

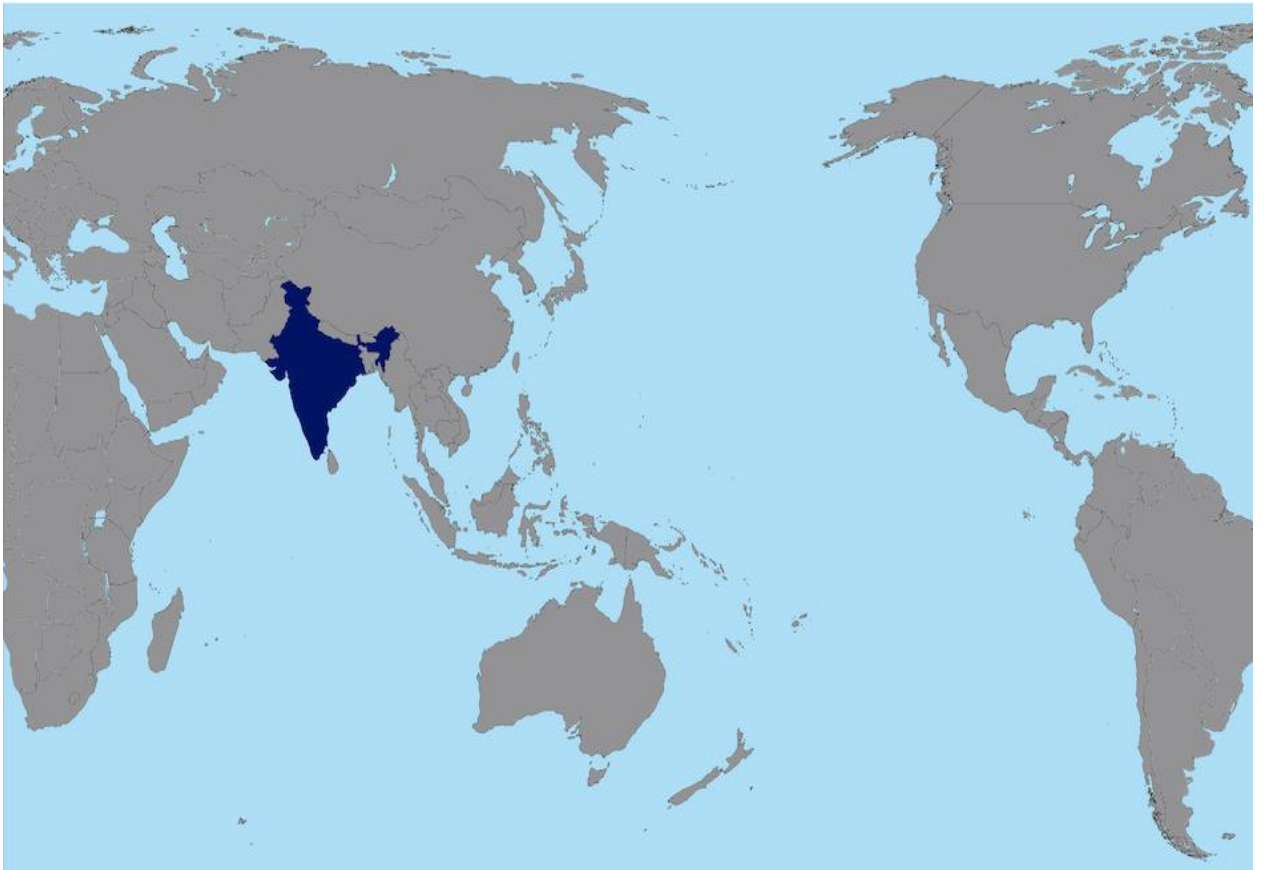


Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



DPG INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR APRIL 2022



Volume III, Issue 4 | April 2022

Delhi Policy Group

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

www.delhipolicygroup.org



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power

DPG INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

Volume III, Issue 4

April 2022

ABOUT US

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

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

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

DPG INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

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

© 2022 by the Delhi Policy Group

Delhi Policy Group

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

DPG INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR
Volume III, Issue 4
April 2022

Contents

Abstract	1
The Fourth India US 2 + 2 Ministerial Meeting	4
The Boris Johnson Visit	8
The EU China Summit	12
AUKUS Developments.....	15
China in the Solomon Islands	17
Exercise Varuna 2022.....	21
Other Indo-Pacific Developments	23



DPG INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

April 2022

Abstract

The fourth India-US Ministerial Dialogue in the 2+2 format took place on April 11, preceded by a Modi-Biden virtual summit. The post-dialogue joint statement indicated enhanced engagement across the board, notwithstanding differences over Ukraine and other issues. Notably, the bilateral defence and security engagement has begun yielding results in the operational domain.

There was confirmation that the next Quad Summit will be held in Tokyo on May 24, 2022. The month also witnessed delivery of the first two batches of vaccines produced under the Quad Vaccine Partnership to Cambodia and Thailand. South Korea's President-elect expressed interest in working closely with the US and sought to attend the forthcoming Quad Summit as an observer.

UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson made his first visit to India as PM on April 21-22, taking forward the bilateral comprehensive strategic partnership concluded last year. The visit optics were well-managed by both sides, and there was progress in strengthening bilateral engagement. This was most visible in the security and defence pillar, where apart from operational interactions; initiatives in defence technology and trade cooperation were announced. Rapid progress in the ongoing FTA negotiations was appreciated by both sides. In sum, the return of the UK to the Indo-Pacific is gathering momentum and the partnership with India appears to be on track towards delivering enhanced security to the region.

The President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, visited India on April 24-25. India and the EU launched a Trade and Technology Council, which will bring India's Ministers for External Affairs, Commerce and Electronics and Information Technology together with their counterparts in the EU Commission. Although the EU remains preoccupied by events in Ukraine, President von der Leyen indicated interest in refocusing on the Indo-Pacific, especially India, ASEAN, Japan, South Korea and Australia.

A two-month truce endorsed by the Saudi Arabia – UAE coalition began at the beginning of April in Yemen, bringing a temporary pause to over seven years of conflict. The truce halts all military activity by any party inside Yemen and



across its borders, while negotiators try to find a way to reach a lasting political compromise. Shortly thereafter, the UAE and Israel announced completion of negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement, the first between Israel and an Arab country. These developments raised prospects for peace and stability in the Arabian Peninsula.

The 20th edition of the India-France naval exercise Varuna concluded off Goa on April 3. The exercise symbolises progress in India-France strategic ties and French interest in the Indo-Pacific. The re-election of President Macron to office, and the participation of an official French representative alongside senior Quad military chiefs at the Raisina Dialogue were positive developments.

China's President Xi Jinping put forward a new Global Security Initiative at the Boao Forum on April 21. The initiative calls for commitment to a vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative, sustainable and indivisible security; respect for territorial integrity of all states; non-interference in the internal affairs, development paths and social systems of different countries; continued commitment to the principles enshrined in the UN Charter; rejection of a Cold War mentality, opposing unilateralism and spurning group politics and bloc confrontations; peaceful resolution of disputes through dialogues; rejection of double standards and opposing the wanton use of unilateral sanctions and long-arm jurisdiction; and common commitment to tackling non-traditional challenges. He also called for safeguarding of peace in Asia, advancing Asian cooperation and promotion of Asian unity, without clarifying how these intentions would be translated into reality in the face of authoritarian China's assertion.

Statements following a China – EU Summit on April 01 indicated that differences outweighed convergences and areas of cooperation. The trend of separate statements instead of a joint one that began in 2020 continued. The EU focused on Ukraine, bilateral issues and areas of cooperation. China sought the setting aside of differences and focusing on bilateral ties to stabilise a turbulent world. There was no mention of the Comprehensive Investment Cooperation Agreement, and the dialogue was described to European lawmakers as a dialogue of the deaf.

