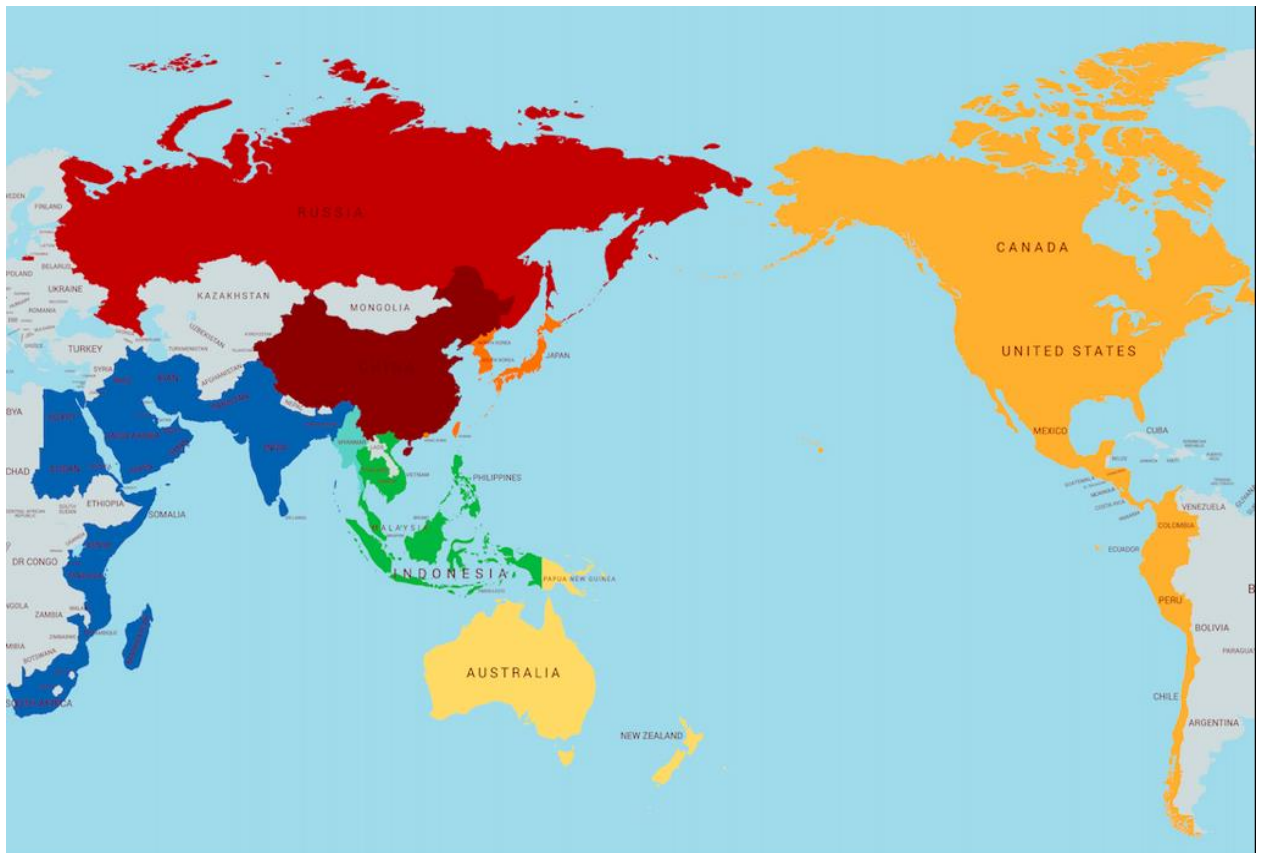




Delhi Policy Group

DPG INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR



Volume I, Issue 3 | April 1, 2020



DPG INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

Volume 1, Issue 3

ABOUT US

Founded in 1994, the Delhi Policy Group is among India's oldest independent think tanks with its primary focus on international and strategic issues of critical national interest. Over the past decades, the Delhi Policy Group has established itself in both domestic and international circles, particularly in the area of national security.

In keeping with India's increasing global profile as a leading power and the accompanying dynamism of India's foreign and security policy, the Delhi Policy Group has expanded its focus areas to include India's broader regional and global role; India's initiatives to strengthen its strategic periphery; India's political, security and connectivity challenges and policies across the Indo-Pacific; and the strategic partnerships that advance India's rise. To support these goals, the DPG undertakes research, publishes policy reports and organises conferences on strategic and geo-political, geo-economic, and defence and security issues.

DPG INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

The DPG Indo-Pacific Monitor is intended to provide the informed reader with an overview of significant developments, opinions, trends and critical issues pertaining to the Indo-Pacific during the previous month. It is compiled by our research team from open source media. To subscribe, please click here ([link to be attached](#)).

Your comments and feedback may be addressed to Anushka Nair at anushka@dpg.org.in

© 2020 by the Delhi Policy Group

Delhi Policy Group

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

Contents

ABSTRACT	1
INDIAN OCEAN REGION	
South Asia	4
1. Official Statements and Press Releases	4
2. Media Discourse and Analyses	6
West Asia	15
3. Official Statements and Press Releases	15
4. Media Discourse and Analyses	15
East Africa	20
5. Media Discourse and Analyses	20
SOUTH EAST ASIA	
6. Official Statements and Press Releases	22
7. Media Discourse and Analyses	25
EAST ASIA	
8. Official Statements and Press Releases	30
9. Media Discourse and Analyses	31
SOUTH WEST PACIFIC	
10. Official Sources and Press Releases	36
11. Media Discourse and Analyses	37

ABSTRACT

The most notable development to occupy the attention of the Indo-Pacific, and indeed the rest of the world during the previous month, was the rapid spread of Novel COVID-19, or the Coronavirus. The number of people infected globally multiplied more than nine-fold from end-February 2020, with over 38,000 fatalities. Governments across the region took several measures to contain the crisis, including sealing borders and shutting down international travel, imposing internal lockdowns and quarantines, suspending all scheduled events involving people coming together, and announcing fiscal stimuli to ameliorate the adverse economic impact. China, on the other hand, began lifting its internal lockdown and going into a production overdrive to fulfil global demand, while keeping its international borders sealed to avoid recontamination due to carriers coming in from abroad. Despite the economic stimulus introduced by many countries, there was global recognition of the likelihood of an impending recession.

High-profile international events postponed due the pandemic included the 36th ASEAN Summit, President Xi Jinping's visit to Japan, the Russia-India-China (RIC) Summit, the Indian Navy's 'Milan 2020' multilateral exercise and the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. Leaders turned to international video conferences to discuss cooperation in response to COVID-19. A teleconference between SAARC leaders, initiated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, was held on 15 March and led to the creation of a COVID-19 Emergency Fund. An Extraordinary Virtual G20 Leaders' Summit was also convoked by Saudi Arabia as current G20 chair on March 26, during which leaders committed to taking all necessary measures to shore up the world economy and fight the pandemic by contributions to the WHO led COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund. Foreign Ministers of the G7 countries also participated in a video conference on March 25 to discuss response. Successive G7 teleconferences are to be held in April and May, instead of the in-person summit scheduled for June this year in the US. In the South-Western Pacific, during a scheduled port visit to Guam, 36 personnel on board the USS Theodore Roosevelt tested positive for COVID-19. The 5,000 crew members on the warship are undergoing testing and numbers are expected to rise.

Preparations began to put into effect the U.S. brokered peace deal presaging the potential end to US presence in Afghanistan that was concluded at the end of last month. Representatives from the Taliban and the government held talks over Skype and the President of Afghanistan Ashraf Ghani offered to release 1,500 prisoners as opposed to the 5,000 that the Taliban had initially demanded. Of

these, 100 will be released at the end of March on humanitarian grounds such as health, age and vulnerability to COVID-19. President Ghani also launched the intra-Afghan dialogue, announcing a team of 21 to facilitate talks with the Taliban. The Masoom Stanekzai led team also includes representatives from the Abdullah Abdullah faction and has his support. However, the Taliban claimed that the negotiating team was not representative, raising concerns about whether negotiations would begin. Additionally, the peace process faces other challenges such as the attack on a Gurudwara in Kabul which killed 25 people and the outbreak of COVID-19, which may result in lockdowns in parts of the country. There are been reports of classified annexes to the peace deal that have been concealed from American lawmakers, U.S. allies and the public. The road to Afghan peace still remains difficult and full of obstacles.

One impact of the falling energy demand due to COVID-19 was the Saudi Arabia - Russia oil price war, with these major players unable to come to an agreement on production cuts in an effort to preserve market share. Brent Crude prices plunged to USD 23.03 per barrel, their lowest level since 2002. The impact of this price war was felt by the U.S. shale industry, severely impacting its financial viability. Washington has been pressuring Riyadh to end the price battle and make amends to stabilise the global oil market. The tussle has also put severe strain on the economies of other oil producers. The crisis could, however, benefit India's fiscal position, resulting in massive reductions in the crude import bill. This will have to be weighed against the impact of lower economic output due to the lockdown, resulting in lower tax collections.

