

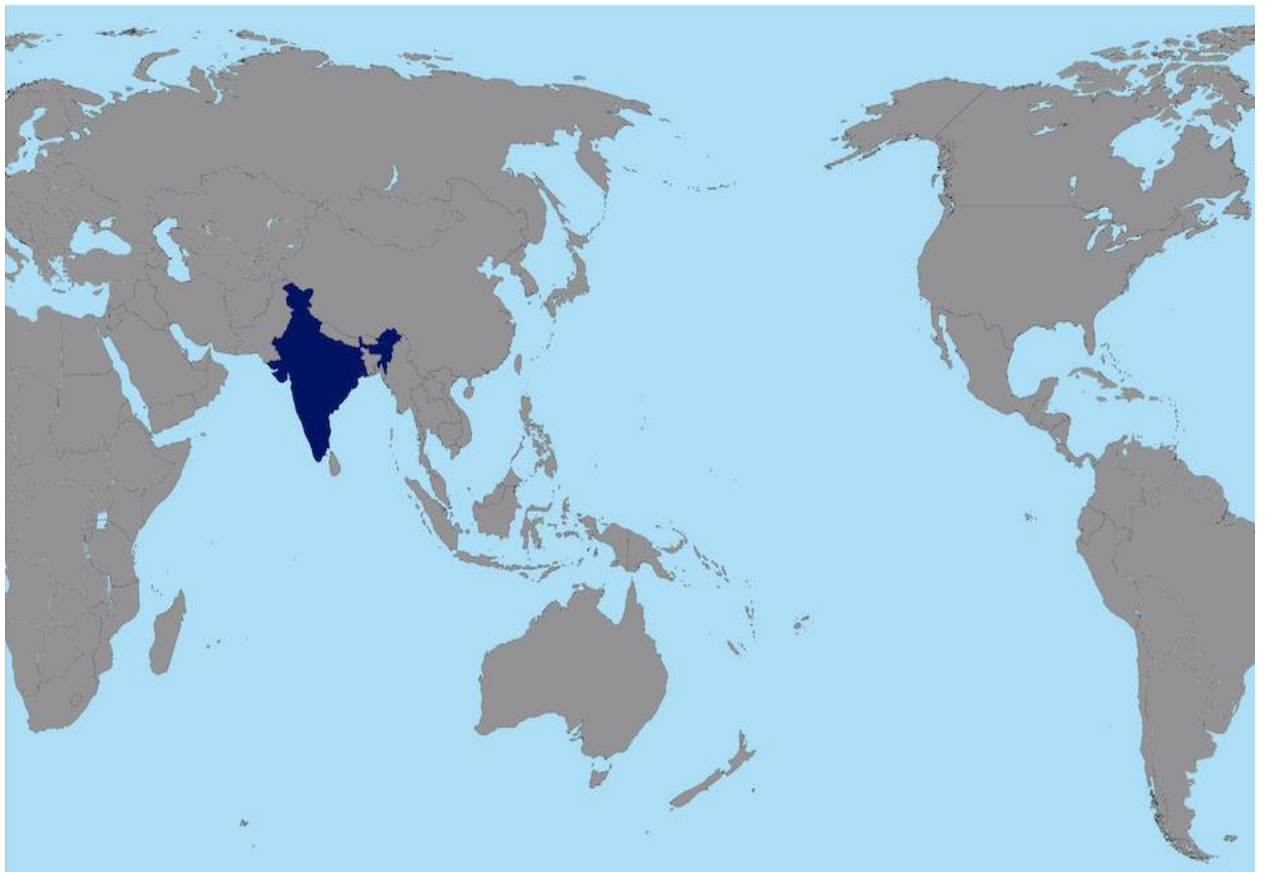


# Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



## DPG INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR JULY 2022



Volume III, Issue 7 | July 2022

Delhi Policy Group  
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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

July 2022

### Abstract

Shinzo Abe, Japan's longest-serving Prime Minister, fell to an assassin's bullet on July 8, 2022. Abe changed how the world saw Japan. His vision of the 'Confluence of the Two Seas' and the 'Democratic Security Diamond' stands established, with both the 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' and the Quad becoming an integral part of regional geopolitics. Quad leaders came together to pay fulsome tributes to his vision and vowed to redouble their work towards a peaceful and prosperous region.

If the Indo-Pacific represents the insertion of India into the geopolitics of "broader Asia", the virtual I2U2 Summit of July 14, 2022, bringing together India, Israel, the UAE and the US, could mark the expansion of India's role in the Middle East. The initial focus of this partnership is on food security and clean energy. Israel's Prime Minister Yair Lapid went on record to include defence as among the areas under discussion. How far the partnership expands and the areas it covers will be decided by the partners as mutual understanding develops and the benefits become visible.

Geopolitical compulsions resulted in President Joe Biden making his maiden visit to the Arabian Peninsula, from July 14-16, 2022. Structured around three legs, the first saw the US-Israel Strategic Partnership Joint Declaration from Jerusalem, implicitly recognising Israel's annexation of the city's eastern part and renewing a US commitment not to allow Iran to develop nuclear weapons. The second leg was the bilateral interaction with Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman of Saudi Arabia, overcoming an openly stated aversion and seeking to rebuild the US-Saudi relationship. The third was interaction with the GCC + 3 (Egypt, Iran and Jordan), seeking to reassure them regarding a continued US commitment to the security and stability of the region.

Presidents Joe Biden and Xi Jinping held an extended phone conversation on July 28, 2022, but without any indication of a change in their respective positions. China continued to demand a change of course by the US and maintained its hardened stance on Taiwan, while the US sought to keep lines of communication open and responsibly manage differences.



Indonesian President Joko Widodo visited Beijing on July 25-26 and followed up with visits to Tokyo on July 27 and Seoul on July 28. A significant development was Beijing's commitment to promote mutually beneficial cooperation between the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) and China's BRI, as well as on AOIP priority areas, reinforcing commitments made during the 2021 China-ASEAN Summit. The Tokyo and Seoul visits and Indonesia's outreach to the US indicate continued pursuit of balancing as great power competition in the Indo-Pacific grows.

The 51<sup>st</sup> meeting of the Pacific Islands Forum held in Suva, Fiji from July 11-14, 2022, indicated that the the US and Australia are engaging the region with greater purpose. Kiribati and the Marshall Islands pulled out of the Forum, but they could be induced to return. Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese saw no option but to take at face value the commitment by his Solomon Islands counterpart that a Chinese base would not be allowed. The efficacy of Australia's diplomacy will be tested going forward, as it joins the US in countering China's gains.

Australian Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Richard Marles visited the US from July 11-14, 2022, completing his bilateral interactions with defence ministers of all three Quad partners. In this process, he has reviewed progress under AUKUS, stated that the decision on which submarine Australia will build will be announced in the first quarter of 2023 and pushed for integration of the US and Australian military industrial bases. Australia's spending choices in the next budget, to be announced in March 2023, will indicate the actual commitment of the Labor government to its words.

Japan published the 2022 edition of its annual Defense White Paper on July 22, 2022. The White Paper speaks in harder tones of the China threat and of China-Russia cooperation, projects the need to enhance deterrence, describes Taiwan as an extremely important partner for Japan (much to China's annoyance) and seeks to enhance its own security capabilities, the Japan-US alliance and partnerships with other like-minded nations, including Australia, India and Western European nations.

The US Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Michael Gilday, updated his Navigation Plan for the United States Navy on July 26, 2022, in line with the emphasis in the 2022 National Defense Strategy on the need to address long-term competition with both China and Russia. He envisaged a force comprising over 350 manned ships, about 150 large unmanned surface and sub-surface platforms and 3000 aircraft by 2045 to assure US dominance of the seas.



IAC-1 Vikrant, India's first indigenously built aircraft carrier, completed the last phase of her sea trials on July 10 and was formally delivered to the Indian Navy on July 28. The ship is expected to be commissioned in mid-August.

Ships from the Indian Navy's Western and Eastern Fleets fanned out on both sides of the Indian Ocean, showing India's flag across the seas. One ship is headed across the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean to Rio de Janeiro, in Brazil, while another is participating in the Rim of the Pacific Exercise (RIMPAC) off Hawaii. The deployments herald India's increasing maritime outreach.

India and the US both reached out to Mozambique during the month. There is considerable scope for synergising their efforts in this important part of the South-western Indian Ocean.

## The I2U2 Summit – Another Opening of Doors

On October 18, 2021, EAM Dr. S Jaishankar, then on a visit to Israel, met virtually with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Israeli Foreign Minister and Alternate Prime Minister Yair Lapid and the Emirati Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed<sup>1</sup>. The Abrahams Accords had been signed just two months earlier, creating opportunities for advancement of economic cooperation and productive investment between India and the Middle East. The participants met to figure out how to bring together the comparative advantages of their four countries to find global solutions to regional problems, thus creating relative business advantages that would benefit each of them<sup>2</sup>. The areas of cooperation discussed included energy, food security and water technology, defence and trade<sup>3</sup>. And thus was born the Western Quad, now named the I2U2, which had its first leader level meeting on July 14, 2022.

Geography dictates that the Middle East be the connector between rising India and developed Europe. The security of this connector and states enroute, including the world's largest store of exportable energy to its biggest

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<sup>1</sup>Secretary of State Antony J Blinken's Meeting with Emirati Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed, Indian External Affairs Minister Dr. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar and Israeli Foreign Minister and Alternate Prime Minister Yair Lapid, <https://www.state.gov/secretary-of-state-antony-j-blinkens-meeting-with-emirati-foreign-minister-sheikh-abdullah-bin-zayed-indian-external-affairs-minister-dr-subrahmanyam-jaishankar-and-israeli-foreign-minist/>

<sup>2</sup>From comments by Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid, "PM Lapid and US President Biden open virtual meeting of the I2U2", <https://www.gov.il/en/departments/news/pm-lapid-and-us-president-biden-open-virtual-meeting-of-i2u2-14-jul-2022>

<sup>3</sup>Ibid



consumers has, however, long been left to extra-regional powers. Despite the dominant role colonial India played in Middle East governance and power play, post-independence India, driven by domestic priorities and non-alignment dogma, stayed aloof from involvement in regional security even after the British withdrawal from east of Suez. India limited its activities to the purchase of oil (and gas) and the supply of skilled and disciplined labour to the Gulf. Meanwhile, the Saudi-US petrodollar agreement, the Islamic revolution in Iran, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the ensuing Carter Doctrine, the Iran-Iraq war and the subsequent Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and finally the war on terror, drew the US inexorably into the region. Pakistan exploited this to further its own ends, drawing on the CENTO-era partnership with the US, its religious connections and the global war on terror to shut India out.

