



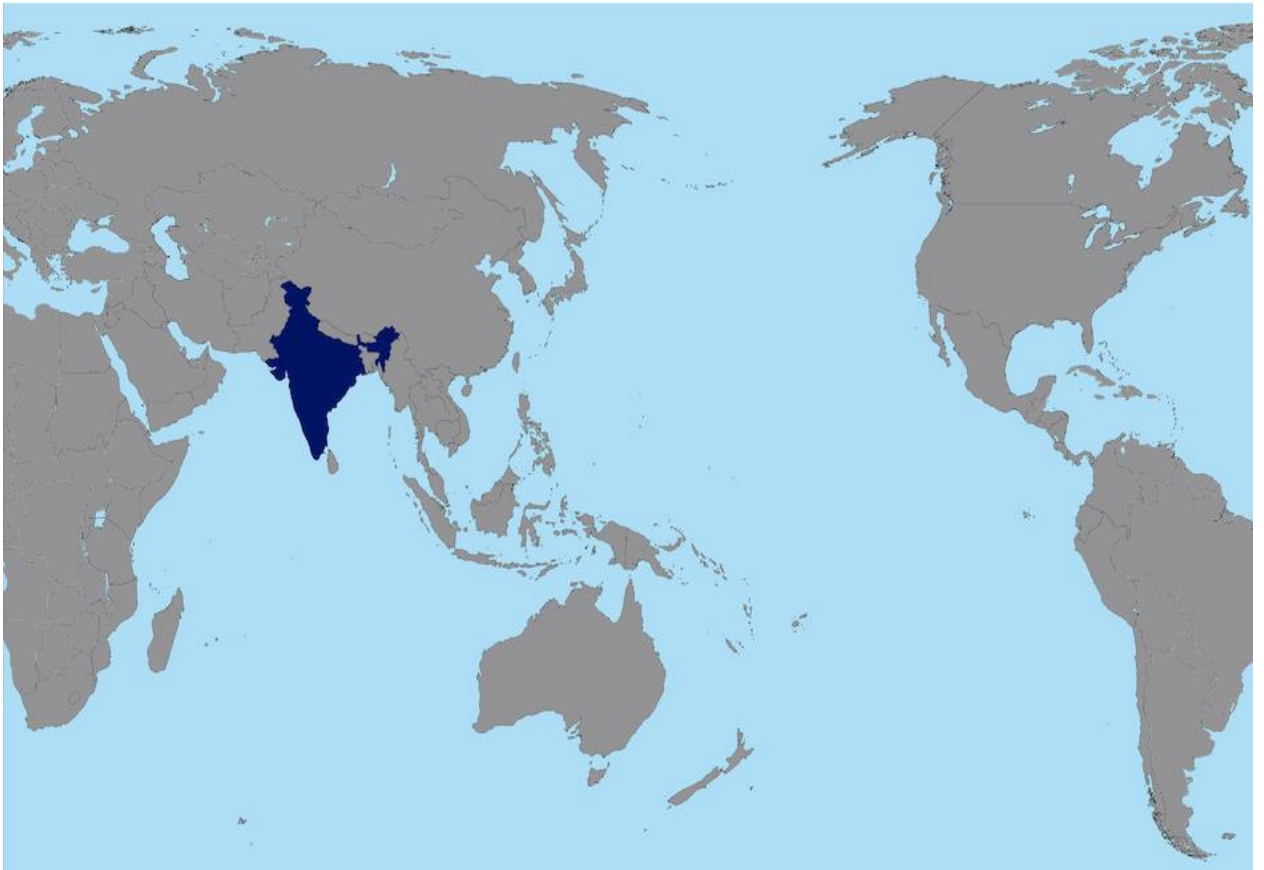
Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

JANUARY 2023



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Delhi Policy Group

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

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

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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 addressed to Jayantika at jayantika@dpg.org.in. To subscribe, please [click here](#).

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Contents

Abstract	1
The US-Japan Security Consultative Committee (2+2) Meeting	2
Kishida's Tour West	6
Voice of Global South Summit	10
The India Egypt Strategic Partnership	13
French Deployment to the Indo-Pacific and Exercise Varuna 2023	16
Other Indo-Pacific Developments	19



INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

January 2023

Abstract

The US-Japan Security Consultative Committee (Ministerial 2+2) met in Washington D.C. on January 11, 2023. The two sides highlighted their strategic convergence on the looming threat from China, and agreed on measures to modernise the US-Japan alliance, including through the effective deployment of Japan's planned counterstrike capability, technological cooperation and upgrading of the US force posture in Japan. They also expressed their intent to further integrate alliance partnerships, including with Australia, South Korea and Euro-Atlantic partners.

In parallel, Japan's Prime Minister Kishida Fumio undertook a whirlwind tour of G-7 countries, meeting leaders from France, Italy, UK, Canada and the US in their capitals from January 09 – 13, 2023. Among the visible outcomes of this tour were elevation of Japan's relations with Italy to a strategic partnership; signing of the Japan-UK Reciprocal Access Agreement and the reaffirmation of alliance commitments in the summit meeting with the US President. All leaders committed to supporting Japan's G-7 Presidency and emphasised strategic cooperation to deal with the China challenge.

In a innovative initiative, India convened the Voice of the Global South Virtual Summit, bringing together leaders and ministers from 125 countries on January 12-13, 2023. India announced its intent to establish a Centre of Excellence, a Science and Technology Initiative, the Aarogya Maitri project to provide essential medical supplies, a Young Diplomats Forum and scholarships for the Global South.

The State Visit of Egyptian President Abdel Fatah El-Sisi accompanied by a high level delegation to New Delhi from January 24-27 resulted in the elevation of India-Egypt relations to a strategic partnership covering the political, security, defence, energy and economic areas. Egypt's geography astride the Suez Canal, the gateway it provides into North Africa and its traditional importance in Arab affairs makes it an important regional partner.

The 21st edition of the India – France Exercise Varuna was conducted in the Arabian Sea from January 16-20, 2023. There were indications of substantial



enhancement of India-France naval cooperation during a visit by President Macron to India due in March 2023.

A US Special Forces strike mission resulted in the killing of a senior ISIS leader, Bilal al-Sudani in Somalia on January 26, 2023.

The Second Australia-France Foreign and Defence Ministerial Consultations (2+2) took place in Paris on January 30, 2023. A comprehensive Joint Statement spelled out the measures the democratic partners intend to take to rejuvenate their cooperation, hard hit by the AUKUS announcement in September 2021.

Indonesia approved the development plan for the Tuna Gas Field in the Natuna Sea on January 2, 2023, setting the stage for confrontation with China which also claims the region which lies inside the Nine-Dash-Line. Meanwhile, China's Coast Guard asserted itself in the vicinity of the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands, warning away Japanese vessels from illegally operating in the area on January 30, 2023.

The inaugural IAF-JASDF exercise Veer Guardian 2023 took place in Japan from January 12-26, 2023. India Commissioned the fifth of its Kalvari-class submarines on January 23, 2023.

The US-Japan Security Consultative Committee (2+2) Meeting

After meeting virtually in January 2022¹, the Foreign and Defense Ministers of the US and Japan met physically in Washington DC on January 11, 2023. The substantially longer joint statement² released by them on this occasion indicates growing convergence between the positions and strategies of the US and Japan as they move purposefully to strengthen their bilateral alliance and put substance in the vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific they have shared since April 2019³.

The current year's statement comprised five broad sections. In the first, the ministers highlighted the alignment of their national vision as well as priorities and goals as set out in their national security and national defense strategies released in the last quarter of 2022. The Japanese side reiterated their resolve

¹ Joint Statement of the Security Consultative Committee("2+2"), <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100284739.pdf>

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

³ Joint Statement of the Security Consultative Committee, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000470738.pdf>

to fundamentally reinforce Japan's defense capabilities and actively engage in maintaining regional peace and stability. The US side expressed its determination to optimise its force posture in the Indo-Pacific, including in Japan, by forward-deploying more versatile, resilient and mobile capabilities while restating its unwavering commitment to Japan's defense using the full range of capabilities, including nuclear. Both sides decided to accelerate work on evolving Alliance roles and missions and employing interoperable and advanced capabilities to address current and future challenges, while strengthening activities with allies and partners.