In the Indian Ocean region, India was admitted to the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) as its fifth observer earlier this month. This move will allow India to increase engagement in the Western Indian Ocean in accordance with its SAGAR vision. The Western Indian Ocean also witnessed the first ever India-France navy patrol, embarking from Reunion Island.

In Southeast Asia, Vietnam hosted the USS Theodore Roosevelt at Da Nang, in a visible sign of its opening up to the possibility of greater bilateral military cooperation. The U.S. Navy carrier became the second to anchor in the country since the conclusion of the Vietnam War. Vietnam also announced its decision to host the second ASEAN Multilateral Naval Exercise (AMNEX 2/2020) off Mah Trang in May 2020. Three planning conferences will be held in preparation for the exercise. In the same region, the USN upped the tempo of its activity with a FONOPS off the Paracel Islands by USS McCampbell on March 10, 2020; tactical

manoeuvres by USS Gabrielle Giffords and USS America; and the live firing of a Standard SM-2 missile by USS Barry in the Philippine Sea, all widely reported as a signal to China. On the other hand, Manila officially announced its decision to scrap the 1998 Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) with Washington this month. Meanwhile, Indonesia has come to a preliminary agreement to hold its first joint naval exercise with Russia, symbolising the growing possibilities for military cooperation between the two countries.

In East Asia, China expelled at least 13 American journalists working for the Washington Post, New York Times and the Wall Street Journal as retaliation for the U.S. tightening restrictions on Chinese state media outlets in the country. As the diplomatic row escalated, Beijing justified its decision by calling it a response to Washington's 'unreasonable oppression' of its journalists. North Korea conducted four weapons tests involving either short-range ballistic missiles or multi-tube rocket launchers. The latest test was conducted on March 29, when two short-range ballistic missiles were fired off the country's east coast from the port city of Wonsan. Meanwhile, Australia concluded negotiations with Singapore on a Digital Economy Agreement to deepen economic and trade cooperation with the help of technology in the region. The announcement was made by Prime Ministers Scott Morrison of Australia and Lee Hsien Loong of Singapore via teleconference on March 23.

Official statements and media reports for the highlights mentioned above can be found in the relevant sections of this monitor.

INDIAN OCEAN REGION

South Asia

1. *Official Statements and Press Releases*

[Joint Statement on the Signing of the U.S.-Taliban Agreement](#)

March 09, 2020, US Department of State

Special Envoys and Representatives of the European Union, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, the United Kingdom, the United Nations and the United States of America agreed on the common statement on the occasion of the signing of the U.S.-Taliban Agreement on February 29 in Qatar.

[Statement on Intra Afghan Negotiations and the Road to Peace](#)

March 10, 2020, US Department of State

The U.S.-Taliban agreement and the U.S.-Afghanistan joint declaration signed on February 29 identified March 10 as the start of intra-Afghan negotiations. While preparations for intra-Afghan negotiations are underway, the Presidential electoral crisis in Afghanistan has delayed the naming of a national negotiating team.

[The Government of India Donates Supply of Essential Medicines to the Maldives](#)

March 14, 2020, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Maldives

The Government of India has donated three months' supply of essential medicines, to enhance the readiness of the Maldives to combat the rapid spread of COVID-19.

[Prime Minister's Opening Remarks at Video Conference of SAARC Leaders on Combating COVID-19](#)

March 15, 2020, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India

Prime Minister Modi held a video conference with leaders of the SAARC in reference to the growing impact of COVID-19 in South Asia.

[PM's Remarks on Way Forward at Video Conference of SAARC Leaders on combating COVID-19](#)

March 15, 2020, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India

Prime Minister Modi spoke to leaders of the SAARC regarding the way forward to combat COVID-19 in the region.

[Deepening Comprehensive Strategic Cooperation Between the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the People's Republic of China](#)

March 17, 2020, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC

Dr. Arif Alvi, President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, visited China from 16-17 March 2020. During the visit, President Dr. Arif Alvi met with President Xi Jinping, Premier Li Keqiang and Chairman of the National People's Congress Standing Committee, Li Zhanshu.

[Foreign Secretary's Conference Call with Counterparts from Indo-Pacific Countries](#)

March 20, 2020, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India Foreign Secretary Shri Harsh Vardhan Shringla participated in a telephonic conference call initiated by U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun on March 20, 2020 for discussions among some countries in the Indo-Pacific region on issues related to countering COVID-19.

[President of Afghanistan Ashraf Ghani Meets U.S. Secretary of State](#)

March 23, 2020, President of Afghanistan

President Ashraf Ghani met with Mike Pompeo, the U.S. Secretary of State on March 23 at the Presidential Palace. The two discussed the Afghan peace process and its future steps, a regional consensus on Afghan peace as well as current political and security issues.

[Statement by US Secretary of State on the Political Impasse in Afghanistan:](#)

March 23, 2020, US Department of State

The United States is not abandoning our partnership with Afghanistan, nor our commitment to support the Afghan security forces, but reviewing the scope of our cooperation given the irresponsible actions of Afghan leaders.

[Keel Laying Ceremony of Second Type 054 A/P Frigate for Pakistan Navy Held At China](#)

March 23, 2020, ISPR

The keel laying ceremony of the 2nd ship of Type 054 A/P for Pakistan Navy was held at Hudong Zhonghua Shipyard, China.

[President Of Afghanistan Ashraf Ghani's Message on Recent Political and Global Developments](#)

March 24, 2020, President of Afghanistan

I (President of Afghanistan) once again call on the Taliban to embrace the religious clerics' – Ulama's – call and agree to a comprehensive ceasefire to save the people of Afghanistan from the catastrophe of coronavirus spread. Those living in the areas under the Taliban control are Afghan citizens and as the president of Afghanistan, I am responsible for their health and well-being, so the Taliban and their supporters will be responsible for any possible tragedy and disaster.

[Press Release on the Extraordinary Virtual G20 Leaders' Summit](#)

March 26, 2020, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India

An Extraordinary Virtual G20 Leaders' Summit was convened on 26 March 2020 to discuss the challenges posed by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and to forge a global coordinated response.

2. *Media Discourse and Analyses*

[Indian Navy Puts Off its Biggest Exercise 'Milan' Amid COVID-19 Scare](#)

March 03, 2020, Hindustan Times

The decision to put off the event was taken after several navies indicated their inability to take part in the exercise because of COVID-19 cases being detected in different parts of the world, said an official.

[Trump's India Visit: Converging Interests?](#)

March 03, 2020, Centre for Land and Warfare Studies, Kanchana Ramanujan

This article discusses convergence between India and US' interests in light of President Donald Trump's visit to India in February.

[The Mess in Afghanistan](#)

March 04, 2020, Bruce Riedel, Brookings

The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, the signature title of the Taliban, is rightly pleased with the agreement that it signed with the United States in Qatar on February 29. The agreement concedes their long-sought demand for the withdrawal "from Afghanistan of all military forces of the United States, its allies, and Coalition partners, including all non-diplomatic civilian personnel, private security contractors, trainers, advisors, and supporting services personnel within fourteen months." It is no wonder the Taliban is hailing the deal as a victory.

[Trump Discusses Afghan Peace Deal with Top Taliban Leader](#)

March 04, 2020, Voice of America

The U.S. military carried out what it called a "defensive strike" against Taliban fighters on March 4 in southern Afghanistan, hours after President Donald Trump spoke by phone with a Taliban leader about a peace deal. A Taliban readout of what it asserted was a 35-minute phone call said its deputy chief, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, assured Trump the insurgent group would seek "positive future bilateral relations" with Washington after all U.S. and coalition troops withdraw from the country under the agreement they signed.

[Conference on Indian Ocean Postponed](#)

March 05, 2020, The Times of India

India on Wednesday put off the International Indian Ocean Science Conference (IIOSC)-2020 scheduled to be held from March 16 to 20 in Goa in view of the COVID-19 outbreak.

[Indian Navy P-8I MPA In Reunion Island for Combined Training with French Forces](#)

March 05, 2020, Naval News

An Indian Navy P-8I Neptune Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA) visited Reunion Island to train with the French Air Force and Navy based on the island, known as "FAZSOI".

[Drugs Worth \\$33m Seized in Sri Lanka's Biggest Ever Bust](#)

March 05, 2020, Al Jazeera

The Sri Lankan Navy seized a vessel with 400kg heroin and 100kg crystal methamphetamine near capital Colombo.

[Sri Lanka Halts Cruise Tourism on COVID-19, to Quarantine High Risk Arrivals](#)

March 05, 2020, Economy Next

Sri Lanka has halted cruise tourism as the COVID-19 spread to Europe and the US and the Indian Ocean island will also start to quarantine arrivals from high risk areas shortly, officials said.

