ties-with-india-11646427835>

<sup>12</sup> "Disappointed: U Senator on India abstention from UNSC resolution", Hindustan Times, February 28, 2022, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/disappointed-u-s-senator-on-india-abstention-from-uns-c-resolution-101645987885800.html>

<sup>13</sup> Dylan Junkin, "The Ukraine Crisis: Previewing the Paradoxes of the US-India Partnership", <https://southasianvoices.org/the-ukraine-crisis-previewing-the-paradoxes-of-the-u-s-india-partnership/>

<sup>14</sup> Radha Kumar, "Why India's Implicit Support to Russia on Ukraine War is a Strategic Blunder", <https://thewire.in/diplomacy/why-indias-implicit-support-to-russia-on-ukraine-war-is-a-strategic-blunder>

<sup>15</sup> From the Synoptic Gospels, New Revised Standard Version.

<sup>16</sup> George Orwell, "Pacifism and the War", [https://www.orwell.ru/library/articles/pacifism/english/e\\_patw](https://www.orwell.ru/library/articles/pacifism/english/e_patw)





The argument, magnified by a polarised media deeply influenced by the West, stifles a dispassionate, independent reading of international developments by nations. It seeks to force a choice in favour of the hegemon. This didn't work in the bipolar Cold War world, or even in the succeeding unipolar one, where India by and large maintained its strategic autonomy. It is one thing for allies, where the habit of US leadership and dependence for security is deeply ingrained. It is, however, unlikely to impact large parts of unaffiliated Asia (including India), where memories of the colonial experience, Western disdain for Asian values and the financial exploitation of less developed nations make forging of dependencies disguised as alliances a tough ask. This is equally applicable to China, whose call for a community with a shared future for mankind is recognised as the proverbial siren song: its dangers are widely understood, but in the absence of alternatives, Asian nations continue being attracted.

India believes that "the very structure of international order is undergoing a profound transition"<sup>17</sup>. It shares "with the international community the objective that a multi-polar world should have a multi-polar Asia at its core"<sup>18</sup> and has chosen to work with multiple partners on different agendas. It must, therefore, view the world not in "black or white terms", but taking into account the numerous shades of grey, prioritise its own interests and act accordingly.

Will Ukraine divert US focus back to Europe at Asia's cost? It has long been US policy to not allow a hegemonic power to rise in any critical part of the world. In strategic terms, there can be little doubt that China poses a much greater threat to US interests than Russia does. In fact, the US pulled out of Afghanistan to enable concentration on the Indo-Pacific. But national policies in democracies are driven by domestic political considerations, and the pressure of powerful anti-Russia interests in the US, irrespective of current strategic reality, will be hard to resist. The US does have the military and financial capacity to deal with both developments in Europe and those in the Western Pacific. Whether it will use this capacity effectively is a function of the decisions made by its leadership – and so far, the indicators are that the leadership lacks the ability to prioritise both challenges. To that extent, Ukraine has diverted US focus. Whether this is temporary or long-term remains to be seen. If the war in Eastern Europe escalates, it will be at the cost of Asia.

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<sup>17</sup> External Affairs Minister's Speech at the 4<sup>th</sup> Ramnath Goenka Lecture, November 14, 2019, [https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/32038/External\\_Affairs\\_Ministers\\_speech\\_at\\_the\\_4th\\_Ramnath\\_Goenk\\_a\\_Lecture\\_2019](https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/32038/External_Affairs_Ministers_speech_at_the_4th_Ramnath_Goenk_a_Lecture_2019)

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.



Will India's neutrality harm the India-US relationship? At the outset, the India-US relationship is not a favour being done to India. Nor is it based on principles or democratic values. Strengthening it is a calculated decision intended to serve shared interests of both partners. The anti-Russia media narrative of today is eerily reminiscent of the now discredited narrative that led to the destruction of Saddam Hussein's Iraq in pursuit of oil interests<sup>19</sup>. The US has a long history of supporting dictatorial regimes and suppressing democracy in pursuit of its geopolitical interests. Its penchant for unilateral sanctions and using domestic law to override treaty commitments is well known. There is the possibility that the US will use CAATSA or impose other secondary sanctions to try and harm the India-Russia relationship. India has been aware of this all along, but the US also understands that such unilateral action will break growing trust and irretrievably set back the bilateral relationship. Logic dictates that mutual interest will override momentary pique, and the bilateral relationship will continue, with perhaps an occasional setback, but no disturbance to the overall trend. The reality is that India needs the US for its maritime interests, but equally needs Russia to balance China's push for hegemony on continental Asia. Equally, India is not indispensable for either, but both need India's heft to balance China's growing power. Neither will give up on India easily.

Insofar as the Quad is concerned, the commitment of the leaders to meet in Tokyo later this year has been reiterated. The announcement regarding standing up a new HADR coordination mechanism is interesting. HADR coordination had worked effectively following the Boxing Day tsunami of December 2004, so the need for a mechanism dedicated to this purpose is questionable. The announcement could just be a fallback option to show summit results because President Biden was not able to convince India to follow his lead. It could, on the other hand, be the beginnings of institutionalisation of the Quad. More will become clear once the physical Quad summit takes place in Tokyo later this year, when progress on delivery of the numerous promises made by Quad leaders will be watched keenly. Failure to deliver public goods and show visible progress in coordination to address future challenges will result in hedging countries choosing to bandwagon with China.

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<sup>19</sup> Alan Greenspan, the Chairman of the US Federal Reserve from June 1987 to January 2006, is on record as having said, "I am saddened that it is politically inconvenient to acknowledge what everyone knows: the Iraq war is largely about oil", see "Invasion of Iraq was driven by oil, says Greenspan", <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/sep/17/iraq.oil>

## The 14th India – Japan Summit

An op-ed by Prime Minister Fumio Kishida on the morn of his first bilateral visit abroad, to India on March 19, 2022, identified protecting the rules-based international order, reinvigorating the post-Covid global economy through resilient supply chains, reforming international organisations and responding to new international challenges like climate change and cybersecurity as the focal areas of his planned exchanges with Prime Minister Modi<sup>20</sup>. He described India as the best partner to have when seeking to realise his pet 'new form of capitalism,' "as showcased in India's contribution in response to the global health crisis as a major manufacturing base, leadership in decarbonisation efforts, including through the International Solar Alliance, engagement in advanced digital society initiatives such as Aadhaar, and the promotion of economic security initiatives, including measures for supply chain resilience"<sup>21</sup>. On these counts and more, he will count his visit to India as a success.



Prime Ministers Narendra Modi and Kishida Fumio meet at Hyderabad House, March 19, 2021.  
Source: Official Website of the Prime Minister of India

<sup>20</sup> Contribution to the Indian Express by Prime Minister KISHIDA Fumio of Japan, [https://japan.kantei.go.jp/101\\_kishida/statement/202203/\\_00019.html](https://japan.kantei.go.jp/101_kishida/statement/202203/_00019.html)

<sup>21</sup>Ibid

The two leaders reaffirmed the bilateral special strategic and global partnership<sup>22</sup> as well as the shared values and principles agreed in October 2018. The joint statement then had four pillars<sup>23</sup>: the vision, partnership for prosperity, partnership for peace, and a partnership for global action. The vision remains similar. The partnership for prosperity has become a “partnership for sustainable growth in a post-COVID world. The partnerships for peace and global action have been combined into a “partnership for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) underpinned by inclusiveness and a rules-based order” in 2022.

Both Prime Ministers expressed satisfaction at evolution of bilateral security relations. The first bilateral 2+2 dialogue was held in 2019, and the next is to be convened at the earliest opportunity in Tokyo. The Reciprocal Logistics Support Agreement has been operationalised. Annual exercises Malabar and Dharma Guardian will continue, while Japan participated in the biennial multilateral Exercise MILAN for the first time last month. The first fighter aircraft bilateral exercise is to be conducted soon. Equipment and technology cooperation remains limited to Unmanned Ground Vehicles and Robotics, but both sides have directed their Defence Ministers to identify new areas.

Quad cooperation will continue, with both leaders committing to delivering tangible outcomes, including through COVID-19 vaccines and cooperation on climate action, critical and emerging technologies, infrastructure coordination, cybersecurity, space and education. A Leaders’ Summit is expected in the next 2-3 months. Japan’s participation as the lead partner in the connectivity pillar of the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) is assured. Space for cooperation between the FOIP, IPOI and the AOIP is being explored. Maritime security in compliance with UNCLOS and international law remains a focal area, with the Prime Ministers reaffirming their determination to meet challenges against the rules-based order in the East and South China Seas. The two sides are on the same page with respect to denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula, bringing about peace and stability in Afghanistan, strengthening cooperation to combat terrorism, the situation in Myanmar, ASEAN centrality and expansion of the UN Security Council to include India and Japan. Ukraine also found mention in the joint statement, with both sides calling for a cessation of violence and return to the path of dialogue and diplomacy.