Japanese Foreign Minister Hayashi Yoshimasa and Defense Minister Hamada Yasukazu with US Secretary of State Antony J Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd J Austin at the State Department on January 11, 2023. Source: US Department of State

The second section addressed perceived threats. The ministers concurred that China's intent to reshape the international order to its benefit "represents the greatest strategic challenge to the Indo-Pacific region and beyond". They reiterated their strong opposition to China's attempts to unilaterally change the status quo by force in the East China Sea and to its unlawful claims, militarisation of features and threatening and provocative activity in the South China Sea, as also their intent to work together to address China's non-market policies and practices as well as economic coercion. While signalling that their basic position on Taiwan remains unchanged, they sought peaceful resolution



of cross-Strait issues. They condemned the actions of North Korea and Russia and resolved to work together to address these challenges.

The third section dealt with steps to modernise the US-Japan Alliance. Japan will establish a permanent joint headquarters to step up coordination. Both will deepen ISR cooperation, through MQ-9 UAVs being deployed to Kanoya Air Base and the launch of a Bilateral Information Analysis Cell to increase intelligence sharing. US facilities in Japan will be hardened and shared with the JSDF, while exercises and training, including in Japan's Southwest Islands, will be increased. Alliance efforts will focus on mission areas such as integrated air and missile defense, anti-surface and anti-submarine warfare, mine warfare, amphibious and airborne operations, ISR and targeting, logistics and mobility. The allies will deepen cooperation to enable effective employment of Japan's counterstrike capability. Cooperation on space, cyber and information security is to be deepened. To maintain a technological edge, both countries will promote efforts toward joint research and development of defense equipment, including development of advanced materials, hypersonic test beds and the potential joint development of a future interceptor.

The fourth area is expanding alliance partnerships. First priority under this goes to Australia, building on the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue in August 2022 and the Trilateral Defense Ministers meetings in June and October 2022. Trilateral training in Australia's northern region is to be enhanced. The ministers have also expressed their intent to deepen cooperation and explore multilateral and trilateral exercises with South Korea. Joint training, capacity-building and transfers of defense equipment to Southeast Asian and Southern Pacific Island countries will become a focal area. Another thrust area will be expanding cooperation with Euro-Atlantic partners, both bilaterally and through multilateral entities such as the NATO and the EU.

The final section concerns optimising Alliance posture. This will result in the upgrading the forward posture of US forces in Japan. While the 3rd Marine Division Headquarters and 12th Marine Regiment will remain in Okinawa, the latter will be equipped with anti-ship missiles and reorganised to become the 12th Marine Littoral Regiment by 2025. There will not be any change to Japan's cash contribution and construction projects for the US presence.

Although the North Atlantic Treaty founding NATO was signed in April 1949⁴, the organisation had no commander and no plans. It took the forcible attempt by an Asian power of a change in status quo on the Korean Peninsula

⁴ The North Atlantic Treaty, Washington DC, 4 April 1949,
https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm



beginning June 1950 for the Allies to wake up to the need for positive action to counter the perceived Soviet threat in Europe. The first Supreme Allied Commander Europe (General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower) assumed command only in December 1950 and began forming his staff in April 1951⁵. NATO's deterrence maintained peace between great powers in Europe for seven decades.

In a twist, a European conflict (Russia's action in Ukraine) has awakened America's allies in the Pacific sufficiently to the need to move beyond discussion and act to deter China. This is visible in actions by Japan, Australia and South Korea. Japan has announced transformation of its security policy through new national security and defence strategies as well as medium term military acquisition guidelines, announced its intention to enhance defense expenditure to 2% of the GDP by 2027 and decided to acquire counter-strike capability. Its decision to set up a permanent joint headquarters will need to be followed up by the US creating a new joint operational command to plan and execute coordinated military operations, on the same pattern that it has in South Korea. Australia is engaged in reviewing its strategic outlook, in the induction of nuclear attack submarines through AUKUS and has announced a sharp increase in defence expenditure. South Korea has announced a new Indo-Pacific strategy, has moved towards strengthening trilateral relations, including defense, with Japan and the US, and has announced its intent to either develop its own nuclear deterrent or return US nuclear weapons to South Korean soil.

The key question is whether these actions will deter Beijing and result in cessation of its grey zone coercion and salami-slicing. That appears unlikely. China's Coast Guard has already begun testing the new alliance by driving Japanese ships out of the vicinity of the Senkaku Islands (see separate report under Other Indo-Pacific Developments).

Moreover, while actions by Japan and other US allies in the region may suffice to hold off China's challenge in East Asia for the time being, they will do nothing in the South China Sea or the Indian Ocean. The need to balance China's asymmetric power in these regions may in fact become stronger in case China shifts attention to less well defended areas.

Given China's paranoia and insecurity, the allied action risks stronger countermeasures and a hardening of approach by Beijing, which could spiral

⁵ Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), <https://www.eucom.mil/organization/history-of-useucom/history-of-supreme-allied-commander-europe-saceur>

into conflict. On the other hand, insufficient action risks cementing China's belief that the deterrence sought by the allies is only on paper and will not result in concerted action. Leaders on both sides face difficult decision choices, and the future of the Indo-Pacific rests on these decisions.

Kishida's Tour West

The second week of 2023 witnessed Prime Minister Kishida Fumio making a whirlwind tour of Japan's G-7 partners in the West⁶. He met French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris on January 09, Italian President Giorgia Meloni in Rome on January 10, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak in London on January 11, Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau on January 12 and US President Joseph Biden on January 13. Germany was the only G-7 country that was not part of Kishida's tour: Kishida had met German Chancellor Olaf Scholz one-on-one in April 2022⁷ and again on the side-lines of the G-20 Summit in November 2022⁸.

In France⁹, the leaders called for a new roadmap to take their bilateral relationship forward. Kishida briefed Macron on Japan's National Security Strategy of November 2022; Macron reciprocated by briefing Kishida on the French National Strategic Review unveiled in December 2022¹⁰. They agreed to hold the next Foreign and Defence Ministerial Dialogue within the next six months and welcomed the holding of the next Japan-France Comprehensive Maritime Dialogue in February 2023. They discussed space, cyberspace and maritime issues as well as UNSC reform and expressed convergent positions on attempts to change the status quo by force in the East and South China Seas, the Taiwan issue and North Korea. Kishida sought and obtained French support for his objectives for the next G-7 Summit to be held in Hiroshima in May 2023.

In Italy¹¹, the leaders agreed to elevate bilateral relations to a strategic partnership and committed to launching a bilateral Foreign Affairs and

⁶ Prime Minister Kishida's visit to France, Italy, the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States of America, https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/we/page4e_001311.html

⁷ Japan-Germany Summit Meeting, https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/c_see/de/page4e_001245.html

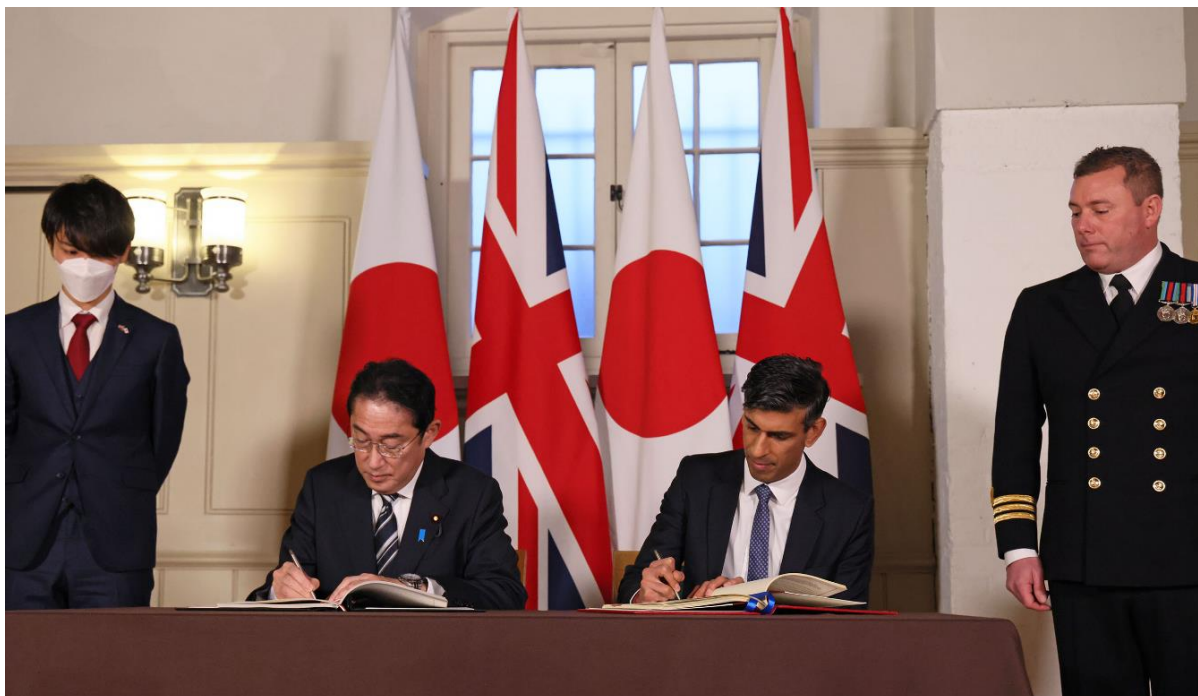
⁸ Japan-Germany Summit Meeting https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/c_see/de/page1e_000533.html