[Scientific Mission to Uncharted Depths of Indian Ocean](#)

March 05, 2020, India Today

In a first, a deep-sea scientific mission to uncharted depths of the Indian Ocean in the Maldives and Seychelles will gather valuable data to support the Commonwealth Blue Charter on ocean action and train local scientists.

[Pompeo: Peace Process Going Forward Despite Setbacks](#)

March 05, 2020, Tolo News

US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo, during a press briefing on March 5, called the violence of the last couple of days "unacceptable," but he said that the US would continue to push the peace process forward. He mentioned the need to discuss the prisoner releases and said that US envoy Zalmay Khalilzad was in Kabul at the moment, to move things along.

[The Taliban Have Fulfilled a Series of Conditions: Gen. Milley](#)

March 06, 2020, Tolo News

The US Defense Secretary Mark Esper and US Army Chief of Staff General Mark Milley at a US Senate Armed Services Committee hearing said that less than a week has passed since the signing of the peace agreement with the Taliban and the overall level of attacks has been low. The two US officials say that, so far, the provincial capitals of the thirty-four provinces in Afghanistan have not witnessed Taliban attacks.

[India-U.S. Trade: Prospects for an Elusive Limited Trade Deal and a Looming Big Deal](#)

March 06, 2020, Delhi Policy Group, V.S. Seshadri

With reference to President Donald Trump's visit to India in February 2020, this article assesses the trade aspect of the India-U.S. relationship.

[India-Africa Ties for Nautical Ops Sought](#)

March 06, 2020, The Times of India

India is keen on initiating partnerships with friendly nations of the Indian Ocean region along the lines of the Lucknow Declaration adopted at the first India-Africa defence ministers' conclave in February, said Defence Secretary Ajay Kumar on Thursday.

[Modi's Proposed Dhaka Visit to Focus on Regional Connectivity](#)

March 06, 2020, The Economic Times

During the visit, New Delhi and Dhaka are expected to initiate a project to enhance the navigability of waterways that serve as Bangladesh's north-south arteries of connectivity.

[India's Foreign Secretary Discusses High-Level Engagements with Russian Envoy](#)

March 07, 2020, India Today

Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla met Russian Ambassador to India Nikolay Kudashev in New Delhi on Saturday and discussed the important high-level engagements marking 10 years of special strategic partnership.

[India Admitted as Fifth Observer to Indian Ocean Commission](#)

March 07, 2020, India Today

The decision was taken at the meeting of the IOC Conference of ministers in Seychelles on Friday making India the fifth observer.

[India's Traditional Sphere of Influence and the Importance of 'Indo-Pacific'](#)

March 07, 2020, Observer Research Foundation, N. Sathya Moorthy

This article explores President Trump's visit to India in February 2020 and its implications for the U.S.-India relationship in the context of the Indo-Pacific.

[Seychelles Hands over Presidency of the Indian Ocean Commission](#)

March 07, 2020, Seychelles News Agency

Maintaining regional stability between Madagascar and Comoros was among the achievements during the one-year presidency of Seychelles over the Council of Ministers of the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), Seychelles' Vice President said.

[India's Approach to the Indian Ocean Region: From Sea Control to Sea Denial](#)

March 09, 2020, The Diplomat, Suyash Desai

This article maintains that given the budget constraints, the Indian Navy's approach should change from sea control to sea denial.

[Trilateral Military Exchange 'Operation Monogram' Ends](#)

March 10, 2020, United News of Bangladesh

US Ambassador Earl Miller and Rear Admiral M Shaheen Iqbal of Bangladesh Navy attended the closing ceremony of a US-UK-Bangladesh special operations exchange. It was the first-ever exchange including US and UK militaries with Bangladeshi Army and Navy elements to promote regional stability and ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific.

[Afghanistan's Election Disputes Reflect Its Constitution's Flaws](#)

March 12, 2020, Jarrett Blanc, Carnegie

Afghanistan's 2004 constitution created a framework for national progress, especially by recognizing women's rights, but it repeatedly failed to resolve key disputes about state power. The coinciding of Afghanistan's latest elections and renewed peace talks with the Taliban may now create a new path forward.

[Why India isn't Going to Save Australia from China's Power](#)

March 15, 2020, East Asia Forum, Hugh White

This article maintains that in light of U.S.' retraction from Asia, Australia looks to India to balance China but India may not necessarily want to play the role of the balancer.

[Whither the United States in the Indo-Pacific?](#)

March 15, 2020, East Asia Forum, J Stapleton Roy

The U.S. approach to the Indo-Pacific is a work in progress. Over the past three years, the Trump administration has outlined a strategic concept that links the Indian Ocean region with the Asia Pacific. Yet, President Donald Trump's freewheeling refusal to be bound within this policy framework has rendered the Indo-Pacific concept of limited utility to the US government.

[The Indo-Pacific Linus Blanket](#)

March 16, 2020, East Asia Forum

U.S. allies in East Asia, like Australia, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, the Philippines and Thailand in Southeast Asia, whose default position has been to cede strategic initiative to their ally across the Pacific – now face a Linus blanket surrender-moment, big time. In these uncertain times, it's no wonder that the Indo-Pacific idea is all the rage – the American alliance framework resuscitated and re-imagined with Indian heft.

[India Japan Developing Hypersonic Missiles to Counter Looming Chinese Threat](#)

March 16, 2020, The Eurasian Times

After the U.S. and Russia first began developing hypersonic missiles, China too jumped on the bandwagon and the latest to enter this race are Japan and India.

[India has Done Well to Revive SAARC](#)

March 16, 2020, Hindustan Times, S.D. Muni

This Op-Ed analyses PM Modi's conference call with SAARC countries on COVID-19 and holds that it underlined Delhi's support to neighbours at a difficult time, while exposing Pakistan's pettiness.

[Peace Hasn't Broken Out in Afghanistan](#)

March 16, 2020, James Dobbins, RAND Corporation

On February 29, the United States and the Taliban signed a preliminary peace deal aimed at ending nearly 19 years of war in Afghanistan. The agreement calls for the U.S. to gradually withdraw its troops from the country over the next 14 months and for the Taliban and the Afghan government (which was not a party to the deal) to open direct talks. The Taliban further promise in the deal to prevent terrorist groups, such as al Qaeda or the Islamic State, from operating in territory they control. Much could go wrong rather quickly.

[Pakistan President Arrives in China Amid Global Coronavirus Scare](#)

March 17, 2020, India Today

President of Pakistan Mr Arif Alvi visited China on March 16-17 in the mid of global coronavirus scare to convey Islamabad's strong support and solidarity to Beijing in its battle against the pandemic that has killed over 3,200 people in China. Alvi was accompanied by a Pakistani delegation including Foreign

Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Asad Umar and senior officials. During his visit he met President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang.

[India and the Indo-Pacific](#)

March 19, 2020, Centre for Land Warfare Studies, Kanchana Ramanujan

This article deconstructs the concept of the Indo-Pacific.

[U.S.-India Relations Shape Japan's Strategic Environment](#)

March 20, 2020, Japan Times, Ramesh Thakur

This article examines President Donald Trump's visit to India in February 2020 and its implications for the Indo-U.S. relations, further claiming that it was relevant to Japan as the country's strategic environment is shaped by the intersection of three major geopolitical story lines.

[RIC Summit Involving Russia, China and India Cancelled due to COVID-19](#)

March 20, 2020, The Eurasian Times

Russia has decided to postpone the annual RIC trilateral Summit due to the coronavirus pandemic. The meeting was scheduled for next week in Sochi.

[India's Cancelled MILAN 2020 Exercise and Delhi's View of the Indian Ocean](#)

March 20, 2020, The Diplomat, Shishir Upadhyaya

This article holds that while the Indian Navy's plans to host multinational naval exercise Milan 2020 in March were cancelled, its significance ought not to be missed.

[Indian Navy Finally Gets Access to Strategic French Base near Mauritius](#)

March 20, 2020, The Eurasian Times

The Indian and French navies for the first time conducted military exercises from the Reunion Island which is an overseas French region and an island east of Madagascar and 175 km southwest of Mauritius.

[Coronavirus, Geopolitics, and Nepal Between Great Powers](#)

March 23, 2020, The Diplomat, Arun Budhathoki

This article holds that the United States risks falling behind China as Nepal weighs its options in dealing with the pandemic.

[COVID-19 Crisis and SAARC Diplomacy](#)

March 23, 2020, Observer Research Foundation, K. Yhome

This article analyses India's leadership role in SAARC with reference to COVID-19 and maintains that geographical realism and taking a leadership role drives Delhi's pro-active regional diplomacy in combating the pandemic.

[India on Alert as 'China Deploys Dozen Underwater Drones in IOR'](#)

March 24, 2020, The Times of India

India is keeping a watchful eye on the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) amid reports that China has now also taken to deploying underwater drones apart from hydrographic surveys and oceanic research ships in the region.

[Asia's Web of Defence Ties Falls Prey to Coronavirus](#)

March 24, 2020, Nikkei Asian Review, Rieko Miki

Joint military drills and defence summits are being cancelled across the Asia-Pacific in response to the coronavirus outbreak, throwing a wrench into Japanese and U.S. efforts to woo regional players in their rivalry against China.