In Japan, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's Research Commission on National Security recommended doubling of defence expenditure to 2% of the GDP over the next five years to government. It also recommended easing of restrictions on arms exports, the development of counter-strike capabilities capable of disabling enemy weapons, and revision of the National Security



Strategy, National Defence Programme Guidelines and the Medium-Term Defence Force Build-up Programme. Meanwhile, tension between Russia and Japan ratcheted up following suspension of peace treaty talks with Russia last month. Japan described the four disputed islands as “illegally occupied” for the first time since 2003. It also protested Russia having test-fired Kalibr cruise missiles from two submarines in the Sea of Japan on April 14. Russia in turn warned Japan that its joint exercises with the US near Russian territory would force it to take retaliatory measures.

The Governments of China and the Solomon Islands signed an Inter-Governmental Framework Security Agreement in mid April, prompting the opposition in Australia to describe the development as “The worst foreign policy blunder that Australia has seen since World War II”. The US Indo-Pacific Coordinator, Kurt Campbell, visited Honiara on April 22 and conveyed a thinly veiled warning, while spelling out measures to enhance cooperation between the US and the South Pacific region.

Leaders from the US, UK and Australia came together on April 5 to review progress and reaffirm their commitment to AUKUS. They announced the expansion of military technological cooperation to hypersonics and counter-hypersonics, as well as electronic warfare, defence innovation, cyber capabilities, artificial intelligence, quantum technologies and additional undersea capabilities. They also announced that as work progresses on these and other critical capabilities, they would seek opportunities to engage allies and close partners.



The Fourth India US 2 + 2 Ministerial Meeting

The Fourth India-US 2+2 Ministerial Meeting, and the first after the advent of the Biden Administration, took place on April 11, 2022. Unusually, it was preceded by a virtual meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Joseph Biden, attended by the ministers, during which the leaders committed to strengthening the bilateral India-US Comprehensive Strategic Partnership as well as to focusing it on the Indo-Pacific, to ending the COVID-19 pandemic and advancing global health and food security.^{1,2} In the event, the Joint Statement following the ministerial^{3,4}, which serves as a report card of the present state of cooperation, displayed enhanced engagement in the pillars that had characterized previous ministerial joint statements: the Indo-Pacific Partnership, Defence and Security, Counterterrorism, other bilateral cooperation and nurturing people to people bonds. It also added cooperation in the fields of energy, science and technology, cybersecurity, space, education and people to people ties, and climate and environment. Consequently, the joint statement expanded in length by nearly 63%.

There was substantial discussion on Ukraine, both during the leaders' meeting as well as during the ministerial. India had faced sustained pressure from multiple sources, including use of the "with us or against us" argument, to condemn the Russian action in Ukraine and comply with sanctions imposed by the West. This pressure had been extensively amplified by the media, leading Dr. Jaishankar to diplomatically observe, "This seems to be my day to get a lot of advice and suggestions from the press But look, we watch what's happening in the world, like any country does, and we draw our conclusions and make our assessments. And believe me, we have a decent sense of what is in our interest and know how to protect it and advance it"⁵. Earlier, in

¹ Virtual meeting between Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and President of USA His Excellence Mr. Joseph R. Biden, https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/35180/Virtual_meeting_between_Prime_Minister_Shri_Narendra_Modi_and_President_of_USA_His_Excellery_Mr_Joseph_R_Biden

² Readout of President Biden's Call with Prime Minister Modi of Indi, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/04/11/readout-of-president-bidens-call-with-prime-minister-modi-of-india/>

³ Joint Statement on the fourth India-US 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue, https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/35184/Joint_Statement_on_the_Fourth_IndiaUS_22_Ministerial_Dialogue

⁴ Fourth Annual US-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue, <https://www.state.gov/fourth-annual-u-s-india-22-ministerial-dialogue/>

⁵ Secretary Antony J. Blinken, Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III, Indian Minister of External Affairs Dr. S. Jaishankar and Indian Minister of Defense Rajnath Singh at a joint press availability, <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-secretary-of-defense-loyd-austin-indian-minister-of-external-affairs-dr-s-jaishankar-and-indian-minister-of-defense-rajnath-singh-at-a-joint-press-availability/>

responding to a question regarding India's oil purchases violating sanctions, he had observed, "probably our total purchases for the month would be less than what Europe does in an afternoon. So you might want to think about that"⁶. In the event, the understanding that India's stand either way would not influence the conflict in Europe significantly, but India's alienation would substantially impact the US coalition taking shape in the Indo-Pacific seems to have prevailed. The joint statement indicates that the two sides agreed not to let differences over the Ukraine conflict rock the boat of growing India-US cooperation.



Prime Minister Modi at the Virtual Summit with President Biden on April 11, 2022.

Source: The White House.

In other aspects of the global partnership, cooperation under the Quad remains on track. President Biden said he looked seeing Prime Minister Modi "in Japan about the 24th of May"⁷. A media report had earlier indicated that the next Quad Summit was likely to be in Tokyo on May 24, 2022⁸. Vaccine cooperation is on track, with the first batch of 325,000 doses of the vaccine produced at Biological E being jointly handed over by Ambassadors of the Quad countries to Cambodia on April 12, 2022⁹. This builds the credibility of the Quad as a force

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Remarks by President Biden and Prime Minister Modi of India Before Bilateral Meeting, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/04/11/remarks-by-president-biden-and-prime-minister-modi-of-india-before-bilateral-meeting/>

⁸ Biden to make first visit to Japan as President in late May for 'Quad', <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2022/04/12/national/biden-may-japan-visit/>

⁹ Inaugural delivery of Covid Vaccines under the Quad's Vaccine Partnership, <https://mea.gov.in/press->



for global good in the Indo-Pacific. Similar cooperation in the Western Quad, comprising India, Israel, the UAE and the US to enhance food security, clean energy, waste management and infrastructure development is on the cards. The US conveyed its support for India's upcoming G20 presidency in 2023. What this means, in the context of US efforts to evict Russia from the G20 remains to be seen.



Defence Minister Shri Rajnath Singh meets Admiral John C Aquilino at Camp H.M. Smith, Hawaii, April 13, 2022. Source: US Indo-Pacific Command

Defence and security cooperation also remains on track. Implementation of the foundational agreements is moving ahead, heading towards real-time information exchange across all domains. The US conducts more exercises with India than any other nation does and the militaries are moving towards tactical interoperability. India has placed liaison officers at both INDO-PACOM in Hawaii and NAVCENT in Bahrain, and will join the Combined Maritime Task Force at Bahrain as an Associate Partner, expanding cooperation in the Arabian Sea. The inclusion of possible cooperation in underwater domain awareness is a positive that must be built upon expeditiously. Cooperation under the DTTI is to be revitalised, with a new agreement to co-develop air-launched UAVs and

[releases.htm?dtl/35188/Inaugural_delivery_of_Covid_Vaccines_under_the_Quads_Vaccine_Partnership](#)



the consideration of projects such as counter-unmanned aerial systems system and an ISTAR platform. There is progress in implementation of the Industrial Security Agreement, leading to greater scope for inclusion of Indian defence industry in defence platform value chains. Both sides have, in fact, agreed to explore ways and promote means to encourage participation of US and Indian vendors in each others' value chains. A dialogue on Artificial Intelligence and a Defence Space Dialogue are to be launched commencing this year. The possibility of repair and maintenance of ships of the US Maritime Sealift Command in India will be explored.