⁹ Working Dinner and Summit Meeting Japan-France, https://www.fr.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_ja/11_000001_01835.html

¹⁰ Republique Francaise National Strategic Review 2022, <http://www.sgdsn.gouv.fr/uploads/2022/12/rms-uk-20221202.pdf>

¹¹ Meeting with Prime Minister Kishida of Japan – President Meloni's Press Statement, <https://www.governo.it/en/articolo/meeting-prime-minister-kishida-japan-president-meloni-s-press-statement/21501>

Defence consultation mechanism soon to strengthen exchange of analyses and information on global and regional issues of interest. They welcomed the recent launch of the Global Combat Air Programme, agreed to strengthen trade and cultural relations and to deepen relations with countries from the Global South. They expressed convergence on the main points for Japan's G-7 Presidency; Italy will take over in 2024.



Prime Ministers Kishida Fumio of Japan and Rishi Sunak of the United Kingdom sign the Japan-UK Reciprocal Access Agreement in London on January 10, 2023.

Source: Prime Minister's Office of Japan

In UK¹², the leaders signed the Japan-UK Reciprocal Access Agreement¹³, making UK the second country (after Australia) and the first European one with which Japan has such an agreement. The agreement will simplify procedures for cooperative activities such as port calls of warships and joint exercises between the two countries. They also discussed UK's accession to the CPTPP, Japan's G-7 Presidency and their support to Ukraine.

In Canada¹⁴, the leaders discussed enhancing economic and security cooperation in accordance with Japan's new National Security Strategy and Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy of November 2022. They agreed on a

¹² Prime Minister hosts Japanese PM and agrees historic defence agreement, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-hosts-japanese-pm-and-agrees-historic-defence-agreement>

¹³ Signing of Japan-UK Reciprocal Access Agreement, https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/we/gb/page1e_000556.html

¹⁴ Prime Minister Justin Trudeau Meets With Prime Minister of Japan Kishida Fumio, <https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/readouts/2023/01/12/prime-minister-justin-trudeau-meets-prime-minister-japan-kishida-fumio>



coordinated approach to security in the Indo-Pacific, shared concerns regarding the impact of Russia's action in Ukraine on the Global South, and G-7 coordination.

Mutual bonhomie reached its highest levels during Kishida's meeting with President Biden¹⁵. There were no new policy announcements, but the leaders extolled the "unprecedented" cooperation between their countries; expressed a convergence of views on challenges from China, North Korea and Russia; and reaffirmed that their alliance remained the cornerstone of peace, security and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific. President Biden commended Japan's leadership for fundamentally reinforcing its defense capabilities and reiterated the unwavering commitment of the US to the defense of Japan using its full range of capabilities, including nuclear. The leaders welcomed progress in modernising their alliance as reflected by the recent meeting of the Security Consultative Committee. They discussed priorities for the G-7 Hiroshima Summit. They condemned all who use their economic power to take advantage of others and called on China to report adequate transparent epidemiological and viral genomic sequence data regarding the spread of COVID-19. They expressed their intent to ensure the Quad remains a force for good, committed to bringing tangible benefits to the region, including by delivering results on global health, cyber-security, climate, critical and emerging technologies and maritime domain awareness. They also committed to supporting ASEAN unity and centrality and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific and to strengthening trilateral cooperation between Japan, the US and South Korea in security and other domains.

A speech by Prime Minister Kishida on January 13 enabled elaboration of Japan's foreign policy approach¹⁶. It was based on three key messages: first, the stable international order that the world had dedicated itself to upholding was now in grave danger; second that Japan was resolved to proactively create peace and prosperity and a free and open order worldwide; and third that Japan and the US needed to engage in further strengthening of their bond. He had, therefore, made two major foreign and security policy decisions in 2022. The first was the shift in Japan's policy towards Russia, transforming the fight from a Trans-Atlantic to a global one. The second was major transformation of Japan's security policy, including the formulation of a new National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy and the Defense Buildup Program; increasing defense spending to 2% of the GDP; possessing counterstrike

¹⁵ Joint Statement of the United States and Japan,
https://japan.kantei.go.jp/101_kishida/documents/2023/_00001.html

¹⁶ Policy Speech by Prime Minister KISHIDA Fumio at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), January 13, 2023,
https://japan.kantei.go.jp/101_kishida/statement/202301/_00005.html



capability; improving response capability in cyber-security; and stepping up Japan's defense posture in the Southwest region. He highlighted the increasingly clear trends around Japan: reinforcement of nuclear and missile capabilities, rapid acceleration of military buildups, and attempts to unilaterally change the status quo by force. He noted that Japan would remain a peace-loving nation, but diplomacy needs to be backed up by defense capabilities and reinforcing defense also leads to persuasiveness in diplomatic efforts.

Kishida then focused on three key challenges: strengthening the unity of like-minded countries and especially the G-7; relations with the Global South; and relations with China, the central challenge for both the US and Japan. He highlighted that in the emerging world, the G-7 would need to remain humble and focus on the principle that the international community is not one in which the strong overwhelm the weak, but one driven by rules, not force. Joint cooperative efforts and a balance between those having a voice and bearing responsibility would be essential in creating the next international order. He identified Southeast countries and India as the most critical partners for Japan and spoke of further enhancing the Japan-India Special Strategic and Global Partnership.

He stated that China had a vision and claims on the international order that diverged from Japan and could never be accepted. He had conveyed this to President Xi Jinping when they met in November 2022. Japan would firmly maintain and assert its position and call strongly for responsible action by China, while continuing dialogue on issues of concern and cooperating on matters of common interest. He expressed confidence that Japan would succeed in view of the Japan-US Alliance and measures to strengthen it. He ended by calling on the US to re-join the TPP, which it had initiated.

Japan's security outlook has undergone substantial change in the direction envisaged by former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, particularly during the last year. There is now acknowledgement of the centrality of China's challenge, as compared to the period not so long ago where China was seen as Japan's strategic partner. Many of the hesitations of previous years have been overcome and momentous decisions that change Japan's pacifist character taken. Nevertheless, there is still a long way to go before Japan can assume responsibility for its own security. Japan has no choice but to do all it can to keep the US engaged in East Asia.

The Kishida tour of G-7 countries was Japan's attempt to obtain support for its new security outlook and its objectives as the G-7 President. G-7 countries will certainly be able to provide economic and technological power. How much



military support they will extend, should push come to shove, remains a moot point. European and Canadian Indo-Pacific strategies remain limited to dealing with non-traditional threats to security, including in the maritime domain. They don't extend to military stability issues. The French National Strategic Review of December 2022 is categorically against extending NATO defence commitments into the Indo-Pacific.

Kishida's remarks about enhancing cooperation with Southeast Asia and India need to be seen in this context. As the sole Asian representative of G-7, Japan will have to balance the aspirations of G-7 partners with those of the more representative G-20. Kishida's policy speech in the US shows he is conscious of this need. Unless he can effectively shape the G-7 approach accordingly, construction of a stable and more representative world order seems a distant prospect.

Voice of Global South Summit

In a unique and innovative initiative, India convened the Voice of the Global South Virtual Summit under the theme "Unity of Voice, Unity of Purpose" on January 12-13, 2023¹⁷. The summit brought together leaders and ministers from 125 countries comprising three-fourths of the world's population and focused international attention on their priorities, perspectives and concerns¹⁸.