[U.S. Vows to Cut \\$1 Billion In Aid to Afghanistan As Political Crisis Threatens Peace Deal](#)

March 24, 2020, Washington Post

In a sign of mounting frustration with Afghanistan's leaders, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced that the United States would cut \$1 billion in aid to the country because of its inability to form a unity government to negotiate with the Taliban.

[What's Behind the Rising India-France Maritime Activity in the Indo-Pacific?](#)

March 27, 2020, Observer Research Foundation, Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan

With India and France conducting a maritime patrol off the coast of Reunion Island, this article assesses the Indo-France maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.

[Covid-19 Total Lockdown: An Economic and Humanitarian Disaster](#)

March 28, 2020, Observer Research Foundation, Rupa Subramanya

This article examines Covid-19's economic and humanitarian impact on India.

[Afghanistan Government Announces Team for Taliban Talks](#)

March 28, 2020, Al Jazeera

Afghanistan's government has announced a 21-member team to negotiate with the Taliban in a tentative sign of progress for the United States-brokered peace deal. It is not clear whether President Ghani's political rival Abdullah Abdullah would endorse the team selected, which diplomats have said would be vital given his camp's strong influence in much of the country's north and west. The development was endorsed by U.S. special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad, who congratulated Afghan political and civil society leaders.

[Taliban Refuses to Talk to Afghan Government's Negotiating Team](#)

March 28, 2020, The Guardian

The Taliban refused to begin talks with the Afghan government's new negotiating team, in a setback to the U.S.-brokered peace process for one of the world's longest-running conflicts. Taliban Spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said the militants could not talk to the 21-member team as it had not been constituted taking all parties into account. The team is headed by Masoom Stanekzai, a former security chief and supporter of President Ashraf Ghani, and includes politicians, former officials and representatives of civil society. Five members are women.

[The Indo-Pacific Scene: An Update](#)

March 28, 2020, Delhi Policy Group, Cmde. Lalit Kapur and Amb. H.K. Singh

As the world order undergoes a disruptive transition, the international community is facing the challenge of reshaping some globalist purpose in the midst of great power rivalry. What is clear is that the locus of global geopolitical competition has decisively shifted to what is being described as the Indo-Pacific.

West Asia

3. *Official Statements and Press Releases*

[Text of a Notice on the Continuation of the National Emergency with Respect to Iran](#)

March 12, 2020, The White House

This order extends the period of national emergency with respect to Iran, first declared on March 15, 1995, for an additional period of one year.

[Ayatollah Khamenei in His Nowruz Message: Increasing Production Key Point In New Year](#)

March 20, 2020, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamic Republic of Iran

Full text of the message issued on March 20, 2020, by Ayatollah Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, on the occasion of Nowruz, the Iranian New Year.

[Statement on Afghanistan Developments](#)

March 22, 2020, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamic Republic of Iran

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran has released an official statement expressing concern about ongoing disputes between Dr Ghani and Dr Abdullah, thus intensifying the crisis and driving political tension in Afghanistan. It has decried the US role in going ahead with elections and not learning lessons from the Presidential elections of 2014.

4. *Media Discourse and Analyses*

[Iran Wouldn't Mess With The Royal Navy If London Had More Ships](#)

March 03, 2020, The National Interest, David Axe

The Royal Navy plans briefly to double its number of warships in the Persian Gulf following an attempted attack by Iranian forces on a British oil tanker on July 20, 2019.

[The IRGC Post-Soleimani: Political and Security Implications at Home and Abroad](#)

March 03, 2020, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Ariane Tabatabai, Mehdi Khalaji, Farzin Nadimi

Three leading Iran scholars explore how the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and the broader regime will adapt their policies following the death of the Quds Force Commander.

[IAEA Reports Renew Questions About Iran's Nuclear Ambitions](#)

March 04, 2020, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Simon Henderson

U.S. officials have ample grounds to reinvigorate diplomatic pressure after the world's nuclear watchdog accused Iran of being uncooperative, but they need to focus on the right questions.

[Saudi Coalition 'Foils Attack' On Oil Tanker Off Yemen's Coast](#)

March 05, 2020, Al Jazeera

The Saudi-led coalition fighting in Yemen said on Wednesday that it foiled an "imminent terrorist attack" on an oil tanker off Yemen's coast on the Arabian Sea.

[Tanker War: Can America's Navy SEALs Stop Iran's Attacks On Oil Shipping?](#)

March 05, 2020, The National Interest, Sebastien Roblin

The Tanker War demonstrated how Iran could retaliate against foreign pressure through calibrated, and semi-deniable attacks on the valuable shipping passing through the narrow waters of the Gulf.

['Confront Hindu Extremists': Iran slams India](#)

March 05, 2020, Deccan Herald

Iran on Thursday sharpened its criticism of India, with the supreme leader of the Persian Gulf nation, Ayatollah Khamenei, saying that the Narendra Modi government "should confront extremist Hindus" and "stop the massacre of Muslims".

[Escalating Houthi Offensives in Yemen: U.S. Options](#)

March 06, 2020, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Alex Almeida and Michael Knights.

To keep recent rebel victories from cascading into a wider military collapse, Washington must urge the Gulf coalition to firm up the government's forces and move more quickly on peace talks.

[In Saudi Arabia, The Virus Crisis Meets Inept Leadership](#)

March 06, 2020, Brookings Institution, Bruce Riedel

Saudi Arabia is facing serious challenges from the coronavirus, testing a leadership that has been impulsive and exclusive. The monarchy has become more remote from even most of the royal family in the last five years. Now the monarchy's response to the virus has been unprecedented. Attention should be focused particularly on the young man who makes the day-to-day decisions in the Royal Palace.

[China's New Silk Road Strategy and the Middle East](#)

March 08, 2020, Begin Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Dr. Mordechai Chaziza

In recent years, the People's Republic of China has significantly increased its economic and diplomatic engagement with the Middle East. Most of Beijing's investment in the region focus on energy, infrastructure construction, nuclear power, new energy sources, agriculture, and finance. These investments serve not only China's interests but also those of Middle Eastern countries hoping to boost their economies as a means of strengthening social stability.

[The Coronavirus in Iran \(Part 1\): Clerical Factors](#)

March 09, 2020, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Mehdi Khalaji

The clergy's ambitions for global Shia revolution made the city of Qom uniquely vulnerable to the disease, and their resistance to modern medical science weakened the state's ability to combat its spread.

[Why Current Saudi-Russia Oil Price War Is Not Déjà Vu](#)

March 10, 2020, Council on Foreign Relations, Amy M. Jeffe

It's happened several times before: geopolitical tensions between Saudi Arabia and Russia have led to a dramatic drop in oil prices in years past. But the breakdown in Saudi-Russian cooperation in oil markets over the weekend is strikingly different this time.

[The Use of Mercenaries: A New Recourse to an Old Practice for Waging War in the Middle East](#)

March 10, 2020, Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), Yoel Guzansky, Daniel Rakov, Gallia Lindenstrauss

A phenomenon that has intensified over the past decade in the Middle East is the use of mercenaries to project power and to realize interests. It seems that the Gulf states, Turkey, and Russia are leaders in this trend, using numerous mercenaries for combat missions beyond their borders.

[What We Know About Iran Five Years After Netanyahu's Speech To the U.S. Congress](#)

March 11, 2020, The Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security, Maj. Gen. Yaakov Amidror

Five years ago last week, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addressed a joint meeting of Congress about the nuclear deal then taking shape with Iran (the JCPOA). The speech remains controversial, yet relevant in current times.

[From the Ukrainian Airplane to the Coronavirus: The Crisis of Public Confidence in the Iranian Regime](#)

March 11, 2020, Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), Raz Zimmat

The failed attempts by the Iranian authorities to hide information from the public regarding the downing of the Ukrainian airplane by the Revolutionary Guards (January 2020) and the outbreak of the Coronavirus (February 2020) have caused further significant damage to Iranian public confidence in Islamic Republic institutions.

[The Only Sensible Iran Strategy is Containment](#)

March 11, 2020, Council on Foreign Relations, Steven Cook

The most effective plan against the Islamic Republic has always been the most obvious—and the one nobody in Washington seems willing to try.

[The Coronavirus in Iran \(Part 2\): Regime Culpability and Resiliency](#)

March 12, 2020, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Mehdi Khalaji

Even as their lack of transparency worsens the public health crisis, the Supreme Leader and other officials have systematically gutted any civil society elements capable of organizing substantial opposition to such policies.

[How the U.S. Can Stop the Surge of Deadly Rocket Attacks in Iraq](#)

March 13, 2020, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Michael Knights

The U.S. Congress and the Trump administration should privately agree to some ground rules for timing deterrent strikes on truly high-value targets, while quietly deploying more force-protection assets like Patriot missiles.