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<sup>22</sup>India-Japan Summit Joint Statement Partnership for a Peaceful, Stable and Prosperous Post-COVID World, [https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/34991/IndiaJapan\\_Summit\\_Joint\\_Statement\\_Partnership\\_for\\_a\\_Peaceful\\_Stable\\_and\\_Prospereous\\_PostCOVID\\_World](https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/34991/IndiaJapan_Summit_Joint_Statement_Partnership_for_a_Peaceful_Stable_and_Prospereous_PostCOVID_World)

<sup>23</sup>India-Japan Vision Statement, <https://mea.gov.in/outgoing-visit-detail.htm?30543/IndiaJapan+Vision+Statement>

Cooperation on the economic front continues to grow. Both sides expressed satisfaction at having exceeded the target of ₹ 3.5 trillion (\$ 34 billion) set in 2014. An investment target of ₹ 5 trillion (\$ 42 billion) was set for the next five years. A bilateral currency swap arrangement of \$ 75 billion was renewed. A series of agreements were signed and exchanged during the summit<sup>24</sup>. A clean energy partnership was announced, covering manufacturing and R&D aspects associated with electric vehicles, energy conservation in buildings, development of solar and wind energy, green Hydrogen and Ammonia, carbon capture etc., with existing working groups being merged into four entities covering electricity and energy conservation, new and renewable energy, petroleum and natural gas, and coal. A sustainable development initiative for India's Northeast to develop the region and better link it with South East Asia<sup>25</sup> and an initiative for strengthening the Bamboo Value Chain in the North East were announced<sup>26</sup>.

Agreements and Memoranda of Understanding exchanged during the visit include a Memorandum of Cooperation in Cybersecurity, JICA loans for projects worth Rs 20,400 crores for projects in connectivity, water supply and sewerage, horticulture, healthcare and biodiversity conservation; amendments to the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, a Memorandum of Cooperation on Domestic Wastewater Management, an India-Japan Industrial Competitiveness Partnership Roadmap, and a Memorandum of Cooperation on Sustainable Urban Development<sup>27</sup>.

The bilateral strategic and global partnership has come a long way from its formulation in 2006. Convergences between the two nations, expressed in the Joint Statement on India Japan Vision 2025, remain<sup>28</sup>. Summit level meetings

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<sup>24</sup>List of Agreements/MoUs signed during the 14<sup>th</sup> India-Japan Annual Summit, [https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/34987/List\\_of\\_AgreementsMoUs\\_signed\\_during\\_the\\_14th\\_IndiaJapan\\_Annual\\_Summit](https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/34987/List_of_AgreementsMoUs_signed_during_the_14th_IndiaJapan_Annual_Summit)

<sup>25</sup> India-Japan Sustainable Development Initiative for the North Eastern Region of India, [https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/34993/IndiaJapan\\_Sustainable\\_Development\\_Initiative\\_for\\_the\\_North\\_Eastern\\_Region\\_of\\_India](https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/34993/IndiaJapan_Sustainable_Development_Initiative_for_the_North_Eastern_Region_of_India)

<sup>26</sup> Initiative for Strengthening Bamboo Value Chain in the North East, [https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/34994/Initiative\\_for\\_Strengthening\\_Bamboo\\_Value\\_Chain\\_in\\_the\\_North\\_East](https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/34994/Initiative_for_Strengthening_Bamboo_Value_Chain_in_the_North_East)

<sup>27</sup> List of Agreements/MoUs signed during the 14<sup>th</sup> India-Japan Annual summit, [https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/34987/List\\_of\\_AgreementsMoUs\\_signed\\_during\\_the\\_14th\\_IndiaJapan\\_Annual\\_Summit](https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/34987/List_of_AgreementsMoUs_signed_during_the_14th_IndiaJapan_Annual_Summit)

<sup>28</sup> Joint Statement in India and Japan Vision 2025: Special Strategic and Global Partnership Working Together for Peace and Prosperity of the Indo-Pacific Region and the World (December 12, 2015), <http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral->





are back on track, after the over three year hiatus generated by political uncertainty and the pandemic. There has been significant progress in the defence, security, economic and cultural domains, though whether this is enough to realise the peaceful, open, equitable, stable and rule-based order that the leaders seek in the Indo-Pacific in the face of the looming China challenge is a matter of opinion.

There is evidence of greater understanding of each other's sub-regional compulsions, including of India's concerns about terror emanating from its West and Japan's concerns from North Korea. Going forward, the bilateral relationship must be independent of, albeit in addition to, the Japan-US alliance and the Quad partnership. Any attempt to pressurise India to hew to alliance interests, as for example in hewing to the US led isolation of Russia, will backfire. Prime Minister Kishida, with his long experience of dealing with India, should understand this.

## The Second India Australia Virtual Summit

Launching an update to Australia's India Economic Strategy to 2035 at Melbourne on March 22, Dan Tehan, Australia's Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment said that he and India's Trade Minister Piyush Goyal were talking to each other practically daily and hoped to conclude the interim agreement within a week or so<sup>29</sup>. He also announced an initiative to link the heads of India's and Australia's Ministries (of External Affairs and Commerce), the treasuries and finance departments so that concerned bureaucracies could develop a shared understanding of each other's perspectives, as well as the establishment of an Austrade office in Bengaluru, bringing Australia's diplomatic footprint in India to the same level as in China<sup>30</sup>. But if the early harvest agreement was so close to conclusion, why was the India-Australia virtual summit not delayed till after it was done? Possible reasons are the forthcoming general elections in Australia or pressures to hold the summit early on account of external considerations.

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[documents.htm?dtl/26176/Joint\\_Statement\\_on\\_India\\_and\\_Japan\\_Vision\\_2025\\_Special\\_Strategic\\_and\\_Global\\_Partnership\\_Working\\_Together\\_for\\_Peace\\_and\\_Prosperty\\_of\\_the\\_IndoPacific\\_R](#)

<sup>29</sup> Update to the India Economic Strategy to 2035,

<https://www.trademinister.gov.au/minister/dan-tehan/speech/update-india-economic-strategy-2035>

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.





Prime Ministers Narendra Modi and Scott Morrison at the Second India-Australia Virtual Summit, March 21, 2022. Source: Official website of the Prime Minister of India

The sequence of events points to the latter. On March 17, India announced that Prime Ministers Narendra Modi and Scott Morrison would hold the second India-Australia Virtual Summit on March 21, "to take stock of progress made on various initiatives under the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and lay the way forward on new initiatives and enhanced cooperation in a diverse range of sectors"<sup>31</sup>. The expectation was that the leaders would "commit to closer cooperation in trade, critical minerals, migration and mobility, and education, among others"<sup>32</sup>. A day later, PM Morrison announced that he would "host the Honourable Shri Mr Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of the Republic of India, for a Virtual Annual Leaders' Meeting on 21 March 2022"<sup>33</sup>. The host nation's announcing the summit after the guest was unusual. The fact that the joint statement was delayed till a day after the summit ended indicates that negotiations on its content were completed only after the summit took place. Taken together, external pressure appears to have been the driver for a summit before negotiations on the early harvest trade agreement were concluded. This pressure is evidently on account of the ongoing confrontation in Ukraine and the thrust to have India join in condemning Russian action.

The summit joint statement focuses on cooperation in six areas<sup>34</sup>: economics and trade; energy, science, technology and research; people-to-people ties; COVID-19; security and defence; and the regional and multilateral context. The two countries had decided to "increase the frequency of Prime Ministerial contact through reciprocal bilateral visits and annual meetings in the margins

<sup>31</sup> India – Australia Virtual Summit, [https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/34980/IndiaAustralia\\_Virtual\\_Summit](https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/34980/IndiaAustralia_Virtual_Summit)

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Virtual Annual Leaders' Meeting With the Prime Minister of the Republic of India, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/virtual-annual-leaders-meeting-prime-minister-republic-india>

<sup>34</sup> Joint Statement: India-Australia Virtual Summit, [https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/35008/JOINT\\_STATEMENT\\_INDIAAUSTRALIA\\_VIRTUAL\\_SUMMIT](https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/35008/JOINT_STATEMENT_INDIAAUSTRALIA_VIRTUAL_SUMMIT)

of international events" in June 2020<sup>35</sup>. The commitment now is to "holding Annual Summits to drive closer cooperation"<sup>36</sup>.

