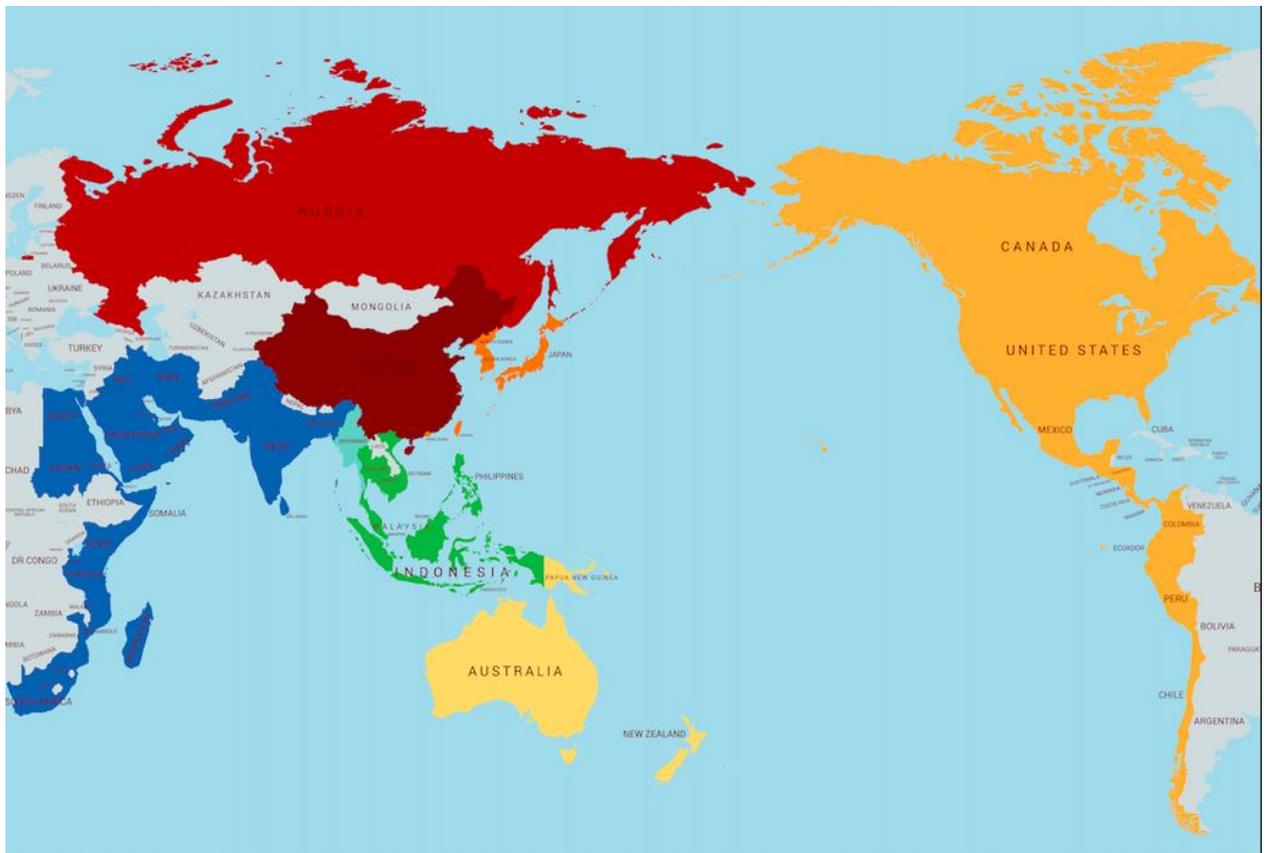




Delhi Policy Group

DPG INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR



Volume I, Issue 4 | April 30, 2020



DPG INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

Volume 1, Issue 4

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

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Contents

ABSTRACT	1
INDIAN OCEAN REGION	
South Asia.....	5
1. <i>Official Statements and Press Releases</i>	5
2. <i>Media Discourse and Analyses</i>	6
West Asia.....	13
3. <i>Official Statements and Press Releases</i>	13
4. <i>Media Discourse and Analyses</i>	14
East Africa.....	18
5. <i>Official Statements and Press Releases</i>	18
6. <i>Media Discourse and Analyses</i>	19
SOUTH EAST ASIA	
7. <i>Official Statements and Press Releases</i>	21
8. <i>Media Discourse and Analyses</i>	23
EAST ASIA	
9. <i>Official Statements and Press Releases</i>	29
10. <i>Media Discourse and Analyses</i>	30
SOUTH WEST PACIFIC	
11. <i>Official Sources and Press Releases</i>	35
12. <i>Media Discourse and Analyses</i>	36

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic continued its destructive march across the world. At the time of writing, the number of confirmed cases was approaching the 3.2 million mark, with nearly 228,000 fatalities globally. The number of US casualties alone stood at 61,472, above the 58,220 toll of the decade long Vietnam War. Societal and international lockdowns which have disrupted global supply chains will, according to IMF projections, result in the global economy contracting by 3% this year, the worst recession since the Great Depression. The International Labour Organisation has estimated that around 81% of the world's work force has been impacted. World trade, according to the WTO, will dip by anything from 8 - 20%, depending on the nature of post-pandemic recovery. International and domestic travel restrictions have decimated travel, tourism and related industries, apart from stranding students and tourists in foreign lands, with no means of support. Global oil prices have collapsed, with WTI oil futures dropping to (-) \$ 37.63 per barrel at one stage. The United Nations Secretary General, António Guterres, has described the situation as the biggest crisis to have hit the world after World War II. Predictions regarding the end of globalisation and talk of the 'Suez moment', the 'Pearl Harbour moment' and China's Chernobyl, are in the air.

Despite the severity of the global impact, the United Nations Security Council could not agree on a collective response. China, which presided over the UNSC in March, refused to entertain proposals for a discussion. When a discussion did take place on April 10, 2020 after China handed over the Presidency to the Dominican Republic, China claimed that the subject was outside the UNSC's mandate. The US and countries traditionally associated with it called for a probe into China's compliance with responsibilities under the WHO's International Health Regulations, with some sections even seeking reparations, while China on its part launched an all-out offensive, both to prevent any such outcome and to propagandise the extent of its "aid" to the world. The US withdrew its financial support to the WHO pending an investigation into its role, putting a major dent in the organisation's budget. Opposing US and Chinese outlooks resulted in insurmountable divisions in UN organisations, depriving them of the ability to deal effectively with the crisis. Similar divisions were visible in the EU and ASEAN.

China used preoccupations with the pandemic, including infections on board USN ships forward deployed in the Indo-Pacific, to extend its control over the South China Sea Islands and bring coercive pressure to bear on Taiwan. Exercises involving fighter aircraft off Taiwan to bring home the power differential between

the two, the deployment of its aircraft carrier Liaoning in the South China Sea, the sinking of a Vietnamese fishing boat, intimidation of Malaysia over the latter's exploration in oil blocks within its South China Sea waters, the creation of the new Nansha and Xisha administrative districts for the disputed Paracel and Spratly Islands and the renaming of over 80 features were among the coercive activities by China during the month. There was, however, a pushback, with USN warships making two transits of the Taiwan Straits and in company with an Australian warship, demonstrating the deterrent impact of US presence on China's attempts to create a *fait accompli* in the South China Sea. This added a substantive military element to the existing diplomatic, technological and informational domains already in play by the US to contest China's assertions.

China's aggression was evident on the diplomatic front too. Its Ambassador in Australia went public with a thinly veiled threat of stopping Australian beef and wine exports to China, as also Chinese students turning away from Australian education centres, if Australia continued with its anti-China policies. The emerging reality, however, was that there are increasing moves towards selective economic decoupling from China, notwithstanding the adverse impact on export-dependent economies. Japan announced incentives totalling 220 billion yen to companies that shift production back to Japan and 23.5 billion yen to companies 'seeking to move production to other countries.' India, meanwhile, amended its FDI rules to prevent hostile takeovers of Indian companies by Chinese businesses.

That the pandemic will change the nature of global interaction is certain. The ability of the US to sustain the competition, particularly if the economic impact of the pandemic results in significant reductions of budgetary support to the US military, remains in doubt. There is continuing speculation that the 'America - First' approach will increasingly shift the US focus to homeland defence, including greater focus on the cyber and space domains rather than land, sea and air; reduce reliance on forward deployment; and increase importance of military reserves. If this transpires, the nature of the Indo-Pacific will change beyond recognition.