The summit was conducted over ten sessions. Speaking at the inaugural session, Prime Minister Narendra Modi drew attention to the major crises facing the world including war, conflict, terrorism and geo-political tensions; rising food, fertiliser and fuel prices; climate change driven natural disasters; and the lasting economic impact of the COVID pandemic. Although these challenges impacted the Global South disproportionately, the South did not have a voice in finding solutions. India's objective during its G20 Presidency was to amplify their voice and ensure they are no longer excluded from the fruits of development. The Prime Minister highlighted the shared need to redesign global political and financial governance so as to remove inequalities, enlarge opportunities, support growth and spread progress and prosperity. Calling for a global agenda of 'Respond, Recognise, Respect and Reform' he

¹⁷ Voice of Global South Summit, https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/36087/Voice_of_Global_South_Summit

¹⁸ Summary of Developments: Voice of Global South Summit 2023 (January 12-13, 2023), https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/36119/Summary_of_Deliberations_Voice_of_Global_South_Summit_2023_January_1213_2023

expressed optimism that consultation would reveal simple, scalable and sustainable solutions that transformed our societies and economies.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi Greeting World Leaders at the Opening Session of the Voice of Global South Virtual Summit, January 12, 2023. Source: MEA Photo Gallery

Sessions of the Summit focused on financial, environmental, energy, commerce/trade, health and education dimensions of empowering the Global South, and were led by India's ministers in charge of these areas. There were also two Foreign Minister led sessions, one on ensuring a conducive international environment, and the other on suggestions for India's G20 Presidency.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a number of new initiatives by India in connection with the Summit. India will establish a 'Global South Centre of Excellence, to undertake research on development solutions or best practices that can be scaled up and implemented in other members of the Global South. It will launch a 'Global South Science and Technology Initiative' to share its expertise with other developing nations. The 'Aarogya Maitri' project will provide essential medical supplies to any developing country affected by natural disasters or humanitarian crises. A 'Global South Young Diplomats Forum' will connect young officers of Foreign Ministries. 'Global South Scholarships' will be instituted for students from developing countries to pursue higher education in India.

The post-colonial order put in place after WW II may have given numerous countries independence, but did little to redress the oppression of the colonial period, when European nations systematically denied technology and education to conquered nations while appropriating their capital, land, mineral resources and labour to enrich themselves. For all its pretensions to democracy,



the order that remained was essentially exploitative, it was neither representative nor democratic. This order is fracturing, providing opportunity to correct the situation.

There is little doubt that the concept of the 'Voice of Global South Summit' will find resonance among all developing nations. That India was able to attract 48 countries from Africa, 30 from Latin America and the Caribbean, 15 from Central Asia and Eastern Europe, another 15 from West and Southeast Asia, 11 from the Pacific Islands and five from South Asia to attend speaks of its global attractions and influence.

Mere demands from the Global South to set right the prevailing situation will not suffice. The politics of unifying this diverse group of nations will have to be managed effectively. It is here that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's experience of managing a large multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual society will prove useful. However, China is also targeting the same constituency, using a very different approach to obtain support for its leadership. Its comprehensive power and outreach enables attracting a following.

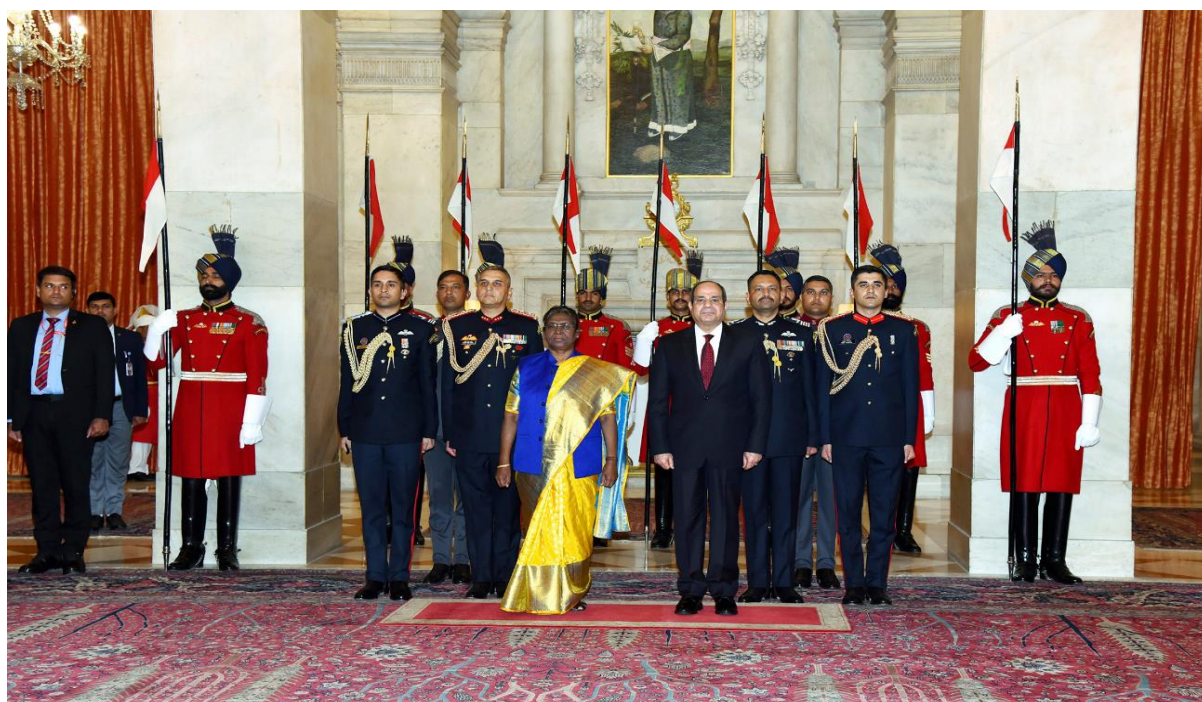
Geopolitical forces and the rise of Asia have created an era that necessitates effective Asian leadership. Whether it is India's essentially democratic 'Vasudhaiva Kuttumbakkam' model that prevails, or China's Middle Kingdom approach wherein China provides benign but firm leadership, will to a large extent determine the shape of the Indo-Pacific in the years ahead.

Some of the initiatives announced by Prime Minister Modi resemble Quad initiatives. It may be fruitful to explore prospects for synergy between the two. The 'Aarogya Maitri' project could be seen as a development of India's Vaccine Maitri and the Quad's Vaccine Initiative. The Global South scholarship scheme could be seen as a variant of the Quad's educational fellowship. G-7 countries may have a common interest in addressing this developmental need and may be more likely to support India than China, particularly in the current environment.

There is also the reality that China will not welcome alternative models to its leadership of the third world, just as it did not welcome India's efforts at leadership of Afro-Asian nations at Bandung. Asian solidarity is unlikely given China's aspirations and non-democratic character. Delusions in this regard must be shed. The need is for proactive and visionary action by India, cooperating with others based on their willingness to ensure everyone is lifted by a rising tide, rather than based on ideological tropes such as Asian unity.

The India Egypt Strategic Partnership

A little over a week after Egypt hosted China's new Foreign Minister Qin Gang in Cairo¹⁹, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi arrived in India on a State visit from January 24-27, 2023. A high level delegation including Egypt's Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Electricity and Renewable Energy, Planning and Economic Development, and Communications and Information Technology apart from senior officials of the Egyptian government accompanied him. President Sisi was the Chief Guest at India's Republic Day Parade on January 26, 2023²⁰.



The President of India Smt. Droupadi Murmu Receives the President of Egypt Abdel Fattah El-Sisi at Rashtrapati Bhavan on January 25, 2023. Source: PIB Photo Gallery

India-Egypt relations were upgraded to a strategic partnership covering the political, security, defence, energy and economic areas as the two sides sought to maximise common interests and provide mutual support to overcome difficulties caused by the various crises and challenges the world faces²¹. On

¹⁹ President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi of Egypt Meets with Qin Gang, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/wshd_665389/202301/t20230116_11008677.html

²⁰ State Visit of President of Egypt to India (January 24-26, 2023), https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/36139/State_Visit_of_President_of_Egypt_to_India_January_2426_2023

²¹ India-Egypt Joint Statement during the State Visit of the President of Egypt to India (January 24-27, 2023), https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/36148/IndiaEgypt_Joint_Statement_during_the_State_Visit_of_the_President_of_Egypt_to_India_January_2427_2023



the political front, the two sides reaffirmed their commitment to multilateralism and the principles of the UN Charter, international law, the founding values of the Non-Aligned Movement and respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states. They agreed to work together to promote and safeguard these principles through regular consultation and coordination at bilateral and multilateral levels.