On the trade front, India-Australia two-way trade grew from \$13.6 billion in 2007 to \$24.3 billion in 2020<sup>37</sup>. Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) negotiations, re-launched on September 30, 2021, were expected to provide an interim agreement by December 2021 and a full CECA by end 2022<sup>38</sup>. During the summit, leaders recommitted to deepening the bilateral economic relationship, welcomed progress in CECA negotiations, emphasised the importance of early resolution of taxation of offshore income of Indian firms under the India-Australia Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement, and reiterated their commitment to a free, fair, inclusive and rules-based trade environment.

On the climate energy and science and technology research front, a letter of intent has been signed between India and Australia on new and renewable energy technology, which aims to drive the costs of low and zero emissions technologies down to a level where they can compete with higher emitting alternatives. Australia is supporting enhanced International Energy Agency activities in India and a path to full IEA membership for India. An MoU has been signed on joint cooperation for critical minerals projects. The inaugural bilateral Foreign Ministers' Cyber Framework Dialogue took place earlier this year. There is agreement to establish an India-Australia Centre of Excellence for Critical and Emerging Technology Policy in Bengaluru. Space cooperation seems to be growing.

On the people-to-people front, focal areas are education scholarships, establishment of a Centre for Australia-India relations in Australia, and conclusion of a migration and mobility partnership. Agreement exists on the setting up of a task force on Educational Qualifications Recognition, to deliver a cooperative mechanism, within six months of establishment, to improve arrangements for recognition of each other's educational degrees and the possibility of doing different parts of the degree curriculum in both countries.

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<sup>35</sup> Joint Statement on a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between Republic of India and Australia, [https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/32729/Joint\\_Statement\\_on\\_a\\_Comprehensive\\_Strategic\\_Partnership\\_between\\_Republic\\_of\\_India\\_and\\_Australia](https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/32729/Joint_Statement_on_a_Comprehensive_Strategic_Partnership_between_Republic_of_India_and_Australia)

<sup>36</sup> Joint Statement: India-Australia Virtual Summit, [https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/35008/JOINT\\_STATEMENT\\_INDIAAUSTRALIA\\_VIRTUAL\\_SUMMIT](https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/35008/JOINT_STATEMENT_INDIAAUSTRALIA_VIRTUAL_SUMMIT)

<sup>37</sup> About the Australia-India Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement negotiations, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/trade/agreements/negotiations/aifta/australia-india-comprehensive-economic-cooperation-agreement>

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

COVID-19 cooperation remains primarily through the Quad Vaccine Partnership and COVAX.

On the security and defence cooperation front, the General Rawat India-Australia Young Defence Officer Exchange Programme has been established. Both sides are working towards enhancing maritime domain awareness through increased information sharing. Participation in each other's exercises will increase: India will participate in Australia's Indo-Pacific Endeavour Exercise later this year. Both sides agree to coordinate on counter-terrorism, through bilateral, Quad consultation and multilateral mechanism.

Both sides expressed concern about the crisis in Ukraine and agreed to remain "closely engaged on the issue and its broader implications for the Indo-Pacific"<sup>39</sup>. Both sides reiterated their commitment to a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, preservation of the global order in the region, ASEAN centrality, Quad cooperation, cooperation on India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative, as well as strengthening cooperation in the Indian Ocean through IORA and in Southern Pacific island nations.

The joint statement is expansive on promise, as is to be expected since it has been only two years since the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership was established. There is significant progress to show, and the potential remains much larger. Strategic convergences between the two nations outweigh divergences. How the partnership delivers to promote each other's interests, as well as regional stability, will be a function of continuity of political stability, how sensitive the leaders are to each other's core concerns, how imaginative they are in expanding the envelope, and how effective they are in prodding bureaucracies to change established ways and realise the potential.

Prime Ministers Modi and Morrison came into the summit with different degrees of political confidence. The former had just led his party to comprehensive victories in elections to four of five state assemblies, including in UP, Uttarakhand, Goa and Manipur. There is little on the horizon to trouble his continuity in the foreseeable future. PM Morrison, however, had to witness his party losing power in South Australia just a day before the summit<sup>40</sup>, notable given that national elections are due in May 2022. The expectation is that

<sup>39</sup> Joint Statement: India-Australia Virtual Summit, [https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/35008/JOINT\\_STATEMENT\\_INDIAAUSTRALIA\\_VIRTUAL\\_SUMMIT](https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/35008/JOINT_STATEMENT_INDIAAUSTRALIA_VIRTUAL_SUMMIT)

<sup>40</sup> Australian PM Morrison's party faced shock state election loss, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/australian-pm-morrison-party-faces-shock-state-election-loss-2022-03-19/>



irrespective of who comes to power in Australia, convergence in interests will continue, enabling growth of the bilateral relationship.

There was a visible display of sensitivity towards India's position on Ukraine: Morrison said, "While we are obviously distressed at the terrible situation in Europe, our focus, of course, is always very much on what is occurring in the Indo-Pacific and ensuring that those events could never occur here"<sup>41</sup>. India has done well to stand its ground, while Australia has done well not to try and force the issue. However, the direct impact of the Ukraine crisis in the Indo-Pacific may be negligible, but the indirect impact of the US losing focus on China will have to be dealt with by India, Australia and Japan. The possibility of China once again getting a free pass, as it did when the US shifted focus to the war on terror in the aftermath of 9/11, cannot be ignored.

Convergences between Australia, India and Japan on the geostrategic front will inevitably grow as the China threat increases. For the present, progress in the bilateral partnership appears good. Leaders will, however, have to step up and increase the rate of progress if they are not to be overtaken by the sheer pace of events. The political future of Asia depends upon this.

## Building Australian SSN Capability

The joint announcement<sup>42</sup> on March 7, 2022 by Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Defence Minister Peter Dutton of the decision to build an additional submarine base on Australia's east coast marked a step forward in strengthening submarine capability. Speaking on the situation in Ukraine, how it impacts the Indo-Pacific and what Australia is doing, Mr Morrison highlighted that the Indo-Pacific remained at the centre of global geo-strategic competition<sup>43</sup>. He outlined a three step approach to ensure Australia's security in the coming era, encompassing building military capability for the new challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, widening and reinforcing alignments in the Indo-Pacific and strengthening national resilience at home with policies that reinforced economic and national security goals into the future. This, he said, involved an investment of \$578 billion in the nation's Defence Force over the next decade, including over \$ 280 billion in enhanced defence capability. The

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<sup>41</sup> Remarks, Virtual Annual Leaders' Meeting with Prime Minister Modi, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/remarks-virtual-annual-leaders-meeting-prime-minister-modi>

<sup>42</sup> Australia to build additional submarine base, <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/minister/peter-dutton/media-releases/australia-build-additional-submarine-base>

<sup>43</sup> Transcript of PM Scott Morrison's Virtual Address to Lowy Institute, March 7, 2022, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/virtual-address-lowy-institute>



amount includes \$ 10 billion for creation of submarine infrastructure at the new base and elsewhere. The Australian Defence Department's 2020 force structure plan, published in July 2020, had envisaged an investment of \$6.8 - 10.2 billion under the head "Undersea Warfare Support Facilities and Infrastructure"<sup>44</sup>. The plan does not, however, explicitly mention creation of a new submarine base. To that extent, the announcement was a new development.

Australia's current Collins class submarines operate out of HMAS Stirling, at Fleet Base West in Garden Island, near Perth. The submarines themselves were built at a newly developed facility at Osborne (a suburb of Adelaide) between 1990 and 2003, and had a predicted life of 30 years. The first of the class, HMAS Collins, was expected to decommission in 2025. Consideration of a replacement project began in 2007. Nuclear propulsion was ruled out due to public opposition to nuclear technology, as well as the absence of nuclear infrastructure and expertise. The French Shortfin Barracuda was identified as the replacement in April 2016, while the planned service life of the Collins class was extended by seven years. In September 2021, the AUKUS alliance resulted in cancellation of the Barracuda programme and the decision to build a nuclear-powered submarine in lieu. A decision on which submarine is to be built is still awaited.