In other developments, rumours about the demise of North Korea's Kim Jong- Un spread, particularly after he failed to attend his grandfather Kim Il Sung's birth commemoration on April 15, 2020 which is among the biggest events in North Korea's official calendar. South Korean officials, however, were confident that they knew where Kim was, and that he was merely protecting himself from the

pandemic. The visit by a specialist Chinese medical team to attend to Kim yielded no further information.

India experienced the largest number of cases and fatalities from the pandemic in the Indian Ocean, after Iran. Lockdowns across the country were extended until May 3, 2020. This did not, however, prevent India from stepping up its role as a first responder to COVID-19 in the region. Humanitarian aid was provided to neighbouring countries including Bangladesh, Nepal, Mauritius, Seychelles, Bhutan, Afghanistan and the Maldives. Reaffirming its Neighbourhood First policy, India was the first country to provide aid to Bangladesh in the form of surgical masks and head covers while also supplying medical aid to Bhutan. India's Ministry of External Affairs announced that the country has gifted 5 million tablets of hydroxychloroquine to neighbouring countries and countries in the IOR (Indian Ocean Region), Africa, Latin America, Central Asia, Eurasia and WANA (Western Asia and North Africa).

Singapore, which was initially touted as a pandemic success story due to its effective initial action, was struck by a second wave, with COVID-19 breaking out in the country's migrant worker population. Even though fatalities remained under control, infections increased from 1,000 at the end of March to nearly 16,000 at the end of April, making it the most affected ASEAN country. Vietnam on the other hand received plaudits for its response to COVID-19, with no fatalities among 270 affected (of which 222 have recovered). The country has eased lockdowns and is preparing to reopen businesses.

Meanwhile in Afghanistan, the Taliban released 20 Afghan security force prisoners after the government released 300 Taliban prisoners on the basis of factors such as age, health and the remaining length of their sentence. This development came after talks almost broke down earlier in the month over the prisoner exchange provision of the US-Taliban agreement. Despite this progress, hostilities continued and the Taliban also rejected the government's call for a ceasefire during the holy month of Ramadan so that the country could focus on COVID-19 response. Due to limited testing and a weak healthcare system, the accuracy of official statistics, which indicate 1939 infections and 60 deaths, is uncertain. Whether the peace process will survive remains to be seen.

Iran, in an action with significant geopolitical implications, launched its first military satellite using a three-stage launch vehicle and a mobile launcher on April 22, 2020. The satellite, which was placed in a 425 Km orbit, will reportedly provide

imagery, navigation and communication capability to the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. Concerns were expressed about the launch vehicle being modified into an ICBM. Meanwhile, Secretary of State Pompeo was reported to be considering a legal argument that the US remains a participant in the JCPOA (despite having pulled out of the deal in 2018), so as to pressurise the UN to extend or tighten sanctions against Iran.

As oil prices plunged to historic lows, producers and consumers were running out of storage space. Russia and Saudi Arabia reached agreement on April 9, 2020 to cut OPEC Plus oil production by 10 million bpd, far less than the 30 million bpd reduction in actual global consumption due to the pandemic. In Yemen, the Joint Forces Command announced a unilateral ceasefire extending to all ground, marine and air operations with effect from April 9, 2020. The ceasefire was reportedly initiated by Riyadh in order to curb the spread of COVID-19.

Official statements and pertinent analyses for the highlights mentioned above can be found in the relevant sections of this Indo-Pacific monitor.

INDIAN OCEAN REGION

South Asia

1. *Official Statements and Press Releases*

[World Bank Fast-Tracks \\$100 Million COVID-19 \(Coronavirus\) Support for Afghanistan](#)

April 02, 2020, The World Bank

The World Bank's Board of Executive Directors approved a \$100.4 million grant for the Afghanistan COVID-19 Emergency Response and Health Systems Preparedness Project to help Afghanistan take effective action to respond to the threat posed by COVID-19 and strengthen its public health preparedness.

[IMF Executive Board Approves a US\\$ 1.386 Billion Disbursement to Pakistan to Address the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

April 16, 2020, IMF

The Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved a purchase of Pakistan under the Rapid Financing Instrument (RFI) equivalent to SDR 1,015.5 million (US\$ 1.386 billion, 50 percent of quota) to meet the urgent balance of payment needs stemming from the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

[President Ashraf Ghani's Address on Precautionary Measures to Fight Corona and Deal with its Risks and Consequences](#)

April 18, 2020, President of Afghanistan

Text of President Ashraf Ghani's address to the Afghan People on precautionary measures to fight COVID.

[India Provides Medicine to the Afghan Ministry of Defence to Assist in the Treatment of Covid-19 Patients](#)

April 19, 2020, MoD Afghanistan

India has assisted the Afghan Ministry of Defense with two types of medicine to help with the treatment of Covid-19 patients. Indian Ambassador to Kabul, Mr. Vinay Kumar met with the Acting Defense Minister, General Asadullah

Khalid on April 19. He said that India is committed to continue assisting Afghanistan in various areas, including the peace process.

[World Bank Funds Transferred to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to Fight COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

April 20, 2020, World Bank

The World Bank announced that on 13 April 2020, US\$20 million has been transferred to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for the emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is the first part of a US\$100.4 million grant for the Afghanistan COVID-19 Emergency Response and Health Systems Preparedness Project that became effective on April 12, 2020.

[Pakistan Navy Conducts Live Weapons Firing in North Arabian Sea](#)

April 25, 2020, ISPR

The Pakistan Navy conducted live weapon firing of anti-ship missiles in the North Arabian Sea. Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Zafar Mahmood Abbasi witnessed the event along-with Commander Pakistan Fleet Vice Admiral Asif Khaliq and other senior naval officers. The weapons firing included anti-ship missiles fired from Destroyers and fixed and rotary wing aircraft.

2. Media Discourse and Analyses

[Beyond Covid, Australia's Big Stake in India's Military Reorganisation](#)

April 01, 2020, Lowy Institute, David Brewster

This article suggests that a consequence of COVID-19 could be Australia's greater reliance on regional security partners, such as Japan and India. This includes an ever-greater stake in the effectiveness of the Indian military, and especially its Navy.

[Looking West: Placing Seychelles Within the Indian Strategic Rim](#)

April 01, 2020, Observer Research Foundation, Sohini Nayak and Anasua Basu Ray Chaudhury

This article locates the Indo-Seychelles relationship within the Indo-Pacific maritime context, specifically with reference to India's definition of its vision.

[India's Navy to Begin Receiving 4 More P-8I Neptune Maritime Patrol Aircraft in May](#)

April 01, 2020, The Diplomat, Franz-Stefan Gady

The Indian Navy is slated to begin inducting four more Boeing P-8I Neptune advanced maritime patrol/anti-submarine warfare (ASW) aircraft this May, according to Navy sources.

[Russia Offers India Three Refurbished Kilo-Class Submarines](#)

April 03, 2020, The Diplomat, Franz-Stefan Gady

The Indian Navy is considering an offer by Russia's state-owned JSC United Shipbuilding Corporation (USC) for three refurbished *Kilo*-class submarines to augment its shortfall in diesel-electric submarines (SSKs)

[Pakistan Is Showing U.S. Enemies How to Defeat America](#)

April 03, 2020, The National Interest, Daniel Pearl

Simply put, the U.S. willingness to accept a flawed 'peace' deal with the Taliban has convinced Taliban sponsors within Pakistan's military and all-powerful intelligence service not only that Washington is weak and its concerns not worthy of serious attention, but also that Pakistan can gratuitously humiliate the United States as Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan pivots the country further into China's orbit.

[How Is COVID-19 Reshaping China-India Relations?](#)

April 04, 2020, Observer Research Foundation, Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan

This article holds that the global pandemic which has hit amid the 70th anniversary of the Indo-Chinese ties mark for relations and affected perceptions and realities in the ties.