On economic cooperation, they sought to increase trade from the current level of US\$ 7.26 billion to \$ 12 billion in five years. They agreed to explore expansion of economic and investment opportunities in each other's country, with Egypt agreeing to allocate space for Indian industry in the Suez Canal Economic Zone. They also agreed to share developmental experience, expressed their determination to cooperate in the trade of commodities of a strategic nature as well as those required for food security, and reviewed progress made by the bilateral 'Joint Trade Committee'. They looked forward to deepening cooperation in agriculture and allied services and strengthening the supply chain of food articles.

The leaders expressed satisfaction at the accelerated levels of interaction between their Armed Forces through exchanges in training, joint exercises, transits and high-level dialogue. They resolved to deepen defence cooperation in all fields, including through exchange of technology between defence industries, co-production in the defence sector, widening the footprint of military exercises and exchanging best practices. They shared concern about the dangers terrorism poses to humanity and condemned its use as a foreign policy tool. Calling for 'zero tolerance' for terrorism and those who support it, they agreed to hold the Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism on a regular basis to exchange information and best practices.

The leaders agreed to expand cooperation in space by using India's expertise to build and launch satellites, and to strengthen cooperation in space research including in remote sensing, satellite communication, space science and other practical applications of space technology. They also agreed to increase bilateral cooperation on cyber-space related subjects. They welcomed progress in cooperation in the field of Pharmaceuticals and Healthcare and committed to enhancing cooperation in disease control and addressing health crises through joint production and transfer of relevant technology. Supporting each other's green initiatives, both leaders underlined their commitment to taking ambitious climate action and accelerating the clean energy transition. They expressed a desire to strengthen cooperation in renewable energy and a bilateral agreement was signed for setting up large-scale green hydrogen and green ammonia projects in the Suez Canal Economic one.

The leaders agreed to explore further collaboration between universities in Egypt and India to facilitate the establishment of an Indian higher education institute in Egypt. On the cultural front, they agreed to enhance people-to-people contacts through joint festivals, encouraging exchange of visits among pioneering figures in various art forms, supporting translation of literary works and developing the film industry in the two countries. They also encouraged tourism cooperation, including through operating direct flights between New Delhi and Cairo as well as other ports of call in the two countries. They also agreed to support each other in various multilateral forums.

Egypt sits astride the Suez Canal, among the most heavily trafficked sea lanes in the world, linking the Atlantic and Indian Oceans through the Mediterranean and Red Seas. It has about a third of India's land area, about a tenth of India's population and an eighth of India's GDP. Among the world's oldest civilisations, Egypt serves as the gateway into North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, shares India's colonial experience and was among the first countries with which independent India established diplomatic relations at the Ambassadorial level in August 1947²². An India-Egypt friendship treaty has existed since 1955. Despite this long history of friendship, bilateral relations have been elevated only now, making Egypt India's 30th strategic partner. Other Indian strategic partners in the region include Iran²³, Oman²⁴, Saudi Arabia²⁵, Afghanistan²⁶, UAE²⁷ and Israel²⁸.

²² India-Egypt Bilateral Relations,

https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/India_Egypt_jan_2023.pdf

²³ The Republic of India and the Islamic Republic of Iran "The New Delhi Declaration",

https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/7544/The_Republic_of_India_and_the_Islamic_Republic_of_Iran_quot_The_New_Delhi_Declarationquot

²⁴ Joint Press Statement on the official visit of His Highness Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud Al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers of the Sultanate of Oman to New Delhi, September 12-15, 2007, https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/5950/Joint_Press_Statement_on_the_official_visit_of_His_Highness_Sayyid_Fahd_Bin_Mahmoud_Al_Said_Deputy_Prime_Minister_for_the_Council_of_Minister_s_of_the_

²⁵ Riyadh Declaration – A New Era of Strategic Partnerships,

<https://www.eoiriyadh.gov.in/page/riyadh-declaration/>

²⁶ Agreement on Strategic Partnership between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Republic of India, <https://eoi.gov.in/kabul/?pdf4644?000>

²⁷ Joint Statement between the United Arab Emirates and the Republic of India,

https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/25733/Joint_Statement_between_the_United_Arab_Emirates_and_the_Republic_of_India

²⁸ India-Israel Joint Statement during the visit of Prime Minister to Israel (July 5, 2017),

https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/28593/IndiaIsrael_Joint_Statement_during_the_visit_of_Prime_Minister_to_Israel_July_5_2017



India's geopolitical stakes in the North-western Indian Ocean, always substantial due to the energy and diaspora factors, received a sharp fillip with the enunciation of SAGAR and its implicit acceptance of greater responsibility in the Indian Ocean. This greater interest was visible in the India-Africa Summit at New Delhi in October 2015, which was attended by President Sisi among others. The Egyptian President followed up with his State visit to India in September 2016. The subsequent Abrahams Accords and the I2U2 partnership have further raised the stakes. Egypt's location, and civilizational identity make it a significant partner for India, while its large population make it a significant market for Indian goods. Egypt is also a dialogue partners of the SCO and seeks to become a full member. So India has invited Egypt to be a guest at the forthcoming G20 Summit.

India will, however, face competition from China, as well as from the US and European nations in engaging Egypt. How effectively it manages this competition and pursues its interests will, to a large extent determine the future of India's aspirations and the Indian Ocean region.

French Deployment to the Indo-Pacific and Exercise Varuna 2023

The 21st edition of the bilateral India France Naval Exercise Varuna-2023 was conducted in the Arabian Sea from January 16-20, 2023²⁹. India's participants included IN Ships Chennai and Teg, P-8I and Dornier maritime patrol aircraft, integral helicopters and Mig-29K fighter aircraft operating from Goa. French participants included the French aircraft carrier Charles De Gaulle, frigates Forbin and Provence, support vessel Marne and an Atlantique maritime patrol aircraft. The objective of the exercise was "to prepare the crews of these two nations to face, together, various challenges, mobilising their anti-surface, anti-submarine and anti-aircraft warfare capabilities, but also shared mastery of the air-sea and tactical command environment"³⁰. The two nations exercise air defence, tactical manoeuvres, surface firing, underway replenishment and cross-deck helicopter operations, among others.

²⁹ 21st Edition of India France Bilateral Naval Exercise 'Varuna' – 2023, <https://indiannavy.nic.in/content/21st-edition-india-france-bilateral-naval-exercise-%E2%80%98varuna%E2%80%99-%E2%80%93-2023>

³⁰ Update on operations from Thursday 19 to Wednesday 25 January 2023, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/point-situation-operations/point-situation-operations-du-jeudi-19-au-mercredi-25-janvier-2023>

Table 1: Comparison of FS Charles De Gaulle and INS Vikrant

Parameter	FS Charles De Gaulle	INS Vikrant
Commissioned	2001	2021
Full Load Displacement (tons)	42,500	45,000
Length Overall (m)	261.5	262
Beam Overall (m)	64.36	62
Draught (m)	9.43	8.4
Propulsion	Nuclear	Gas Turbine
Max Speed (knots)	27	30
Carrier configuration	CATOBAR	STOBAR
Range (nm)	Unlimited	8000
Aircraft Carried		
Fighters	30 Rafale-M	To be announced
AEW	2 E2C Hawkeye	Ka-31
ASW Heprtr	2 NFH Caiman Marine	MH60R
Others	2 AS365 Dauphin Pedro	HAL Dhruv

A comparison between FS Charles De Gaulle and INS Vikrant is placed above. Both are about the same size. The former is, however, nuclear-propelled, giving her virtually unlimited range. She has a CATOBAR configuration enabling launch of heavier aircraft including higher performance fixed wing AEW, unlike the latter which relies on Ka-31 helicopters. She also carries more aircraft. Her task group comprises one tanker, 4-6 destroyers/frigates, at least one nuclear-propelled attack submarine and one Atlantique maritime patrol aircraft³¹.

Mission Antares, the current deployment of the French Carrier Strike Group, is the 15th operational deployment of FS Charles De Gaulle since her commissioning³². During her current deployment which began on November 15, 2022, the French CSG operated in the Mediterranean to shore up NATO's Eastern defensive and dissuasive posture till December 18. During this phase, it included USS Arleigh Burke, the Italian frigate ITS Virginio Fasan and the Greek frigate HS Adrias. The CSG thereafter crossed the Suez Canal and operated in the Red Sea for the next week, crossing the Straits of Bab-el-Mandeb on

³¹ Press Kit of the Ministry of Armed Forces, Mission Antares, https://www.defense.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/operations/20221122_DP_ANTARES_VF_EN_G.pdf

³² Ibid.