The ability of the US to maintain regional security and stability has, however, been tested over a long period and resulted in fatigue setting in. The unceremonious US withdrawal from Afghanistan highlighted the limitations of US power. Iraq and Syria are unstable, with both Iran and Turkey exploiting the situation for their own purpose. Temporarily quiescent conflict in Yemen impacts Saudi Arabia and the UAE. China is increasingly reaching out to the region, including through a prospective deal with Iran to invest \$ 400 billion in return for assured oil supplies, its base in Djibouti, investments in Gwadar and large BRI investments in the Arabian Peninsula. Geostrategic competition between the US and the Russia-China combine is growing and its impact is increasingly being felt in the region.

India has not remained blind to these developments and has been moving decisively in the recent past to address its long isolation from the region. In August 2015, Narendra Modi became India's first Prime Minister to visit Abu Dhabi in 38 years, launching a "new and comprehensive strategic partnership between India and UAE in a world of multiple transitions and changing opportunities and challenges"<sup>4</sup>. Carefully nurtured by both sides thereafter, the bilateral relationship has witnessed numerous high-level interactions, the signing of a Free Trade Agreement and initiatives to upgrade defence cooperation. It is now poised for takeoff. Modi also became India's first Prime Minister ever to visit Israel in July 2017, elevating the bilateral relationship to a strategic partnership including joint development of defence products, cyber security, homeland security, counter-terrorism and numerous other areas of

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<sup>4</sup>Joint Statement between the United Arab Emirates and the Republic of India, August 17, 2015, [https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/25733/Joint\\_Statement\\_between\\_the\\_United\\_Arab\\_Emirates\\_and\\_the\\_Republic\\_of\\_India](https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/25733/Joint_Statement_between_the_United_Arab_Emirates_and_the_Republic_of_India)





cooperation<sup>5</sup>. The US has become India's most consequential strategic partner, a position reinforced during the visit of Prime Minister Modi to the US in September 2021 and subsequent Quad Summits, most recently on May 24, 2022. Considerable effort has also gone into fostering relations with Saudi Arabia, other Gulf countries and somewhat less successfully, with Iran.

The I2U2 summit is a continuation of this trend. It aims to "harness the vibrancy of our societies and entrepreneurial spirit to tackle some of the greatest challenges confronting our world, with a particular focus on joint investments and new initiatives in water, energy, transportation, space, health and food security"<sup>6</sup>. Like the Quad, it could become a fixture in India's external relationships.

The inaugural I2U2 Summit focused on two areas: food security and clean energy. In the former, the I2U2 will develop a series of integrated food parks across India maximising crop yields and helping tackle food insecurity in South Asia and the Middle East. India will provide both land and labour, facilitating the integration of farmers into the project; the UAE will provide capital with an initial investment of \$ 2 billion in integrated food parks that reduce food waste and spoilage, conserve fresh water and employ renewable energy sources; while the US and Israel will provide the technological know-how and expertise that contribute to overall sustainability of the project. The entrepreneurial spirit required to make the initiative a success is to be provided by the private sector. In the clean energy domain, the I2U2 will advance a hybrid renewable energy project in Gujarat consisting of 300 MW of wind and solar capacity complemented by a battery energy storage system. The US Trade and Development Agency has already funded a feasibility study for this \$ 330 million project, while companies in the UAE, the US and Israel will serve as investment partners. As with the Quad, these initiatives focus on providing public goods.

If the Indo-Pacific enabled India to transcend the confines of South Asia towards its east, the I2U2 offers the potential to transcend these confines to its west. But India's partnerships to the east involve a comparatively more stable region (with the exception of Myanmar); and strong strategic partnerships with

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<sup>5</sup>India-Israel Joint Statement during the visit of Prime Minister to Israel ((July 5, 2017), [https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/28593/IndiaIsrael\\_Joint\\_Statement\\_during\\_the\\_visit\\_of\\_Prime\\_Minister\\_to\\_Israel\\_July\\_5\\_2017](https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/28593/IndiaIsrael_Joint_Statement_during_the_visit_of_Prime_Minister_to_Israel_July_5_2017)

<sup>6</sup>Joint Statement of the Leaders of India, Israel, United Arab Emirates, and the United States (I2U2), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/07/14/joint-statement-of-the-leaders-of-india-israel-united-arab-emirates-and-the-united-states-i2u2/>





Japan and Australia, among others. The domain involved is primarily maritime. Security underpinnings are provided by the US INDOPACOM, with which India has established over two decades of cooperation and considerable familiarity, including through participation in exercises such as MALABAR and RIMPAC. India is clear that the objective of the partnership is to provide public goods through various Quad initiatives, while keeping the military element recessed.

To the west, however, partnerships including for security are underdeveloped (although the foundations are being laid); there are far greater levels of regional instability; the security underpinning will be provided by the US CENTCOM; and the domain will be primarily continental. No doubt India has had a strong connect with the region through business, Diasporas, energy, remittances and investment from the region's wealth funds. But relationships will have to be developed as patiently and assiduously as they were in the east. The opening has been created on the platform of public goods. Given the wealth that resides in both the Gulf and Europe, the economic potential is enormous. How far this partnership expands, and how much of a security content it will have, is a question India will have to answer at some stage.

## Biden's Middle East Visit

The maiden visit by President Biden to the Middle East from July 13-16, 2022, demonstrates why geopolitical compulsions overcome even deeply held prejudices. Before even entering the White House, Candidate Biden had made no secret of his aversion to Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler, Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman (MBS). "Khashoggi was, in fact, murdered and dismembered, and I believe on the order of the crown prince", he said, before speaking of cutting down arms sales to Saudi Arabia and making that country a pariah<sup>7</sup>. On becoming President, he directed declassification and release of an intelligence report which, based on MBS's absolute control over Saudi security and intelligence organisations and the involvement of his close advisers and personal protective detail, assessed that MBS personally approved the Istanbul operation to capture and kill Jamal Khashoggi in October 2018<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Democratic Debate Transcript, November 30, 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2020-election/read-democratic-debate-transcript-november-20-2019-n1088186>

<sup>8</sup> Assessing the Saudi Government's Role in the Killing of Jamal Khashoggi, <https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/Assessment-Saudi-Gov-Role-in-JK-Death-20210226v2.pdf>



US President Joe Biden and Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid Meet in Jerusalem on July 14, 2022. Source: Israel Prime Minister's Office

Biden's handling of MBS was not the only area of concern about US policy towards the region. Gradual pullout from regional security commitments including the botched withdrawal from Afghanistan, failure to respond effectively to drone and missile attacks on Saudi Arabia and the UAE, opposition to the shifting of Israel's capital to Jerusalem, backing out of sanctions imposed by Trump on Iran to stop its nuclear programme, and increasing restrictions on weapons supplies to Arab partners had combined to created doubt about US reliability amongst the region's autocratic regimes. China and Russia moved in to fill the void. The former is by far the region's biggest oil and gas customer, buying over half its annual requirement from the region. It is a big investor in infrastructure, including in the UAE's 5G network, an industrial part at Duqm, and a container terminal in Abu Dhabi, among others. The China-Iran strategic partnership agreement<sup>9</sup> and China's proposed investment of \$ 400 billion in Iran over the next 25 years cannot be missed<sup>10</sup>. There are also reports of China helping Saudi Arabia to develop ballistic missiles

<sup>9</sup> Full text of Joint Statement on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the People's Republic of China, <http://www.president.ir/EN/91435>

<sup>10</sup> Wang Yi Holds Talks with Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/wjbz\\_663308/activities\\_663312/t1865100.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/wjbz_663308/activities_663312/t1865100.shtml)



to counter the Iranian threat<sup>11</sup>. More important, engaging China does not impose human rights or environmental costs on Gulf regimes. So despite the Islamic factor, Arab nations have not condemned China's treatment of Muslim Uyghurs. Russia's stock is also up because of the personal chemistry between Putin and MBS, which enabled a cap on Russian oil production at a time when oil prices had slumped.

Geopolitical circumstances, however, have a way of forcing the hands of even the most obdurate leaders. The China-Russia partnership, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the criticality of the region's hydrocarbon resources to stabilising global energy prices and the realisation that the Middle East is a critical connector that cannot be allowed to fall into adversarial hands have forced Biden to attempt to woo the region back. His objectives would have thus included reassuring Israel of its central position in US strategy for the region; winning back some influence over Saudi Arabia, and reassuring Gulf partners of the reliability of US support to head off their turning to Russia and China. Biden's visit can be divided into three parts: the interaction with Israel at Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, the interaction with MBS at Jeddah, and the interaction with the GCC+3 at Jeddah.

The strongest signal emanating from the Israel leg was perhaps the use of Jerusalem for US-Israel Strategic Partnership Joint Declaration<sup>12</sup>. In December 2017, then President Trump finally complied with the Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995<sup>13</sup>, enabling the shift of the US Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, the Eastern part of which had been annexed by Israel following the 1967 war. The US, however, continued to maintain that this did not reflect any change in the official US position on Jerusalem's status. Biden's presence in Jerusalem was implicit recognition of the city's annexation, a change that Israel's Prime Minister Yair Lapid was quick to exploit during the joint press interaction by describing Jerusalem as the eternal capital of Israel<sup>14</sup>. There were minor economic incentives for the Palestine Authority during Biden's

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<sup>11</sup> CNN Exclusive: US Intel and satellite images show Saudi Arabia is now building its own ballistic missiles with help of China, <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/12/23/politics/saudi-ballistic-missiles-china/index.html>

<sup>12</sup> The Jerusalem US-Israeli Strategic Partnership Joint Declaration, <https://www.gov.il/en/departments/news/israel-us-sign-joint-declaration-on-strategic-partnership-14-jul-2022>

<sup>13</sup> Public Law 104-45- Nov 8, 1995, Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995, <https://www.congress.gov/104/plaws/publ45/PLAW-104publ45.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Remarks by President Biden and Prime Minister Yair Lapid of the State of Israel, <https://www.gov.il/en/departments/news/israel-us-sign-joint-declaration-on-strategic-partnership-14-jul-2022>



subsequent interaction with them, but the reality that support for the Palestine question has faded was evident.