On the counter-terrorism and counter-narcotics front, there was ritual condemnation of the use of terrorist proxies and cross border terrorism in all its forms, along with calls for the perpetrators of the Mumbai and Pathankot attacks to be brought to justice. There was also a ritual call for early adoption of the UN Comprehensive International Convention on Terrorism. Counter-narcotics cooperation is on track. The ministerial meeting of the India-US Homeland Security Dialogue is to be reconvened during the current year.

Other areas of bilateral cooperation in the joint statement encompass mutual prosperity, innovation and resilient supply chains; climate, environment and clean energy; science, technology, cybersecurity and space (an MoU on Space Situational Awareness was concluded); global health; and education and people-to-people ties. These are still at the negotiation stage. Launch of the NASA ISRO NISAR satellite from India has been pushed back from 2022 to 2023.

For all the appearance of bonhomie, fissures remain. Perhaps the most prominent of these is trade. The partial Free Trade Agreement (FTA) that was expected during the Trump administration is still not in sight. Whether the US is ready to progress FTAs or not remains unclear. Consultation on the new US Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) has taken place, more will become clear once the IPEF contours become available to the public.

The overhang of CAATSA sanctions continues. India has inducted the first battery of the Russian S-400 AD system; the second is expected shortly. Differences over Ukraine persist. There are differences in outlook towards Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, and Myanmar. There are also continuing differences over human rights: The US State Department released its 2021 Country Reports Human Rights Practices on April 12¹⁰. This includes a chapter

¹⁰ Secretary Antony J. Blinken on the Release of the 2021 Report on Human Rights Practices, <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-on-the-release-of-the-2021-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/>



on India¹¹. Following the ministerial, Secretary Blinken unilaterally raised what he described as a rise in human rights abuses in India¹². Dr. Jaishankar pushed back a day later with "People are entitled to have views about us. We also are entitled to have views about their lobbies and vote banks. We will not be reticent. We also have views on other people's human rights, particularly when it pertains to our community"¹³.

Despite these differences, the relations are on track. The ministerial indicates that the US administration has decided to prioritise partnership-building over the differences. There is a bi-partisan consensus in Congress about India. Imposition of CAATSA sanctions is unlikely in the near term, though the US will keep the possibility up its sleeve. Much will, however, depend on how the war in Ukraine goes for the US. The coming Quad Summit in Tokyo will provide the next indicator of the direction of the US-India comprehensive global partnership.

The Boris Johnson Visit

If one event reaffirmed the importance of India and the Indo-Pacific in the emerging world order, it was the first visit of UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson to India from April 21-22, at a time when he faced an inquiry in the House of Commons over having lied to parliament over the 'Partygate' scandal. Planned initially for Republic Day 2021, the visit was then aborted on account of a spike of COVID-19 infections due to the B.1.1.7 variant of the virus in UK. A second attempt in May 2021 failed due to the emergence of the B.1.617 variant in India, leading to the summit being conducted virtually. That in turn led to the announcement of a new and transformational comprehensive strategic partnership between UK and India¹⁴ and publication of a ten-year roadmap spread over five pillars¹⁵.

¹¹ India 2021 Human Rights Report, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/313615_INDIA-2021-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf

¹² Blinken flags 'rise' in rights abuses in India, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/us/us-raps-india-on-human-rights/articleshow/90804281.cms>

¹³ "Have concerns about human rights in US: EAM Jaishankar", <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-too-has-concerns-about-human-rights-in-us-says-jaishankar-in-strong-push-back/articleshow/90828197.cms>

¹⁴ Joint Statement on India-UK Virtual Summit, https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/33837/Joint_Statement_on_IndiaUK_Virtual_Summit_Roadmap_2030_for_a_Comprehensive_Strategic_Partnership ;

¹⁵ Roadmap 2030 for India-UK future relations launched during India-UK Virtual Summit (4 May, 2021), https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/33838/Roadmap_2030_for_IndiaUK_future_relations_launched_during_IndiaUK_Virtual_Summit_4_May_2021 <https://mea.gov.in/bilateral->



Prime Ministers Narendra Modi and Boris Johnson meet at Hyderabad House, New Delhi, on April 22, 2022. Source: MEA Photo Gallery

The joint statement following the April 22 in-person summit provides an opportunity to take stock of progress in transforming the vision set out last year into reality¹⁶. The commencement of Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations in January 2022 indicates that the pre-negotiation scoping phase, which was to have been completed by the end of 2021, was successfully completed. Four chapters of the proposed FTA have been closed, and negotiators have been tasked to complete their work by October 2022¹⁷. New measures to make it easier to export UK-made medical devices to India were announced¹⁸. The next round of negotiations has begun in New Delhi. The scope of cooperation remains ambitious, extending to removal of barriers in the agriculture, healthcare, education, legal services, marine and social security sectors; increased exchanges and cooperation in IT and digital tech, healthcare and life

[documents.htm?dtl/33840/List_of_MoUsDeclarations_agreedannounced_at_the_IndiaUK_Virtual_Summit_May_4_2021](#)

¹⁶ Joint Statement on the visit of the Prime Minister of UK to India: Towards shared security and prosperity through national resilience, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prime-minister-boris-johnsons-visit-to-india-april-2022-uk-india-joint-statements/uk-india-joint-statement-april-2022-towards-shared-security-and-prosperity-through-national-resilience>

¹⁷ PM Statement at press conference with Prime Minister Modi: 22 April 2022, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-statement-at-press-conference-with-prime-minister-modi-22-april-2022>

¹⁸ Ibid



sciences, transport and logistics, business services, tourism and hospitality etc. Infrastructure, railways, financial cooperation, developmental cooperation, investment, economic cooperation, smart and sustainable urbanization, space and the nuclear sector are other areas that have been identified. An MoU on satellite launch was among the documents exchanged¹⁹ during the current visit.

On the defence and security cooperation front, the UK's Carrier Strike Group (CSG 21) exercised with the Indian Navy both on its way out to the Pacific, in July 2021²⁰, and conduct Exercise Konkan Shakti, the first India-UK tri-service exercise, on the way back in October 2021. This made UK only the third country (after Russia and the US) with which India has conducted a tri-service exercise²¹. The inaugural annual India-UK Maritime Dialogue was held in October 2021²². Lt Cdr Stephen Smith joined IFC-IOR, Gurugram, as the UK's International Liaison Officer in June 2021²³. A Defence Ministerial Dialogue is to be convened during the current year. However, negotiation of logistics and training cooperation MoUs and grey and dark shipping information sharing agreements are still work in progress. A Joint Working Group has been established for an electric propulsion capability partnership to deliver marine electric propulsion systems, but jet engine technology cooperation still remains a promise. PM Johnson did announce that the UK would create an India-specific Open General Export License, reducing bureaucracy and slashing delivery times for defence procurement by India²⁴. An India-UK Cyber Statement was issued, recommitting both countries to a partnership that delivers results for both countries²⁵.

¹⁹ List of MoUs exchanged during the official visit of Prime Minister of UK to India, https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/35219/List_of_MoUs_exchanged_during_the_official_visit_of_Prime_Minister_of_UK_to_India

²⁰ See Lalit Kapur, 'Britain's Foray Into the Indo-Pacific' in the Indo-Pacific Monitor, July 2021, https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads_dpg/publication_file/volii-issue7-2777.pdf

²¹ See Lalit Kapur, 'CSG 21, Global Britain and India' in the Indo-Pacific Monitor, October 2021, https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads_dpg/publication_file/volii-issue10-3442.pdf

²² Inaugural Indi-UK Maritime Dialogue, https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/34401/Inaugural_India_UK_Maritime_Dialogue#:~:text=India%20and%20UK%20held%20their,Prime%20Ministers%20in%20May%202021.