The need for a new base became evident when Australia decided to double the size of its submarine fleet from 6 to 12 boats, in 2009. It will involve construction of specialised wharfs, maintenance facilities, administrative and logistics support infrastructure, personnel amenities, and suitable accommodation for submarine and support staff. Three potential locations have been identified: Brisbane, Newcastle and Port Kembla. The task before the Australian DoD will now be to acquire the land needed and persuade the current occupants to leave. More important will be persuading those who remain to accept the presence of nuclear submarines in their vicinity. Australia has a long history of opposition to nuclear power, and there will be fears of the selected location becoming a target for adversaries. In parallel, Australia will have to more than double the numbers of its submarine work force, in view of the greater crew requirements of the new boats as compared to the Collins class. But there is time enough for this.

A new base in East Australia, geographically displaced more than 3500 Km from its current facility, creates redundancy for submarine sustainment and maintenance capabilities. The extent of infrastructure to be created has not yet been announced. Defence Minister Peter Dutton expects the additional

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<sup>44</sup>2020 Force Structure Plan, <https://www.defence.gov.au/about/publications/2020-force-structure-plan>





capability to be used not just by the Australian Navy, but also by SSNs and surface ships from the UK, US, Japan and India, who are more likely to deploy to the region due to the uncertainty in the Indo-Pacific<sup>45</sup>. He expressed concern about finding skilled workers for all the jobs that would be created. He ruled out an intermediate class of submarines till the SSN project started delivering results. He also ruled out the possibility of buying SSNs off the shelf, since production lines in both UK and US were already working to capacity. He expressed confidence that the new SSNs would enter service before the 2040s. A decision on which SSN will be built is expected by mid-2022. However, a change of government in the elections due in May 2022 could result in the entire project being debated afresh and consequentially delayed.

It is reasonable to assume that the new base is part of the AUKUS agreement. The infrastructure created will not just service Australian needs, but will also provide alternative facilities for the USN and the RN. The USN also gains alternate and more secure maintenance, logistics support and R&R facilities: its SSN base at Guam is well within the strike range of DF-26 IRBMs launched from China's mainland, or even its South China Sea outposts. A base on Australia's east coast will be outside range. Greater integration of personnel from the three navies is on the cards.

The expectation of increased activity from the Japanese and Indian Navies by Defence Minister Dutton is interesting. Japan's core area of maritime security interest can be expected to expand to the South China Sea and the Southern Pacific following the rapidly developing security links with Australia. India's core area of interest lies in the Indian Ocean, so increased activity in Australia's Indian Ocean ports, stretching from Darwin to Tasmania could be expected. The anticipation of greater Indian activity on the East Coast points to an expectation of greater Indian participation in Indo-Pacific security.

Even as Australia forges ahead with its submarine programme, India continues to procrastinate. There is still no decision on which submarine it will construct under Project 75I when the last Kalvari class submarine rolls out of Mazagon Docks less than a year hence and both infrastructure and trained manpower created at considerable expense become idle. Separately, India's SSN project is moving along, but construction is still some distance away. Idle facilities after the commissioning of INS Shankul in 1994 had resulted in loss of trained manpower to Australia, to build their Collins class. Submarines. Continued

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<sup>45</sup> Interview with David Bevan, ABC Radio, Adelaide,  
<https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/minister/peter-dutton/transcripts/interview-david-bevan-abc-radio-adelaide>





procrastination could see history repeating itself, with trained manpower migrating to Australia to construct a new class of submarines.

## China Developments

The month witnessed three significant political interactions involving China that impact the Indo-Pacific. In the first, US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan met China's Director of the Office of the Central Commission for Foreign Affairs, Yang Jiechi, in Rome on March 14<sup>46</sup>. Their seven hour discussion purportedly covered the gamut of bilateral issues, including the Russia/Ukraine crisis, North Korea, Taiwan, crisis management and ways to manage strategic risk so as to ensure competition between the two countries does not become conflict<sup>47</sup>. The central discussion, however, was on the Ukraine Crisis. There was evident US concern about the Russia – China alignment. "The National Security Advisor was direct about those concerns and the potential implications and consequences of certain actions", said the US Press Release<sup>48</sup>. The discussion was described as "intense", implying that threats were exchanged<sup>49</sup>.

A two-hour secure video call between President Biden and President Xi Jinping followed on March 18. The White House readout emphasises that the conversation focused on Ukraine, with President Biden describing "the implications and consequences if China provides material support to Russia"<sup>50</sup>. In the process, he "reiterated that US policy on Taiwan has not changed, and emphasised that the US continues to oppose any unilateral changes to the status quo"<sup>51</sup>. He was careful to stress that "Russia is spreading disinformation about biological weapons in Ukraine as a pretext for a false-flag operation" and underscored concerns about (Beijing) echoing such disinformation<sup>52</sup>. The two leaders also discussed the importance of managing competition between their

<sup>46</sup> Yang Jiechi to Meet With US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan in Rome, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjdt\\_665385/wsrc\\_665395/202203/t20220313\\_1065138\\_3.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/wsrc_665395/202203/t20220313_1065138_3.html)

<sup>47</sup> Background Press Call by Senior Administration Officials on China, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2022/03/14/background-press-call-by-senior-administration-officials-on-china/>

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid

<sup>50</sup> Readout of President Joseph R Biden Jr Call with President Xi Jinping of the People's Republic of China, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/03/18/readout-of-president-joseph-r-biden-jr-call-with-president-xi-jinping-of-the-peoples-republic-of-china-2/>

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Background Press Call by a Senior Administration Official on President Biden's Call with President Xi Jinping of China, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2022/03/18/background-press-call-by-a-senior-administration-official-on-president-bidens-call-with-president-xi-jinping-of-china/>

countries, addressing areas of strategic risk and maintaining open lines of communication.



China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi and India's External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar at Hyderabad House on March 25, 2022. Source: MEA

The US account prioritises Ukraine, with other aspects being secondary. China's readout, on the other hand, places greater emphasis on the Taiwan question, the current state of the US-China relationship and the shared view "that China and the US need to respect each other, coexist in peace and avoid confrontation, and that the two sides should increase communication and dialogue at all levels and in all fields"<sup>53</sup>. On Ukraine, it records that "President Biden expounded on the US position, and expressed readiness for communication with China to prevent the situation from exacerbating". It also states, "China does not want to see the situation in Ukraine to come to this" and "China has put forward a six-point initiative on the humanitarian situation in Ukraine, and is ready to provide further humanitarian assistance to Ukraine and other affected countries". It adds, "the US and NATO should also have dialogue with Russia to address the crux of the Ukraine crisis and ease the security concerns of both Russia and Ukraine"<sup>54</sup>. Reports indicate President Xi

<sup>53</sup> President Xi Jinping Has a Video Call with US President Joe Biden, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/202203/t20220319\\_10653207.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/202203/t20220319_10653207.html)

<sup>54</sup> Ibid

used an old Chinese proverb, "Let he who tied the bell on the tiger's neck take it off"<sup>55</sup>.

The third event was Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's unannounced visit to New Delhi on March 25. In the days before coming to New Delhi, he had attended the opening ceremony of the 48<sup>th</sup> session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers<sup>56</sup> in Islamabad, becoming the first Chinese Foreign Minister to do so. He was reported to have said, "On Kashmir, we have heard again today the calls of many of our Islamic friends. And China shares the same hope"<sup>57</sup>. India rejected the "Uncalled reference to India by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi during his speech at the Opening Ceremony of the OIC Meeting"<sup>58</sup>. The nature of hope Wang Yi shared was expressed in the OIC Foreign Ministers resolution, containing three paragraphs condemning violation of human rights of the people of "Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir", rejecting "India's illegal and unilateral actions since August 5, 2019 aimed at altering the demographic composition of the occupied territory", and in general echoing Pakistan's position on J&K<sup>59</sup>. India observed, "The statements adopted at the meeting demonstrate both the irrelevance of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation as a body and role of Pakistan as its manipulator"<sup>60</sup>. Describing the references to India as based on falsehoods and misrepresentation, India pointedly said, "Nations and Governments that associate themselves with such exercises should realise the impact it has on their reputation"<sup>61</sup>.