December 26. It then exercised with French forces in Djibouti, USS Truxton and JS Suzutsuki before heading across the Arabian Sea for Exercise Varuna.



Ships from the Indian and French Navies in the Arabian Sea during Exercise Varuna, January 16-20, 2023. Source: French MoD

Even as the French aircraft carrier strike group was exercising with the Indian Navy, the Frigate Guepratte was operating inside the Persian Gulf after visiting Manama. Atlantique aircraft were operating out of Al Dhafra Air Base (in UAE) and Djibouti to provide surveillance information for French maritime forces in the region. Meanwhile, three Rafale-M from the CSG were joined by an Airbus A330 Multi Role Tanker Transport (MRTT) and flew to Singapore to exercise with the Royal Singapore Air Force. The continued determination of France to display its presence in the region and contribute to regional security was evident.

Meanwhile, even as Exercise Varuna began, the French CSG tweeted, "Something big is coming between our two navies". India and France will commemorate the 25th anniversary of their strategic partnership. Media reports indicate that President Macron may visit India in March 2023³³, to follow up on his visit in March 2018. His last visit resulted in the Joint Strategic Vision for India-France Cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region and the India-France Joint Vision for Space Cooperation. Deliveries of the 36 Rafale aircraft and five of the six Scorpene submarines acquired through India-France

³³ German Chancellor Scholz to visit India in February, French President Macron in March, <https://www.wionews.com/india-news/german-chancellor-to-visit-india-in-february-2023-french-president-in-march-549818>

defence cooperation have since then been completed. A French newspaper has already speculated that India will sign the Rafale-M contract during the March 2023 visit³⁴. What vistas lie ahead for India and France, even as the regional geopolitical situation continues to evolve, will become clear in the coming months.

Other Indo-Pacific Developments

The Marcos Visit to Beijing

Philippines President Ferdinand (Bong Bong) Marcos Jr. made his maiden visit to Beijing and his first visit to a non-ASEAN country from January 3-5, 2023³⁵. The visit resulted in agreement to further strengthen the Comprehensive Strategic Cooperation that President Duterte had agreed to in 2018³⁶. The Philippines reaffirmed its adherence to the One-China Policy, while China recorded consensus on peaceful resolution of disputes on the basis of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, the UN Charter and the 1982 UNCLOS. The leaders agreed to cooperate in four priority areas: agriculture, infrastructure, energy and people-to-people exchanges, and to pursue additional avenues of cooperation in defense and security, science and technology, trade and investments. 14 agreements were signed and China pledged an investment of over \$ 22 billion in the Philippines. China agreed to pursue pre-pandemic levels of tourist arrivals as well as direct flights between China and the Philippines, particularly between Beijing and Manila. The leaders agreed that disputes in the South China Sea “do not comprise the sum total of relations between the two countries and agreed to appropriately manage the differences through peaceful means”.

The economic attractions of China remain difficult to ignore, and the agreements on enhancing tourist arrivals as well as exports of Durian fruit from the Philippines to China could help a hard-hit economy. However, there is considerable disappointment in Manila because the hype and promise during the Duterte Administration did not result in tangible gains. Marcos will face difficulty in implementing energy development plans with China: the Philippines Supreme Court has just a week after his return held void a deal for

³⁴ India: the Rafale Marine close to embarking on the aircraft carrier INS Vikrant, <https://www.latribune.fr/entreprises-finance/industrie/aeronautique-defense/inde-le-rafale-marine-pres-d-embarquer-sur-le-porte-avions-ins-vikrant-945736.html>

³⁵ Joint Statement Between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of the Philippines, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/202301/t20230105_11001064.html

³⁶ China, Philippines agree to upgrade ties, jointly build Belt and Road, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/2018zt/xjpcxytjhzz/201811/t20181121_709997.html

such exploration between China, Philippines and Vietnam signed in 2005 on the grounds that it does not comply with the nation's constitution³⁷. He will also face difficulty in overcoming reservations from the fishing community, which faces denial of traditional fishing grounds, as well as from the country's armed forces, which have historically preferred relations with the US. At this stage, the visit will enable him to test the waters and judge for himself whether China is truthful about its promises or not. As such, it will set the tone of international relations in the region for the rest of Marcos' tenure.

China's New Foreign Minister Qin Gang's Visit to Africa

In keeping with a 33-year old precedent under which China's Foreign Minister makes his first international visit each year to Africa, the newly appointed Qin Gang visited Ethiopia³⁸, Gabon³⁹, Angola⁴⁰, Benin⁴¹ and Egypt⁴² from January 10-16, 2023. He was received at the level of Foreign Minister and Head of Government in each country. He also availed the opportunity to meet the apex-level leadership of the African Union⁴³ and the League of Arab States⁴⁴. The tour was Qin Gang's first international visit after assuming charge as China's Foreign Minister. As such, its content was essentially directed towards highlighting the convergence between China and the countries visited, expressions of mutual support and promises of greater engagement under the

³⁷ Philippine SC voids oil exploration agreement with China and Vietnam, <https://www.aninews.in/news/world/asia/philippine-sc-voids-oil-exploration-agreement-with-china-and-vietnam20230112012241/>

³⁸ Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali Meets with Qin Gang, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/wjbz_663308/activities_663312/202301/t2_0230111_11005851.html

³⁹ President Ali Bongo Ondimba of Gabon Meets with Qin Gang, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/wjbz_663308/activities_663312/202301/t2_0230113_11006919.html

⁴⁰ Angolan President João Lourenco Meets with Qin Gang, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/wjbz_663308/activities_663312/202301/t2_0230114_11007469.html

⁴¹ Beninese President Patrice Talon Meets with Qin Gang, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/wjbz_663308/activities_663312/202301/t2_0230115_11007677.html

⁴² President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi of Egypt Meets with Qin Gang, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/wjbz_663308/activities_663312/202301/t2_0230116_11008677.html

⁴³ Qin Gang Holds the 8th China-AU Strategic Dialogue with AUC Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/wjbz_663308/activities_663312/202301/t2_0230112_11005965.html

⁴⁴ Qin Gang: Implement the Outcomes of the First China-Arab States Summit and Strive for More Early harvests, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/wjbz_663308/activities_663312/202301/t2_0230117_11009930.html

rubrics of Belt and Road Cooperation and the Global Developmental Initiative. There were no significant new announcements.



Australian Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Richard Marles, French Minister for the Armed Forces Sébastien Lecornu, French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Ms Catherine Colonna and Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs Penny Wong in Paris for the second France-Australia Foreign and Defence Ministerial Consultations, January 30, 2023.

Source: French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs.

The Australia PNG Summit

The Fourth Annual Papua New Guinea–Australia Annual Leaders’ Dialogue was held between PNG Prime Minister James Marape and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese in Port Moresby on January 12, 2023⁴⁵. The leaders committed to a bilateral security treaty, to be negotiated by their respective Foreign Ministers and concluded by 30 April 2023⁴⁶.

Located east of Indonesia, west of the Solomon Islands and north of Australia, PNG is resource-rich but under-developed, is the biggest of the Pacific Island

⁴⁵ Papua New Guinea-Australia Fourth Annual Leaders’ Dialogue, Joint Statement 12 Jan 2023, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/papua-new-guinea-australia-fourth-annual-leaders-dialogue>

⁴⁶ Papua New Guinea-Australia Bilateral Security Agreement Joint Statement, 12 Jan 2023, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/papua-new-guinea-australia-bilateral-security-agreement>



countries and has a larger area and population than New Zealand. It has long been courted by China and is now being wooed by both the US and Australia. It is one of the few Pacific Island countries with a mission in India (since October 2006) and was represented at the Leaders's session of the Voice of the Global South Summit in India in January 2023. The First India-PNG Foreign Office Consultations in December 2022 discussed the joint hosting by the two countries of the third Summit of the Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation in Port Moresby⁴⁷; when this happens, Prime Minister Modi will become the first ever Indian Prime Minister to visit PNG.