[Peace Versus Democracy? Afghanistan between Government Crisis and a U.S. Peace Deal With the Taliban](#)

April 06, 2020, Pajhwok, Dr. Ellinor Zeino

With a US-Taliban peace agreement signed and NATO troops about to leave, Afghanistan is again at a decisive moment where it's political and social order and its role as a Western partner are renegotiated. The Taliban leadership seems ready to move from combat to politics. The current government crisis and hardened intra-Afghan conflicts put the pluralist-democratic achievements of the past twenty years at risk when going to the negotiation table with the Taliban.

[A Sovereign Iraq Is Key to Securing India's Energy Industry](#)

April 07, 2020, The Diplomat, Michael Haddad

This article suggests that given its commercial ties to Iraq, India's economy is prone to backlash from Iraq's political instability and so a sovereign Iraq is in the interest of the South Asian country.

[India Partially Lifts Ban on Export of Hydroxychloroquine to Help US, Others Fight Covid-19](#)

April 07, 2020, The Print

The Narendra Modi government has decided to partially lift the ban on the export of two key drugs, hydroxychloroquine and paracetamol, to clear "all existing orders."

[How the United States Should Deal With China in Pakistan](#)

April 08, 2020, Carnegie, Daniel Markey

By the end of 2019, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), China's high-profile development initiative in Pakistan, had shifted to a new phase. Whereas the first CPEC projects were mainly devoted to building new physical infrastructure, the next iteration of CPEC will tackle a wider array of projects intended to spur economic development and job creation.

[FATF Grants Unexpected Relief to Pakistan Amid Pandemic](#)

April 08, 2020, Dawn

Pakistan has been given a five-month grace period by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to submit its performance report on 13 outstanding benchmarks for foolproof arrangements against money laundering and terror financing.

[China's Strategic Assessment of Afghanistan](#)

April 08, 2020, Yun Sun

With the U.S. troop withdrawal in sight, Afghanistan's future seems less certain than ever. As a neighbouring state with significant interests at stake, how does China view and prepare for Afghanistan's future?

[India Despatches 10-tonne Consignment of Medicines to Sri Lanka](#)

April 08, 2020, Times of India

Following a request by Sri Lanka, India rushed a 10-tonne consignment of medicines to Colombo.

[Chabahar No Long a Priority for Modi Government as India-Iran Drift Apart: Op-Ed](#)

April 08, 2020, Eurasian Times, Eurasian Times Desk

This Op-Ed suggests that with the gradual straining of the relations between India and Iran raises doubts on India's foreign policy investment in Iran, specifically in the Chabahar port.

[Afghan Government Releases 100 Taliban Prisoners](#)

April 09, 2020, Dawn

The Afghan government released 100 low-risk Taliban prisoners on April 09. The Taliban, however, said they have yet to verify if those released were on the list they handed over to Washington during negotiations. The prisoner release is a critical first step to intra-Afghan negotiations aimed at bringing an end to decades of war in Afghanistan. The U.S.-Taliban deal signed in February also calls for the Taliban to free 1,000 government personnel they hold hostage.

[Maldives: COVID-19 Brings Out Best Again in India Relations](#)

April 09, 2020, Observer Research Foundation, N. Sathiyamoorthy

Maldives was the first South Asian nation struck by COVID. This article highlights the steps taken by India to provide assistance and the competing actions by China in this regard.

[Significance of Maldives to India](#)

April 09, 2020, National Maritime Foundation, Ritika V. Kapoor

This article details Maldives' geopolitical importance to India and the relationship between the two partners.

[Covid-19 and Bangladesh: Looming Crisis in the Horizon](#)

April 09, 2020, Manohar Parrikar IDSA, Smruti S. Pattanaik

This article outlines the threats and challenges COVID-19 poses to Bangladesh.

[Mauritius: Old and New Challenges in a Post-Pandemic World](#)

April 10, 2020, Observer Research Foundation, Vinitha Revi

This article highlights the relationship between India and Mauritius and observes that in the post-COVID world, as governments will be turning

inwards, both politically and economically, India must map out a long-term perspective while engaging with neighbours.

[Delivery of Rafale Fighters to India Likely Delayed Due COVID-19](#)

April 15, 2020, The Diplomat, Franz-Stefan Gady

The delivery of the first batch of Rafale fighter jets to the Indian Air Force will likely be delayed by three months, according to Indian defence sources.

[Covid19: G20 Leaders Reclaim Power from Bureaucrats – and China](#)

April 17, 2020, Observer Research Foundation, Gautam Chikermane

This article conceptualises a new post COVID-19 world order, with the G20 playing a dominant role in the emerging political leadership.

[Turkey and Pakistan: A Special Relationship?](#)

April 17, 2020, Marisa R. Lino, IISS

The recent discussion of an agreement to grant dual citizenship to Turks and Pakistanis – which may or may not ever come to fruition – is definitely a sign of a special relationship.

[To Save Afghan Peace Deal, U.S. May Scale Back C.I.A. Presence](#)

April 17, 2020, The New York Times

The United States is considering pulling back front-line C.I.A. personnel from bases in Afghanistan as part of the American government's effort to further reduce violence in the country in the wake of its landmark peace agreement with the Taliban.

[Economic Vulnerabilities and Power Shifts in a Post-Covid19 world](#)

April 18, 2020, Observer Research Foundation, Dhruva Jaishankar

This article explores the impact of COVID on world economies and steps to be taken by India to deal with the economic disruption.

[COVID19: An Opportunity and Challenge for 'Neighbourhood First' Policy](#)

April 18, 2020, Observer Research Foundation, N. Sathiya Moorthy

This article holds that India has done well with its neighbours by not giving up on them in the hour of crisis. Even while the nation was faced with exigencies of every kind, New Delhi has repeatedly dispatched COVID19-related medical assistance to individual nations that their governments had sought from India.

[COVID-19 Response: Beijing Consensus versus New Delhi Model](#)

April 21, 2020, Delhi Policy Group, Mohit Mussadi and Arun Sahgal

In this Policy Brief, the authors examine two very different responses to the pandemic: one by China, a single party authoritarian state, attempting to mask its initial subterfuge and concealment by showcasing the success of its rigorous containment strategies and demanding accolades for its generous Covid-19 assistance; and the other by India, a democratic state of similar size that has chosen to base its response on the principles of openness, transparency and human values.

[India Fires a Salvo at China](#)

April 22, 2020, Observer Research Foundation, Harsh V. Pant

This article assesses New Delhi's decision to amend its extant FDI policy to make prior governmental approval mandatory for foreign investments from countries that share land borders with India to curb "opportunistic takeovers" of domestic firms.

[Growing Salience of the Indian Ocean Commission: What has Changed for India as an Observer?](#)

April 22, 2020, National Maritime Foundation, Somen Banerjee

This article analyses the connotations and opportunities attached with India's status as an observer in the Indian Ocean Commission

[India's Indian Ocean Diplomacy in the COVID-19 Crisis](#)

April 22, 2020, The Diplomat, Niranjana Marjani

This article claims that India's assistance in the coronavirus crisis could help cement its leadership in the Indian Ocean Region.

[Failing COVID-19 Response in Pakistan and Afghanistan](#)

April 24, 2020, Delhi Policy Group, Brig. Arun Sahgal (Retd) and Shreyas Deshmukh

The COVID-19 pandemic is testing the resolve of all nation states and revealing their true national character. Countries, both rich and poor, have been fighting the pandemic to the best of their ability and in consonance with their political philosophy and health infrastructure. However, there are also certain nations where deep fault lines are being exposed, Pakistan and

Afghanistan among them, where political gamesmanship prevails and the security establishment is watching from the sidelines.

[Trump Tells Advisers U.S. Should Pull Troops as Afghanistan COVID-19 Outbreak Looms](#)

April 27, 2020, NBC News

President Donald Trump has pushed his military and national security advisers to pull all U.S. troops out of Afghanistan amid concerns about a major coronavirus outbreak in the war-torn country. His renewed push to withdraw all of them has been spurred by the convergence of his concern that coronavirus poses a force protection issue for thousands of U.S. troops in Afghanistan and his impatience with halting progress of the Taliban peace deal.

[UN finds 'disturbing increase in violence' following U.S.-Taliban deal](#)

April 27, 2020, FDD's Long War Journal

There was a "disturbing increase in violence" in Afghanistan following the signing of a withdrawal agreement between the U.S. and Taliban on Feb. 29, according to a new report by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. Overall, the number of civilian casualties was 29% lower during the first quarter of 2020, as compared to the same timeframe last year. But this dip in casualties, caused in part by a brief "reduction in violence" before the U.S.-Taliban withdrawal accord was signed in Doha in late February, didn't hold throughout March.