Other developments in Israel were along expected lines. Biden announced an unshakable US commitment to Israel's security, describing it as an anchor of regional stability. He committed to enhancing the \$ 38 billion (over 10 years) US security assistance made by the Obama administration. He vowed to never allow Iran to acquire nuclear weapons and confront Iran's destabilising actions. He spoke of the US-Israel partnership in cutting edge defence technology, including high energy laser weapons. A strategic high level dialogue on technology was launched<sup>15</sup>. There was appreciation for the inaugural meeting of the steering committee of the Negev Forum for Regional Cooperation<sup>16</sup> and the I2U2 Summit<sup>17</sup>.

The Saudi leg of the visit resulted in the Jeddah Communiqué<sup>18</sup>, marked by platitudes and little of substance. Its 'Security and Defense' section reaffirms the US commitment to Saudi Arabia's security and territorial integrity, supports the nation obtaining necessary capabilities, underscores the need to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons and deterring its interference in the internal affairs of other countries, stresses the importance of preserving the free flow of commerce through international waterways and speaks of enhancing cooperation between the Saudi Navy and US forces in the region, apart from mentioning cooperation in 5G and 6G using open radio access networks. Other areas covered include cybersecurity and space exploration.

With the GCC + 3 (Egypt, Iraq and Jordan), Biden set forth five declaratory principles to guide US engagement with the region: partnership, deterrence, diplomacy, integration and values<sup>19</sup>. These commit the US to support and

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<sup>15</sup> Joint US-Israel Statement on Launching Strategic High-Level Dialogue on Technology, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/07/13/joint-u-s-israel-statement-on-launching-strategic-high-level-dialogue-on-technology/>

<sup>16</sup> Negev Forum Steering Committee Joint Statement, <https://www.state.gov/negev-forum-steering-committee-joint-statement/>

<sup>17</sup> Joint Statement of the Leaders of India, Israel, United Arab Emirates and the United States (I2U2), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/07/14/joint-statement-of-the-leaders-of-india-israel-united-arab-emirates-and-the-united-states-i2u2/>

<sup>18</sup> The Jeddah Communiqué: A Joint Statement Between the United States of America and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/07/15/the-jeddah-communicue-a-joint-statement-between-the-united-states-of-america-and-the-kingdom-of-saudi-arabia/>

<sup>19</sup> Fact Sheet: The United States Strengthens Cooperation with Middle East Partners to Address 21<sup>st</sup> Century Challenges, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements->



strengthen partnerships with countries subscribing to the rules-based international order; ensuring foreign or regional powers do not jeopardise freedom of navigation through the region's waterways and preventing domination of any country by another; reducing tensions and ending conflicts through diplomacy; integrating the region through political, economic and security connections; and always promoting human rights and values enshrined in the UN Charter. In return, the first Jeddah Security and Development Summit witnessed GCC partners committing to provide \$ 10 billion to address food security challenges in the MENA region (the US also committed \$ 1 billion for this purpose)<sup>20</sup>. OPEC had earlier agreed to increase oil production by 648,000 barrels per day in July and again in August 2022; but this will be offset by Russia's decreased production following sanctions. GCC leaders committed to investing \$ 3 billion in projects that align with the US Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment. Two new maritime task forces were announced: Combined Task Force 153, which actually came into being in April 2022 and is intended to operate from the Suez Canal to the Gulf of Aden and the Yemen-Oman border to stop Iran's smuggling of weapons to Houthi rebels in Yemen; and TF 59, actually established in September 2021<sup>21</sup>, which integrates unmanned systems and AI with maritime operations in the 5<sup>th</sup> Fleet Area of Operations.

Four major factors have influenced the Middle East from time immemorial and continue to do so. The first is its location connecting Europe to Asia, more so after construction of the Suez Canal. The region is thus vital for Eurasian trade, and thus any power seeking to dominate Eurasia. The global salience of this factor diminished following the power shift between UK and USA but is on the rise again, as economic power shifts to Asia and Asian power centres emerge. Biden's policies had effectively left a void for China and Russia to fill. The US is now trying to claw back, but doing so will require accepting difficult compromises on the human rights situation that will impact Biden's domestic standing. That these are not yet taking place was evident from the different US and Saudi versions of Biden's interaction with MBS on the Khashoggi issue.

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[releases/2022/07/16/fact-sheet-the-united-states-strengthens-cooperation-with-middle-east-partners-to-address-21st-century-challenges/](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/07/16/fact-sheet-the-united-states-strengthens-cooperation-with-middle-east-partners-to-address-21st-century-challenges/)

<sup>20</sup>Joint Statement Following the Summit of the Leaders of the United States and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Countries, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/07/15/the-jeddah-communique-a-joint-statement-between-the-united-states-of-america-and-the-kingdom-of-saudi-arabia/>

<sup>21</sup>US Fifth Fleet Launches New Task Force to Integrate Unmanned Systems, <https://www.cusnc.navy.mil/Media/News/Display/Article/2768468/us-5th-fleet-launches-new-task-force-to-integrate-unmanned-systems/>





The second is the region's enormous hydrocarbon potential, giving it the richest source of exportable energy in the world and with it, enormous wealth. The urge to control this was responsible for the West's post Ottoman divide and rule policy to prevent regional consolidation (now entrenched following establishment of the principle of territorial sanctity and non-use of force to resolve disputes), the overthrow of Mossadegh and the subsequent Islamic revolution in Iran, the 1974 petrodollar deal between the US and Saudi Arabia<sup>22</sup>, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan followed by the Carter Doctrine. The fracking revolution made the US self-sufficient in oil and gas and created substantial export potential. However, policy errors due to climate and green concerns as well as sanctions on export of oil by Iran, Venezuela and now Russia have led to an unprecedented international spike in oil prices, adversely impacting western economies. The hydrocarbon factor has assumed greater importance for Indo-Pacific economies, with China; Japan, India, and other regional powers becoming the region's biggest customers. Biden's visit alone will not help re-establish US control over the region's hydrocarbon wealth.

Third is the Sunni – Shia divide and the continuing conflict it generates, evident in the isolation of Iran and the war in Yemen. This continues to generate instability, evidenced by the increasing impact of terror in the region's affairs, Iran's drive for nuclear weapons and the conflict in Iraq and Syria. How Biden will reconcile his commitments to ensuring Iran never possesses a nuclear bomb with his evident desire to pull out of never-ending conflicts and avoid a potentially crippling military entanglement in Iran, while focusing US power on China, is the intractable question that will not have escaped the attention of his Arab interlocutors. In the event, Biden's security commitments to Arab partners may be exploited by them to recommence US weapon supplies, but are unlikely to reassure them.

Fourth is the Arab-Israeli divide, exacerbated by the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Israel. The uniting power of this seems to be declining, as Sunni-ruled states accept the Abrahams Accords and establish relations with Israel in a bid to counter Iran. Continued subordination of this divide, and consequential economic commitments by the Arab nations to western interests, may comprise the only tangible outcomes of the Biden visit.

The Middle East is a vital region for the US' European partners. If the US truly wishes to ensure that it is not exploited by China and Russia, it will have to step up its game in the Middle East. This will inevitably draw resources away from

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<sup>22</sup> Milestone Pact is signed by US and Saudi Arabia,  
<https://www.nytimes.com/1974/06/09/archives/milestone-pact-is-signed-by-us-and-saudi-arabia-acclaimed-by.html>



commitments in the Indo-Pacific. How the US balances between these two regions will in large measure influence the shape of the future world.

## Australia's Strategic Direction

As a developed island country with a western culture, a land area more than twice that of India<sup>23</sup>, a relatively isolated location, a small population of just over 26 million<sup>24</sup> and no nuclear capability of its own, engaging with external partners to ensure its own security is inevitably a high Australian priority. Security support has long been provided by the West, so Prime Minister Anthony Albanese interacted with the Quad partners immediately on assuming office, then with NATO at the Madrid Summit, before re-engaging with France. His Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Richard Marles engaged with Quad counterparts at Singapore and followed up with bilateral engagements with Japan and India in June 2022<sup>25</sup>. He continued this outreach by leading a bipartisan Australian team that included his predecessor in office Peter Dutton (now the Australian leader of the opposition) and shadow Foreign Minister Simon Birmingham to the US on July 11 – 14, 2022.

Marles' objectives<sup>26</sup> in the US were establishing personal relationships, speeding up the SSN programme under AUKUS, integration of the defence industrial base of both countries to enable seamless transfer of technology from the US to Australia, strengthening deterrence against China in the Indo-Pacific, and coordination for security and other assistance to the Pacific Islands. His itinerary included meetings with General Lloyd Austin, the US Defense Secretary and with Jake Sullivan, the National Security Adviser<sup>27</sup>; addressing the Centre for Strategic and International Studies and the Australian-American Leadership Dialogue, inauguration of the new Australian Strategic Policy Institute office in Washington D.C., and media interviews.

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<sup>23</sup> Australia has a land area of 7,741,220 Km<sup>2</sup> as compared to India's 3,287,263 Km<sup>2</sup>. Source: Country Comparisons: Area, The CIA World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/field/area/country-comparison>

<sup>24</sup> Australia, The CIA World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/australia/>

<sup>25</sup> For an overview of this outreach, see Lalit Kapur, "Australia's Indo-Pacific Defence Engagement", in the Indo-Pacific Monitor Volume III Issue 6 / June 2022, [https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads\\_dpg/publication\\_file/indo-pacific-monitor-3883.pdf](https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads_dpg/publication_file/indo-pacific-monitor-3883.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> As gleaned from various official statements issued during the visit.