Australia France 2+2

The Second Australia-France Foreign and Defence Ministerial Consultations were held in Paris on January 30, 2023. It may be recalled that 16 days after the first such consultations on August 30, 2021, the AUKUS announcement and cancellation of the Attack-class submarine project had resulted in severe disruption of Australia-France relations. That a semblance of normality has been restored is evident from the Joint Statement following the dialogue on January 30, 2023⁴⁸. Four distinct pillars of cooperation have been identified: Cooperation in the Pacific; the Indo-Pacific Region (where Australia and France commit to working together in the Indian Ocean in alignment with the IORA outlook on the Indo-Pacific, welcome India's leading role in the region and reaffirm their commitment to trilateral cooperation), Bilateral Cooperation; and International and Regional Security. On the bilateral front, the ministers endorsed initiatives to step up bilateral strategic dialogue and intensify information sharing, agreed to deepen operational and logistical cooperation, announced their intent to enhance mutual access to each other's defence infrastructure and joint exercises, announced an annual dialogue between the Chiefs of Defence, welcomed French full participation for the first time in Exercise Talisman Sabre 2023 and agreed to enhance their industrial and defence cooperation towards strategic capacity-building. They also agreed to foster military and civil space cooperation and highlighted the need to establish more reliable and sustainable critical mineral supply chains.

⁴⁷ 1st India-Papua New Guinea Foreign Office Consultations, https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/35944/1st_IndiaPapua_New_Guinea_Foreign_Office_Consultations

⁴⁸ Joint Statement – Second France-Australia Foreign and Defence Ministerial Consultations, <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/statements/2023-01-30/joint-statement-second-france-australia-foreign-and-defence-ministerial-consultations>

Indonesia Approves Development of Tuna Gas Field in Natuna Sea

Indonesia's upstream oil and gas regulator SKK Migas approved the development plan for the Tuna gas field in the Natuna Sea on January 2, 2023⁴⁹, underlining its resolve to uphold its claim to the region's natural resources notwithstanding China's claim in the South China Sea. Development is to be carried out by UK's Harbour Energy and Russia's Zarubezhneft. The project envisages that the Indonesian government will receive a revenue of \$ 1.24 billion, Harbour Energy will earn \$ 773 million and is entitled to cost recovery of \$ 3.315 billion⁵⁰. Final investment approval is expected in the first half of 2023, and first production is planned in 2026. The gas is to be exported to Vietnam through a pipeline⁵¹,

The Tuna Block, located about 140 nautical miles (nm) north of Indonesia's Riau Islands, is well within the 200 nm EEZ allowed by UNCLOS. It also lies within China's expansive nine-dash-line claim in the South China Sea. The Permanent Court of Arbitration had in 2016 ruled that there was no legal basis for China's claim. China disregarded the ruling and continues attempting to enforce its claim, primarily through grey zone activity.



Map Showing Harbour Energy's Interests in SE Asia and Location of Tuna Block in the Natuna Sea. Source: Harbour Energy

⁴⁹ Indonesia approves \$ 3 bln development plan for South China Sea gas block, <https://www.reuters.com/markets/commodities/indonesia-approves-3-bln-development-plan-south-china-sea-gas-block-2023-01-02/>

⁵⁰ Harbour Energy gets approval for \$3.3 bn Tuna oil and gas project in Indonesia, <https://www.energyvoice.com/oilandgas/473506/harbour-energy-gets-approval-for-3-3bn-tuna-oil-and-gas-project-in-indonesia/>

⁵¹ Indonesia aim to export natural gas to Vietnam in 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/indonesia-aim-export-natural-gas-vietnam-2026-2022-12-23/>

China has actively disrupted energy development activities in claimed areas of the South China Sea through its Coast Guard or maritime militia over the last few years. Reports indicate that China had asked Indonesia to stop exploration in the area in 2021⁵². Chinese law enforcement vessels were reported to have maintained a presence around the Tuna block for prolonged periods in 2021⁵³. One of China Coast Guard's largest vessels of nearly 12,000 GRT, CCG 5901, was reported to be in the area from December 30, 2022⁵⁴. The Indonesian decision will lead to confrontation between the CCG and Indonesian Navy in the coming months.

Operational Developments

US Forces Special Operation in Somalia. US Special Forces conducted a counter-terror heliborne assault operation in northern Somalia leading to the death of a number of ISIS members, including Bilal-al-Sudani, a key facilitator responsible for the growing presence of ISIS in Africa and funding its operations worldwide, including in Afghanistan⁵⁵. Reports indicated there were no civilian or American casualties. Speculation indicated that the raid was possibly done by the same SEAL Team 6 that was responsible for the killing of Osama bin Laden⁵⁶. While the US may have withdrawn its forces from the region, its ability to strike unexpectedly remains intact.

Taiwan Straits Transit. The USN Arleigh Burke-class destroyer USS Chung-Hoon (DDG 93) conducted a routine Taiwan Strait transit on January 5, 2023⁵⁷, remaining outside the territorial waters of both the PRC and Taiwan. Unusually, there was no protest from the Chinese side.

CCG Asserts Itself in Senkaku Islands. China's Coast Guard claimed it had warned away five Japanese vessels that illegally entered China's territorial

⁵² Exclusive China protested Indonesian drilling, military exercises, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/exclusive-china-protested-indonesian-drilling-military-exercises-2021-12-01/>

⁵³ Nervous Energy: China Targets New Indonesian, Malaysian Drilling, <https://amti.csis.org/nervous-energy-china-targets-new-indonesian-malaysian-drilling/>

⁵⁴ Indonesia sends warship to monitor Chinese Coast Guard Vessel, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/indonesia-sends-warship-to-monitor-chinese-coast-guard-vessel?s=09>

⁵⁵ Statement by Secretary of Defense Lloyd J Austin III on Somalia Operation, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3279923/statement-by-secretary-of-defense-lloyd-j-austin-iii-on-somalia-operation/>

⁵⁶ Senior ISIS Leader in Somalia Killed in US Special Operations Raid, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/26/us/politics/isis-leader-us-somalia-raid.html>

⁵⁷ 7th Fleet Destroyer transits Taiwan Strait, <https://www.cpf.navy.mil/Newsroom/News/Article/3259832/7th-fleet-destroyer-transits-taiwan-strait/>

waters off the Diaoyu (Senkaku Islands) on January 30, 2023⁵⁸. Till now, it was the Japanese Coast Guard that was warning away Chinese fishing vessels in the area. This new development is sure to impact Japan China relations adversely.

China's Indian Ocean Deployment. The 43rd Chinese naval escort task force departed Zhanjiang for the Gulf of Aden on January 10, 2023⁵⁹. The force comprises the destroyer Nanning, the frigate Sanya and the supply ship Weishanhu. 14 years after China began using escort operations as a pretext for gaining operating experience in distant waters, the effort continues, though only one successful pirate attack has been recorded in the region since 2012. The Chinese taskforce and the base in Djibouti provide the PLA (N) presence in a vital international chokepoint, one that will remain for the foreseeable future.

USMC Reactivates Guam Base. The USMC reactivated its base in Guam on January 26, 2023⁶⁰. The base, first established in 1899, was deactivated in Nov 1992. The reactivation is part of the mutually agreed plan to strengthen USMC presence in Japan as well as deploy more forces forward, so as to cut down the time required to bring them into the conflict area.

Japan's Indo-Pacific Deployment. The JMSDF began its Indo-Pacific and Middle East Deployment 2023, in the course of which JS Uruga and JS Awaji will call at Brunei, Bahrain, Cambodia, Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Philippines, Singapore and Vietnam. The deployment is from January 19 – May 23⁶¹. Both the ships being deployed are Mine Countermeasures (MCM) vessels. Their presence will provide India, which has no MCM vessels left in its inventory, an opportunity to see these ships at first hand.

Russian Frigate Heads for Indian Ocean. Russian frigate Admiral Gorshkov departed Severomorsk on January 4, 2023, for deployment via the Barents Sea and Norwegian Sea to the Atlantic, Mediterranean and Indian Ocean⁶². The deployment is intended to show Russia's naval presence in strategically important regions of the world's oceans. Admiral Gorshkov is the world's first warship armed with an operational hypersonic missile – the Tsirkon, with a

⁵⁸ CCG warns away Japanese vessels trespassing into Chinese territorial waters off Diaoyu Islands. http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2023-01/30/content_10215530.htm

⁵⁹ 43rd Chinese naval escort taskforce sets sail for Gulf of Aden, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2023-01/11/content_10211332.htm

⁶⁰ Marine Corps Reactivates Base on Guam, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/3279525/marine-corps-reactivates-base-on-guam/>

⁶¹ Indo-Pacific and Middle east Deployment 2023, <https://www.mod.go.jp/msdf/en/release/202301/20230117en.pdf>

⁶² Russia's Admiral Gorshkov frigate begins trip across Atlantic, Indian Oceans, <https://tass.com/defense/1558937>

range of about 1000 Km and a speed of Mach 9. The ship will replenish provisions at Tartus, Syria, before entering the Indian Ocean. She is expected to participate in the Joint Russia-China- South Africa exercise in the Indian Ocean in February 2023⁶³.