[Implications of the Saudi Corruption Arrests](#)

March 16, 2020, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Simon Henderson

On March 15, Saudi Arabia announced that 298 individuals have been arrested for bribery, embezzlement, wasting public funds, and other corruption offenses. Although none of the detainees has been named, they reportedly include high-ranking officers in the Defense and Interior Ministries, adding to rumors that recent royal crackdowns may be related to a planned coup.

[The Economic-Political Struggle behind the Energy Market Crash](#)

March 18, 2020, Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), Daniel Rakov, Yoel Guzansky, Tomer Fadlon

Russia's decision to break its alliance with OPEC was motivated by the desire to change the dynamics of the energy market – in which the cartel provided a "safety net" for American production while Russian corporations were a target of sanctions from Washington – and to demonstrate its ability to influence the global and the Middle East economy.

[The False Promise of 'pro-American' Autocrats](#)

March 19, 2020, Brookings Institution, Shadi Hamid

US efforts to promote democracy in the Middle East have long been paralyzed by a unique "Islamist dilemma". The U.S. wants democracy in theory but fears its outcomes in practice. In this case, the outcomes that it fears are Islamist parties either doing well in elections or winning them outright. If the U.S. would like to (finally) get serious about democratic reform in the region, then it must resolve this dilemma one way or the other.

[Iraq Has A New Prime Minister. What Next?](#)

March 20, 2020, Brookings Institution, Ranj Alaaldin

Iraq has a new prime minister-designate, almost three weeks after the previous nominee — Mohammed Tawfiq Allawi — failed to secure

parliamentary approval for his cabinet. The new figure, Adnan al-Zurfi, is a veteran of the Iraqi opposition and a long-time member of the ruling class who worked closely with the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) during the U.S. occupation of Iraq.

[Despite Political Turmoil and Coronavirus, Iraq's Protest Movement Continues](#)

March 23, 2020, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Azhar Al-Rubaie

With neighboring Iran one of the most severely affected areas of coronavirus, Iraqi authorities are also confirming rising infections and deaths despite closing the border between the two states. However, Iraqi protesters maintain that "oppression and fear are more dangerous than coronavirus," and have consistently demonstrated a will to continue what has become known as the October 2019 revolution.

[In the Saudi-Russian Oil Price War, the U.S. Blinks First](#)

March 24, 2020, The Hill, Simon Henderson

President Trump said Thursday that he was "a little torn" on how to address the differences between Saudi Arabia and Russia in their oil-price war but would intervene in oil markets at the "appropriate time." Many people probably would interpret those phrases as indicating that the president is under enormous pressure to do something but doesn't like the options he has been offered.

East Africa

5. Media Discourse and Analyses

[Kenya-Somali Row: Has a Phone Call Brought Peace?](#)

March 06, 2020, BBC News

Hundreds of residents of Mandera in north-eastern Kenya near Somalia have fled the area in the aftermath of clashes between warring troops across the border.

[Will Africa's Economies Buckle Under the Coronavirus?](#)

March 09, 2020, Institute for Security Studies, Ronak Gopaldas

The outbreak of the coronavirus disease named COVID-19 has led to mass fear and panic worldwide. Although the infection rate in Africa has been minimal to date, concern is mounting that its arrival on a bigger scale is imminent, and that the continent won't be adequately prepared for the fallout.

[Covid-19 and its Impact on Africa](#)

March 20, 2020, Observer Research Foundation, Abhishek Mishra

This article examines Covid-19's implications for African countries.

SOUTH EAST ASIA

6. *Official Statements and Press Releases*

[General Ngo Xuan Lich Receives The Chief Of Staff Of Japan Self-Defense Forces' Joint Staff](#)

March 02, 2020, Vietnam Ministry of Defence

On March 2, in Hanoi, General Ngo Xuan Lich, Minister of National Defence received General Yamazaki Koji, Chief of Staff of Japan Self-Defense Forces' Joint Staff, who was leading a Japanese high-ranking military delegation to visit and work in Vietnam.

[To Enhance the Effectiveness of Defence Cooperation Within ASEAN and Between ASEAN and Partners](#)

March 03, 2020, Vietnam Ministry of Defence

On March 3, the 13th Track II Network of ASEAN Defence and Security Institutions annual Meeting (NADI-13) and the 5th Track II Network of ASEAN Defence and Security Institutions Retreat (NADI Retreat-5) took place in Danang.

[Theodore Roosevelt Strike Group Arrives in Vietnam](#)

March 4, 2020, US Pacific Fleet

USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN 71) and USS Bunker Hill (CG 52) arrived in Da Nang, March 5, for a scheduled port visit commemorating 25 years of U.S.-Vietnam diplomatic relations.

[Singapore's Assistance To Myanmar To Fight COVID-19](#)

March 4, 2020, Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs

In response to a request from the Myanmar Ministry of Health and Sports, the Singapore Government has contributed 3,000 diagnostic tests and two polymerase chain reaction (PCR) machines for the detection of the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

[US Aircraft Carrier Visits Danang](#)

March 05, 2020, Vietnam Ministry of Defence

The USS Theodore Roosevelt aircraft carrier and USS Bunker Hill cruiser arrived at Tien Sa Port, Da Nang city on March 5, for a scheduled visit commemorating 25 years of Vietnam - US diplomatic relations.

[Plan for International Maritime Review 2020 Approved](#)

March 05, 2020, Vietnam Ministry of Defence

On March 5, in Hanoi, the General Staff held a conference to approve plans for International Maritime Review and some other activities of the Vietnam People's Navy. Senior Lieutenant General Phan Van Giang, Chief of the General Staff of the Vietnam People's Army and Deputy Defence Minister chaired the conference.

[39th Cobra Gold Exercise Comes to Close in Thailand](#)

March 06, 2020, US Pacific Fleet

Leaders and commanders from Indo-Pacific nations participating in Cobra Gold 2020 came together to give final remarks and shake hands as the two-week exercise came to a close, March 6.

[Tripartite MOA Signed For Proposed PAMANA Projects](#)

March 11, 2020, Ministry of Defence, Philippines

In line with the objectives of Executive Order 70, PAMANA is the national government's development program that ensures the delivery of peace promoting and conflict-sensitive services to remote and conflict affected areas. Among others, PAMANA projects include the provision of needs-based infrastructures and basic services such as bridges, potable water systems, electricity, farm-to-market roads, multi-purpose buildings, and peace centers.

[Minister for Foreign Affairs Dr Vivian Balakrishnan's Live Interview on CNBC Asia's Squawk Box Asia, 11 March 2020](#)

March 12, 2020, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Singapore

Dr Vivian Balakrishnan reacted to Covid-19 and the looming recession.

[Close Cooperation between Republic of Singapore Navy and Indonesian Navy Led to Successful Disruption of Sea Robbery in the Singapore Strait](#)

March 16, 2020, Ministry of Defence, Singapore

Lieutenant-Colonel Gary Ow, Head IFC, said, "By working closely together with the shipping community and littoral states to monitor our waters and share information, we can quickly cue operational responses and keep up the pressure on sea robbers to bring sea robbery incidents down."

[Remarks by the Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam Le Thi Thu Hang About The Impact of the Epidemic Towards Vietnam's Foreign Affair Activities, in Relation to the ASEAN Chairmanship 2020](#)

March 18, 2020, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Vietnam

On the 6th of February, 2020, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Regular Press Conference, in responding to a question about the impact of the epidemic towards Vietnam's foreign affair activities, especially in relation to the ASEAN Chairmanship 2020.

[Prime Minister's Letter on Rescheduling The 36th ASEAN Summit Handed To ASEAN Ambassadors](#)

March 19, 2020, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Vietnam

In view of the complicated developments of the COVID-19 situation, on 19 March 2020, Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc sent a letter to Leaders of ASEAN Member States and New Zealand on rescheduling the 36th ASEAN Summit and the ASEAN- New Zealand Leaders' Summit that was planned to be held in Da Nang on 8-9 April 2020 to the end of June 2020.

[Remarks By The Spokesperson Of The Ministry Of Foreign Affairs Of Vietnam Le Thi Thu Hang Regarding Publication Of Images Of Chinese Map With The "Nine-Dash Line" By Some Social Networking Accounts Registered As Chinese Overseas Representative Missions](#)

March 20, 2020, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Vietnam

Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Le Thi Thu Hang stated: Vietnam's position on the East Sea issue is clear and consistent. Vietnam has ample legal grounds and historical evidence to affirm its sovereignty over the Hoàng Sa (Paracel) and Trường Sa (Spratly) Islands and has sovereignty, sovereignty rights and jurisdiction over maritime zones in the East Sea as established in accordance with the 1982 United Nations Convention on Law

of the Sea. Accordingly, Vietnam rejects any maritime claims of China based on the so-called “nine-dash line” in the East Sea.