<sup>55</sup> In the Words of Xi Jinping: Unraveling an Ancient Saying, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/13/world/asia/in-the-words-of-xi-jinping-unraveling-an-ancient-saying.html>

<sup>56</sup> Wang Yi Attends and Addresses the Opening Ceremony of the 48<sup>th</sup> Session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjzb\\_663304/wjzbz\\_663308/activities\\_663312/202203/t20220323\\_10654502.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjzb_663304/wjzbz_663308/activities_663312/202203/t20220323_10654502.html)

<sup>57</sup> Wang Yi's J&K remark: India hits back names him, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/chinese-foreign-minister-wang-yi-oic-kashmir-remarks-india-7833453/>

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Islamabad Declaration 48<sup>th</sup> Session of OIC Council of Foreign Ministers "Partnering for Unity, Justice and Development", 23 March 2022, [https://www.oic-oci.org/topic/?t\\_id=33947&t\\_ref=22694&lan=en](https://www.oic-oci.org/topic/?t_id=33947&t_ref=22694&lan=en)

<sup>60</sup> Official Spokesperson's response to media queries on references to India in the statements and resolutions adopted in the meeting of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation in Islamabad, [https://mea.gov.in/response-to-queries.htm?dtl/35046/Official\\_Spokespersons\\_response\\_to\\_media\\_queries\\_on\\_references\\_to\\_India\\_in\\_the\\_statements\\_and\\_resolutions\\_adopted\\_in\\_the\\_meeting\\_of\\_the\\_Organisation\\_o](https://mea.gov.in/response-to-queries.htm?dtl/35046/Official_Spokespersons_response_to_media_queries_on_references_to_India_in_the_statements_and_resolutions_adopted_in_the_meeting_of_the_Organisation_o)

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.



Unusually, the External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar held a special media briefing session after his three-hour meeting with Minister Wang Yi<sup>62</sup>. His focal point was that the “frictions and tensions that arise from China’s deployments (in Eastern Ladakh) since April 2020 cannot be reconciled with a normal relationship between the two neighbours. Restoration of normalcy will obviously require a restoration of peace and tranquillity. If we are both committed to improving our ties, then this commitment must find full expression in ongoing disengagement talks”<sup>63</sup>. He went on to say, “Where India and China are concerned, our relationship is best served by observing the three mutuals – mutual respect, mutual sensitivity and mutual interests”<sup>64</sup>. A similar message was conveyed during Minister Wang Yi’s interaction with National Security Adviser Ajit Doval.

China’s narrative of discussions during the visit, however, indicates its thrust that “China and India should put the boundary issue in a proper place in bilateral relations, and should not let the boundary issue define or even affect the overall development of bilateral relations”<sup>65</sup>. Essentially, it demands the right to keep nibbling away at India’s territory while continuing to try and turn India into an economic dependency. The formulation was repeated at Wang Yi’s meeting with India’s National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, where Wang Yi propounded a three point approach: look at the long-term perspective, place the boundary issue in its proper position, and adhere to the pre-Galwan judgement by leaders of the two countries that China and India don’t threaten each other but offer mutual developmental opportunities; view each other’s development with a win-win mentality; and participate in constructing cooperation and support for each other in upholding multilateralism and improving global governance.

On the Ukraine front, the US has successfully rallied the West in imposing sanctions on Russia, no mean achievement given Western Europe’s dependence on Russia’s energy supplies for its economic production. The conflict has also resulted in an unprecedented spike in energy prices throughout the world. This will not only hit the West, which accounts for over 50% of world GDP, but also the world’s less well-off economies, as high energy prices and the search for alternate sources distort the global market. It is,

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<sup>62</sup> Transcript of Special Briefing by External Affairs Minister on Meeting with Foreign Minister of China (March 25, 2022), [https://mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/35076/Transcript\\_of\\_Special\\_Briefing\\_by\\_External\\_Affairs\\_Minister\\_on\\_Meeting\\_with\\_Foreign\\_Minister\\_of\\_China\\_March\\_25\\_2022](https://mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/35076/Transcript_of_Special_Briefing_by_External_Affairs_Minister_on_Meeting_with_Foreign_Minister_of_China_March_25_2022)

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid

<sup>65</sup> Wang Yi Holds Talks with Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjdt\\_665385/wshd\\_665389/202203/t20220326\\_10656097.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/wshd_665389/202203/t20220326_10656097.html)



therefore, no surprise that the US posture has not found support amongst the countries that account for the largest share of the world population.

The Ukraine crisis has again given China the potential of a free pass from the West, as happened after 9/11 and the war on terror. China's focus has again turned to rallying the global South against US domination. India's setting aside the boundary question and acting with China would be of inestimable value to it, hence Wang Yi's outreach.

Strangely, after having been at the receiving end of Western pressure on the Ukraine crisis, China is trying the same pressure tactics on India. But preaching between great powers is unlikely to work. The US would do better to find an amicable solution to the Ukraine crisis by honest talks with Russia. It is more likely to enlist China's support by moderate behaviour and diplomatic give and take, rather than the coercive and threatening behaviour it often accuses China of displaying. By the same token, China would have better chances of enlisting India's support in a multipolar world by accommodating core concerns instead of adopting a coercive approach. But statesmanship appears to be lacking in both the world's biggest powers. The world is a poorer and more dangerous place for it.

## Other Developments Related to the Indo-Pacific

The US and UK held high-level consultations on the Indo-Pacific on March 7&8. The US delegation, led by Indo-Pacific Coordinator Kurt Campbell met a British delegation led by Deputy NSA David Quarrey and "committed to coordinate implementation of the US Indo-Pacific Strategy and the UK's Indo-Pacific tilt, as set out in its Integrated Review"<sup>66</sup>. Discussions encompassed a review of AUKUS, economic engagement on the Indo-Pacific through supporting green transitions, collaboration on critical and emerging technologies, ensuring economic security and opposing economic coercion. They also discussed action to invest in partnerships in the Pacific Islands, supporting ASEAN centrality and advancing cooperation with ASEAN and India. The two sides agreed to inaugurate a continuing dialogue on the Indo-Pacific, led on the US side by the National Security Council and the Department of State, and on the British side by the National Security Secretariat and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. The UK's sustaining an

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<sup>66</sup>Joint Statement on US-UK Consultations on the Indo-Pacific, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/03/11/joint-statement-on-u-s-uk-consultations-on-the-indo-pacific/>



increased Indo-Pacific role will depend on its continuing acceptance of the role of junior partner to the US.

The Indo-Pacific Region remains the priority theatre for the US Defence Department, according to Ely Ratner, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Affairs<sup>67</sup>. Mr Ratner said that the defense budget to be presented to Congress later this month will reflect that reality. The budget request will be based on the needs of the new National Defense Strategy, which will be unveiled soon. Ratner also said US officials are seeing historic progress in a major defense partnership with India, and the two countries continue to operationalise day-to-day defense cooperation and logistics, enhance information sharing, and increase bilateral cooperation in emerging domains such as space and cyberspace.



Closing ceremony of Exercise MILAN-2022 on board INS Jalashwa off Visakhapatnam, March 04, 2022. Source: PIB

President Biden released his FY 2023 budget request on March 28, 2022<sup>68</sup>. Describing it as built on the three values of fiscal responsibility, safety and security, and the investments needed to build a better America, he claimed his budget would reduce the deficit by 1.3 trillion dollars. A Pentagon Press Release indicated that the amount requested was \$ 773 billion, including \$56.5 billion for air power platforms and systems, \$40.8 billion for sea power to include nine more battle force ships, \$ 12.6 billion to modernize Army and

<sup>67</sup>Defense Official Says Indo-Pacific is the Priority Theater; China is DOD's Pacing Challenge, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/2962518/defense-official-says-indo-pacific-is-the-priority-theater-china-is-dods-pacing/>

<sup>68</sup>Remarks by President Biden Announcing the Fiscal Year 2023 Budget, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/03/28/remarks-by-president-biden-announcing-the-fiscal-year-2023-budget/>



Marine Corps fighting vehicles and over \$ 130.1 billion for R&D<sup>69</sup>. The amount is \$ 30.7 billion, or 4.1% above the enacted amount for FY 2022. It includes a 4.6% pay hike for military and civilian personnel, \$6.1 billion for the Pacific Deterrence Initiative, \$4.2 billion for the European Deterrence Initiative. The US State Department request was \$60.4 billion, \$1.9 billion higher than the amount enacted for FY 2022.

The United States Department of Defense transmitted the classified version of the National Defense Strategy (NDS) to Congress on March 28<sup>70</sup>. The NDS sets out how the DoD intends to advancing vital US national interests: protecting the American people, expanding America's prosperity and defending democratic values. The DoD said, " An unclassified version of the NDS will be forthcoming and sequenced with the release of the unclassified National Security Strategy"<sup>71</sup>. An accompanying unclassified Fact Sheet identified Defense priorities as "Defending the homeland, paced to the growing multi-domain threat posed by the PRC; Deterring strategic attacks against the US, Allies and partners; Deterring aggression, while being prepared to prevail in conflict when necessary, prioritizing the PRC challenge in the Indo-Pacific, then the Russia challenge in Europe; and Building a resilient Joint Force and defense ecosystems"<sup>72</sup>. It reiterated that the People's Republic of China (PRC) was seen as the most consequential strategic competitor and the pacing challenge. Russia posed acute threats, and the US would collaborate with NATO allies and partners to reinforce robust deterrence. Other challenges included DPRK, Iran, violent extremist organisations, climate change and other dangerous transboundary threats, including pandemics. The primary ways to advance US goals were identified as integrated deterrence, campaigning and building enduring advantages.