HMS Tamar in Port Blair. HMS Tamar, one of the two RN OPVs permanently deployed in the Indo-Pacific, became only the first British warship to visit the Andaman & Nicobar Islands in 16 years when she called at Port Blair for five days in January 2023⁶⁴. The ship was hosted by INS Karmuk and exercised with this ship on departure. The long gap is a reflection of the Royal Navy's reduced deployment in the Indian Ocean. The ship's Commanding Officer was granted a call on the Commander-in-Chief A&N Islands and hosted the Rajya Raksha Mantri, Shri Rajnath Singh on board. At least two other RN engagements with India are planned for later in the year, by HMS Lancaster, based in Bahrain, and by a Royal Marines Amphibious Task Group. The engagements reflect the greater British interest in the Indo-Pacific in the years ahead.

USS Nimitz Deployment. USS Nimitz began operations in the South China Sea for the first time during her 2022-23 deployment⁶⁵. The ship is the oldest serving aircraft carrier in the world, having been commissioned in May 1975. USS Ronald Reagan, forward deployed to Yokosuka, is currently in port under sustainment but ready to deploy at short notice if the need arises.

Indian Armed Forces News

The inaugural Indian Air Force – Japan Air Self Defense Force Exercise Veer Guardian-23 took place in the air space around Japan's Hyakuri and Iruma air bases, near Tokyo, from January 12-26, 2023⁶⁶. India fielded four Su-30 MKI aircraft, two C-17 Globemasters and one IL-78 aerial tanker, while Japan fielded four F-2 and four F-15 fighters. India thus became the fifth country, after the US, Australia, the UK and Germany to exercise with the JASDF in Japan. The exercise provided Japanese aircrew the opportunity to fly in the Su-30 MKI,

⁶³ Russia top brass posts clip of hypersonic missile's electronic launch in Atlantic drills, <https://tass.com/defense/1566667>

⁶⁴ Indian adventure begins for HMS Tamar in Andaman Islands, <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/news/2023/january/11/20230111-royal-navy-patrol-ship-hms-tamar-visits-indian-andaman-islands>

⁶⁵ Nimitz Carrier Strike Group Operates in South China Sea, <https://www.cpf.navy.mil/Newsroom/News/Article/3268082/nimitz-carrier-strike-group-operates-in-south-china-sea/>

⁶⁶ IAF and Japan Air Self Defence Force set to Exercise Jointly in Japan, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1889366>

while IAF personnel were able to fly the F-2, enabling an understanding of each other's operating philosophies and sharing of tactics and best practices.



Participating aircrew from the IAF and JASDF pose in front of their aircraft in Japan during Exercise Veer Guardian 2023. Source: PIB

The India Armed Forces conducted the biennial Amphibious Exercise, AMPHEX-2023, at Kakinada from January 17-22, 2023, validating India's amphibious capability⁶⁷. The Indian Navy also began its theatre level exercise TROPEX-2023, involving all IN units as well as assets from the Indian Army, Air Force and Coast Guard⁶⁸. The exercise will run from January to March 2023.

India's fifth Kalvari-Class submarine, INS Vagir, was commissioned into the Indian Navy by Admiral R Hari Kumar, Chief of the Naval Staff, on January 23, 2023⁶⁹. The sixth and last submarine of the class, INS Vaghsheer, is expected to commission an year later. With the contours of the next submarine under Project 75I still to be finalised, the likelihood of India losing trained submarine-construction manpower creates serious concern. Media reports indicate that the possibility of ordering another three Kalvari-class submarines is under

⁶⁷ Tri-services Amphibious Exercise AMPHEX 2023 Concludes, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1893205>

⁶⁸ Theatre Level Operational Readiness Exercise (TROPEX-23) Indian Navy's Largest War Game, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1893232>

⁶⁹ Commissioning of Fifth Kalvari Class Submarine 'Vagir' at Naval Dockyard, Mumbai, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1893036>

consideration. Meanwhile, India's Naval Materials Research Laboratory (NMRL) and France's Naval Group have signed an agreement to integrate the indigenous DRDO-developed Air Independent Propulsion system on Kalvari⁷⁰. The design phase of this integration will commence shortly, and Naval Group will certify the AIP design for use on board submarines.

Miscellaneous Developments

Paris Naval Conference. The First Paris Naval Conference, designed to discuss the possible return of an era naval combat and high intensity conflict, brought together Admiral Michael Gilday, the US Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Pierre Vandier, Chief of Staff of the French Navy and Admiral Sir Ben Key, First Sea Lord of the Royal Navy on January 18, 2023. The three Chiefs discussed the challenges, key priorities and prospects of their Navies⁷¹. They agreed that the coming era would witness the strategic return of the sea, that the 21st century would be essentially maritime, and their mission of ensuring peace prevailed at sea would involve greater challenges.

France to Boost Defence Spending. French President Emmanuel Macron announced he would ask parliament to boost French defence spending from € 295 billion for the period 2019-2025 to € 413 billion (over \$ 449 billion) for the period 2024-2030⁷². Defence budget increases have now announced by the US, UK, France, Japan, Australia, South Korea and Germany, among others.

New US Fleet Commanders. US President Joseph R Biden nominated R Adm Frederick W. Kacher for promotion to V Adm and appointment as Commander US 7th Fleet at Yokosuka; and R Adm George M Wikoff for promotion to V Adm and appointment as Commander US Naval Forces CENTCOM, Commander US 5th Fleet and Commander Combined Maritime Forces at Manama, Bahrain⁷³. The former, a surface warfare officer, is currently Vice Director for Operations with the Joint Staff and will eventually succeed V Adm Karl Thomas, the current 7th Fleet Commander. The latter is presently Vice Director of the Joint Staff and

⁷⁰ DRDO and Naval Group France sign agreement to safely integrate the indigenous system in Kalvari Class Submarines, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetailm.aspx?PRID=1893096>

⁷¹ Paris Naval Conference: the return of naval combat, <https://www.ifri.org/en/debates/paris-naval-conference-return-naval-combat>

⁷² Macron to hike military funds amid Ukraine war, new threats, <https://apnews.com/article/france-government-macron-e1f6730a55d1674424e1de09b21440ea>

⁷³ Flag Officer Announcements, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3280606/flag-officer-announcements/>



will succeed V Adm Brad Cooper. Both will engage with India and the Indian Navy.

Critical and Emerging Technology. The first formal India-US dialogue under the Initiative for Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET) announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Joseph Biden in Tokyo on May 24, 2022⁷⁴, began in Washington DC on January 31, 2023. Earlier, the US Congress had mandated engagement of counterparts within India's MoD on critical technologies, operational readiness and logistics⁷⁵. Targeted at expanding the bilateral partnership in critical and emerging technologies, ICET will in many ways shape the future of the India-US partnership.

Call to Extend AUKUS to India. Even as the Australian ministers prepared to meet their British counterparts, media reports⁷⁶ quoted the Chair of the House of Commons Defence Select Committee, The Rt. Hon. Tobias Ellwood, MP, as having called for the inclusion of India and Japan in AUKUS. Whether the British government shares this opinion, or this idea was floated as a trial balloon to gauge public opinion remains to be seen. Critics have indicated this is just part of a British move to join the Quad.

⁷⁴ Prime Ministers' meeting with President of the United States of America, https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/35355/Prime_Ministers_meeting_with_President_of_the_United_States_of_America

⁷⁵ Article 1260, HR 7776, <https://www.congress.gov/117/bills/hr7776/BILLS-117hr7776enr.pdf>

⁷⁶ Britain calls for AUKUS expansion, <https://www.skynews.com.au/world-news/united-kingdom/britain-calls-for-aukus-expansion/video/2e467bc9a85dad0b865c437d6c4cc6b>



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

www.delhipolicygroup.org