[US-India Cooperation Against COVID-19](#)

April 27, 2020, Observer Research Foundation, Kashish Parpiani and Dhriti Kamdar

This article explores the opportunities of cooperation between the U.S. and India during the COVID-19 pandemic and maintains that the two countries have a chance to build a positive-sum consensus.

[Containing COVID-19 in Bangladesh](#)

April 28, 2020, East Asia Forum, Asad Islam, Gaurav Datt and Sisira Jayasuriya

This article highlights COVID-19's impact on health and the economy in Bangladesh and makes policy suggestions to combat the crisis.

[America's Afghan Mission has been Overtaken by Pandemic](#)

April 28, 2020, War on Rocks

COVID-19 is only going to throw gasoline on an already raging fire. At present, Afghanistan's legitimate government is on the verge of infighting, with Taliban attacks escalating and Afghan forces attrited, defecting, and in retreat. Meanwhile, insider attacks against Afghans and Americans are spiking among Afghan security forces. Ironically, Afghan refugees in COVID-devastated Iran are now re-entering an unprepared Afghanistan en-masse. Afghanistan has few recorded COVID-19 cases, but this is due to poor testing; half the country may already be infected.

West Asia

3. *Official Statements and Press Releases*

[Statement By the Special Envoy For Yemen On the Unilateral Ceasefire By the Joint Forces Command](#)

April 08, 2020, Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary General for Yemen

The Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, Martin Griffiths, welcomes the announcement by the Joint Forces Command of a two-week unilateral ceasefire covering all ground, maritime and air operations in Yemen starting 9 April. The announcement comes in support of the UN's peace process and the UN Secretary-General's call for a nationwide ceasefire in order to avert the grave risks of a COVID-19 outbreak.

[IRGC Hails Successful Launching of Iran's 1st Military Satellite](#)

April 22, 2020, Islamic Republic News Agency

Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Baqeri in a message on April 22 congratulated his team for the successful launching of Noor-1 military satellite in earth orbit. The launching of the Noor-1 satellite is regarded as a blessed dawn for boosting defence power by joining space and promoting science and deterrence power in line with maintaining self-sufficiency.

[Iran's Foreign Ministry Spokesman Denounces US Stance on Noor Military Satellite Launch](#)

April 24, 2020, Iran Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman has denounced Washington's recent stance on the successful launch of its Noor satellite into space, calling them the US regime's interference in the Islamic Republic's internal affairs.

[Iran's Foreign Ministry Spokesman Dismisses UK, French Stances on Satellite Launch](#)

April 24, 2020, Iran Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran has rejected the stances adopted by France and the UK on the launch of Iranian homegrown Noor satellite as a result of double standards and accepting the US bullying policies.

4. *Media Discourse and Analyses*

[The Saudi-Russia Oil Fight is the Last Thing the Economy Needs in a Pandemic](#)

April 01, 2020, The Hill, Simon Henderson

With absence of at least a loose framework for sales of a commodity such as oil can lead to wide fluctuations in price, to the detriment of consumers and producers alike.

[China and COVID-19: From Crisis to Opportunity](#)

April 01, 2020, Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), Oded Eran and Galia Lavi

The Chinese response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been reflected in varying intensities in medical, economic, and public relations terms in accordance with the spread of the virus. After China managed to gain control over the domestic outbreak, the Chinese government directed significant attention to the international arena in an effort to bolster China's image as a responsible global power, and to take advantage of the infection's outbreak around the world in order to promote its ideas and influence.

[Iran Warns US after Patriot Missile Deployment to Iraq](#)

April 01, 2020, Al Jazeera

Iran warned the United States it is leading the Middle East to disaster amid the coronavirus pandemic after reports that Patriot air defence missiles were deployed to Iraq.

[Iraq's Oil Income Falls by 40 Percent in March](#)

April 02, 2020, ET Energy World

Iraq's crude oil income fell by 40 percent last month, the government announced, as demand plummets amid the global coronavirus pandemic and a pricing war between Russia and Saudi Arabia.

[US Fears Large-scale Attacks against American Troops in Iraq](#)

April 03, 2020, Financial Times

US officials are increasingly concerned that Iran and its proxies are planning larger-scale attacks against American forces in Iraq as militant groups backed by the Islamic republic have stepped up their assaults in recent weeks.

[Iranian Navy Building New Submarines and a 6,000-Ton Destroyer](#)

April 04, 2020, Forbes, H I Sutton

The Iranian Navy's latest homegrown warship projects include "giant submarines" and a large destroyer, Rear Admiral Amir Rastegari, Head of the Iranian Defense Ministry's Marine Industries Organization, said in a recent interview with Iranian media.

[China Prepares To Close 'Oil Deal of A Lifetime' In Iraq](#)

April 04, 2020, Oilprice.com, Simon Watkins

An engineering contract worth US\$203.5 million in Iraq's supergiant oil field, Majnoon, was awarded to the little known 'China Petroleum Engineering & Construction Corp (CPECC)'. With the U.S.' focus increasingly on fire-fighting the coronavirus outbreak at home, Beijing has good reason to believe that it largely has a clear run in Iraq, provided it does not stick it too much in the U.S.' craw.

[Trump Considers a Cameo Role in Saudi-Russia Oil Price Drama](#)

April 06, 2020, The Hill, Simon Henderson

The oil price war between Russia and Saudi Arabia is about who can survive longest while selling oil cheaply – so cheaply that it is barely profitable. Saudi

oil has some of the lowest production costs in the world, but the kingdom needs a high price to meet its budget requirements, which is less of a problem for Russia. Riyadh has pruned budgets but this also means delaying MbS's signature Vision 2030 program for economic transformation.

[The Impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic on the Iranian Economy](#)

April 07, 2020, Institute for National Security Studies, Raz Zimmat and Tomar Fadlon

The outbreak of the coronavirus dealt a harsh blow to the Iranian economy, which had already fallen to a record low point in the wake of economic sanctions imposed by the United States and the decline of oil prices. The economic impact of the pandemic is particularly severe because it harms sectors that were less affected by the sanctions.

[Middle East Set for Sharp Economic Fall Due To Covid-19 "Great Lockdown" Says IMF](#)

April 14, 2020, Forbes

Middle East economies are set to suffer a huge economic hit this year because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The situation is being exacerbated by domestic political turmoil and the collapse in oil prices, but economists say some countries look far more resilient than others.

[Opposing an IMF Loan to Iran: Not an Outlier, Not a Barrier to Aid](#)

April 14, 2020, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Patrick Clawson
Washington often objects to loans that it deems insufficiently rigorous, but its blocking attempts usually fail—and Iran has no need for the IMF funds anyway.

[The Pandemic's Implications for Iran's Nuclear Program](#)

April 14, 2020, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Omer Carmi

Although the leadership in Tehran seems preoccupied with the coronavirus, the international community must still watch out for any attempts to exploit the situation via clandestine nuclear activities.

[Pandemic Could Change Iran's Model of Supreme Leadership Forever](#)

April 17, 2020, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Mehdi Khalaji

With the IRGC spearheading the containment effort, the clergy shooting itself in the foot, and the regime widening its cyber-repression, Iran is ripe for an

evolution in which Khamenei or his successor give way to de facto military rule.

[Pompeo Calls on the UN to Extend Iran Arms Embargo](#)

April 19, 2020, Radio Farda

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has urged the United Nations Security Council to extend the international arms embargo on Iran, set to expire in October, 2020.

[Trump Says US Will 'Destroy' Iranian Gunboats that Harass American Ships](#)

April 22, 2020, CNBC

President Trump warned that the United States would destroy Iranian gunboats that harass American ships at sea.

[Iran's Evolving Approach to Asymmetric Naval Warfare: Strategy and Capabilities in the Persian Gulf](#)

April 22, 2020, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Farzin Nadimi

In an April 22 tweet, President Trump spoke of instructing the U.S. Navy to destroy any Iranian gunboats that "harass American ships at sea." Aside from whether it departed from existing U.S. rules of engagement, the statement highlighted a persistent reality: the military threat posed by Iranian forces in the Persian Gulf.