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<sup>69</sup>The Department of Defense Releases the President's Fiscal Year 2023 Defense Budget, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/2980014/the-department-of-defense-releases-the-presidents-fiscal-year-2023-defense-budg/>

<sup>70</sup>DoD Transmits 2022 National Defense Strategy, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/2980584/dod-transmits-2022-national-defense-strategy/>

<sup>71</sup>Ibid.

<sup>72</sup>Fact Sheet: 2022 National Defense Strategy, <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Mar/28/2002964702/-1/-1/1/NDS-FACT-SHEET.PDF>



Successful test of a Brahmos Land Attack Cruise Missile from INS Chennai on March 5, 2022.

Source: PIB

China announced a proposed defence budget of 1.45 trillion Yuan (about \$230 billion) for FY 2022, marking a 7.1 year increase over last year's budget of 1.35 trillion Yuan<sup>73</sup>. In comparison, the US Defense Budget for FY 2022 is \$740.3 billion<sup>74</sup> and that for India in FY 2022-23 is about \$ 70.6 billion<sup>75</sup>.

Yoon Seok-youl of the People Power Party won a closely contested South Korean Presidential election on March 9<sup>76</sup>. Yoon won 48.6% of the vote, compared with 47.8% won by the ruling party candidate, Lee Jae-Myung, making this the closest presidential election in South Korean history. He is the former Prosecutor General of South Korea who came into the media spotlight for his tenacious investigation of corruption during the Park Geun-hye and Lee Mung-bak presidencies. He doesn't have much foreign policy experience, but is expected to more openly support President Biden's Indo-Pacific Strategy, strengthen the alliance with the US, perhaps seek additional Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) systems, and perhaps to join the Quad. Media

<sup>73</sup>Defense budget proposed to grow by 7.1%, military urged to upgrade, remain resolute, [http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2022-03/05/content\\_10137811.htm](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2022-03/05/content_10137811.htm)

<sup>74</sup>Summary of the Fiscal Year 2022 National Defense Authorization Act, <https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/FY22%20NDAA%20Agreement%20Summary.pdf>

<sup>75</sup>Update: India increases defence budget by 10%, <https://www.janes.com/defence-news/news-detail/update-india-increases-defence-budget-by-10>

<sup>76</sup>South Korea: Conservative Candidate Yoon Suk-yeol Elected President, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-60685141>



reports indicate that he sought a future-oriented approach to improving Seoul-Tokyo ties when he met Japan's ambassador to South Korea on March 28<sup>77</sup>.

The Council of the European Union forwarded a 'Strategic Compass' to member states on March 21<sup>78</sup>. The Compass seeks to make the EU a stronger and more capable actor in security and defence, both to protect the security of its citizens, and to act in crisis situations that affect the EU's values and interests. It sets out a common strategic vision for the EU's role in security and defence and commits to a set of concrete and wide-ranging objectives to achieve these goals in the coming 5-10 years. Given that the EU GDP is larger than that of China, successful security integration could lead to its emergence as a consequential player in global geopolitics.

An extraordinary NATO summit on March 24 led to the alliance coming together in ways that were unimaginable during the Trump era, or even when President Biden attended the last NATO Summit in June 2021. The 30 NATO allies expressed solidarity with Ukraine, called for implementation of an immediate ceasefire, threatened Russia with severe consequences if it used chemical or biological weapons, and expressed NATO resolve to counter Russia's attempts to destroy the foundations of international security and stability<sup>79</sup>. It called on all states, including China, to uphold the international order and the principle of sovereignty and territorial integrity, as enshrined in the UN charter. It also called on China to cease amplifying the Kremlin's false narratives, in particular on the war and on NATO, and to promote a peaceful resolution to the conflict<sup>80</sup>. It announced the activation of NATO's defence plans, deployment of elements of the NATO Response Force and the placement of 40,000 troops, including significant air and naval assets, under NATO command. It also announced the intent to significantly strengthen long term NATO deterrence and defence posture and to further develop the full range of ready forces and capabilities required for this. US success in binding NATO closer together may have drawn its focus away from the Indo-Pacific for the present, but will strengthen its ability to handle the larger threat from China in the years ahead.

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<sup>77</sup>South Korean President-elect seeks future-oriented approach to improving Seoul-Tokyo ties, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2022/03/28/national/politics-diplomacy/south-korea-japan-relations-yoon-suk-yeol/>

<sup>78</sup> A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence For a European Union that protects its citizens, values and interests and contributes to international peace and security, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7371-2022-INIT/en/pdf>

<sup>79</sup> Statement by NATO Heads of State and Government, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_193719.htm?selectedLocale=en](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_193719.htm?selectedLocale=en)

<sup>80</sup> Ibid



The Commissioning Ceremony of INAS 316 at Goa on March 29, 2022.

Source: Indian Navy

Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong paid a working visit to Washington DC and met President Biden on March 29. The leaders reaffirmed the US-Singapore partnership and welcomed three new areas of cooperation: the renewal and expansion of the MoU to deepen cooperation on infrastructure development in the Indo-Pacific; the establishment of a bilateral cyber dialogue; and Singapore's signing of the Artemis Accords.<sup>81</sup> The Joint Statement issued on the occasion draws attention to Singapore's unique status as a Major Security Cooperation Partner; the 5,400 US companies working out of Singapore and close cooperation between the two nations. It focuses on two broad pillars: upholding the rules-based international order and driving inclusive prosperity and addressing emerging challenges<sup>82</sup>.

Russian military personnel on Etorofu Island, off Hokkaido, conducted a missile exercise involving the S-300 on March 10<sup>83</sup>. A group of 10 Russian warships passed through the Tsugaru Strait, between Hokkaido and Honshu, on the night of March 10-11. Another group of six Russian warships was spotted

<sup>81</sup>Meeting and Joint Leaders's Statement between PM Lee Hsein Loong and US President Joe Biden, 29 March 2022, <https://www.mfa.gov.sg/Newsroom/Press-Statements-Transcripts-and-Photos/2022/03/20220330-PMV-JS>

<sup>82</sup>US-Singapore Joint Leaders' Statement, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/03/29/u-s-singapore-joint-leaders-statement/>

<sup>83</sup>Russia conducts missile drill on disputed islands off Hokkaido, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2022/03/11/national/russia-missile-drill-japan/>

passing through the Soya Strait, between Hokkaido and Sakhalin Island, on March 13<sup>84</sup>. On March 26, Russia began a large-scale military exercise involving over 3000 personnel, Su-35 aircraft and missile defence systems on the Southern Kuril Islands, claimed by Japan<sup>85</sup>. The increased Russian activity off Hokkaido is intended to deter any adventurism by Japan / US to retake the Kuril Islands while Russia's attention is focused on Ukraine. Russia also called off its peace treaty negotiations with Japan on March 21, in protest against Japan's sanctions over the war in Ukraine<sup>86</sup>.

A flurry of missile launches by North Korea continued to cause concern to South Korea, Japan and the US, amongst others. During 2022, North Korea has so far tested hypersonic missiles on January 5 and 11, ballistic missiles on January 14, 25, 27 and 30 and on February 27, and on March 4, 16, 20 and 24. The last was reported to be a new ICBM or the Hwasong-17 ICBM that could have a range of 13,000 Km, sufficient to reach all of continental United States<sup>87</sup> with multiple warheads so as to overcome missile defences. The Pentagon described the tests of February 26 and March 4 as involving a new ICBM<sup>88</sup>. On the other hand, some reports indicate that the last claimed successful launch (on March 24) may be part of deception<sup>89</sup>. Irrespective, the possibility of a ballistic missile with a nuclear warhead reaching the US mainland will concern an administration whose hands are already full on account of the Ukraine crisis, China's ambitions and Iran. As part of the US response to bolster deterrence, USS Abraham Lincoln carried out a carrier based air demonstration in the Yellow Sea on March 15, using F-35C Lightning-II and F/A-18-E/F Hornet aircraft<sup>90</sup>. The aircraft were refueled by KC-135 Stratotankers operating from Kadena Air Base, in Japan.