<sup>27</sup> Australian Official Sees Shared Mission with US, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3096768/australian-official-sees-shared-mission-with-us/>





A high-level review of developments under AUKUS in April 2022 had shown visible progress in the first part of the agreement: assessing whether a way could be found to deliver SSNs to Australia<sup>28</sup>. The US Congress is presently considering a bipartisan bill titled "Australia-US Submarine Officer Pipeline Act"<sup>29</sup>; Australia is confident it will pass. This will enable Australian Navy officers to train in USN nuclear submarine courses as well as SSNs. Marles publicly stated that his first priority would be the Australia-UK-US partnership under AUKUS, and that the heart of deterrence for Australia was undersea capability<sup>30</sup>. Australia has still not determined which SSN it will eventually operate<sup>31</sup>. That decision, along with the building schedule, when the first submarine will become available and how Australia intends to bridge the submarine capability gap will be announced in the first quarter of 2023<sup>32</sup>. Marles also highlighted an Australian hope that AUKUS will enable "the defence industrial bases of our two countries to integrate together in a seamless way. So that that reflects the way in which our two Defence Forces are so interoperable – really, interchangeable – in the way in which we operate"<sup>33</sup>. Speeding up delivery, however, will require a separate line of effort. Secretary Austin's action in naming Abraham Denmark as his senior adviser on AUKUS on July 29 may help<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> See Lalit Kapur, "AUKUS Developments" in the Indo-Pacific Monitor Vol III Issue 4/April 2022, [https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads\\_dpg/publication\\_file/voliii-issue4-3831.pdf](https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads_dpg/publication_file/voliii-issue4-3831.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> Courtney and AUKUS Working Group Introduce New Bill to Establish Officer Training Pipeline for Australian Submarines, <https://courtney.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/courtney-and-aukus-working-group-introduce-new-bill-establish-officer#:~:text=The%20Australia%2DU.S.%20Submarine%20Officer%20Pipeline%20Act%20outlines%20that%20the,to%20support%20increased%20submarine%20production.>

<sup>30</sup> Richard Marles Address: Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/minister/rmarles/speeches/address-center-strategic-and-international-studies-csis>

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Annelise Nielsen, Sky News, <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/minister/rmarles/transcripts/interview-annelise-nielsen-sky-news>

<sup>32</sup> Doorstop Interview, Washington DC, <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/minister/rmarles/transcripts/doorstop-interview-washington-dc-0>

<sup>33</sup> Speech: Address to the Australian American leadership dialogue, <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/minister/rmarles/speeches/speech-address-australian-american-leadership-dialogue>

<sup>34</sup> Statement on AUKUS Senior Adviser, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3109966/statement-on-aukus-senior-adviser/>



US Secretary of Defense General Lloyd J Austin meets Australian Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Richard Marles at the Pentagon on July 13, 2022. Source: US Secretary of Defense/Flickr

This aspect of integrating the two defence industrial bases also formed part of Marles' speech at CSIS. "Australia's inclusion in the US National Technology Industrial Base was a vital first step But implementing it will require change ... I will be proposing specific measures that both sides could adopt to streamline processes and overcome barriers to procurement, investment, information and data sharing systems and export requirement"<sup>35</sup>. He added, "Our ultimate goal is to supplement and strengthen US industry and supply chains, not to compete with them". He was confident that the idea of integration of defence industrial bases had been well-received<sup>36</sup>. The similarity between the Labor's "A Future Made in Australia" plan<sup>37</sup>, wherein Australia becomes "a country that makes things again" and India's "Make in India" and "Atmanirbhar Bharat" visions is striking. Progress in implementing the Australian plan will be watched keenly in India, more so given its experience with the DTTI.

<sup>35</sup> Richard Marles' Address at CSIS, Op Cit.

<sup>36</sup> Doorstop interview, Washington DC, Op Cit.

<sup>37</sup> A Future Made in Australia, <https://www.alp.org.au/policies/a-future-made-in-australia>



As expected, the aspect of common cause in deterring China came up time and again. At the CSIS, Marles committed to operationalising a regular American presence and an increased exercise routine in Northern Australia. He expressed the desire to expand exercises and operational deployments, drawing on the successes of TALISMAN SABRE, RIMPACT and MALABAR. He spoke of more defence cooperation with other regional partners, including India and Japan. Meanwhile, former Defence Minister and current Australian leader of the opposition Peter Dutton, who was in the US at the same time, went on record to say that peace was at risk in the Indo-Pacific in a manner similar to the 1930s, and that “the biggest security issue in the Indo-Pacific at the moment is China and her acts of aggression”<sup>38</sup>. However, the question of whether current plans would suffice to deter China in the short-term remained unanswered. Acceleration of the timeline for construction of Australia’s SSNs remains an unlikely prospect. The US and UK don’t possess spare SSNs they could transfer to Australia. The US takes at least six years from laying the keel of a Los Angeles class SSN to commissioning it, while the UK takes 10-11 years for its Astute class. Building a shipyard to construct the Australian SSN will take a minimum of 6-8 years, while the construction time for the first new Australian submarine can safely be estimated at about 10 years. This indicates that the first SSN cannot be in service before 1940. For all the current hue and cry, Australia and the US appear to have accepted that their joint capability is not intended to prevent China having its way in Taiwan and in the South China Sea. The capacity they are building is for the period beyond.

There is visible continuity in the policies of the current Australia Albanese government vis-à-vis the previous Morrison government in their outlook towards making common cause with the US and enhancing deterrence towards China. The Albanese government has evidently determined that the US will remain a reliable security provider into the future. But these are early days. Marles’ words in the US come at the same time as his diplomatic counterpart Penny Wong was reaching out to Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi at the Bali Summit and hearing his four-point prescription for improving Australia-China relations: regard China as a partner rather than a rival; seek common ground while reserving differences; don’t be controlled by a third party; and stick to building positive and pragmatic social foundations and public support<sup>39</sup>. The true test of Australia’s direction will come when financial requirements for Labor’s domestic agenda including better Medicare and child

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<sup>38</sup> Leader of the Opposition – Transcript – Interview with Kieran Gilbert, Sky News, <https://www.peterdutton.com.au/leader-of-the-opposition-transcript-interview-with-kieran-gilbert-sky-news/>

<sup>39</sup> Wang Yi Meets with Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/202207/t20220710\\_10718115.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/202207/t20220710_10718115.html)



care, affordable housing, more secure jobs and social services come up against the demands of defence spending, including for AUKUS. How the pie will be shared between these areas will become clearer when the next Australian budget is announced, in March 2023. The spending choices the Albanese government makes at that time will indicate which way Australia will tilt in the ongoing China-US great game.

## Engaging Mozambique

Two press releases regarding Mozambique drew attention during the month. The first, from India, related to the recently concluded India-Mozambique Foreign Office consultations<sup>40</sup>. The second related to the visit of US Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy and Human Rights Uzra Zeya to Mozambique from July 18-20, 2022<sup>41</sup>.

India's relations with Mozambique date back to the country gaining independence from Portugal in 1975. The underlying regional strategic approach became visible only when Prime Minister Narendra Modi unveiled the SAGAR policy in March 2015<sup>42</sup>. "We also seek a more integrated and cooperative future in the region that enhances the prospects for sustainable development for all", he said<sup>43</sup>. The vision of creating an integrated, cooperative and prosperous Indian Ocean community lies at the heart of India's regional relationships, including with Mozambique.

Located in the south-western Indian Ocean, Mozambique arouses interest due to at least five major reasons. The first is its geography and connectivity potential: Mozambique is both a regional cross-roads and choke-point. Its ports provide outlets for landlocked Eswatini, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi, while the country itself sits astride the Mozambique Channel, a choke point for ships plying routes connecting the western half of the Indian Ocean. Second is its political potential. As a member in good standing of both regional and global international organisations, Mozambique can contribute to India's objectives in these multilateral fora, including in the UN and its subsidiaries. Third is its economic and resource potential: Mozambique has over 100 trillion

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<sup>40</sup>2<sup>nd</sup> Foreign Office Consultations Between India and Mozambique, [https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/35472/2nd\\_Foreign\\_Office\\_Consultations\\_between\\_India\\_and\\_Mozambique](https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/35472/2nd_Foreign_Office_Consultations_between_India_and_Mozambique)

<sup>41</sup>Under Secretary Zeya's Travel to Mozambique and Namibia, <https://www.state.gov/under-secretary-zeyas-travel-to-mozambique-and-namibia/>

<sup>42</sup>Text of PM's Remarks on the Commissioning of Coast Ship Barracuda 12 March 2015, <http://www.pib.gov.in/newsite/erecontent.aspx?relid=116881>

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.



cubic feet (tcf) of proven natural gas reserves (the third largest in Africa), substantial coal reserves<sup>44</sup> and a productive agricultural sector. India has significant interests in all three and has extended substantial developmental assistance to the country<sup>45</sup>. Fourth is the Indian Diaspora in Mozambique, estimated to number over 20,000 Mozambican nationals who trace their ancestry to India and about 3000 Indian nationals who serve in the country as professionals. Fifth is regional security: Mozambique's insurgency could destabilise the entire region, while its prime location and deep water harbours provide the potential for an excellent maritime security hub.

India shares these interests, including stability and development, with other international partners. They are, however, jeopardised by a terrorist insurgency linked to ISIS and called Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham – Mozambique (ISIS-M). This insurgency, active since 2017 and recognised as an ISIS affiliate in 2019, aims at implementing ISIS's strict interpretation of Sharia and the establishment of an Islamic state. It has led to the death of nearly 4000 personnel and the displacement of over 700,000 persons from Northern Mozambique<sup>46</sup>. It has also led to the stoppage of energy developmental activity in the Rovuma Basin, Mozambique's gas hub. Consequently, Mozambique is now identified as the 21<sup>st</sup> most fragile state in the world, at par with Libya, up from the 42<sup>nd</sup> position it held in 2016<sup>47</sup>. This has led the Biden Administration to identify Mozambique as the only Indian Ocean country among the four priority targets (the others are Haiti, Libya and Papua New guinea) for peace building and conflict prevention efforts under the Global Fragility Act of 2019<sup>48</sup>. A ten-year integrated country strategy for Mozambique has been published<sup>49</sup>. It is in pursuit of this integrated strategy that the Biden Administration announced \$ 116 million additional assistance for Mozambique during Under

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<sup>44</sup>Mozambique Country Analysis, <https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/country/MOZ>

<sup>45</sup>India-Mozambique Bilateral Relations, [https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Mozambique\\_2020nnn\\_3.pdf](https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Mozambique_2020nnn_3.pdf)

<sup>46</sup>Terrorist Organizations, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/references/terrorist-organizations>

<sup>47</sup>Country Dashboard – Mozambique, Fragile States Index 2022, <https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/>

<sup>48</sup> The US Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability: Priority Countries and Regions, <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/press-releases/apr-1-2022-us-strategy-prevent-conflict-and-promote-stability-priority-countries>

<sup>49</sup>Integrated Country Strategy – Mozambique, [https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/ICS\\_AF\\_Mozambique\\_Public.pdf](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/ICS_AF_Mozambique_Public.pdf)





Secretary Zeya's visit<sup>50</sup>. Meanwhile, the US Congress has been kept informed through a CRS brief<sup>51</sup>.