²³ Britain posts liaison officer at Indian Navy's Information Fusion Centre, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/britain-posts-liaison-officer-at-indian-navys-information-fusion-centre/articleshow/83747085.cms?from=mdr>

²⁴ PM Statement at press conference with Prime Minister Modi: 22 April 2022, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-statement-at-press-conference-with-prime-minister-modi-22-april-2022>

²⁵ India – UK Cyber Statement, April 2022, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prime-minister-boris-johnsons-visit-to-india-april-2022-uk-india-joint-statements/india-uk-cyber-statement-april-2022>



Ambitious plans are afoot on the health, climate and energy security fronts. Joint initiatives on malaria vaccines, on antimicrobial resistance and a digital partnership between national health authorities in the two countries were announced. Energy plans include harnessing offshore wind energy, the creation of a new Hydrogen Science and Innovation Hub, and taking forward the green grids solar power initiative. If there is one area in which progress has been somewhat more difficult, it is in nurturing the living bridge, the Indian diasporas who connect the two countries, with COVID-19 playing spoilsport. But even here, PM Johnson struck a positive note, expressing a need for Indian genius in the UK and asking negotiators to get a move on²⁶.

The visit optics were well-managed by both sides. There was clear display of concern regarding India's sensitivities and compulsions from PM Johnson, thus avoiding cause for complaint from India's commentariat. He pointed to the similarities in India's and British condemnation of atrocities in Ukraine, spoke of understanding India's constraints and the shared history with Russia, and focused instead on conveying his opinion that Putin had blundered catastrophically and was turning Russia into a Chinese satrapy, highlighting the need for democracies to stick together. He appreciated Prime Minister Modi's moves towards an 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' and said the UK was trying to do the same thing, pointing out that it would be sensible for the two nations to work together. He was also careful in his response to a question about British members of parliament questioning India's democracy, observing, "Parliamentarians, they say all sorts of things, you should see what they say about me in our Parliament", before going on to opine that it was not the job of one country to preach to another and that nobody could say India was not a democracy, before turning back to India's evident role as a guardian of democracy in the Indo-Pacific.

In sum, the confluence of circumstances and the shared vision and values that led to an agreement on cooperation at apex level last year has strengthened, despite the happenings in Ukraine. Translating this vision into mutually beneficial cooperation on ground, however, still requires substantial effort. Numerous impediments of history remain to be ironed out, and these are work in progress. India – UK relations, however, appear to be on the right track, which is good news for India and the Indo-Pacific.

²⁶ India's role as guardian of democratic values important: UK PM Boris Johnson – Full Interview, <https://www.timesnownews.com/india/indias-role-as-guardian-of-democratic-values-important-uk-pm-boris-johnson-full-interview-article-91005094>



The EU China Summit

Two weeks after Presidents Joe Biden and Xi Jinping discussed the Russian action in Ukraine through videoconference²⁷, President of the European Council Charles Michel and President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen met through video conference for the 23rd EU-China Summit with China's Prime Minister Li Keqiang and President Xi Jinping. The outcome was watched keenly not just in the EU and China, but also in the US, Russia, Japan, Australia and India. Statements released by the two sides portray differing narratives.

The EU account placed Russia's action in Ukraine at the forefront, highlighting the common responsibility to work together to stop the war and bring about peace at the earliest²⁸. Russia's action was portrayed as "endangering global security and the world's economy, as well as food and energy security". The EU called on China to support efforts to bring about an immediate end to the bloodshed in Ukraine, to join in the sanctions imposed by the West, and to stop any attempts to circumvent sanctions or aid Russia. On the bilateral front, the EU "noted its disappointment with China's unjustified sanctions, including against members of the European Parliament, and coercive measures against the EU Single Market and Member States". It sought addressing of long-standing concerns related to market access and the investment environment in China, with a view to ensuring a balanced trade and economic relationship. It expressed concerns about the human rights situation in China and on dismantling of "One Country Two Systems" in Hong Kong. It mandated a high-level Trade and Economic Dialogue to address market access concerns, resumption of the high-level Cyber Dialogue, and resumption of a substantive Human Rights Dialogue, while reaffirming its commitment to the one-China policy.

²⁷ 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/>

²⁸ EU-China summit: Restoring peace and stability in Ukraine is a shared responsibility, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/04/01/eu-china-summit-restoring-peace-and-stability-in-ukraine-is-a-shared-responsibility/>



Presidents Charles Michel, Ursula von der Leyen and Xi Jinping in Video Conference during the China – EU Summit, April 1, 2022. Source: European Council

China, on the other hand, prioritised the bilateral relationship²⁹. President Xi called on the EU to “form its own perception of China, adopt an independent China policy and work with China to promote the bilateral relationship and add stabilising factors to a turbulent world”. He stressed that the two should take the lead in defending the international system with the UN at its core, and should jointly reject the resurrection of rival-bloc mentality, with a view to maintaining world peace and stability. On trade, he called for the two to promote shared development and deepen economic globalisation through open cooperation. He committed to opening up China further, while seeking that the EU provide “a fair, transparent and non-discriminatory environment for Chinese business investment and development in Europe”. He called on the two sides to follow true multilateralism involving extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits. On Ukraine, he put forward a four-point plan to settle the crisis. First, all should create favourable conditions for negotiations between Russia and Ukraine and make room for political settlement, rather than adding fuel to the fire. Second, China and the EU should work together to prevent a larger humanitarian crisis. Third, the fundamental and legitimate concerns of all relevant parties must be accommodated. Finally, both sides must work to prevent the regional conflict from magnifying. A

²⁹ President Xi Jinping Meets with European Council President Charles Michel and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/202204/t20220401_10663276.html



separate statement from Prime Minister Li Keqiang followed the same template³⁰.

As after the 22nd China-EU summit, there was no joint statement, reflecting the growing gulf between the two sides after the Biden administration assumed charge. Debriefing European lawmakers at the European Parliament Plenary on April 06, Josep Borrell, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy said, "... the dialogue was everything but a dialogue. In any case, it was a dialogue of the deaf"³¹. He also said, "... most of you will agree that our relations with China are not where we would like them to be. Given China's increasing assertiveness, both at home and abroad, it is clear that we do not share the same political values"³².

Major differences between the EU and China are China's position on the Ukraine crisis, human rights, the treatment of minorities in Xinjiang, concerns about Tibet and Inner Mongolia, the abrogation of the 'One Country, Two Systems' approach in Hong Kong, China's unilateral sanctions against EU parliamentarians and its attempts to break the EU single market, and market access and investment considerations. China seeks to compartmentalise these differences, something the EU had been willing to go along with till now. The Ukraine crisis has resulted in the EU making it clear that such compartmentalisation is no longer feasible or acceptable. The EU sees Ukraine as a defining moment determining whether the future will be one in which its members lived in a world governed by rules, or one governed by the use of force. It has laid down red lines, making it clear that violation of sanctions by China will have consequences. It has pointed out that EU trade with China is over \$ 2 billion per day (total trade was estimated at \$ 828 billion in 2021), as against just \$ 330 billion per day between China and Russia. Whether this economic fact will suffice to change China's geopolitical outlook is a matter of conjecture.

China's stand, on the other hand, is that the EU position is driven by the US rather than independent thought. Security concerns have clearly come to the forefront in EU thinking now, and a tilt back to the US side has become visible following the US – EU summit and the NATO summit June 2021.

³⁰ Premier calls on China, EU to enhance dialogue, coordination, deepen cooperation, http://english.www.gov.cn/premier/news/202204/01/content_WS62472009c6d02e5335328a16.html

³¹ EU-China Summit: Speech by High Representative /Vice President Josep Borrell at the EP plenary, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-china-summit-speech-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-ep-plenary_en

³² Ibid.