<sup>84</sup>Russian Navy convoy passes through strait off Japan, [https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20220314\\_44/](https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20220314_44/)

<sup>85</sup>Russia begins large-scale military drill on disputed islands off Japan, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2022/03/26/national/russia-military-exercises-northern-territories-japan/>

<sup>86</sup>Russia halts peace treaty talks with Japan over sanctions, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Russia-halts-peace-treaty-talks-with-Japan-over-sanctions>

<sup>87</sup>North Korea tests banned intercontinental missile, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-60858999>

<sup>88</sup>Statement by Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby on Recent DPRK Missile Tests, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/2963053/statement-by-pentagon-press-secretary-john-kirby-on-recent-dprk-missile-tests/>

<sup>89</sup>Analysts investigate possibility of North Korea missile test 'deception', <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/analysts-investigate-possibility-nkorea-missile-test-deception-2022-03-28/>

<sup>90</sup>Indo-Pacific Command Conducts Carrier Based Air Demonstration in the Yellow Sea, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/2966689/indo-pacific-command-conducts-carrier-based-air-demonstration-in-the-yellow-sea/>



The Arabian Peninsula remained unstable, with Yemen's Houthi rebels carrying out drone and rocket attacks on an oil depot in Jeddah and other facilities in Riyadh on March 25<sup>91</sup>. Yemen's spokesman claimed that the group had attacked Aramco's facilities with missiles and the RasTanura and Rabigh refineries with drones, while also targeting vital facilities in Riyadh. In retaliation, the Saudi-led coalition unleashed a series of airstrikes on Sanaa and Hodeida, reportedly hitting a power plant, a fuel supply station and a social insurance office<sup>92</sup>. More than seven years after the war began with the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen, neither side has been able to prevail. The attack highlights the continuing threat to oil supplies from Saudi Arabia, even as the world grapples with oil price hikes following the Ukraine crisis. The US meanwhile condemned the attacks, blamed Iran for enabling them, and sought implementation of ceasefire calls by the Saudi Arabian and Yemeni governments<sup>93</sup>. Similar condemnation had come following Houthi attacks in Saudi Arabia a week earlier<sup>94</sup>.

Terror attacks by Al Shabab on March 23 on a military camp in the AdenAdde International Airport area in Mogadishu as well as in Beledweyne, over 300 Km north, resulted in the death of at least seven members of the Somali security forces and the African Union Mission in Somalia. The attack was condemned by the UN Security Council<sup>95</sup> and India<sup>96</sup>, among others. There was, however, no condemnation by the US Department of State<sup>97</sup>.

The 5<sup>th</sup> NSA level meeting of the Colombo Security Conclave took place in the Maldives on March 9 & 10, 2022. It was attended by India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives, as well as Mauritius, the newest member of the Conclave. Bangladesh

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<sup>91</sup>Saudi Aramco's Jeddah oil depot hit by Houthi attack, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/25/saudi-aramco-jeddah-storage-facility-hit-by-attack>

<sup>92</sup>Saudi airstrikes hit Yemen's Houthis after Jeddah attack, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1681948/saudi-airstrikes-hit-yemens-houthis-after-jeddah-attack>

<sup>93</sup>Statement by National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan on Houthi Attack Against Saudi Arabia, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/03/25/statement-by-national-security-advisor-jake-sullivan-on-houthi-attack-against-saudi-arabia-3/>

<sup>94</sup>Statement by National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan on Houthi Attack Against Saudi Arabia, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/03/20/statement-by-national-security-advisor-jake-sullivan-on-houthi-attack-against-saudi-arabia-2/>

<sup>95</sup>Security Council Press Statement on Recent Terrorist Attacks in Somalia, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2022/sc14840.doc.htm>

<sup>96</sup>India strongly condemns the terrorist attack in Somalia, [https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/35079/India\\_strongly\\_condemns\\_the\\_terrorist\\_attack\\_in\\_Somalia](https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/35079/India_strongly_condemns_the_terrorist_attack_in_Somalia)

<sup>97</sup>No statement by the State Department was available on its website till the time of going into print.



and the Seychelles participated as observers<sup>98</sup>. Member states agreed to cooperate on Maritime Safety and Security; Countering Terrorism and Radicalisation; Combating Trafficking and Transnational Organised Crime; Cyber Security and Protection of Critical Infrastructure and Technology; and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief. Members agreed upon a roadmap for further cooperation, directed towards building the capacity for coordinated response and information flow in the identified areas. Successful implementation of the roadmap could provide the kernel for similar cooperation in a larger area, encompassing the entire Indian Ocean.

The second India-Indonesia Security Dialogue was held in Jakarta on March 17, 2022<sup>99</sup>. Co-chaired by Mohammad Mahfud, Indonesia's Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal and Security Affairs and Ajit Doval, India's National Security Advisor, the dialogue enabled review of current global and security issues, countering terrorism and violent extremism, and enhancing maritime, defence and cyber security cooperation.

Trade Ministers from Australia, India and Japan met through video conference on March 15 and reaffirmed their commitment to further develop the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative to promote strong, sustainable, balanced and inclusive growth in the region. They directed their officials to identify key sectors, particularly in manufacturing and services, where trilateral cooperation would enhance the resilience of supply chain in these sectors, and decided to formulate and promote supply chain principle in the region<sup>100</sup>.

India, the European Union, Australia, Comoros, Japan, Mauritius, New Zealand, South Korea, Singapore and Sri Lanka came together to announce a joint declaration on privacy and the protection of personal data and strengthen trust in the digital environment<sup>101</sup>. The agreement commits signatory nations to fostering cooperation based on core elements such as comprehensive legal frameworks and policies covering both the private and public sectors; core

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<sup>98</sup>Joint Press Statement of the 5<sup>th</sup> NSA Level Meeting of the Colombo Security Conclave held on 09-10 March 2022, in Maldives, [https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/34943/Joint\\_Press\\_Statement\\_of\\_the\\_5th\\_NSA\\_Level\\_Meeting\\_of\\_the\\_Colombo\\_Security\\_Conclave\\_held\\_on\\_09\\_10\\_March\\_2022\\_in\\_Maldives](https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/34943/Joint_Press_Statement_of_the_5th_NSA_Level_Meeting_of_the_Colombo_Security_Conclave_held_on_09_10_March_2022_in_Maldives)

<sup>99</sup>Second India – Indonesia Security Dialogue, [https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/34982/Second\\_India\\_Indonesia\\_Security\\_Dialogue](https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/34982/Second_India_Indonesia_Security_Dialogue)

<sup>100</sup>Joint Statement on the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative by Australian, Indian and Japanese Trade Ministers, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/news-speeches-and-media>

<sup>101</sup>Joint Declaration by India, the European Union, Australia, Comoros, Japan, Mauritius, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, Singapore and Sri Lanka on privacy and the protection of personal data: Strengthening trust in the digital environment, [https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/35001/Joint\\_Declaration\\_by\\_India\\_the\\_European\\_Union\\_Australia\\_Comoros\\_Japan\\_Mauritius\\_New\\_Zealand\\_the\\_Republic\\_of\\_Korea\\_Singapore\\_Sri\\_Lanka\\_on\\_privacy\\_and\\_t](https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/35001/Joint_Declaration_by_India_the_European_Union_Australia_Comoros_Japan_Mauritius_New_Zealand_the_Republic_of_Korea_Singapore_Sri_Lanka_on_privacy_and_t)

principles such as lawfulness, fairness, transparency, purpose limitation, data minimization, limited data retention, data security and accountability; enforceable rights of individuals; safeguards for international transfers to enable cross border data flows by ensuring protection travels with the data; and independent oversight by a dedicated supervisory authority and effective redress.

UK Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs Liz Truss visited India on March 31, to review progress in the bilateral relationship that was upgraded to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership during the Summit in May 2021 and to participate in the inaugural edition of the India-UK Strategic Futures Track 1.5 Dialogue<sup>102</sup>. A substantial part of her discussions in India focused on Ukraine, and enlisting India's support for the democratic cause. She was careful to make the point that it is very important to respect decisions other countries (India) make, and she was not going to tell India what to do.

The Sea Phase of multinational Exercise MILAN concluded off Visakhapatnam on March 04, with a debrief on board INS Jalashwa. 26 ships, one submarine and 21 aircraft took part in the exercise. Exercises conducted included complex anti air warfare drills, weapon firing against low flying air targets, helicopter operations, underway replenishment, anti-submarine exercises and simulation of complex operational scenarios<sup>103</sup>.