[Treaty on Military Training and Training Area Development in Australia a Milestone for Singapore-Australia Defence Relations](#)

March 23, 2020, Ministry of Defence, Singapore

The Treaty is an upgrade of the bilateral Memorandum of Understanding on Military Training and Training Area Development in Australia, signed in 2016 under the Singapore-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP), and marks a significant milestone in bilateral defence relations.

7. *Media Discourse and Analyses*

[Indonesia, China, and the Natuna Linchpin](#)

March 01, 2020, The Diplomat, Evan A Laksmana

Can Indonesia develop a strategy to confront China’s long game in the Natunas and the South China Sea?

[Chinese Tanker Seized by Cambodia, Suspect in DPRK Sanctions Violation](#)

March 02, 2020, Maritime Bulletin

Tanker COURAGEOUS was seized by Cambodia Navy Police on Feb 27 in Cambodian waters, arriving there after being expelled from Taiwan, as a violator of sanctions imposed on North Korea. The tanker is suspected in illegal oil ship-to-ship transfers to North Korean tankers. COURAGEOUS was taken to Sihanoukville, Cambodia.

[Parliament: SAF to Restructure to Deal With Cyber, Terrorism, Maritime Threats](#)

March 02, 2020, The Straits Times

A high-level committee will be formed to build an integrated cyber force to defend Singapore against cyber threats, said Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen on March 02.

[China Vessels Impede Energy Exploration by Malaysia as Vietnam Looks on](#)

March 02, 2020, Benar News

After a prolonged stand-off with Vietnam, Chinese vessels are again monitoring and harassing energy exploration efforts by another claimant

country in the disputed South China Sea, according to a report by a Washington-based think tank. This time it is Malaysia that's on the receiving end.

[U.S., China Sea Tensions on a Precarious Laser's Edge](#)

March 2, 2020, Asia Times, Richard Javad Heydarian

While global attention focuses on the fast-spreading Covid-19 epidemic, ratcheting US-China tensions in the South China Sea represent another rising threat to regional stability.

[Is The South China Sea at a Crossroads?](#)

March 03, 2020, AEC News Today, East Asia Forum

The South China Sea remains a focal concern within the international community, grabbing headlines and placing it firmly on the agendas of many bilateral and multilateral political and academic summits. While likely to remain relatively stable in 2020, worrying developments and uncertainties are on the rise.

[A New Malaysia-Brunei Spat on Maritime Boundary Projects?](#)

March 04, 2020, The Diplomat, Prashanth Parameswaran

A closer look at new reports that the two countries are in a new spat over cross-border projects in their shared maritime boundary.

[What's in the New China Military Presence Fears in the Philippines?](#)

March 05, 2020, The Diplomat, Prashanth Parameswaran

Recent concerns of thousands of Chinese military personnel infiltrating the country are just one manifestation of the growing fears of Beijing's influence in the Philippines and alleged government complicity.

[India Not Extending 5% Safeguard Duty on Malaysian Palm Oil](#)

March 05, 2020, Free Malaysia Today

India will not be extending the bilateral safeguard duty on the import of certain palm oil varieties from Malaysia.

[Indonesia to Increase Sea Toll Routes to 26](#)

March 05, 2020, Xinhua

Indonesia's Coordinating Minister for Maritime and Investment, Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan, said here on Thursday that the country will increase the number of sea toll routes to 26 as they give many benefits.

[Is Vietnam Sending Its Maritime Militia to China's Coast?](#)

March 05, 2020, The Diplomat, Yan Yan

In recent weeks, hundreds of Vietnamese fishing boats have gathered near China's Hainan province, site of a sensitive military base.

[After Duterte Scraps VFA, What's Next for the US-Philippine Alliance?](#)

March 05, 2020, Geopolitical Monitor, Michael Hart

On 11 February, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte provided formal notice to the United States of his decision to scrap the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA).

[Thailand, US and Partner Nations Join Cobra Gold 2020 Military Exercise](#)

March 06, 2020, Pattaya Mail

The Royal Thai Armed Forces, the United States Armed Forces and partner countries have together participated in the Cobra Gold 2020 military exercise, which focused on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

[HMAS Dechaineux first Australian submarine to visit Brunei](#)

March 12, 2020, Defence Connect

Minister for Defence Linda Reynolds said the visit was an opportunity for the Australian Navy to strengthen its partnership with the Royal Brunei Armed Forces in the region.

[Japan-Vietnam Defense Ties in the Headlines With Naval Shipbuilding Cooperation](#)

March 16, 2020, The Diplomat

An engagement this month spotlighted ongoing collaboration between the two sides in the security domain.

[New Joint Maritime Patrols Put the Focus on Vietnam-Cambodia Naval Ties](#)

March 16, 2020, The Diplomat, Prashanth Parameswaran

Earlier this month, Vietnam and Cambodia held the latest in a series of frequent joint maritime patrols. The engagement highlighted one aspect of the broader bilateral defense relationship between the two neighboring Southeast Asian states.

[A New Front In The Narrative 'War' Over The South China Sea – Analysis](#)

March 20, 2020, Eurasia Review, By Mark J. Valencia

A new front has opened up in the contest to control the narrative regarding actions in the South China Sea. This is evidenced by a recent flurry of contested revelations and explanations concerning concentrations of Chinese and Vietnamese fishing vessels in other countries' waters.

[China Enlists Academics in South China Sea Propaganda War](#)

March 20, 2020, Geopolitical Monitor, Bich T. Tran & James Borton

During this COVID-19 global crisis, when facts and fiction are easily blurred, Beijing is using cyber skills to disseminate fake news stories, expelling American journalists, and turning to invited academics to steer policymaking arguments and write narratives that are patently false.

[Chinese Naval Planes Conduct Anti-submarine Drills in South China Sea](#)

March 21, 2020, SCMP

Chinese military aircraft recently conducted an anti-submarine drill over the South China Sea, the People's Liberation Army said on Friday, amid a growing number of patrols and exercises by US warships in the region.

[China Bashers Strike Out in the South China Sea](#)

March 23, 2020, Geopolitical Monitor , By Mark J. Valencia

Recently an article appeared in Geopolitical Monitor attacking an article Mark J. Valencia published in the South China Morning Post. Mark J. Valencia responds by explaining the finer points of the issues- and the normal bounds of academic debate.

[China Debuts 'Research Stations' in South China Sea While World Battles Coronavirus](#)

March 23, 2020, Breitbart

China established two new "research stations" in the South China Sea on Yongshu [Fiery Cross Reef] and Zhubi [the Subi Reef], Beijing state news agency Xinhua reported this weekend — evidence China is surging forward with its colonization of the South China Sea while the world grapples with the Chinese coronavirus pandemic.

[Singapore And Australia Sign Military Training Treaty Amid Covid-19](#)

March 23, 2020, Army Technology

Singapore and Australia have signed a treaty on military training and training area development in view of the global Coronavirus Disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic.

[China Conducts Second Methane Hydrate Test in the South China Sea](#)

March 26, 2020, Nasdaq

China extracted 861,400 cubic metres of natural gas from methane hydrate, known as "flammable ice", during a one-month trial production in the South China Sea.

[China's Aggressive Moves in South China Sea](#)

March 27, 2020, Modern Diplomacy, Pankaj Jha

At the time when the whole world is reeling under the Wuhan virus epidemic, China has upped the ante in the South China Sea, knowing very well that the domestic compulsions in the US would be a constraining factor for the global hegemon to undertake any military action in SCS.

EAST ASIA

8. *Official Statements and Press Releases*

[Overview: The Track 1.5 Meeting for Substantive Advancement of Nuclear Disarmament](#)

March 06, 2020, Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The Track 1.5 Meeting for Substantive Advancement of Nuclear Disarmament was held in Tokyo, Japan on March 06. The meeting was attended by government officials from nine countries including nuclear weapon states and non-nuclear weapon states as well as Japanese and foreign experts.

[ROK to Receive Relief Supplies from Chinese Government as Support over COVID-19](#)

March 09, 2020, South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The Government of the Republic of Korea is holding consultations on receiving relief supplies that the government of the People's Republic of China intends to provide for the ROK to support its efforts to tackle the COVID-19 outbreak.

[Consultation among Directors-General of South Korean, Chinese and Japanese Foreign Ministries Takes Place](#)

March 17, 2020, South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The Directors-General of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea, the People's Republic of China, and Japan spoke over the phone on the morning of March 17 to discuss responses to the COVID-19 outbreak. Diplomatic authorities of the three countries shared information on their countries' domestic situations regarding COVID-19, and exchanged views on ways forward for cooperation to prevent the spread of COVID-19 between the three countries and across the world.

[South Korea-China-Japan Foreign Ministers' Video Conference](#)

March 23, 2020, South Korea Ministry of Foreign Affairs

South Korean Minister of Foreign Affairs Kang Kyung-wha presided over the "ROK-China-Japan Foreign Ministers' video conference" on COVID-19 On March 20. In a bid to respond to the crisis, the three Foreign Ministers affirmed their determination to continue efforts to promote closer cooperation among

their relevant authorities through existing trilateral systems, including the trilateral Health Ministers' Meeting among the three countries.