India's resources are limited and must be shared between other fragile Indian Ocean states. These include Yemen (ranked 1), Somalia (ranked 2), Sudan (ranked 7), Ethiopia (ranked 13), Eritrea (ranked 18) and Iraq (ranked 23), all amongst the world's top 25 fragile states<sup>52</sup>. Given the complementarity in interests between India and the US and their burgeoning strategic partnership, however, the benefits of India-US cooperation in stabilising Mozambique would appear self-evident. Both India and the US can bring their individual strengths to bear, but in a synergised manner. Such cooperation would also go a long way towards binding two nations that were, till not so long ago, eloquently described as 'Estranged Democracies'<sup>53</sup> but are today strong partners.

But making such cooperation happen will require building of bridges between foreign and defence policy divisions in both countries that have not, so far, been involved in the India-US relationship. This is unlikely to happen unless leadership levels in both countries direct such cooperation, in the larger regional interest.

## Defense of Japan White Paper 2022

The publication by Japan of the latest edition of its annual Defense White Paper (WP) on July 22, 2022 provides analysts the opportunity to assess changes in the establishment's perception of the national security situation and defence plans. Its stated objective is to explain to Japanese and international readers the security environment surrounding Japan, the efforts undertaken by the MOD and the SDF to address it, and to convince them that Japan has the will and the capability to constantly and resolutely defend itself and ensure continued regional and international peace and prosperity, as well as an international order based on universal values<sup>54</sup>.

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<sup>50</sup>The United States Announced \$ 116 Million in Additional Assistance for Mozambique, <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/press-releases/jul-20-2022-united-states-announces-116-million-additional-assistance-mozambique>

<sup>51</sup> Insurgency in Northern Mozambique: Nature and Responses, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11864>

<sup>52</sup>Fragile States Index Heat Map, <https://fragilestatesindex.org/analytics/fsi-heat-map/>

<sup>53</sup> Professor Dennis Kux, *India and the United States: Estranged Democracies 1941-1991*.

<sup>54</sup>Paraphrased from foreword by Kishi Nobuo, Minister of Defense, in the Defense of Japan White Paper Digest, [https://www.mod.go.jp/en/publ/w\\_paper/wp2022/DOJ2022\\_Digest\\_EN.pdf](https://www.mod.go.jp/en/publ/w_paper/wp2022/DOJ2022_Digest_EN.pdf)



The WP portrays that four major issues that impact on Japan's security environment. The first is China, its Civil-Military-Fusion and "intelligentization" with the aim of building a world-class military; its accelerating development of hypersonic glide vehicles and UAVs, the continuously rising defence budget which is now more than four times that of Japan, and its improving maritime capability. Second is Russia's action against Ukraine, which shakes the foundations of the entire international order including in Asia, generating concern that unilateral changes to the status quo by force will extend to the Indo-Pacific. Third is intensifying strategic competition between the US and China, complicated by China-Russia cooperation and expansion of the scope of national security to economic and technological domains. Fourth is China again – its relentless and unilateral attempts to change the status quo in the Senkaku Islands and in the South China Sea through coercion and its strengthening coordination with Russia. North Korea's missile developments also pose a threat.

Given the worsening security environment, Japan's MOD believes "Deterrence is critical for both defending Japan and creating peace" and must be reinforced. Deterrence is to be achieved through strengthening Japan's own architecture for defence, including in new domains such as space, cyber, electromagnetic and leading edge technologies; strengthening the Japan-US alliance; and broader security cooperation with like-minded partners. The desirable security environment is a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), created through security cooperation with partners, capacity-building in the region and major exercises.

Accordingly, the National Security Strategy (NSS), the National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG) and the Medium Term Defense Program (MTDP) are being revised, with revision to be completed by the end of the year. R&D expenditure is to be increased. The White Paper also seeks enhancement of defence expenditure, which is presently "the lowest among the G7, Australia and ROK"<sup>55</sup>.

There is broad similarity between previous versions of the White Paper and the current one. Changes from the 2021 edition include Russia's aggression in Ukraine, which is described as intolerable as it shakes the foundations of the international order. There is increased concern about Russia-China coordination and the joint sails and bomber flights the two have carried out together in recent times. A reference to Taiwan, which appeared for the first

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid





time in 2021, remains notwithstanding China's strong protest last year. Taiwan is described as "an extremely important partner for Japan, sharing the same fundamental values such as freedom and democracy". The paper goes on to say, "The stability of the situation surrounding Taiwan is also critical for Japan's security and must be closely monitored with a sense of urgency".

China's response has followed predictable lines<sup>56,57</sup>. It encompasses accusing Japan of deliberately playing up the China threat; gross interference in China's internal affairs on the Taiwan question; protestations regarding China being committed to the path of peaceful development and its defence buildup being legitimate, reasonable and beyond approach; and the Senkaku Islands being part of China's territory. It then foments fears of revision of Japanese defence documents and plans to increase defence spending stoking Japan's militarism and advises Japan to "earn the trust of its Asian neighbours and the international community with concrete actions". China obviously feels no compulsion to earn the same trust it advises Japan to obtain!

Japan's strategy to tackle growing geo-strategic competition rests on three pillars: enhancement of its own security capabilities, the Japan-US alliance, and security cooperation partnerships with others. It may be noted that the same three pillars have been adopted by Australia, while the first and third pillars also form part of India's strategy. But in the first pillar, Japan faces the handicaps of a pacifist constitution that limits its security development, an uncompetitive defence industrial base, nuclear diffidence and defence spending that is dwarfed by China. The second pillar is the relic of an age when the only peer competitor for the US was the USSR, whose primary focus was oriented to the west; while China's technological capacity and economic power was limited (and in any case became inconsequential following the US-China rapprochement). The situation today is different: China has emerged as a peer competitor with both the capacity and the will to contest US maritime supremacy and has effectively adopted grey zone tactics to dominate proximate blue water territory. Moreover, Japan is regionally isolated: its primary security provider is an ocean away and will have to contend with China's A2AD capability to bring power to bear in the region, and even the budding ally, Australia is too far to make a difference in the absence of the US.

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<sup>56</sup> Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin's Regular Press Conference on July 22, 2022 [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/2511\\_665403/202207/t20220722\\_10726515.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/202207/t20220722_10726515.html)

<sup>57</sup> Japan has made a very dangerous move: Defense spokesperson, [http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2022-07/26/content\\_4916548.htm](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2022-07/26/content_4916548.htm)



Utility of the third pillar, security partnerships, is limited by the distances and capacities of partners, including Australia, India and the European nations.

There is thus need for Japan to make some difficult decisions to effectively deter China. Foremost among them will be constitutional reform to ensure deterrent strike capability, including nuclear. Former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe had in fact broached the idea before his untimely assassination. Maritime capability in all dimensions will have to be strengthened. Technological cooperation with other nations who share concern about the China challenge, including Australia and India, will have to be enhanced. The Japan-US partnership must be strengthened, but cannot be allowed to remain the crutch it has become. Finally, Japan has little choice but to increase and optimise its defence spending. The alternative may necessitate acceptance of Chinese hegemony.

Whether Japan is willing to make these decisions or not will become visible once revised versions of the NSS, NDPG and MTDP become available. Till then, both Japan's Defense White Paper and China's response must be considered posturing and the creation of narratives, in Japan's case without the resources needed to be effective.

## The USN Force Design

On July 26, 2022, Admiral Michael Gilday, the US Chief of Naval Operations, updated his 2021 Navigation Plan<sup>58</sup> for the United States Navy (USN)<sup>59</sup>. The revised plan updates his long-term vision of how the USN will build, maintain, train and equip a dominant naval force to strengthen strategic partnerships, deter conflict, and if called upon, to win the nation's wars.

He cited three factors that led to updation of the previous plan: the 2022 National Defense Strategy (yet to be made public) that emphasises the need to address long-term competition with China and sustain military advantage against Russia; the development of the Joint Warfighting Concept; and recognition that the USN needs a more continuous, iterative force design process to focus modernization efforts and accelerate the capabilities needed to maintain its edge. Significantly, the CNO acknowledged, "unacceptable variability in our performance – the gap between our best and worst performers is too great" in his plan. Coming after the series of mishaps that

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<sup>58</sup> CNO Releases Navigation Plan 2021, <https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/Press-Releases/display-pressreleases/Article/2467465/cno-releases-navigation-plan-2021/>

<sup>59</sup> CNO Releases Navigation Plan 2022, <https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/Press-Releases/display-pressreleases/Article/3105576/cno-releases-navigation-plan-2022/>



have plagued the USN in recent years, including major damage to 10 helicopters due to a severe storm in Norfolk<sup>60</sup>, an F/A-18 being blown overboard from USS Harry S Truman<sup>61</sup> and the Commanding Officer of the nuclear attack submarine USS Scranton being relieved due to loss of confidence in his ability to lead<sup>62</sup>, all during the current month, this acknowledgement was timely. It does, however, raise questions about the state of training, readiness and morale in the USN.