The ninth edition of the India – Sri Lanka Bilateral Maritime Exercise SLINEX was conducted off Visakhapatnam from March 07 – 10. The exercise is intended to enhance inter-operability, improve mutual understanding and exchange best practices and procedures for multi-faceted maritime cooperation between the two navies<sup>104</sup>.

Lt Gen Richard Maxwell Burr, Australia's Army Chief visited India from March 8-11<sup>105</sup>. Apart from interaction with his counterpart and the other two service chiefs, the Australian Chief's programme included interaction with the National Defence College, the Centre for Land Warfare Studies, visits to army

<sup>102</sup>Visit of the Foreign Secretary of the UK to India (March 31, 2022), [https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/35085/Visit\\_of\\_Foreign\\_Secretary\\_of\\_the\\_UK\\_to\\_India\\_March\\_31\\_2022](https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/35085/Visit_of_Foreign_Secretary_of_the_UK_to_India_March_31_2022)

<sup>103</sup>Multilateral Naval Exercise MILAN 22 Concludes, <https://indiannavy.nic.in/content/multilateral-naval-exercise-milan-22-concludes>

<sup>104</sup>Sri Lanka – India Bilateral Maritime Exercise SLINEX 07-10 March 2022, <https://indiannavy.nic.in/content/sri-lanka-india-bilateral-maritime-exercise-slinex-07-10-march-2022>

<sup>105</sup>Visit of Australian Army Chief to India From 08 to 11 March 2022, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1804481>

units at Laungewala and Jodhpur, and witnessing a firepower demonstration at Pokharan<sup>106</sup>.

IN ships Chennai and Teg visited Colombo on March 10 & 11, 2022. The visit enabled working level interaction between naval personnel<sup>107</sup>. The ships exercised with SLNS Sindurala off Colombo on departure, on March 12<sup>108</sup>.

The Indian Navy has, during the last two years, undertaken eight missions to 16 friendly foreign countries for shipment of HADR relief material, COVID supplies and food assistance<sup>109</sup>. It has maintained year round sustained surveillance through mission-based deployments in the Gulf of Aden, Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman, approaches to the Malacca Strait, and in the Central and Southern Indian Ocean to address military challenges, pursue Navy-to-Navy foreign cooperation activity, tackle contingencies such as piracy, drug/arms trafficking and natural calamities. Apart from the above, the Indian Navy has conducted joint EEZ surveillance with the Maldives, Mauritius and Seychelles and signed an MoU to do the same with Mozambique; conducted coordinated patrols (CORPATs) with Bangladesh, Indonesia, Myanmar and Thailand, conducted bilateral exercises with 21 foreign countries, participated in 18 multilateral exercises and five tri-service exercises.

The Indian Navy successfully tested an extended-range Brahmos Land Attack Missile from on board INS Chennai on March 05. The missile was reported to have hit its intended target with pinpoint accuracy after performing complex manoeuvres<sup>110</sup>.

The Indian Navy's second P-8I squadron was commissioned into the Indian Navy at Goa on March 29<sup>111</sup>. Christened the Condors, the Squadron will add to India's ability to keep the Indian Ocean under surveillance and deter adventurism. The need now is to enhance Medium Altitude Long Endurance (MALE) UAV capability, through early induction of the Rustom-II and suitable High Altitude Long Endurance (HALE) drones.

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<sup>106</sup>Australian Army Chief Visits Laungewala, Witnesses Integrated Fire Power Demonstration at Pokharan, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1804809>

<sup>107</sup>INS Chennai and INS Teg visit Colombi, <https://indiannavy.nic.in/content/ins-chennai-and-ins-teg-visit-colombo>

<sup>108</sup>Western Fleet Deployment to Sri Lanka ends on High Note, <https://indiannavy.nic.in/content/western-fleet-deployment-sri-lanka-ends-high-note>

<sup>109</sup>Maritime Cooperation with Regional Partners, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1807607>

<sup>110</sup>Indian Navy successfully fires extended range Brahmos land attack missile, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1803212>

<sup>111</sup>Commissioning Ceremony of INAS 316 on 29 Mar 22, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1810972>



General MM Naravane, COAS, received Lt Gen Richard Maxwell Burr, Chief of the Australian Army, at South Block on March 09, 2022. Source: PIB

Japan revised interpretation of its guidelines on the transfer of defence equipment overseas as the country prepared to send supplies to conflict-hit Ukraine<sup>112</sup>. Its principles had earlier prohibited transfers to a country which is party to a conflict<sup>113</sup>. The updated guidelines now state, "defense equipment assigned by the defense minister based on the SDF law can be provided to Ukraine, which has been invaded in violation of international law".

The Solomon Islands has signed a policing deal with China and will send a proposal for a broader security agreement covering its military to its cabinet for consideration, according to media reports<sup>114</sup>. The country had switched recognition from Taiwan to the PRC in 2019. Australia has historically provided security support to the Solomon Islands and has a bilateral security agreement that covers the deployment of police and armed forces. The broader security

<sup>112</sup>Japan to Change Defense Supply Transfer Guidelines Amid Ukraine Crisis, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2022/03/08/national/japan-defense-supply-transfer-change/>

<sup>113</sup>The Three Principles on Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page1we\\_000083.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page1we_000083.html)

<sup>114</sup>EXCLUSIVE Solomon Islands considers security cooperation with China – official, <https://www.reuters.com/world/exclusive-solomon-islands-considers-security-cooperation-with-china-official-2022-03-24/>



agreement provides for Chinese naval ships to carry out logistic replenishment from the Solomon Islands, fuelling anxiety that it might be the prelude to a Chinese military base in the region. In response, Australia's Foreign Minister Marise Payne said, "Australia is aware of the proposed draft Security Cooperation agreement between China and Solomon Islands. We respect the right of every Pacific country to make sovereign decisions. We have regularly and respectfully raised our concerns with the Solomon Islands Government and will continue to do so. We would be particularly concerned by any actions that undermine the stability and security of our region, including the establishment of a permanent presence such as a military base"<sup>115</sup>.

USS Ralph Johnson transited the Taiwan Straits on March 17, hours before the video conversation between Presidents Joe Biden and Xi Jinping on March 18<sup>116</sup>. She was reported to be shadowing the Chinese aircraft carrier Shandong. Unusually, the transit was not reported on the websites of the US Indo-Pacific Command, the Pacific Fleet and the Seventh Fleet, which otherwise proclaim all Freedom of Navigation Operations and Taiwan Strait transits. In contrast, China reported that the ship had not only sailed through the Taiwan Strait but also accused the ship of hyping it up publicly<sup>117</sup>.

The USN recovered the F-35C Lightning II aircraft that had crashed while undertaking operations from USS Carl Vinson in the South China Sea on January 24, 2022. The recovery was made from a depth on about 12,400 feet on March 2<sup>118</sup>.

The Final Planning Conference for RIMPAC 2022 was held at Pearl Harbour, Hawaii, from March 21-24<sup>119</sup>. 41 ships, 4 submarines, more than 170 aircraft and nearly 25,000 personnel from 27 nations are expected to participate in the exercise off Hawaii in July and August 2022. Taiwan has been invited for the first time, India is a regular participant.

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<sup>115</sup>Statement on Solomon islands, <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/marise-payne/media-release/statement-solomon-islands>

<sup>116</sup>Chinese and US warships sailed through Taiwan Straits before Biden - Xi talks, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2022/03/19/asia-pacific/taiwan-strait-us-china-warships/>

<sup>117</sup>Chinese military slams US Warship's transit through Taiwan Strait, [http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2022-03/20/content\\_4907032.htm](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2022-03/20/content_4907032.htm)

<sup>118</sup>US Navy Recovers F-35C from South China Sea, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/2955895/us-navy-recovers-f-35c-from-south-china-sea/>

<sup>119</sup>US 3<sup>rd</sup> Fleet Hosts RIMPAC Final Planning Conference, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/2979234/us-3rd-fleet-hosts-rimpac-final-planning-conference/>



The United States Navy and the Royal Australian Air Force conducted the first cooperative air-to-air refuelling exercise involving an RAAF KC-130A tanker and a USN P-8A. The exercise broadens the scope of bilateral interoperability and enables USN aircraft to remain on task in the designated area for longer periods of time<sup>120</sup>.

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<sup>120</sup>US Navy and Royal Australian Air Force conduct First Cooperative Air-to-Air Refuelling, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/2976256/u-s-navy-and-royal-australian-air-force-conduct-first-cooperative-air-to-air-re/>



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