There was no mention of the comprehensive agreement on investment concluded by the two sides in 2020. The bilateral divide between China and EU is widening, with bridging action not in sight. Dialogue between them will continue: it will not be easy to curtail a relationship with such a large economic content. It is, however, likely to remain a dialogue of the deaf going ahead, unless there is major change in the outlook of either side.

AUKUS Developments

Nine months after the leaders of Australia, UK and the US came together virtually to announce the AUKUS Alliance³³, intended to deliver maritime Asia from China's hegemony by providing nuclear attack submarines (SSNs) and other advanced capabilities to Australia, they met again, virtually, to assess progress. A joint media statement³⁴ and fact sheet³⁵ were issued to mark the discussions.

There has been visible progress. The countries have established nine trilateral working groups towards finding a way to deliver SSN capability to Australia. Each of these groups has met multiple times. An agreement for exchange of naval nuclear propulsion information entered into force on February 8 this year. Joint teams have visited multiple sites in Australia to scope out the requirements for nuclear stewardship, infrastructure, workforce and industrial capabilities. Australian personnel have commenced training in nuclear science and engineering. Land on which to build the SSN construction yard is being acquired. A new submarine base on the East Coast of Australia has been announced. The three countries have engaged with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) regarding the non-proliferation aspects of the SSN partnership. An AUKUS Caucus has formed, intended to engender bipartisan consensus in the US Congress³⁶.

³³ See Lalit Kapur, "The AUKUS Alliance: Return to the Past?", <https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/publication/policy-briefs/the-aukus-alliance-return-to-the-past.html>

³⁴ AUKUS Leaders' Level Statement, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/joint-media-statement-aukus-leaders-level-statement>

³⁵ FACT Sheet: Implementation of the Australia – United Kingdom – United States Partnership (AUKUS), <https://www.pm.gov.au/sites/default/files/media/aukus-fact-sheet.pdf>

³⁶ AUKUS Working Group Issues Statement As New Details of the Trilateral Defence Alliance Emerge, <https://courtney.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/aukus-working-group-issues-statement-new-details-trilateral-defense>



Progress is also reported on the four other advanced capabilities identified in the September 2021 announcement³⁷. Eight trilateral working groups have been established for other advanced capabilities. The AUKUS Undersea Robotics Autonomous Systems (AURAS) project has been launched; initial trials and experimentation are expected in 2023. The AUKUS Quantum Arrangement (AQuA) will accelerate investment to deliver generation-after-next quantum capabilities, with initial focus on positioning, navigation and timing, with trials and experimentation targeted over next three years. Early work in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and advanced cyber capability has also commenced, with protecting critical communications and operations systems as the priority focal area. Four new areas of cooperation were announced on April 5: accelerated development of advanced hypersonic and counter-hypersonic capability; enabling AUKUS forces to work in contested and degraded EW environments; accelerating defence innovation enterprises; and sharing of sensitive information.

The incongruity of an erstwhile colonial nation and its settler colonies, one of which is now the world's predominant power, unilaterally determining how to secure Asian waters (the Indo-Pacific), and developing the capability to impose their divination on the region, will not have escaped Asian eyes. Having been at the receiving end of colonialism, Asian nations will remain suspicious of any perceived attempt to reassume the "White Man's Burden" and guide their affairs. This lies at the heart of the Asian preference for multilateralism and multipolarity. Despite its professed values, the unipolar record of the US has been anything but stellar, as is shown by interventions and regime change attempts in Burma, China, South Korea, Iran, Vietnam, Cuba, Laos, Cambodia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Yugoslavia, Libya, Grenada, Nicaragua and Guatemala, among others. The ongoing Ukraine crisis is another example: the penchant of the US to see the world community as comprising solely of the West (and US dependencies in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan) has not found resonance in Asia, Africa and even Latin America. But Australia and the UK have long conceded leadership of the white races to the US. They will follow the US lead.

An aggressive and assertive China does pose problems particularly for Southeast Asian nations, one that they lack the unity or capacity to manage. The potential of a China-Russia combine is an even greater problem. So Southeast Asian nations will go along with AUKUS, even though its results will become visible only after the so-called Davidson Window has closed for Taiwan. Their choices lie between a balance of power through AUKUS, or a G-

³⁷ Joint Leaders Statement on AUKUS, September 15, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/09/15/joint-leaders-statement-on-aukus/>



2, where the US and China reach some accommodation and find a way to dominate the rest of Asia. The Asia-Pacific, comprising East and Southeast Asia, will be where the AUKUS and China / the China Russia combine confront each other. AUKUS does provide the potential for regional balance, provided continuity and progress can be maintained.

Europe has, by and large, decided to tilt to the US side at least in terms of values, as seen from the various Indo-Pacific European strategies. The war in Ukraine will further reinforce this trend, though in the short-term, it will force greater internal focus. European capacity to act in Asia is presently somewhat limited, but that can be changed given the requisite financial investment – and Western Europe not only has the capacity to spend more on defence and security, but has already begun doing so.

India and the Indian Ocean are still relatively insulated: China's maritime geography and capacity doesn't yet permit more than token deployment in the Indian Ocean. This provides India a window in which to implement its SAGAR vision and develop the requisite capacity to counter China's inroads into the region. But though the India-US Comprehensive Global and Strategic Partnership is of great importance and one of the most consequential partnerships for the region's future, India cannot lose sight of the fact that the US has only limited interests in the Indian Ocean and will not fight for them. The lack of US alliances, bases and forward deployed forces in the Indian Ocean; coupled with the US having accepted India's primacy in securing this space; are facts that speak for themselves.

Unless there is dramatic change in the outlook of either China or the US, India must take the lead in ensuring hard security for the Indian Ocean. Realisation of the need has dawned on India's decision-makers. What matters now is making steady progress towards our goals. Two steps were taken this month, in the India-US 2+2 Ministerial Meeting on April 11 (covered separately in this Indo-Pacific Monitor) and the constitution and inaugural meeting of the Inter-ministerial Coordination Group convened by the Prime Minister on April 12³⁸. Many more such steps will be required to secure India's interests going ahead.

China in the Solomon Islands

Responding to a question during his regular press conference on April 19, China's spokesperson said, "As approved by the Governments of China and

³⁸ Meeting of the Inter-Ministerial Coordination Group on Neighbouring Countries, https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/35190/Meeting_of_InterMinisterial_Coordination_Group_on_Neighbouring_Countries



Solomon Islands, State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Minister of Foreign Affairs and External Trade Jeremiah Manele, on behalf of the Governments of China and Solomon Islands respectively, officially signed the inter-governmental framework agreement on security cooperation between the two countries the other day³⁹. Prime Minister of the Solomon Islands Manasseh Sogavare confirmed the formal signing of the security cooperation agreement in parliament⁴⁰. What does this agreement mean for the Indo-Pacific in general, and for the Quad partners?



USS Abraham Lincoln, USS Mobile Bay, JS Kongo, JS Inazuma and USS Spruance exercise with aircraft from USS Abraham Lincoln and the JASDF in the Sea of Japan on April 12, 2022.

Source: US Navy.

Located about 2000 Km to the north of Australia's east coast and to east of Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands group comprises six major islands and over 900 smaller ones. They, along with Papua New Guinea and Bougainville, Vanuatu and associated islands, New Caledonia and New Zealand, form an island chain 1500 – 2000 Km from Australia's East coast, with the potential to act either as a waypoint or as a barrier between the United States and Australia. This geography had made them the scene of several major land,

³⁹ Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin's Regular Press Conference on April 19, 2022, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/202204/t20220419_10669768.html

⁴⁰ Solomon Islands-China Security Cooperation Signed, <https://solomons.gov.sb/solomon-islands-china-security-cooperation-signed/>



sea and air battles during World War II in 1942-43, as Imperial Japan sought to create a barrier between the US and Australia, making the names of Gaudalcanal, Choiseul, Malaita and San Cristobal familiar to aficionados of military history. The possibility of China creating a similar barrier makes expansion of China's influence in the region is a matter of deep strategic concern for the trans-Pacific allies.