USS Nimitz operates in the Indian Ocean, November 2020. Source: Indo-US Pacific Command

The plan is based on three significant trends impacting geostrategic challenges to the US, the erosion of credible military deterrence, particularly against China; increasingly aggressive Chinese and Russian behaviour; and the accelerating pace of technological change and the expanding impact of the information environment. Competition over offshore resources, including protein, energy and minerals is on the rise, fuelling international challenges to the rules-based

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<sup>60</sup> 10 Navy Helicopters Suffer Major Damage, Several Blown Over in Sudden Norfolk Storm, <https://news.usni.org/2022/07/27/10-navy-helicopters-suffer-major-damage-several-blown-over-in-sudden-norfolk-storm>

<sup>61</sup> F/A-18 Super Hornet assigned to USS Harry S Truman blown overboard due to unexpected heavy weather, <https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/Press-Releases/display-pressreleases/Article/3088326/fa-18-super-hornet-assigned-to-uss-harry-s-truman-blown-overboard-due-to-unexpe/>

<sup>62</sup> Navy Relieves CO of Attack Submarine USS Scranton, <https://news.usni.org/2022/07/10/navy-relieves-co-of-attack-submarine-uss-scranton>



order, creating vulnerabilities for adversaries to exploit and volatility that can quickly erupt into crisis, says the CNO. He points out that decisive naval power is essential in this security environment.

The US response will comprise strengthening integrated deterrence, campaigning forward and building enduring warfighting advantages. The CNO identified six overarching force design imperatives: expand distance (through long range strike ability), leverage deception, harden defence, increase distribution, ensure delivery (of logistics support) and generate decision advantage. The force design visualised to achieve this comprises over 350 manned ships; about 150 large unmanned surface and sub-surface platforms and about 3000 aircraft. These include 12 SSBNs, 12 nuclear powered aircraft carriers, 66 SSNs, 96 large and 56 small surface combatants, 31 amphibious assault and 18 light amphibious warships, about 150 other unmanned surface and sub-surface platforms, 82 combat logistics ships, 1300 carrier based aircraft, about 900 aircraft for anti-submarine and anti-surface warfare, and about 750 support aircraft. The plan identifies readiness, capabilities, capacity and sailors as the priority focal areas to deliver the fleet of the today and the future.

That supreme sea power has underpinned US influence across the world, provided economic opportunities and safeguarded the rules-based order that is responsible for security and prosperity cannot be doubted. The questions are about the USN's ability to sustain this supremacy in the face of reducing force levels, its forward-operating posture, a decline in ship-building capacity, personnel constraints and technological competition.

PLA (N) force levels for sea control tasks (ignoring the needs of nuclear deterrence and power projection) are already larger than the force levels the USN can bring to bear. China's Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) capability can be counted on to keep US aircraft carriers beyond the Second Island Chain, at least till A2/AD can be overcome. Its blue water surface fleet already comprises roughly 84 modern ships of frigate size and larger, as against the about 95 (older) ships presently in the USN (the number the USN can actually use will be substantially lower, given the requirements of maintenance and deployment in other areas). Moreover, Chinese industry can churn out ships at a far greater rate than the US industry can. The PLA (N) will be operating in the proximity of its bases. It can also bring to bear green water forces comprising over 150 corvettes and missile boats. The USN has no equivalent. Underwater, the PLA (N) possesses 70 submarines of various types, as against 50 in the USN. USN technological superiority (particularly underwater) and higher levels of training may ultimately prevail, but the outcome will be determined by the ability to



sustain conflict over prolonged periods. The reality that numbers possess a quality of their own and can eventually overcome both training and technological deficiencies is evident in Ukraine. This dilutes the conventional deterrence that the US could take for granted till just a few years ago.

The 2045 force level projected by the CNO still has to go through the US budgetary process, including acceptance by the Department of Defence and allocation of funds by Congress. For the time being, the USN will continue shrinking, bringing home the fact that creation of maritime capability is a time consuming process. Recognising this, the House has reportedly added five ships to the eight that the USN asked for in the current year's Department of the Navy budget<sup>63</sup>.

Even if one presumes that China will not further increase its maritime capability building and compete with the US, the reality that China has a window in which it can deter US intervention cannot be ignored. The Davidson window forecast that a Taiwan contingency could be expected within this decade, perhaps as early as 2026. The reality that the USN could be under-equipped for this, and will not thus be able to conventionally deter China's action, cannot be overlooked.

## Shaping India's Diplomatic Environment

Ships belonging to India's Western and Eastern Fleets fan out each monsoon on flag showing goodwill visits on either side of the Indian Ocean, but also beyond, including into the South China Sea. The number of ships and countries being visited has increased steadily. This year, an Indian warship is making its way across the Mediterranean Sea and Atlantic Ocean to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, to show India's flag there on the occasion of 'Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav'. Another is currently participating in the Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) Exercise, billed as the biggest maritime exercise in the world, demonstrating that the Indian Navy has global reach. The question that would inevitably be asked in a country often accused of being sea blind is, what purpose do such trans-oceanic deployments serve?

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<sup>63</sup> House Passes FY 2023 Defense Bill Authorizing 13 Battle Force Ships, Saves 5 LCS, <https://news.usni.org/2022/07/14/house-passes-fy2023-defense-bill-authorizing-13-battle-force-ships-saves-5-lcs>





INS Sahyadri arrives at Pearl Harbour to participate in RIMPAC 2022.

Source: PIB

If the function of the Army is seen as defending national territory from external attack, the function of the Navy, in many Indian eyes, is to defend the nation's territory against seaborne attack. Protecting India's coastal and offshore assets against attacks and threats emanating from or at sea is certainly one of the stated aims of India's maritime strategy<sup>64</sup>. It is but one of the many responsibilities undertaken by the Navy in coordination with the Indian Army, the Indian Air Force, the Indian Coast Guard and other security agencies<sup>65</sup>. Moreover, this is the responsibility of coastal defence forces, not the fleet.

Over a century ago, Julian Corbett, an acknowledged master of maritime strategy, wrote, "The function of the fleet, the object for which it was always employed, has been three-fold: firstly, to support or obstruct diplomatic effort; secondly, to protect or destroy commerce; and thirdly, to further or hinder military operations ashore"<sup>66</sup>. The first is a full-time effort, the other two are wartime actions. Acknowledging that wars cannot be concluded upon the sea,

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<sup>64</sup> Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy October 2015, P 10,

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, P 73.

<sup>66</sup> Sir Julian Stafford Corbett, "England in the Seven Years' War: A Study in Combined Strategy", Longmans, Green, and Co. 1907, P 6.



he went on to add, "But just as land operations demand the cooperation and just coordination of horse, foot and artillery, and as sea operations demand the cooperation and just coordination of battleships, cruisers and flotillas, so are great wars conducted by the ordered combination of naval, military and diplomatic force"<sup>67</sup>. The advent of submarines, air power, missiles and the cyber age has not changed this fundamental three fold purpose of all fleets: shaping of the environment by diplomatic, economic and military means.

Introducing SAGAR in March 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had said, "Our vision for the Indian Ocean Region is rooted in advancing cooperation in our region; and to use our capabilities for the benefit of all in our common maritime home"<sup>68</sup>. The vision committed India to ensuring a safe, secure and stable Indian Ocean Region, deepened economic and security cooperation with maritime neighbours and island states, improved maritime governance, collective action, and an integrated and cooperative future in the region. But executing this vision necessitates acceptance by regional and extra-regional nations of India as a reliable security partner. This in turn necessitates visible presence, familiarity with the forces of maritime neighbours, and effective action to dispel doubt and adverse propaganda, particularly in times of need. It requires reassuring them of India's benign intentions, capability to provide regional security, showcasing of indigenous defence technology and ship construction capability, engagement with equivalent forces of other nations, building up of interoperability and testing support networks. Goodwill visits, which usually include courtesy calls on high level officials in the port being visited, social interaction including with Indian Diaspora and a 'Maritime Partnership Exercise' serve all these purposes.

So during the current month, INS Kolkota visited the Seychelles to take part in the country's Independence Day celebrations, deliver Dornier engines overhauled by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited and conduct EEZ surveillance<sup>69</sup>. INS Aditya visited Jeddah<sup>70</sup>, while INS Talwar was mission-deployed in the Persian Gulf<sup>71</sup>. INS Kochi visited Safaga, on Egypt's Red Sea coast<sup>72</sup>. INS

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid, P 7.

<sup>68</sup>Text of the PM's Remarks on the Commissioning of Coast Ship Barracuda, 12 March 2015, <http://www.pib.gov.in/newsite/erecontent.aspx?relid=116881>

<sup>69</sup>India's Participation in Seychelles Independence Day Celebrations, <https://indiannavy.nic.in/content/india%E2%80%99s-participation-seychelles-independence-day-celebrations>

<sup>70</sup> INS Aditya at Jeddah, <https://indiannavy.nic.in/content/ins-aditya-jeddah>

<sup>71</sup>INS Talwar Mission-Deployed in Persian Gulf, <https://indiannavy.nic.in/content/ins-talwar-mission-deployed-persian-gulf>

<sup>72</sup>INS Kochi Visits Safaga, Egypt, <https://indiannavy.nic.in/content/ins-kochi-visits-safaga-egypt>





Tarangini, the sail training ship, visited Cherbourg<sup>73</sup> (France) and Amsterdam<sup>74</sup>. INS Teg visited Al-Shuwalik Port, in Kuwait<sup>75</sup> and Manama, in Bahrain<sup>76</sup>. INS Tarkash set off on a five month deployment that will enable her to represent India at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on August 15, 2022. The deployment will show India's flag at 14 ports in 11 countries in Europe, Africa and South America<sup>77</sup>: at the time of writing, she had already been to Djibouti, Sudan, Alexandria and Valencia, and exercised with the navies of Sudan, Egypt, Greece, Italy, Algeria and France.

The Eastern Fleet, meanwhile, was reaching out into the Indo-Pacific. IN ships Sahyadri and Kadmatt represented India at the Singapore. Armed Forces Day<sup>78</sup>. INS Satpura and one P-8I were participating in the biennial Rim of the Pacific Exercise<sup>79</sup> off Hawaii in deep in the Eastern Pacific. Billed as the largest maritime exercise in the world, the exercise involves 28 countries, 38 warships, 179 aircraft and over 25,000 personnel.

Over a century ago, US President Theodore Roosevelt sent 16 battleships and accompanying vessels, his Great White Fleet (so named because the ships were painted white instead of battleship grey) on a round-the-world voyage, calling at 20 ports on six continents<sup>80</sup>. The purpose was a demonstration of US power to the world. The Indian Navy's goodwill visits, although on a much smaller scale, demonstrate India's benign intentions and reach, both in the Indian Ocean and beyond. As India moves along the road to implementing its aspiration to become a great power, it is the first purpose Corbett defined for the fleet – to support or obstruct diplomatic effort – that will increasingly dominate fleet activities in peacetime.