[The World and the Middle East in 2021: Four Scenarios](#)

April 22, 2020, Institute for National Security Studies, Itai Brun

What will the world look like one year from now, and how will the corona pandemic affect the Middle East? This article presents four possible scenarios.

[A Gloomy Forecast for the Middle East following the Coronavirus Crisis](#)

April 22, 2020, Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), Oded Eran

The coronavirus crisis is in effect the new calamity following the decade of the "Arab Spring," which severely undermined political and economic stability in a number of countries in the region and left 10 million refugees, mainly in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey.

[Coronavirus Nightmare for West Asia](#)

April 27, 2020, Delhi Policy Group, Sanket Joshi

COVID-19 is wreaking havoc in West Asia. The scenario is exacerbated by falling oil prices, with collapsing demand and a continuing glut in supply depriving countries of the mainstay of their economies. This paper analyses the economic and geopolitical impact of the coronavirus and falling oil prices on the nations in West Asia and its broader regional consequences.

[Iran Puts First Spy Satellite into Orbit. Here's Why Israel Should Worry](#)

April 27, 2020. Haaretz, Yossi Melman

It is not just the successful launch that is worrying. It is how they did it. The launcher was a mobile Shahab-3 adapted for a longer rocket and there was no launch umbilical tower, thus setting this apart from Iran's previous "civilian" launches.

[Iran's Satellite Launch Carries More Political Weight than Military Significance](#)

April 28, 2020, Atlantic Council, Sina Azodi

The placing of Noor in a 425 km orbit for the first time gives Iran indigenous satellite reconnaissance, navigation and communication capability. The launch vehicle, which for the first time used a solid propellant stage, could be used to develop ICBM capability. The main gain was, however, assessed as political rather than military.

East Africa

5. *Official Statements and Press Releases*

[African Union Bureau of Heads of State and Government Teleconference Meeting](#)

April 03, 2020, South African Department of International Relations & Cooperation

President Cyril Ramaphosa of the Republic of South Africa, and Chairperson of the African Union convened a second and follow-up teleconference meeting of the AU Bureau of Heads of State and Government, on April 03, 2020, to discuss the African response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

6. *Media Discourse and Analyses*

[COVID19: An African Perspective](#)

March 31, 2020, Observer Research Foundation, Malang N Fofana

This article examines COVID-19's effect on Africa and provides recommendations to the African governments and people to tackle the pandemic.

[Africa as an Export Market: An Analysis of Chinese and Indian Pharmaceutical Industry](#)

April 01, 2020, Observer Research Foundation, Kriti Kapur and Oommen C Kurian

This article evaluates India and China's pharmaceutical trade and Africa as a market for the export of pharmaceuticals.

[Covid-19: China's Donation Diplomacy Towards Africa Turns into a PR Disaster](#)

April 13, 2020, Observer Research Foundation, Abhishek Mishra

With the maltreatment of the African community in China amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, relations between China and Africa are undergoing a considerable amount of strain.

[East Africa and Kenya under the COVID19 Emergency](#)

April 20, 2020, Observer Research Foundation, Kwame Owino

This article evaluates the effect of COVID-19 on the East African Community (EAC-5) and deduces that this pandemic has accidentally exposed the fragility of the EAC countries based on their debt servicing obligations and limited state capacity to absorb shocks and the structure of their economies.

[COVID-19- Africa the Next Battle Ground](#)

April 24, 2020, Vivekananda International Foundation. Anil Triguyanat

This article talks about Africa's vulnerability to COVID-19 and explores opportunities for India to aid the region in its response.

[COVID-19 in South Africa: When it Rains, it Pours](#)

April 28, 2020, Observer Research Foundation, Sewagodimo Matlapeng and Belardina Zunguza

This article assesses South Africa's response to COVID-19 and the effectiveness of the measures undertaken by the country.

SOUTH EAST ASIA

7. *Official Statements and Press Releases*

[ASEAN Health Ministers Enhance Cooperation in Fighting COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

April 07, 2020, ASEAN

Health Ministers of the ASEAN nations convened through a video conference to intensify regional cooperation with various stakeholders as member states step-up measures to control the spread and mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

[Philippines Statement on the Sinking of a Vietnamese Fishing Vessel in the South China Sea](#)

April 08, 2020, Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs

The Philippines expressed deep concern over the reported sinking on April 03 of a Vietnamese fishing vessel in the South China Sea and noted that such incidents undermine the potential of a genuinely deep and trusting regional relationship between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and China.

[Statement on Sinking of Vietnamese Fishing Vessel in the South China Sea](#)

April 08, 2020, Department of Foreign Affairs, Philippines

Philippine Statement expressing deep concern over the reported sinking on April 03, 2020, of a Vietnamese fishing vessel in the South China Sea and noting that such incidents undermine the potential of a genuinely deep and trusting relationship between ASEAN and China

[Intervention by PM Lee Hsein Loong at the Special ASEAN Summit on COVID-19](#)

April 14, 2020, Prime Minister's Office, Singapore

PM Lee Hsien suggests three ways for ASEAN to respond to the Covid-19 crisis: by sharing information, strategies and experiences; by keeping trading routes and supply lines open, especially for essential goods such as medical supplies and food; and third by building resilience to deal with future economic shocks.

[Declaration of the Special ASEAN Summit on Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)

April 14, 2020, ASEAN Secretariat

Text of Declaration of the Special ASEAN Summit on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19).

[UNGA Resolution on COVID – 19 – Op Ed](#)

April 16, 2020, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Singapore

Text of Op Ed jointly submitted by Foreign Ministers of Ghana, Indonesia, Liechtenstein, Norway, Singapore and Switzerland calling for global solidarity and support to the UN and WHO in the fight against COVID

[Declaration of the Ministerial Coordination Group on COVID-19 on Maintaining Essential Global Links](#)

April 18, 2020, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Singapore

Text of Declaration on Maintaining Essential Global Links by participating countries of the Ministerial Coordination Group on COVID-19 on April 17, 2020

[Remarks by the Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Viet Nam Regarding the 18 April 2020 announcement by China on the establishment of the so-called “Xisha district” \(the Hoàng Sa Islands of Viet Nam\) and “Nansha district” \(the Trường Sa Islands of Viet Nam\) under “Sansha city”](#)

April 18, 2020, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Vietnam

Text of protest by Vietnam on China’s declaration of April 18, 2020 establishing the “Xisha District” and “Nansha District” in the Hoang Sa (Paracel) and Truong Sa (Spratly) Islands of Vietnam.

[Vietnam Prime Minister Talks of Special ASEAN and ASEAN + 3 Summits on COVID-19](#)

April 21, 2020, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Vietnam

Media statement by Vietnam’s MFA on PM Nguyen Xuan Phuc’s interview on the outcomes of the two summits.

[Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson's Press Statement Regarding a Diplomatic Note Sent by Vietnam's Permanent Mission to the UN](#)

April 21, 2020, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China

Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Geng Shuang addressed the press and acknowledged Vietnam's claims over its Xisha Islands and Nansha Islands as illegal. He said that China's Permanent Mission to the UN was instructed to send a diplomatic note to the UN Secretary-General reiterating China's solemn position and expressing objection to Vietnam's illegal claim and erroneous view.

8. *Media Discourse and Analyses*

[Indonesia re-thinks USD900 million submarine contract with South Korea](#)

April 01, 2020, Jane's Navy International, Ridzwan Rahmat

Indonesia's defence planners have convened a meeting to discuss the country's KRW1.162 trillion (USD900 million) order for a second batch of three diesel-electric submarines (SSKs) with South Korea and are considering several options for the programme, including contract termination.

[USS Gabrielle Giffords patrols in the South China Sea](#)

April 03, 2020, Defence Blog

The U.S. Navy has announced that Independence-variant littoral combat ship USS Gabrielle Giffords (LCS10) is patrolling the South China Sea while deployed to the 7th Fleet area of responsibility.

[South China Sea and the Coronavirus: New Vietnam-China Incident Spotlights Old Realities](#)

April 06, 2020, The Diplomat, Prashanth Parameswaran

The sinking of a Vietnamese vessel last week is a tangible remainder of the need to pay attention to the South China Sea flashpoint even amid the focus on COVID-19.