A British protectorate through most of the 20th century, the Solomon Islands gained independence in 1978. The government since then has been characterised by unstable political coalitions and frequent changes of leadership. Sogavare, a bureaucrat before he entered politics, has been the Prime Minister four times; in 2000-01, 2006-07, 2014-17 and from 2019 onwards. His government entered into an agreement with Australia providing the basis for deployment of Police, Armed Forces and other Personnel to the Solomon Islands in August 2017⁴¹, and this deployment was used to quell riots in the Solomon Islands in 2019. In 2019, however, shortly after becoming the PM for the fourth time, he (and President Taaneti Maamau of Kiribati, about 4000 Km east of the Solomon Islands), switched recognition from Taiwan to the PRC, a Chinese diplomatic success. The current Framework Security Cooperation Agreement with China builds on that success.

Although the actual content of the Framework Agreement is not known, a draft circulated on social media permits the Solomon Islands to request China to send police, armed police, military personnel and other law enforcement and armed forces to maintain social order, protect lives and property, provide humanitarian response, or provide other assistance as requested⁴². Moreover, China may, according to its needs, make ship visits to the Solomon Islands, carry out logistical replenishment, and use relevant forces to protect the safety of Chinese personnel and major projects in the region.

The pact provides China a foundation for subverting democratic norms and enhancing its interference in domestic politics, particularly in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. It calls into question the Australian stewardship of the Pacific Island community: there is evidently a strong undercurrent of dissatisfaction within the region. It helps extend the PLA's military reach and opens up prospects for a Chinese military base in the Solomon Islands. Such a base would effectively enable China to interpose a barrier,

⁴¹ Agreement between the Government of Australia and the Government of Solomon Islands Concerning the Basis for Deployment of Police, Armed Forces, and other Personnel to Solomon Islands, <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/dfat/treaties/ATS/2018/14.html>

⁴² Draft Framework Agreement Between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of Solomon Islands on Security Cooperation, <https://twitter.com/AnnaPowles/status/1506845794728837120>



hindering move of personnel and stores across the Pacific in the event of conflict. It could also be the precursor for emplacement of underwater sensors across inter-island choke points, enabling detection of AUKUS submarines moving from their east coast bases towards China and Taiwan. It complicates Australia's security planning, forcing provision for a threat from the east that could target otherwise secure bases that were out of reach of the DF-21 and DF-26 missiles from China or South China Sea Islands. The pact must, therefore, be viewed as an acute foreign policy failure: in fact, Penny Wong, the opposition shadow Foreign Minister in Australia, has described it as "The worst foreign policy blunder in the Pacific that Australia has seen since the end of World War II"⁴³.

A reaction by Australia and the US has begun, though its efficacy remains in question. A US delegation led by NSC Indo-Pacific Coordinator Kurt Campbell visited Honiara on April 22 and had a long discussion with Prime Minister Sogavare and members of his cabinet⁴⁴. The US side committed to "fulfilling and strengthening its commitments in the region, working to advance regional unity, coordinating with allies and partners on meeting twenty-first century challenges, and protecting the sovereignty of Pacific Island states"⁴⁵. It further committed to expediting opening of a US Embassy at Honiara, advancing cooperation on unexploded ordinance, launching a programme on maritime domain awareness, dispatching USS Mercy to address public health, advancing a dialogue on the return of the Peace Corps, delivering additional vaccines, and advancing initiatives on climate, health and people to people ties. It also held out a threat by making clear that if steps were taken to establish a de facto permanent Chinese military presence, power projection capabilities, or a military installation, the US would have significant concerns and would respond accordingly. The two sides agreed to launch a high-level strategic dialogue, co-chaired by the White House and Department of State on the US side, to enhance communication, drive practical progress and discuss in greater detail security issues of mutual concern.

India's connect with the Pacific Islands, including Solomon Islands, comes through the Forum for Indo-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC). Prime Minister Modi had met Pacific Island leaders on the sidelines of the UNGA

⁴³ Video: 'Worst foreign policy blunder in the Pacific since the end of World War II': Penny Wong, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-04-20/worst-foreign-policy-blunder-in-the-pacific-since/13847436>

⁴⁴ Readout of Senior Administration Travel to Hawaii, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, and Solomon Islands, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/04/22/readout-of-senior-administration-travel-to-hawaii-fiji-papua-new-guinea-and-solomon-islands/>

⁴⁵ Ibid.



meeting in September 2019 articulated the desire to be a close partner for the region and work with it to advance its developmental agenda, and spoken of holding the third FIPIC Summit in Port Moresby in the first half of 2020⁴⁶. However, COVID-19 stalled the dialogue. China's outreach in the region may not have a direct impact on India, but it is a major concern for strategic partners. As such, it is time to revive India's efforts to provide an alternative to China to the region.

Exercise Varuna 2022

Shared interests between India and France in the Indian Ocean include maritime transportation security; respect of international law by all States, in particular freedom of navigation and overflight; action against organised crime, trafficking including in WMD; smuggling and IUU fishing, disaster relief and protection of the maritime environment and its resources⁴⁷. India-France cooperation in the region must, therefore, be targetted towards securing these interests.

India and France started exercising together periodically in 1993; the focus then was transnational crime. The exercise was christened 'Varuna' in 2001. It grew in scope over the years, and by 2018, it had expanded to three phases: the first phase focusing on anti-submarine operations off Goa, the second involving amphibious exercises off Chennai, and the third off Reunion, in the South-western Indian Ocean.

The 20th edition of Exercise Varuna was conducted off Goa from March 30 – April 3⁴⁸. Reports had earlier indicated that Exercise Varuna would form part of the deployment of a French Amphibious Ready Group centred on FNS Mistral to the Atlantic, Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean for Mission Jeanne D'Arc 2022⁴⁹. However, participation appears to have been limited to INS Chennai and its embarked Seaking helicopter as well as P-8I aircraft from the Indian side, and the frigate Courbet, the support vessel Loire and "other units" from the

⁴⁶ Prime Minister meets Pacific Island Leaders,
<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1586327>

⁴⁷ Joint Strategic Vision of India-France Cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region (New Delhi, 10 March 2018), <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/29598/Joint+Strategic+Vision+of+IndiaFrance+Cooperation+in+the+Indian+Ocean+Region+New+Delhi+10+March+2018>

⁴⁸ 20th Edition of India France Naval Exercise Varuna-2022,
<https://indiannavy.nic.in/content/20th-edition-india-france-naval-exercise-varuna-%E2%80%93-2022>

⁴⁹ French Amphibious Ready Group Sets Sail for Mission Jeanne D'Arc 2022,
<https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2022/02/french-amphibious-ready-group-set-sails-for-mission-jeanne-darc-2022/>



French side⁵⁰. The exercise appears to have been directed at the “maritime transportation security” and “respect of international law by all States, in particular freedom of navigation and overflight” interests.



FS Loire, FS Courbet and INS Chennai in close formation during Exercise Varuna 2022 in the Arabian Sea on April 03, 2022. Source: Indian Navy

As a great power with a territorial possessions in the Indian Ocean (in Reunion, Mayotte and 13 French Southern and Antarctic islands), a resident population of 1.6 million French citizens and an EEZ of over 2.6 million Km² (larger than that of India), France has deep interests in Indian Ocean stability. According to French statistics, 13% of its exports and 17.5% of its imports pass through the Indian Ocean. France maintains a military presence at Abu Dhabi (the base for the French Indo-Pacific Command), Djibouti, Reunion and Mayotte. In addition, a French surface warship group deploys into the Indian Ocean for a few months each year. India is its foremost political and security partner in the Indian Ocean.