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<sup>73</sup>INS Tarangini at Cherbourg, France, <https://indiannavy.nic.in/content/ins-tarangini-cherbourg-france>

<sup>74</sup>INS Tarangini at Amsterdam, Netherlands, <https://indiannavy.nic.in/content/ins-tarangini-amsterdam-netherlands>

<sup>75</sup>INS Teg Currently Undertaking an Operational Turn Around at Al Shuwalik, <https://indiannavy.nic.in/content/ins-teg-currently-undertaking-operational-turn-around-al-shuwaik>

<sup>76</sup>INS Teg, Mission-Deployed in the Persian Gulf, <https://indiannavy.nic.in/content/ins-teg-mission-deployed-persian-gulf>

<sup>77</sup>INS Tarkash Mission Deployed for Five Months, <https://indiannavy.nic.in/content/ins-tarkash-mission-deployed-five-months>

<sup>78</sup>Eastern Fleet Ships Visit Singapore, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1838987>

<sup>79</sup>Indian Navy's INS Satpura and P8I Participate in the RIMPAC Harbour Phase, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1839384>

<sup>80</sup>Great White Fleet, <https://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Learn-About-TR/TR-Encyclopedia/War-and-Military-Affairs/Great-White-Fleet.aspx>



## Other Indo-Pacific Developments

### Assassination of Shinzo Abe

The assassination of Shinzo Abe, Japan's former Prime Minister at a political event in Nara City by Tetsuya Yamagami on July 8, 2022, shocked the world. Acknowledged as the architect of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific, Abe was Japan's longest-serving Prime Minister. His tenure extended for a year in 2006-07, during which he delivered the "Confluence of the Two Seas" speech at India's Parliament<sup>81</sup>, and again from December 2012 till September 2020, when he resigned due to relapse of colitis. Although he came into office with the idea of improving relations with China and was the first post-war Japanese Prime Minister to visit Beijing, China's assertive turn led to Japan's recognising an increasingly severe security environment, strengthening its alliance with the US and turning towards greater capability to play a role in regional security affairs, including revision of the pacifist constitution and acquisition of strike capability. Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed shock and sadness at his demise and remarked on his immense contribution to elevating India-Japan relations<sup>82</sup>. The Quad partners jointly expressed shock at the tragic assassination and committed to honouring his memory by redoubling their work towards a peaceful and prosperous region<sup>83</sup>.

### The Xi-Biden Telecon

Presidents Joe Biden and Xi Jinping spoke to each other for the fifth time since assuming office on June 28, 2022<sup>84</sup>. The conversation, which lasted for over two hours, covered three broad themes: areas in which the two countries could work together (including climate change, health security and counter-narcotics); Russia's war in Ukraine and its global impact; and Taiwan. In the first, officials from both countries will follow up on the discussion. On Ukraine, China's readout acknowledged it was discussed, and that President Xi reiterated

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<sup>81</sup>"Confluence of the two Seas": Speech by H.E. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan at the Parliament of the Republic of India, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmv0708/speech-2.html>

<sup>82</sup>PM expresses shock and sadness at the tragic demise of former Prime Minister Abe Shinzo, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1840099>

<sup>83</sup>Statement by President Joe Biden, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and Prime Minister Narendra Modi Mourning Former Prime Minister Abe, <https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/35485/Statement+by+President+Joe+Biden+Prime+Minister+Anthony+Albanese+and+Prime+Minister+Narendra+Modi+Mourning+Former+Prime+Minister+Abe>

<sup>84</sup> Background Press Call on President Biden's Call with President Xi Jinping of the People's Republic of China, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2022/07/28/background-press-call-on-president-bidens-call-with-president-xi-jinping-of-the-peoples-republic-of-china/>



China's principled position<sup>85</sup>. The US readout doesn't even mention Ukraine<sup>86</sup>. Both seem to have reiterated their positions without finding meeting ground. On Taiwan, President Xi reiterated, "... resolutely safeguarding China's national sovereignty and territorial integrity is the firm will of the more than 1.4 billion Chinese people. The public opinion cannot be defied. Those who play with fire will perish by it". President Biden repeated the US position recognising that there is only one China and said there is no change in US position. The US does, however, oppose unilateral efforts to change the status quo and impose unification by force.

The reality, is that US recognition of the One-China Principle makes Taiwan an internal affair of the PRC. The US threat to oppose forcible reunification thus amounts to unacceptable interference in China's internal affairs, as China sees it. It does not presently serve US interests to allow Taiwan's forcible integration into the PRC: Taiwan is a democracy and has a flourishing semiconductor industry at the world's technological forefront; and forcible occupation would gravely damage the interests of Japan, a strong US ally. As China's power grows, the US may find it has no option but to look the other way when China does move to reintegrate Taiwan. That will not bode well for the Indo-Pacific.

### **Indonesia's Summits with China, Japan and South Korea**

President Joko Widodo of Indonesia visited China on July 25-26 for summit level meetings with President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang; then Japan for a summit with Premier Kishida on July 27 and Seoul for a summit with President Yoon on July 28. Among the notable commitments was, "Both sides will promote mutually beneficial cooperation between the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific and BRI, as well as promote collaboration of the GDI key areas and the AOIP's priority areas, contributing to the implementation of the AOIP<sup>87</sup>. This commitment follows up developments during the China-ASEAN Special Summit of November 2021, wherein China had agreed to "advance cooperation in relevant areas identified in the AOIP"<sup>88</sup>. The implicit acceptance of the term

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<sup>85</sup> President Xi Jinping Speaks with US President Joe Biden on the Phone, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/202207/t20220729\\_10729593.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/202207/t20220729_10729593.html)

<sup>86</sup> Readout of President Biden's Call with President Xi Jinping of the People's Republic of China, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/07/28/readout-of-president-bidens-call-with-president-xi-jinping-of-the-peoples-republic-of-china/>

<sup>87</sup> Joint Press Statement on the Bilateral Meeting between President of the Republic of China and President of the Republic of Indonesia, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/202207/t20220726\\_10728227.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/202207/t20220726_10728227.html)

<sup>88</sup> Joint Statement of the ASEAN-China Special Summit to Commemorate the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of ASEAN-China Dialogue Relations: Comprehensive Strategic Partnership for Peace, Security, Prosperity and Sustainable Development, <https://asean.org/wp->



'Indo-Pacific' marks a change from the normal aversion displayed by Chinese leaders for it. In Japan, the two leaders agreed to cooperate on energy, infrastructure and security, among other areas. Japan committed to participating for the first time in the Garuda Shield military exercises to be held in Indonesia in September<sup>89</sup>. Both leaders also agreed to changes in the revised Indonesia-Japan economic partnership agreement to be signed later this year.

## Pacific Island Forum

The 51<sup>st</sup> meeting of the Pacific Islands Forum took place in Suva, Fiji from July 11-14, 2022<sup>90</sup>. It was attended by the Heads of State/Government of Australia, Micronesia, Fiji, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu, as well as representatives from French Polynesia, Tuvalu, the Cook Islands and Nauru. Kiribati announced it would withdraw from the Forum but could come back<sup>91</sup>. A similar situation prevails in the Marshall Islands: prospects of return were heightened when US Deputy Secretary Wendy Sherman met with the Marshall Islands' Foreign Minister Kitland Kabua in Washington on July 29 and discussed the bilateral relationship<sup>92</sup>. The Leaders noted that the region continues to be a highly contested sphere of interest with external powers seeking to assert their own interest. US Vice-President Kamala Harris gave a virtual address and announced assistance of \$ 1 billion as well as two new US embassies for the region. Australia's Prime Minister spoke of newfound interest in the Southern Pacific and cooperation with the long-neglected region. He spoke of the earlier lack of engagement and welcomed Prime Minister Sogavare's ruling out of a Chinese base there<sup>93</sup>. He also launched a project to enhance Fiji's Maritime

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[content/uploads/2021/11/Joint-Statement-30th-Anniversary-of-ASEAN-China-Dialogue-Relations-Final.pdf](#)

<sup>89</sup> Japan to join 'Garuda Shield' military drills for the first time, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/japan-pm-agreed-close-cooperation-with-indonesia-fields-including-energy-2022-07-27/>

<sup>90</sup> Report: Communiqué of the 51<sup>st</sup> Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting, <https://www.forumsec.org/2022/07/17/report-communique-of-the-51st-pacific-islands-forum-leaders-meeting/>

<sup>91</sup> Doorstop Interview – Suva, Fiji, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/doorstop-interview-suva-fiji-0>

<sup>92</sup> Deputy Secretary Sherman's Meeting with the Republic of the Marshall Islands' Foreign Minister Kabua and Select Compact Negotiation Delegation Members, <https://www.state.gov/deputy-secretary-shermans-meeting-with-the-republic-of-the-marshall-islands-foreign-minister-kabua-and-select-compact-negotiation-delegation-members/>

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

Domain Awareness<sup>94</sup>. Geopolitical competition between China on the one hand and Australia and the US on the other will shape the policies of great powers in the years ahead, continuing to pull regional leaders in different directions.

## Western Pacific Developments



EAM Dr. S Jaishankar and Indonesian Minister for Foreign Affairs Retno Marsudi meet on the sidelines of the G-20 Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Bali, July 7, 2022. Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia

G20 foreign ministers came together in Bali, Indonesia, on July 7-8, 2022, for the G20 Foreign Ministers' Meeting. The event was intended to discuss global recovery efforts and comprised two sessions, the first on strengthening multilateralism with a view to strengthening global collaboration and building mutual trust between countries and thus providing an enabling environment for world stability, peace and development; and the second on food and energy security<sup>95</sup>. The event was, however, disrupted by strident Western criticism of

<sup>94</sup>Enhancing Fiji's Maritime Domain Awareness, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/enhancing-fijis-maritime-domain-awareness>

<sup>95</sup>G20 Foreign Ministers' Meeting to be Held in Bali, [https://kemlu.go.id/portal/en/read/3774/siaran\\_pers/g20-foreign-ministers-meeting-to-be-held-in-bali#:~:text=Indonesia%20holds%20the%202022%20G20.discussed%20at%20the%20G20%20meetings.](https://kemlu.go.id/portal/en/read/3774/siaran_pers/g20-foreign-ministers-meeting-to-be-held-in-bali#:~:text=Indonesia%20holds%20the%202022%20G20.discussed%20at%20the%20G20%20meetings.)