[G7 Foreign Ministers' Meeting](#)

March 26, 2020, Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs

On March 25, Mr. Motegi Toshimitsu, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, attended the G7 Foreign Ministers' Meeting, held via video conference. They reaffirmed the recognition that it is important for the G7 to work closely together to encourage China to play a constructive role and to fulfil a greater responsibility in the free, open and rules-based international system.

9. *Media Discourse and Analyses*

['Provocative' China Pressures Taiwan with Fighters, Fake News amid Virus Outbreak](#)

March 03, 2020, Reuters

China is pressuring Taiwan with "provocative" air force manoeuvres near the island and spreading fake news to sow discord during the COVID-19 outbreak, according to Taiwan's security sources and government officials.

[Pentagon Sends Extra Medical Personnel, Gear to U.S. Troops in South Korea](#)

March 03, 2020, The Korea Herald

The Pentagon has sent additional medical personnel and equipment to its troops in South Korea to help fight the COVID-19 outbreak there, U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Mark Milley said. The general noted that the allies have already postponed combined military exercises scheduled for this month due to concerns about the spread of the virus.

[North Korea Fires Two Short-Range Missiles into Eastern Sea](#)

March 03, 2020, The Straits Times

North Korea fired two short-range missiles into the sea off its eastern coast on March 02, resuming testing after a three-month pause, said South Korea's military. The missiles were launched from the eastern coastal city of Wonsan, flying 240km and reaching 35km in altitude, said South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff. North Korea has in the past launched a series of missiles from the area

[Warplanes Play Dangerous Game over Taiwan](#)

March 05, 2020, Asia Times

Taiwan News reported that on at least one occasion, a Chinese warplane locked its radar onto a Taiwanese F-16 fighter jet. As the Wuhan COVID-19 rages in China, the communist country has stepped up aggressive air force missions near and around Taiwan to intimidate “separatist forces” and distract attention from the epidemic, officials said.

[Taiwan's New F-16s Won't Save Taipei From China](#)

March 07, 2020, The National Interest, David Axe

Nearly a decade after first requesting them, the Taiwanese Air Force finally could get 66 new F-16 fighters to begin replacing some of its older fighter aircraft. But the \$8-billion fighter acquisition, which the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump approved over strong objections from China, will do little to alter the overall balance of power across the Taiwan Strait, since China possesses hundreds of more modern fighters than Taiwan does.

[With Xi Visit now Delayed, COVID-19 Threatens to Spoil Abe's 2020](#)

March 07, 2020, The Japan Times, Satoshi Sugiyama

The COVID-19 outbreak has prompted Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to request nationwide school closures, call for large events to be cancelled or postponed and seek to pass legislation that would enable the government to declare a state of emergency. Now, by postponing Xi’s visit and expanding entry restrictions to cover all of China, Abe seems to have come to terms with the fact that the COVID-19 is beyond his control and has put on the back burner his attempt to score a major victory through his greatest strength: diplomacy.

[South Korea Suspends Visas for Japanese in tit-for-tat COVID-19 Curbs](#)

March 07, 2020, The Japan Times

South Korea has retaliated against Japan’s request for Korean visitors to voluntarily self-quarantine upon arrival as measures to contain the novel COVID-19 epidemic. South Korea plans to raise its travel advisory for Japan to Level 2, or “refrain from travel,” First Deputy Foreign Minister Cho Se-young said in a statement. It also plans to halt a visa-waiver program for the Japanese and introduce a mandatory two-week quarantine period for any visitors from the country, in response to similar measures imposed by Tokyo in connection with the outbreak.

[Mask Diplomacy: How Coronavirus Upended Generations of China-Japan Antagonism](#)

March 09, 2020, Brookings Institution, Cheng Li and Ryan McElveen

While the Covid-19 crisis has led many states to behave in their self-interest, viewing the distribution of masks and medical supplies as a sort of zero-sum geopolitical game, others have selflessly endeavoured to distribute supplies to those who need them most, engaging in “mask diplomacy” despite their own needs. Through the gifting of masks and other supplies, Japan rebuilt a bridge to China that had long been severed. Chinese social media quickly filled with gratitude for the Japanese wishes.

[Covid-19 Will Kill Moon Jae-in's Korea Détente](#)

March 12, 2020, The Interpreter, Khang Vu

South Korea is one of the countries worst hit by Covid-19, with numbers of confirmed cases over 7500 and deaths more than 50. President Moon Jae-in has faced severe criticism for his handling of the virus -- an online petition calling for his impeachment has attracted almost 1.5 million signatures. Just when it looked like things couldn't get worse for Moon, North Korea test-fired its first two short-range ballistic missiles of the year. It had been hoped the virus outbreak would calm political and diplomatic tensions on the peninsula, yet North Korea has shown that it is committed to bolstering its nuclear capability.

[The Novel Coronavirus Outbreak and Its Political/Economic Impact on China](#)

March 13, 2020, Japan Institute for International Affairs

As of March 9, 2020, instances of pneumonia attributable to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) have appeared in more than 100 countries; more than 80,000 persons have been infected in China, of whom over 3,000 have died. This paper offers a brief examination of the political and economic impact of this outbreak on China.

[Japan-India: An Indigenous Indo-Pacific Axis](#)

March 18, 2020, The Diplomat, Tan Ming Hui and Nazia Hussain

The longstanding India-Japan partnership is seen as a crucial pillar for the free and open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) vision. While the United States' FOIP strategy emphasises the containment of a rising China, India and Japan share a more inclusive stance of engaging regional neighbours.

[Japan's Emerging 'Multi-Domain Defense Force'](#)

March 18, 2020, The Diplomat

Japan's defence budget spending plan for fiscal year 2020 reached a record high of 5.07 trillion yen (\$47 billion). The Japanese Self-Defense Forces plan to acquire and improve its capabilities in new fields, such as space, cyberspace, and the electromagnetic spectrum, by cultivating experts and making the best of new research in science and technology.

[U.S. Stirs Regional Conflict to Stem China's Rise](#)

March 22, 2020, Global Times

What is driving the U.S. to conduct frequent military cooperation with Vietnam? What impact will it have? First, the U.S. sees Vietnam's position in its Indo-Pacific Strategy within the framework of its comprehensive strategic competition with China. Second, the improvement in U.S.-Vietnam military ties won't restrict the U.S. from attempting to transform Vietnam. Third, relevant parties are seeking solutions to the South China Sea issues via coordination and cooperation, and support the establishment of a regional community of a shared future to mitigate contradictions.

[Kim Jong-un Oversees Ballistic Missile Test](#)

March 22, 2020, The Korea Herald

Pyongyang's Korean Central News Agency said that leader Kim Jong-un oversaw two short-range ballistic missiles North Korea fired into the East Sea, adding the "strategic guided weapons" would soon be operational. In its third weapons launch this month, North Korea seems to have flown its own version of the US' surface-to-surface missile ATACMS.

[Spat Between China Diplomats Signals Internal Split over How to Handle Trump](#)

March 24, 2020, The Japan Times

An unusual public spat between two top Chinese diplomats points to a possible internal split in Beijing over how to handle rising tensions with U.S. president Donald Trump. The differences spilled into public view after China's ambassador to the U.S. Cui Tiankai reaffirmed his opposition to promoting theories that the virus that causes COVID-19 originated in an American

military lab. Cui's comments represent a sharp public rebuke to foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian, who has questioned whether the virus originated in China and even touted the idea that it may have been introduced by U.S. Army athletes.

[China, America, And The International Order After The Pandemic](#)

March 24, 2020, War on the Rocks, Mira Rapp-Hooper

The article discusses the opportunity for China to emerge from the COVID-19 crisis as more of a global leader than it began. This opportunity for China is helped in part by America's recent hostility to multilateral institutions, bellicose positions on trade, and national security redefinition in terms of narrow, homeland defence, in addition to the U.S. President Trump's own disastrous denial of the COVID-19 threat, his rejection of scientific expertise and spreading of misinformation.

[China's Misplaced Pandemic Propaganda](#)

March 29, 2020, The Japan Times, Minxin Pei

The article discusses the propaganda machinery of the Chinese Communist Party with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic, and whether the trumpeting of declining infection rates and the effectiveness of centralised leadership will yield much benefit to China as compared to concrete action to help end the global health crisis caused by the COVID-19.

SOUTH WEST PACIFIC

10. *Official Sources and Press Releases*

[Australia's Statement on the U.S.-Taliban Agreement](#)

March 01, 2020, Website of the Foreign Minister of Australia

Australia welcomes the announcement that the United States and the Taliban have signed an agreement on steps toward a political settlement in Afghanistan, and that the Afghan government and U.S. representatives in Kabul have agreed on next steps.