Considerable progress has been made in strengthening the India-France strategic partnership. Domain awareness has been enhanced through sharing of white shipping information. The reciprocal access agreement extends the

⁵⁰ Exercise Varuna 2022 Culminated, <https://indiannavy.nic.in/content/exercise-varuna-2022-culminated>



reach of the maritime forces of both. However, capacities still remain a limitation, particularly the vast area of operations. The two countries had, in March 2018, said they would be “open to inviting strategic partner countries in the region to participate in Indo-French exercises”⁵¹. France and India have strategic partnerships with Australia, Indonesia, Japan and Singapore in the Indian Ocean, and the intent was evidently to include them, beginning with Australia. This hasn’t, however, happened yet. French pique at the announcement of the AUKUS alliance in September 2020 scuttled a promising trilateral dialogue, which could have led to the inclusion of Australia in Exercise Varuna. It is time to renew such dialogues, not just with Australia, but also with Indonesia, Singapore and Japan. The rapidly evolving regional geo-strategic environment brooks no delay.

Other Indo-Pacific Developments

The month began with the announcement of a two-month truce in Yemen, aimed to stop all military activity inside the country and across its borders while negotiators hammer out a political compromise that can bring about enduring peace⁵². The truce enables ships carrying fuel to enter Hudaydah port and international flights to operate from Sana’a to pre-determined destinations. It could be further extended with the consent of the parties concerned. The US expressed its gratitude to Saudi Arabia, UAE and the Yemen government for this initiative, and committed to deterring threats to friends and partners in the region⁵³.

US Deputy NSA Daleep Singh visited New Delhi on April 01 ahead of the 2+2 ministerial dialogue, ostensibly to “deepen India – US Economic Cooperation and advance shared interests in a free and open Indo-Pacific”⁵⁴. The real purpose of his visit was to prod India into condemning Russia’s action in Ukraine. As per the US, “he consulted Indian counterparts on goals and mechanisms of US sanctions on Russia and ways to cooperate to address global food insecurity and energy prices. He also discussed development of an Indo-

⁵¹ Joint Strategic Vision of India-France Cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region (New Delhi, 10 March 2018), <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/29598/Joint+Strategic+Vision+of+IndiaFrance+Cooperation+in+the+Indian+Ocean+Region+New+Delhi+10+March+2018>

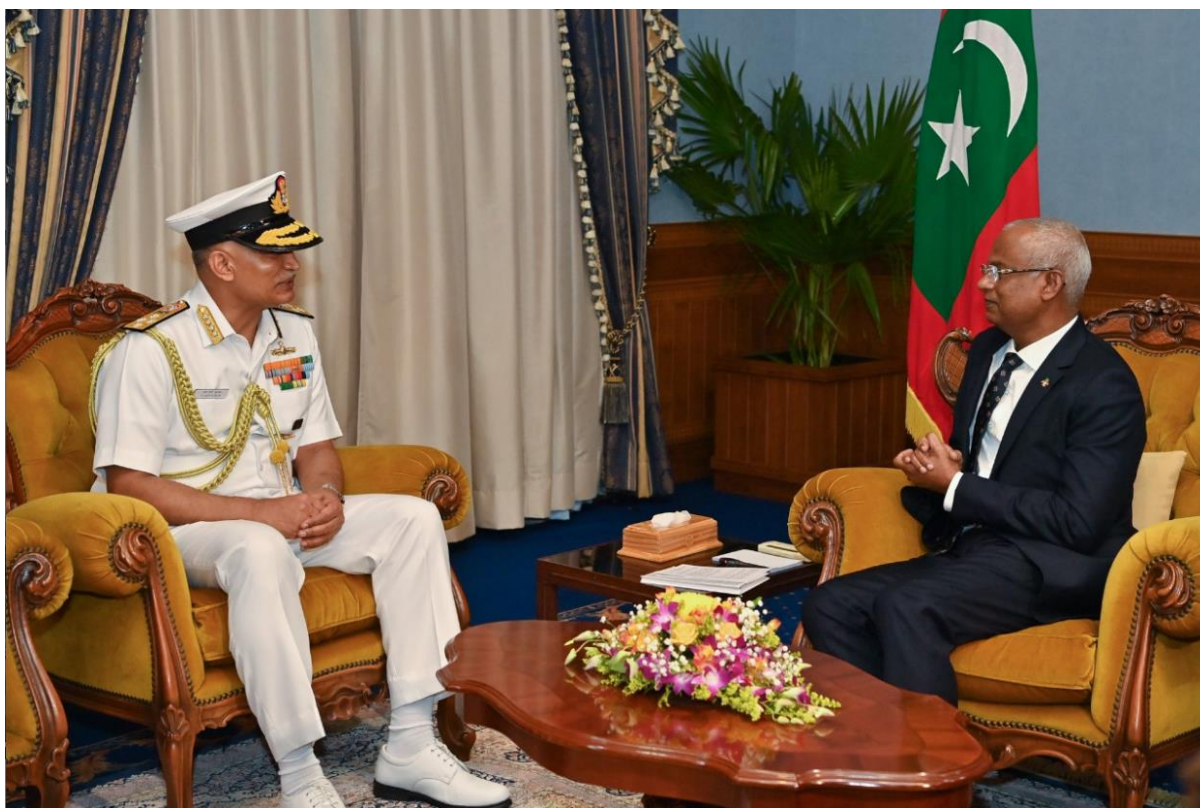
⁵² Press Statement by the UN Special Envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg on a two-month Truce, <https://osesgy.unmissions.org/press-statement-un-special-envoy-yemen-hans-grundberg-two-month-truce>

⁵³ President Biden Statement on UN-Mediated Truce in Yemen, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/04/01/president-biden-statement-on-un-mediated-truce-in-yemen/>

⁵⁴ Readout of Senior Administration Official Travel to India, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/04/01/readout-of-senior-administration-travel-to-india/>



Pacific Economic Framework, delivering high-quality infrastructure through Build Back Better World and strengthening the global economy". The discussions were described as productive.



Admiral R Hari Kumar, Chief of the Naval Staff, with President Ibrahim Mohamad Solih at Male on April 18, 2022. Source: PIB

Israel and UAE concluded negotiations on a Free Trade Agreement on April 01⁵⁵. The first such agreement between Israel and an Arab country, the agreement covers over 95% of the goods on both sides' customs lists including food and agricultural products and is also expected to advance trade in services. The agreement builds on the September 2020 Abrahams Accord and helps bridge at least one fault line in the Gulf.

India and Australia signed the bilateral Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA) virtually on April 02⁵⁶. India's first agreement with a developed nation in over a decade, the ECTA is expected to enhance bilateral trade to over \$ 50 billion in the next five years. The agreement will facilitate the

⁵⁵Israel and UAE have completed negotiations on a bilateral free trade agreement, <https://www.gov.il/en/departments/news/israel-and-the-uae-complete-negotiations-on-bilateral-free-trade-agreement-2-apr-2022>

⁵⁶Prime Minister, Shri NarendraModi says the signing of the India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA) in a short time span reflects the depth of the mutual confidence between the two countries, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1812710>



import of Australian goods to India, including coal, LNG, horticulture, critical minerals and rare earths while delivering increased work, study and travel opportunities for Indian citizens. Described as the first step towards a full comprehensive economic cooperation agreement by the end of 2022, it will go a long way towards building stronger bridges between the two countries.