Russia's action in Ukraine, resulting in a walkout by Sergei Lavrov, Russia's Foreign Minister<sup>96</sup>. Earlier, UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss had decided to skip the meeting and return home due to the resignation of Boris Johnson as the Prime Minister. There were no reports of any agreement following the meeting.

China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi and the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken engaged extensively with Southeast Asian leaders in the run-up to the G 20 Foreign Ministers Summit in Bali, as did India's External Affairs Minister Dr. S Jaishankar. The event, on July 7-8, 2022 also provided opportunity for bilateral meetings between Wang Yi<sup>97</sup> and Blinken<sup>98</sup>, Blinken and Jaishankar<sup>99</sup> and Wang Yi<sup>100</sup> and Jaishankar<sup>101</sup>.

A series of activities by USS Benfold continued the confrontation between the US and China in the South and East China Seas. In the first, the ship conducted a Freedom of Navigation Operation off the Paracel Islands on July 13. The PLA claimed that the ship had trespassed into China's territorial waters and had been warned off<sup>102</sup>. The USN was quick to rebut the Chinese claim, pointing out that the FONOP was in accordance with international law and describing the PLA statement as misrepresenting lawful US operations and asserting its excessive and illegitimate maritime claim at the expense of SE Asian

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<sup>96</sup>Russia's Lavrov walks out of G20 as West denounces Ukraine War, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/war-looms-large-over-g20-event-russia-meets-rivals-bali-2022-07-07/>

<sup>97</sup> Wang Yi Holds Talks with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjwb\\_663304/wjzb\\_663308/activities\\_663312/202207/t20220709\\_10718037.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjwb_663304/wjzb_663308/activities_663312/202207/t20220709_10718037.html)

<sup>98</sup> Secretary Antony J Blinken and Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi Before Their Meeting, <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-and-chinese-state-councilor-and-foreign-minister-wang-yi-before-their-meeting/>

<sup>99</sup> Secretary Antony J Blinken and Indian External Affairs Minister Dr. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar Before Their Meeting, <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-and-indian-external-affairs-minister-dr-subrahmanyam-jaishankar-before-their-meeting-3/>

<sup>100</sup> Wang Yi Meets With Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjwb\\_663304/wjzb\\_663308/activities\\_663312/202207/t20220708\\_10717362.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjwb_663304/wjzb_663308/activities_663312/202207/t20220708_10717362.html)

<sup>101</sup> External Affairs Minister's Meeting with State Councilor and Foreign Minister of China H.E. Mr. Wang Yi on the sidelines of the G20 Foreign Ministers' Meeting, [https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/35480/External\\_Affairs\\_Ministers\\_meeting\\_with\\_State\\_Councilor\\_and\\_Foreign\\_Minister\\_of\\_China\\_HE\\_Mr\\_Wang\\_Yi\\_on\\_the\\_sidelines\\_of\\_G20\\_Foreign\\_Ministers\\_Meeting](https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/35480/External_Affairs_Ministers_meeting_with_State_Councilor_and_Foreign_Minister_of_China_HE_Mr_Wang_Yi_on_the_sidelines_of_G20_Foreign_Ministers_Meeting)

<sup>102</sup> PLA Spokesperson remarks on US destroyer's trespassing China's territorial waters off Xisha Islands on July 13, [http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2022-07/13/content\\_4915534.htm](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2022-07/13/content_4915534.htm)





neighbours<sup>103</sup>. On July 16, USS Benfold conducted a similar operation off the Spratly Islands<sup>104</sup>. On July 19, the same ship transited through the Taiwan Straits<sup>105</sup>, generating a predictable narrative from the Chinese side<sup>106</sup>. The ship is part of the USS Ronald Reagan Carrier Strike Group, which was conducting operations in the South China Sea<sup>107</sup>. The two narratives, of lawful operations from the US side, and of transgression of China's waters from the Chinese side, have become entrenched, with neither side willing to find meeting ground.



Indo-Pacific Chiefs of Defence meet in Sydney, Australia on July 25-27. Source: US Indo-Pacific Command

<sup>103</sup>7<sup>th</sup> Fleet Destroyer Conducts Freedom of Navigation Operation in South China Sea, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/3092350/7th-fleet-destroyer-conducts-freedom-of-navigation-operation-in-south-china-sea/>

<sup>104</sup>7<sup>th</sup> Fleet Destroyer Conducts Freedom of Navigation Operation in South China Sea, <https://www.c7f.navy.mil/Media/News/Display/Article/3095437/7th-fleet-destroyer-conducts-freedom-of-navigation-operation-in-south-china-sea/>

<sup>105</sup>7<sup>th</sup> Fleet Destroyer Transits Taiwan Strait, <https://www.c7f.navy.mil/Media/News/Display/Article/3097826/7th-fleet-destroyer-transits-taiwan-strait/>

<sup>106</sup>Chinese military slams US warship's transit through Taiwan Strait, [http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2022-07/20/content\\_10172254.htm](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2022-07/20/content_10172254.htm)

<sup>107</sup>Ronald Reagan Carrier Strike Group Operates in the South China Sea, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/3092328/ronald-reagan-carrier-strike-group-operates-in-the-south-china-sea/>



The 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Indo-Pacific Chiefs of Defense Conference was co-hosted by General Angus Campbell, the Australian Chief of Defence Force and Admiral John C Aquilino, Commander of the US Indo-Pacom, at Sydney, Australia, from July 25-27, 2022<sup>108</sup>. Air Marshal BR Krishna, CISC, represented India at the event. The fact that 30 countries come together for this conference speaks eloquently of the US partnerships and alliances in the Indo-Pacific.

US Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Affairs Ely Ratner described the PRC as the pacing challenge for the US on July 26, 2022<sup>109</sup>. Speaking of a sharp increase in unsafe and unprofessional behaviour by PLA ships and aircraft, he said, "this aggressive and irresponsible behaviour represents one of the most significant threats to peace and stability in the region today, including in the South China Sea. And if the PLA continues this pattern of behaviour, it is only a matter of time before there is a major incident or accident in the region"<sup>110</sup>. China, in response, described the statement as "just another hype of the China threat theory that would give the US an excuse to intervene in the Asia-Pacific region, including the South China Sea, and advance its Indo-Pacific Strategy. At the same time, it could drive a wedge between China and regional countries so that the US could promote a regional alliance aimed at China"<sup>111</sup>. It went on to raise the fear of the Ronald Reagan carrier strike group attacking relevant islands in the South China Sea or clashing with Chinese warships and fighter jets. China's continued unwillingness to discontinue its assertive outlook or change its self-serving narrative will continue to raise tensions in the region.

The navies of Pakistan and China came together off Shanghai for Exercise Sea Guardians-2 from July 10-13<sup>112</sup>. The exercise symbolises continuing China-Pakistan defence cooperation. Although it claims to have nothing to do with the regional situation and is supposedly not targeted at any third party<sup>113</sup>, the exercise content including "attacking maritime targets, tactical manoeuvre,

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<sup>108</sup> Australia co-hosts 2022 Indo-Pacific Chiefs of Defense Conference, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/3104904/australia-co-hosts-2022-indo-pacific-chiefs-of-defense-conference/>

<sup>109</sup> Twelfth Annual South China Sea Conference "Lunch Keynote by Ely Ratner", [https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/220726\\_South\\_ChinaSea\\_LunchKeynote.pdf?XSB9sj4WJaeHOsHdSHLu3Fo.f.tONemj](https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/220726_South_ChinaSea_LunchKeynote.pdf?XSB9sj4WJaeHOsHdSHLu3Fo.f.tONemj)

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> 'Major incident' in S China Sea could only mean US-made conflict, [http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2022-07/28/content\\_10174049.htm](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2022-07/28/content_10174049.htm)

<sup>112</sup> China, Pakistan maritime drill concludes, [http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2022-07/13/content\\_4915539.htm](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2022-07/13/content_4915539.htm)

<sup>113</sup> China, Pakistan kick off joint naval exercise "Sea Guardians – 2" in Shanghai, [http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2022-07/10/content\\_4915287.htm](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2022-07/10/content_4915287.htm)



anti-submarine operation, replenishment at sea, reinforcing damaged ships, anti-aircraft and anti-missile operations etc<sup>114</sup> calls into question this claim.

### India's Maritime Capacity

India commissioned its first naval squadron on the Eastern Seaboard to operate the indigenous Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH) Mk III on July 04, 2022<sup>115</sup>. INAS 324 (Kestrels) will be used for maritime reconnaissance, search and rescue, HADR Operations, Special Operations, and Medivac on the Eastern Seaboard.



IAC Vikrant at sea during User Acceptance Trials. Source: Indian Navy

IAC-1 Vikrant, India's first indigenous aircraft carrier, completed the fourth and final phase of her sea trials by the contractor (Cochin Shipyard Limited) on July 10, 2022<sup>116</sup>. On July 28, the ship was formally delivered to the Indian Navy<sup>117</sup>. Christened after her illustrious predecessor, the first INS Vikrant which ensured

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> ALH Squadron INAS 324 Commissioned at Visakhapatnam, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1839119>

<sup>116</sup> Indigenous Aircraft Carrier Vikrant Completion of 4<sup>th</sup> Phase of Sea Trials, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1840608>

<sup>117</sup> Delivery of Indigenous Aircraft Carrier (IAC) 'Vikrant', <https://indiannavy.nic.in/content/delivery-indigenous-aircraft-carrier-iac-vikrant>



India had air superiority over the then East Pakistan during the 1971 war, the current avatar is far larger, displacing nearly 45,000 tons as against the old Vikrant's 19,500 tons full load. She will operate an air wing of 30 aircraft, including Mig-29s, the indigenous ALH and MH-60R multi-role helicopters. The ship is scheduled to commission in mid-August 2022, to commemorate the 'Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav'.

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