[COVID-19 Assistance to Pacific and Timor-Leste](#)

March 03, 2020, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

COVID-19 is now affecting 75 countries, with the total number of cases over 90,000 and the global death toll at more than 3000. To date, there are no confirmed cases in the Pacific islands or Timor-Leste. However, Australia remains vigilant, especially as the possibility of a global pandemic is now widely acknowledged, and is working in partnership with neighbouring countries to keep the region safe from COVID-19.

[Australia and Fiji Strengthen Pacific Maritime Security](#)

March 06, 2020, Australian Department of Defence

As part of the Pacific Maritime Security Program, Australia has handed over the newest Guardian-class Patrol Boat to Fiji at a ceremony today at Austal Shipyard in Henderson, Western Australia. The Republic of Fiji Military Forces' RFNS Savenaca was received by the Prime Minister of Fiji Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama; Minister for Defence, National Security and Foreign Affairs Inia Seruiratu; and Commander of Fiji Military Forces Rear Admiral Viliame Naupoto.

[Joint Statement CDF & Secretary - ADF Confirms Two Cases of COVID-19](#)

March 08, 2020, Australian Department of Defence

Two members of the Australian Defence Force are confirmed to have contracted the COVID-19 virus. Having tested positive to COVID-19, they have been isolated. Efforts to trace any contact are focussed on the two officers travelling to a meeting at Defence Headquarters, Russell, ACT on February 28,

2020. Defence is cooperating with Health authorities to contact, isolate, test and support persons involved.

[Secretary Pompeo's Meeting with Australian Foreign Minister Payne](#)

March 11, 2020, U.S. Department of State

U.S. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo met Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne to discuss coordination of U.S. and Australia policy in the Indo-Pacific, including through the annual Australia-U.S. Ministerial Consultations (AUSMIN), as well as trilateral infrastructure cooperation with Japan, and Quad coordination with Japan and India.

[Commander Task Force 72 Concludes Exercise with Royal Australian Navy](#)

March 13, 2020, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command

Commander Task Force (CTF) 72 wrapped up its participation in the Australian Navy's Fleet Certification Period 2020. CTF-72 dispatched a P8-A Poseidon maritime patrol and reconnaissance aircraft from Patrol Squadron (VP) 45 to assist with the Royal Australian Navy's first major exercise of the year.

[Australia and Singapore Conclude Negotiations on Landmark Digital Economy Agreement](#)

March 23, 2020, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Australia and Singapore completed negotiations for the Digital Economy Agreement to harness digital transformation and technology to expand trade and economic ties in the region. Prime Ministers Scott Morrison and Lee Hsien Loong announced this via joint videoconference on the conclusion of negotiations.

11. *Media Discourse and Analyses*

[Making the Indo-Pacific](#)

March 02, 2020, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Graeme Dobell
The Indo-Pacific is an idea with a crucial purpose: avoid war. 'Indo-Pacific' has shifted from a way to look at the map to become an arena for mounting contests. The journey from construct to competition has been short and sharp. 'Asia-Pacific' was the understanding that dominated for roughly 30 years. In a swift remaking, Indo-Pacific has become the replacement vision for the U.S., Japan, India, Australia, the 10 ASEAN states of Southeast Asia, and major European powers.

[COVID-19 Shock will Cascade Through the Indo-Pacific Region](#)

March 03, 2020, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Rory Medcalf

The Covid-19 crisis heralds a decade of strategic volatility. Now that the virus has emerged from China, societies, governments and international institutions must brace for contagion of all kinds—health, environmental, financial, cyber and the risk of conflict. The crisis will shake up the Indo-Pacific region.

[No Surprises: 'Indo-Pacific Pivot' Invites Prying Eyes to our Backyard](#)

March 03, 2020, Defence Connect, Sandy Milne

Much has been made in recent years of the pivot away from the Asia-Pacific towards an Indo-Pacific worldview – which Professor Rory Medcalf characterised as “the logic that Australia’s region was changing to a two-ocean system”.

[Australia to Follow U.S. Withdrawal From Afghanistan](#)

March 07, 2020, The Diplomat, Joshua McDonald

The Australian government welcomed the announcement of a planned withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan and called on the Taliban to negotiate “with the Afghan government in good faith.” Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne and Defense Minister Linda Reynolds issued a joint statement earlier this week welcoming the agreement reached between the United States and the Taliban, which will see all American troops leave the war-ravaged country within 14 months.

[Coexistence or War in the Indo-Pacific](#)

March 09, 2020, The Strategist (ASPI), Graeme Dobell

The new Indo-Pacific that Rory Medcalf describes in his book, “Contest for the Indo-Pacific” will be built by pushback against China, the rise and strength of the rest, and American endurance. The recipe is for what he calls ‘a kind of full-spectrum staring contest’. The vision is of a multipolar Indo-Pacific where lots of the poles line up together.

[How Australia Can Deter China](#)

March 12, 2020, The Strategist (ASPI), Paul Dibb

Two important military developments could give China cause for concern. The first is the announcement by PM Scott Morrison of a \$1.1 billion upgrade to the Australian Air Force base at Tindal. The second is the announcement by

the U.S. State Department that Australia has been cleared to purchase 200 AGM-158C long-range anti-ship missiles, which can be fired from F/A-18 Super Hornets and F-35s.

[Anticipating Covid-19 in the Pacific](#)

March 16, 2020, The Interpreter, Alexandre Dayant and Jonathan Pryke

With the confirmation of a coronavirus case in French Polynesia, the Pacific has officially joined the pandemic. The Covid-19 crisis could have a dramatic impact on the small island states. Understanding and managing critical risks, as well as strengthening the resilience of these small and fragile economies should be key objectives of local public policies and development partners' efforts.

[Is Australia Trading Too Much with China?](#)

March 16, 2020, East Asia Forum, Shiro Armstrong

China accounts for close to a quarter of all of Australia's international trade, and over a third of its exports, including both goods and services. The article discusses the extent to which Australia's economy is dependent on China, which has come into focus as the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak was felt harshly in many sectors of the Australian economy.

[As the Coronavirus Spreads, RIMPAC Planners Face Grim Facts](#)

March 17, 2020, The Diplomat, John Letman

Warships, fighter jets, destroyers, and submarines will maneuver, and more than 25,000 military personnel will gather in Hawaii for the 27th Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) exercise, the world's largest international maritime exercises. But there is uncertainty regarding the event, since the spread of the COVID-19 global pandemic, forcing an ever-increasing number of cancellations, travel bans, and sweeping, unprecedented disruptions.

[Australia's Southeast Asian Step Down](#)

March 17, 2020, The Diplomat, Grant Wyeth

Australia's Pacific Step-Up strategy is currently considered the country's highest foreign policy priority. Historically the core component of Australia's strategic doctrine has been to prevent any unaligned powers from gaining significant influence in the South Pacific, and due to China's increased activity in the region Canberra now sees the need to fortify this objective. But

to do so Australia has made trade-offs, and it seems that Australia's Pacific Step-Up is being funded by a Southeast Asian step down.

[Inquiry Already Poses Questions for Pacific Step-Up](#)

March 17, 2020, Sandy Milne

The Pacific step-up is one of the best-documented policy swings of recent years in Australia's region, second only to the rise of China. A recent inquiry, commissioned into Australia's defence relationship with Pacific nations, shows all is not in order.

[ADF Suspends Non-Essential Personnel in Iraq and Afghanistan due to COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

March 24, 2020, The Times of India

The Australian Defence Force has decided to temporarily suspend non-essential personnel from Iraq and Afghanistan due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Defence Minister Linda Reynolds announced that all non-essential ADF members would temporarily be called back to the country's main Middle East base, and some withdrawn to Australia.

[COVID-19 Exposes Cracks in Pacific Regionalism](#)

March 24, 2020, East Asia Forum, Anna Powles and Jose Sousa-Santos

Responses to the COVID-19 pandemic have varied across the Pacific. States are implementing border protection policies like reducing inbound flights, banning cruise ships, restricting officials from overseas travel and closing border crossings. Australia and New Zealand are jointly funding the WHO's Pacific response plan at a cost of around US\$1 million. But there are differences in how the two are publicly responding to Pacific needs. New Zealand PM Jacinda Ardern stated that New Zealand has a duty of care to the Pacific Islands, and has even made updates available in nine Pacific languages. Meanwhile, Australia has come under fire for being missing in action and not providing public information about how it is protecting the region.

[COVID-19 Risks Stalling the Indonesia-Australia Economic Partnership](#)

March 26, 2020, The Diplomat, Kyle Springer

It has been a little over a year since Australia and Indonesia signed their landmark trade deal, the Indonesia-Australia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement. For a deal that was over 10 years in the making and

weathered challenges in bilateral relations, it was a historic result. However, government responses to the COVID-19 pandemic have curtailed many activities that underpin economic relations: international travel, face-to-face meetings, and large events. Policymakers and diplomats have duly turned their attention to managing the spread of the virus. The fallout from the pandemic threatens another critical phase of IA-CEPA: Its entry into force and implementation.



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

www.delhipolicygroup.org