A Japanese media report attributed to a high-ranking official indicated that South Korea's President-elect Yoon Suk-yeol had requested that he be allowed to attend the forthcoming Quad Summit in Tokyo as an observer⁵⁷. That a formal request has been made was confirmed by Maj. Gen. Jung Hae-il, President of South Korea's National Defence University, at the Raisina Dialogue on April 26. The Summit itself is scheduled for May 24, three days after the Australian general elections on May 21⁵⁸, indicating confidence that Australia's policies would remain unaltered irrespective of who wins.

China's President Xi Jinping put forward a new Global Security Initiative at the Boao Forum on April 21⁵⁹. The initiative calls for commitment to a vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative, sustainable and indivisible security; respect for territorial integrity of all states; non-interference in the internal affairs, development paths and social systems of different countries; continued commitment to the principles enshrined in the UN Charter; rejection of a Cold War mentality, opposing unilateralism and spurning group politics and bloc confrontations; peaceful resolution of disputes through dialogues; rejection of double standards and opposing the wanton use of unilateral sanctions and long-arm jurisdiction; and common commitment to tackling non-traditional challenges. He also called for safeguarding of peace in Asia, advancing Asian cooperation and promotion of Asian unity, without clarifying how these intentions would be translated into reality in the face of authoritarian China's assertion.

The war in Ukraine had its impact in East Asia as Russia's Deputy Prime Minister warned Japan that its joint exercises with the US near Russian territory would force Russia to take retaliatory measures⁶⁰. JMSDF ships have exercised

⁵⁷South Korea seeks to attend Quad summit as observer in May, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Indo-Pacific/South-Korea-seeks-to-attend-Quad-summit-as-observer-in-May>

⁵⁸Australia election: PM Scott Morrison calls poll for 21 May, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-61055915>

⁵⁹Rising to Challenges and Building a Bright Future Through Cooperation, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/202204/t20220421_1067108_1.html

⁶⁰Russia warns Japan over joint military exercises with US, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2022/04/26/national/russia-warns-japan-us-military-exercises/>



with the USS Abraham Lincoln Task Group in the Sea of Japan, and it is easy to understand how such exercises could be construed as “offensive” by Russia. Meanwhile, Japan protested Russia having test-fired two Kalibr cruise missiles from submarines in the Sea of Japan as Russia carried out its own exercises in the region on April 14⁶¹.

India’s DRDO successfully flight-tested a solid fuel ducted ramjet booster on April 08. The booster is an important milestone in the development of critical missile technologies indigenously. It will enable enhancement of ranges of India’s air-to-air missiles and interception of aerial targets using supersonic speeds at very long ranges⁶².

USS Annapolis, a Los Angeles Class SSN, joined US Submarines Asheville, Key West, Jefferson City and Springfield to become the 5th attack submarine to be homeported at Guam US Navy press release described this as part of plans “to put the most advanced and capable units forward”⁶³ in order to support Indo-Pacific initiatives and missions.

An Indian Naval P-8I Long Range Maritime Patrol Aircraft was reported at Darwin on April 12, to conduct an operational turnaround and engage with counterparts from 92 Wing of the Royal Australian Air Force⁶⁴. Aircraft from the two countries would conduct coordinated surveillance to enhance maritime domain awareness, including underwater, according to the report. This cooperation would go a long way towards making both countries aware of China’s activities, including underwater, at the Indian Ocean entrances lying between Indonesia and Northern Australia.

India’s Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral R Harikumar visited the Maldives⁶⁵ from April 18-20 and the Seychelles⁶⁶ from April 21-23. USS Momsen and INS Trishul exercised together off Goa on April 27⁶⁷. The US destroyer had earlier arrived

⁶¹ Russian Subs Test-Fire Cruise Missiles in Sea of Japan, <https://www.nippon.com/en/news/yj2022041400870/>

⁶² DRDO successfully flight-tests Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet technology off Odisha coast, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1814813>

⁶³ USS Annapolis Makes Fifth Submarine Homeported in Guam, <https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/News-Stories/Article/2995061/uss-annapolis-makes-fifth-submarine-homeported-in-guam/>

⁶⁴ India-Australia Maritime Patrol Reconnaissance Aircraft (MPRA) Coordinated Operations, <https://indiannavy.nic.in/content/india-australia-maritime-patrol-reconnaissance-aircraft-mpira-coordinated-operations>

⁶⁵ CNS Visit to Maldives, <https://indiannavy.nic.in/content/cns-visit-maldives>

⁶⁶ CNS visit to Seychelles, <https://indiannavy.nic.in/content/cns-visit-seychelles>

⁶⁷ USS Momsen Conducts Underway Operations with India Navy, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/3014193/uss-momsen-conducts-underway-operations-with-india-navy/>



Goa from April 23 for a scheduled port visit⁶⁸. She had before that exercised with the Indonesian Navy in the South China Sea⁶⁹.

USS Sampson conducted a routine Taiwan Strait transit on April 26⁷⁰, the fourth such transit during the current year. Reports indicate she was shadowed by a Chinese Type 054A class frigate.

USS Momsen exercised with INS Trishul off Goa on April 28⁷¹. The ship had earlier arrived Goa for a scheduled visit on April 23.

President Biden will host Leaders of ASEAN nations on May 12-13 for a US-ASEAN Special Summit, according to an announcement by his Press Secretary on April 16⁷². Eight ASEAN member nations have accepted. President Joko Widodo of the Philippines has regretted as his successor would have been elected on May 9, but will not have assumed office, and he does not wish to speak for his successor. Myanmar has not been invited, though indications are that a member of Myanmar's civil society may be asked to attend.

Former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe called for US strategic ambiguity over Taiwan to end as it was fostering instability in the Indo-Pacific by encouraging China to underestimate US resolve, while making the government in Taipei unnecessarily anxious. He sought a clear commitment from the US to defend Taiwan against any attempted Chinese invasion⁷³.

The US and 60 partner countries launched a Declaration for the Future of the Internet on April 29⁷⁴. The declaration represents a commitment to reclaim the

⁶⁸ USSS Momsen Arrives in Goa, India, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/3009849/uss-momsen-arrives-in-go-a-india/>

⁶⁹ USS Momsen conducts Underway Operations with Indonesia Navy, <https://www.cpf.navy.mil/News/Article/2999873/uss-momsen-conducts-underway-operations-with-indonesian-navy/>

⁷⁰ 7th Fleet Destroyer Transits Taiwan Strait, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/3010992/7th-fleet-destroyer-transits-taiwan-strait/>

⁷¹ USS Momsen Conducts Underway Operations with India Navy, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/3014193/uss-momsen-conducts-underway-operations-with-india-navy/>

⁷² Statement by Press Secretary Jen Psaki on US-ASEAN Special Summit, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/04/16/statement-by-press-secretary-jen-psaki-on-u-s-asean-special-summit-2/>

⁷³ US Strategic Ambiguity Over Taiwan Must End, https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/us-taiwan-strategic-ambiguity-must-end-by-abeshinzo-2022-04?utm_source=Project+Syndicate+Newsletter&utm_campaign=cb9678acffsunday_newsletter_04_17_2022&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_73bad5b7d8-cb9678acff-107165545&mc_cid=cb9678acff&mc_eid=48bba1b6de

⁷⁴ A Declaration for the Future of the Internet, https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Declaration-for-the-Future-for-the-Internet_Launch-Event_Signing-Version_FINAL.pdf



promise of a free and open internet, one that fosters competition, while respecting privacy and human rights and other challenges presented by the 21st century. Notably, the only Indo-Pacific countries that signed on were Australia, Japan, New Zealand, Taiwan and the Maldives⁷⁵.

⁷⁵ Fact Sheet: United States and 60 Global Partners Launch Declaration for the Future of the Internet, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/04/28/fact-sheet-united-states-and-60-global-partners-launch-declaration-for-the-future-of-the-internet/>



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

www.delhipolicygroup.org