[Water Wars: Coronavirus Spreads Risk of Conflict Around the South China Sea](#)

April 07, 2020, Lawfare, Sean Quirk

Washington and Beijing are using their militaries to signal that neither is letting down its guard on Taiwan and the South China Sea during the

coronavirus pandemic. Soon after Taiwan's Vice President-Elect William Lai Ching-te visited the United States in February, China's military aircraft crossed the dividing line in the Taiwan Strait into Taiwan's airspace two days in a row. Washington and Beijing are using their militaries to signal that neither is letting down its guard on Taiwan and the South China Sea during the coronavirus pandemic.

[New South China Sea Fishing Vessel Sinking: Philippines Backs Vietnam Amid China Standoff](#)

April 08, 2020, The Diplomat

The Philippines has expressed solidarity with Vietnam after the alleged ramming and sinking of a Vietnamese fishing boat by a Chinese coast guard ship.

[Could China's Aggression in the South China Sea Boost U.S.-Vietnam Relations?](#)

April 08, 2020, WPR, Benjamin Wilhelm

Vietnam lodged an official protest with China after a Chinese coast guard ship collided with a Vietnamese fishing boat near the disputed Paracel Islands in the South China Sea on Thursday. Hanoi accused the Chinese ship of ramming and sinking the Vietnamese boat before capturing and detaining its crew of eight fishermen on a nearby island. Vietnamese state media reported that two other Vietnamese fishing boats attempted to rescue them, but were also detained.

[China-Vietnam Fishing Boat Incident: US State Department Gets It Wrong – Analysis](#)

April 09, 2020, Eurasia Review, Mark J. Valencia

The US State Department regularly criticises China for its policy and behavior in the South China Sea. Usually, its statements contain elements of truth interspersed with the usual criticism of China. However the April 06 statement entitled "PRC reported sinking of a Vietnamese fishing vessel in the South China Sea" stands out because of its false and unsupported accusations as well as its hypocrisy.

[Continuing Geopolitical Games in the South China Sea](#)

April 10, 2020, Delhi Policy Group, Lalit Kapur and Anushka Nair

This article examines the geopolitical implications of the sinking of a Vietnamese fishing boat in a collision with a Chinese Coast Guard vessel off the Paracel Islands on April 02, 2020 and points out inconsistencies in official statements and media hype created by all concerned sides.

[What the South China Sea Tells Us About the New Geopolitics of Southeast Asia](#)

April 13, 2020, ASEAN Today, Editorial

This article postulates that as China projects its power in the South China Sea amid the COVID-19 pandemic, ASEAN governments will see their economies and development further defined by how they embrace or contest Beijing's agenda.

[How Will Thailand's Future Military Planning Shift Amid its Coronavirus Challenge?](#)

April 13, 2020, The Diplomat, Prashanth Parameswaran

A closer look at suggestions that COVID-19 could affect the country's future defense outlook.

[The China-Myanmar Economic Corridor: Delays Ahead](#)

April 13, 2020, The Jamestown Foundation, Sudha Ramachandran

Although no new deals were struck during the People's Republic of China (PRC) President Xi Jinping's trip to Myanmar on January 17 and 18, the visit was significant for several reasons.

[COVID-19 Can't Freeze Vietnamese Geopolitics Forever](#)

April 16, 2020, East Asia Forum, Thuy T Do

This article states that despite Southeast Asia's preoccupation with the COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical factors in the South China Sea retain a significant amount of relevance and Vietnam will have to prepare to tackle geopolitical challenges eventually.

[At a Time of Crisis, ASEAN Centrality Really Matters](#)

April 17, 2020, The Diplomat, Rifki Dermawan

This article holds that amid the COVID-19 pandemic, multilateral cooperation as seen within ASEAN is necessary to share best practices and provide support.

[Why Philippine Solidarity with Vietnam in South China Sea Fishing Row Matters](#)

April 17, 2020, Eurasia Review, Lucio Blanco Pitlo III

This article analyses the significance of the Philippines showing solidarity with Vietnam after a Chinese coast guard vessel sunk a Vietnamese fishing boat near Paracel Islands.

[Maritime Flashpoints and the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

April 20, 2020, The Diplomat, Sumathy Permal

This article explores how Southeast Asian states have to not only deal with a global health crisis but also step up defence of their South China Sea claims simultaneously.

[Navy Slashes 33% Of Budget, Two Subs On Hold](#)

April 18, 2020, Bangkok Post

The Royal Thai Navy has cut its 2020 budget by 33%, or 4.1 billion baht, of its unspent total so the money can be used to fight the coronavirus outbreak and on rehabilitation.

[China Lays Ever Larger Claim to South China Sea](#)

April 21, 2020, Asia Times, Richard Javad Heydarian

China announces new administrative districts with the US in retreat in contested waterways but signs of overreach are apparent.

[Indonesia Discovers New Oil Reserves](#)

April 21, 2020, China.org.cn

Indonesia's state-owned oil company Pertamina Hulu Energi (PHE) through its subsidiary Pertamina Hulu Energi Offshore Northwest Java (PHE ONWJ) has discovered oil reserves from drilling activities at its FK-1 well.

[Making Sense of China's Latest Bid to Administer Sovereignty in the South China Sea](#)

By April 21, 2020, The Diplomat, Ankit Panda

New additions to 'Sansha' City and a naming exercise for submerged features are the latest in Beijing's sovereignty-seeking toolkit.

[The Indo-Pacific Outlook: a New Lens For ASEAN](#)

April 20, 2020, East Asia Forum, Simon Tay and Jessica Wau

With China–US tensions and geopolitical turbulence increasing, many in the Asia-Pacific have looked at how ASEAN would respond to remain united, central and relevant. The ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) report is a response to the rising contention between great powers as well as a lens for ASEAN’s future priorities.

[COVID-19 And The South China Sea](#)

April 22, 2020, CFR, Joshua Kurlantzick

The rapid spread of COVID-19 in Southeast Asia, where the pandemic recently has hit Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines (as well as other regional states like Singapore) hard, has not stopped jockeying over the South China Sea.

[Philippines Protests China’s Creation of New Districts In South China Sea](#)

April 22, 2020, CNN Philippines

The Philippines has filed a diplomatic protest over China’s creation of new districts in what it claims to be its territory, Foreign Affairs Teodoro “Teddyboy” Locsin Jr.said.

[Beijing Moves To Strengthen Its Hold On Disputed Islands In The South China Sea](#)

April 23, 2020, Business Insider

Beijing has moved to tighten its grip over the South China Sea by setting up new administrative districts in the disputed waters. The two new districts will be under the authority of the local government in Sansha, a city in the southern island of Hainan.

[Malaysia Calls For Peaceful End To Months-Long South China Sea Standoff](#)

April 23, 2020, Reuters

Malaysia called for disputes over the South China Sea to be resolved by peaceful means, amid a standoff between Chinese and Malaysian vessels that a U.S. think tank said had been going on for months.

[China Closes Border Crossing With Myanmar Amid Fighting](#)

April 24, 2020, The Economic Times

China closed a border crossing with Myanmar on Friday after fighting in that nation spilled into a Chinese province and damaged buildings. State broadcaster CCTV said vehicles, a school and other buildings in Yunnan province were damaged by bullets, artillery fire and flames from an exploding gas station in Myanmar.

[5-Nation Face-Off In High-Seas Energy Tussle Off Malaysia](#)

April 25, 2020, The Straits Times

Malaysia's push to explore energy blocks off its coast has turned into a five-nation face-off involving American and Chinese warships, raising the risk of a direct confrontation as broader tensions mount between the world's biggest economies.

[Philippines Urged To Go On Joint Patrols With Malaysia, Vietnam To Show United Front Vs China](#)

April 27, 2020, Inquirer.net

The Philippines should carry out joint patrols with Malaysia and Vietnam in the South China Sea to push back against China, which seemed to be using the COVID-19 pandemic as a smokescreen for its continued aggression in the disputed waters, according to retired Senior Associate Supreme Court Justice Antonio Carpio.

[USS Bunker Hill Conducts 2nd South China Sea Freedom of Navigation Operation](#)

April 29, 2020, USNI.org

Guided-missile cruiser USS Bunker Hill (CG-52) conducted a freedom of navigation operation through the Spratly Island chain in the South China Sea, the U.S. 7th Fleet announced.

EAST ASIA

9. *Official Statements and Press Releases*

[U.S Navy, Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force Operate Together in Andaman Sea](#)

April 06, 2020, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command

The Independence-variant littoral combat ship USS Gabrielle Giffords (LCS 10) and the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force Akizuki-class destroyer JS Teruzuki (DD 116) conducted exercises together while sailing through the Andaman Sea on April 02.

[MIKTA Countries Adopt Foreign Ministers' Joint Statement on COVID-19 and Global Health](#)

April 10, 2020, South Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The Foreign Ministers of the five MIKTA countries - South Korea, Mexico, Indonesia, Turkey and Australia expressed solidarity as a group to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic as well as their commitment to joining global policy coordination.

[America, Akebono Sail Together in East China Sea](#)

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

Amphibious assault ship USS America, with the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit joined Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force Murasame class destroyer JS Akebono for a series of collaborative events while sailing in the Philippine Sea and East China Sea from April 09-11.

[The United States Issues an Advisory on North Korean Cyber Threats](#)

April 15, 2020, U.S. Department of State

On April 15, the U.S. Departments of State, Homeland Security, and Treasury, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation issued an advisory to raise the awareness of the cyber threat posed by North Korea highlighting North Korea's malicious cyber activities around the world and recommended measures to counter the cyber threat.

[Open Letter from the Spokeswoman for the Chinese embassy in Germany to the BILD Editor-in-Chief](#)

April 15, 2020, Embassy of China in Germany

Text from an open letter written by a Chinese Embassy Spokeswoman to the Editor-in-Chief of German newspaper Bild, alleging that the newspaper's reporting about China's role in the spread of COVID-19 and its legal responsibility towards Germany was inaccurate, and unfairly fuelled nationalism, prejudice and xenophobia against China.

[Statement by the Spokeswoman for the Chinese Embassy in Germany on the Open Letter from the BILD Editor-inChief on April 17](#)

April 17, 2020, Embassy of China in Germany

The Spokeswoman of the Chinese Embassy in Germany responded to a letter from the Editor-inChief of German newspaper Bild, stating that China has acted in an open, transparent, and responsible manner since the outbreak of COVID-19, and that the Chinese government gives top priority to public health and safety. The newspaper was accused of politicising the epidemic and inciting anti-China sentiments.

[U.S., Japan Bomber-fighter Integration Demonstrates Dynamic Force Employment](#)

April 22, 2020, US Indo-Pacific Command

A U.S. Air Force B-1B Lancer bomber flew from the continental United States and integrated with the Japan Air Self Defense Force to conduct bilateral and theater familiarisation training near Japan. The B-1 flew a 30-hour round-trip sortie from Ellsworth Air Force Base, S.D., to the Indo-Pacific and teamed up with six U.S. Air Force F-16 Fighting Falcons, seven JASDF F-2s and eight JASDF F-15s over Draughton Range near Misawa as part of a joint U.S. Indo-Pacific Command - U.S. Strategic Command Bomber Task Force mission.

10. Media Discourse and Analyses

[The U.S., China and Asia After the Pandemic: More, Not Less, Tension](#)

April 01, 2020, East Asia Forum, Ryan Hass and Kevin Dong

Few events of the past century have emphasised the need for global and regional leadership as clearly as the spread of COVID-19. But the world's two most powerful countries are mired in a narrative war over the causes of the

pandemic and the apportionment of blame for the global destruction it is causing.

[WHO and China: Compounding Politics and Policy](#)

April 09, 2020, The Interpreter, Rowan Gallick

National governments and health experts around the world are determining the strategies for combating the pandemic, with polite nods as needed to the WHO, but without crucial input from the global body, which has diminished its own potential role as a result of its politicisation.

[Dummy Missile Test Suspected at North Korean Shipyard: Report](#)

April 09, 2020, The Korea Herald

North Korea may have tested dummy missiles at its Sinpo South Shipyard along its east coast in recent days, Washington-based website 38 North said, citing commercial satellite imagery.

[Strategic Challenges of China's Rise](#)

April 11, 2020, East Asia Forum, Trevor Wilson

This article discusses the challenges that China's increasing strategic reach poses to the rest of the world, and how Chinese policies can be tweaked to be more compliant with international norms.

[China, Japan and South Korea Can Marshal a Collaborative Response to COVID-19](#)

April 13, 2020, East Asia Forum, Choong Yong Ahn

The post-COVID-19 world is likely to be a very different one. But a model of collaboration between China, Japan and South Korea, despite lingering historical issues, would offer a silver lining.

[Japan and South Korea Should Use the Coronavirus to Patch up Their Differences](#)

April 15, 2020, The National Interest, Rintaro Nishimura

Both countries have much to gain from better relations, and can use this pandemic to improve relations for their own interests, and ultimately, the security of the entire Asia-Pacific.

[Can Japan Successfully Decouple From China?](#)

April 16, 2020, The Diplomat, John Lee

The Abe government is providing 243.5 billion yen (about \$2.25 billion) from its stimulus package to encourage firms to move production lines out of China. The article discusses the possibilities of this move being a successful one, and also the risks it may pose to Japan-China diplomatic rapprochement.

[Same as it Ever Was: China's Pandemic Opportunism on its Periphery](#)

April 16, 2020, War on the Rocks, Abraham Denmark, Charles Edel and Siddharth Mohandas

While Washington and Beijing's overheated rhetoric and mutual recriminations amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic are grabbing headlines, equally important is what has been playing out across China's eastern and southern peripheries over the past weeks, including a marked increase in the number of incidents between China and its neighbours.

[Japan's COVID-19 Stimulus](#)

April 18, 2020, Delhi Policy Group, Sanjay Pulipaka and Libni Garg

On April 06, 2020 Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced a big-bang stimulus package amounting to 108 trillion yen (\$992 billion), equivalent to 20 percent of the country's GDP. The article examines its implications for Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's Three Arrows structural reform programme. It also maps the broader international trend of state-led stimulus measures and the increasing salience of direct-cash-transfers.

[North Korea Flouts Sanctions Through China Shipping, U.N. Report Finds](#)

April 18, 2020, The Japan Times

North Korea sharply stepped up trade in coal and oil products last year in defiance of UN sanctions through the apparent help of China's shipping industry, a UN panel said. The annual report to the UN Security Council by sanctions experts went online and inexplicably disappeared later in the day, with the text itself noting China's reservations about the findings.

[China's Diplomats Show Teeth in Defending Virus Response](#)

April 25, 2020, The Diplomat, Dave Kang

Chinese envoys have set off diplomatic firestorms with a combative defence whenever their country is accused of not acting quickly enough to stem the spread of the coronavirus pandemic. The tougher approach has been building

for several years under President Xi Jinping, who has urged Chinese diplomats to pursue “major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics” – a call for China to reassert its historic status as a global power.

[Probing Japan’s Slow Response to the COVID-19 Crisis](#)

April 25, 2020, East Asia Forum, Kate Kalinova

Japanese leaders are facing increasing scrutiny for ‘dragging their feet’ in their response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The article looks into the factors which have influenced Japan’s gradual policy evolution regarding COVID-19 since January 2020.

[Islands of Ire: The South Korea–Japan Dispute](#)

April 27, 2020, The Interpreter, Olivia Tasevski

The article discusses the territorial dispute regarding the Dokdo/Takeshima islands between Japan and South Korea, which has been a source of tension between the governments and citizens of the two countries since 1945.

[Seoul’s Top-Down Approach to Pyongyang](#)

April 27, 2020, East Asia Forum, Lauren Richardson

North Korea’s nuclear weapons program remains one of the key challenges to regional security in Asia. Dealing with this predicament has been the major foreign policy focus of South Korean President Moon Jae-in’s administration since its inauguration in 2017. This article discusses President Moon’s reluctance to adopt a characteristically middle-power approach vis-à-vis his northern counterpart.

[Kim Rumours Rekindle Fears of a ‘Weak’ North Korea](#)

April 27, 2020, The Japan Times, Brad Glosserman

One of the most vexing questions for Northeast Asian strategists is whether adversaries are more dangerous when they are weak or when they’re strong. North Korea tops the list of Japanese security concerns. Rumours and unverifiable reports about North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un’s failing health and possible death have left strategists unsure about policies regarding the elusive country in light of its uncertain political climate.

[When the World Reached Out to China](#)

April 29, 2020, Sanjay Pulipaka

This article looks at the remarkable outreach by the global community to assist China, which was reeling under the COVID-19 pandemic for the first two months of this year. It discusses five broad trends which can be discerned from foreign assistance provided to China.

SOUTH WEST PACIFIC

11. *Official Sources and Press Releases*

[Responding to the COVID-19 Challenge in the Pacific](#)

April 01, 2020, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Prime Minister Morrison told G20 leaders on 26 March that the Pacific needed to be a focus of international support. Australia's response will build on its Pacific Step-up, which has strengthened cooperation in helping to grow economies, build resilience, and enhance regional stability through defence, policing and border security cooperation.

[Joint Ministerial Statement for Commitment to Ensuring Supply Chain Connectivity Amidst the COVID-19 Situation](#)

April 14, 2020, New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, New Zealand, Singapore and Uruguay released a joint statement affirming their commitment to ensuring supply chain connectivity during the COVID-19 pandemic.

[The United States Assistance to Pacific Island Countries for COVID-19 Response](#)

April 21, 2020, U.S. Department of State

As of April 17, the U.S. Government has provided over \$32 million in funding to support the COVID-19 response in Pacific island countries. CDC, USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance, U.S. Embassy Suva, and the Pacific Islands Health Officers' Association are coordinating with the Fiji-based Pacific Joint Incident Management Team, which is leading the regional response to COVID-19.

[Chinese Embassy's Spokesperson Responding to a Question on Ambassador Cheng Jingye's Phone Call with DFAT Secretary Frances Adamson](#)

April 28, 2020, Embassy of China in Australia

Text of the statement made by a Chinese Embassy spokesperson regarding reports in the Australian media about a telephone conversation between Chinese Ambassador Cheng Jingye and DFAT Secretary Frances Adamson.

The statement conveyed that the Chinese considered the reports to be misleading and inaccurate.

[DFAT Statement Regarding Comments by the Embassy of the People's Republic of China](#)

April 28, 2020, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Text of the DFAT statement taking note of the Embassy of the People's Republic of China issuing a statement releasing purported details of official diplomatic exchanges.

[Remarks by Chinese Embassy Spokesperson Regarding Relevant DFAT Statement](#)

April 29, 2020, Embassy of China in Australia

Remarks by Chinese Embassy Spokesperson in response to the Australian DFAT statement issued on April 28, 2020.

12. Media Discourse and Analyses

[Indo-Pacom Chief's Bold \\$20 Billion Plan For Pacific; What Will Hill Do?](#)

April 02, 2020, Breaking Defense, Paul McLeary

The head of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, Adm. Philip Davidson told the U.S. Congress that he wants to spend \$20 billion to more fully disperse troops and advanced weaponry across the Pacific, build up missile defence systems, and create a network of joint training ranges stretching from California to Japan. The proposal aims to pump major resources into truly making the Pacific region the Pentagon's number-one priority.

[COVID-19 and Geopolitics in the Pacific](#)

April 04, 2020, East Asia Forum, Anna Powles and Jose Sousa-Santos

The COVID-19 pandemic in the Pacific has several frontlines. In addition to health security, a geopolitical front has opened up: China and the contest for influence in the Pacific. It was inevitable that pandemic diplomacy would emerge as either a fault line or a site of cooperation in the fight against COVID-19. This could have long-lasting implications for Australia's 'Pacific step up' and New Zealand's 'Pacific Reset', as well as for the credibility of other regional actors.

[A French Perspective on Australia's Role in the Indian Ocean](#)

April 07, 2020, The Interpreter, Frederic Grare

France increasingly sees Australia as a key strategic partner in the Indian Ocean. The French perspective on Australia's role in the Indian Ocean was in many ways reflected in the May 2018 vision statement of then-Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and French President Emmanuel Macron, made during Macron's visit to Australia. Seen from Paris, Australia's strategic importance is still predominantly a function of its role in the Pacific Ocean.

[Indonesia's and Australia's Middle-Power Moment](#)

April 08, 2020, The Strategist, Greta Nabbs-Keller and Ian Errington

As the world contends with COVID-19, Indonesia and Australia have an opportunity to establish deeper ties and cooperation on matters of mutual concern. Beyond the COVID-19 crisis, there are opportunities for Australia and Indonesia to exercise greater middle-power leadership on key issues.

[Fighting Corona will Strain US Military Capacity in the Indo-Pacific](#)

April 08, 2020, The Interpreter, Ashley Townsend and Jim Golby

The U.S. military is currently facing complex challenges on three fronts. It's fighting to support civilian agencies in the struggle against COVID-19 across a sickened US homeland. It's fighting to preserve a healthy force as the coronavirus spreads through its ranks. And it's fighting to uphold its readiness and operational commitments abroad. With outbreaks in the ranks and resources directed home, America's commitments abroad will be challenged.

[Australian Foreign Policy Beyond the Pandemic](#)

April 11, 2020, East Asia Forum, John McCarthy

While Australian leaders are properly focussed on managing the domestic impacts of COVID-19, they also need to think about an evolving external environment. Australia must secure long-term multilateral structures with its Southeast Asian neighbours in order to better prepare itself for the post-COVID-19 world, in addition to reducing its dependence on the United States as a security shield.

[Thornberry To Congress: Indo-Pacific Theater Needs \\$6B](#)

April 16, 2020, Breaking Defense, Paul McLeary

Following the bold proposal by the head of the Indo-Pacific Command to spend \$20 billion in the Pacific region to counter China in coming years, the

top Republican on the House Armed Services Committee, Rep. Mac Thornberry has crafted a plan to make a \$6 billion down payment in 2021.

[Reshaping Australia's Health Security Engagement in the Indo-Pacific](#)

April 16, 2020, The Strategist, Nicholas Thomson, Andy Singh and Mason Littlejohn

The spread of Covid-19 has highlighted the importance of a health security strategy that extends outside of Australia. The Indo-Pacific Centre for Health Security demonstrates Australia's commitment to preparedness for health emergencies in the Indo-Pacific. It is time to shape how security sector partners in regional countries engage with their public health sectors. Supporting them to partner in public health can create a safe and apolitical environment for innovation and engagement.

[How Much is Too Much? Covid Loans for the Pacific](#)

April 16, 2020, The Interpreter, Alexandre Dayant and Roland Rajah

There is a growing recognition that Australia will need to do a lot to help the Pacific get through the Covid-19 pandemic. Like everywhere, big sums of money are needed. The question is how to finance it. Many advanced economies are rolling out budget packages of 10% of GDP or more. The Pacific might need something similar. If so, that could mean as much as A\$5 billion.

[Australia Needs a Comprehensive Plan for Covid-19 in the Pacific](#)

April 20, 2020, The Interpreter, Pat Conroy

The twin health and economic crises caused by the Covid-19 pandemic have the potential to hit the Pacific hard. The crisis will continue to unfold for some time, and will cast a long shadow over the countries of the Pacific. There will be humanitarian, economic, social and political impacts – not only for the region itself, but also for Australia, which faces national security and geopolitical risks from an inadequate response to Covid-19 in the Pacific.

[COVID-19 Crisis has Big Geopolitical Implications for Australia](#)

April 21, 2020, The Strategist, Paul Dibb

The COVID-19 pandemic will affect the power of countries in different ways. It has widened the confrontation between the US and China, with uncertain results. Australia will find itself weaker in the post-pandemic world. Serious economic damage may well have a long-term impact. Australia's ally America

is left with a damaged reputation, and there is uncertainty about whether trade with China will return to the significant levels it was at before.

[The Importance of Australia's Pacific Step-Up in the Post-Virus Environment](#)

April 24, 2020, The Strategist, Jeffrey Wall

Australia's Pacific step-up, introduced in 2016 and upgraded in November 2018, is seen as the spearhead of the response to China's growing influence in the region. At its heart is a \$1.4 billion in development assistance to the Pacific in 2019–20. When the impact of Covid-19 is fully felt in the Pacific, the step-up strategy will need to be revised, and it should be upgraded.



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