

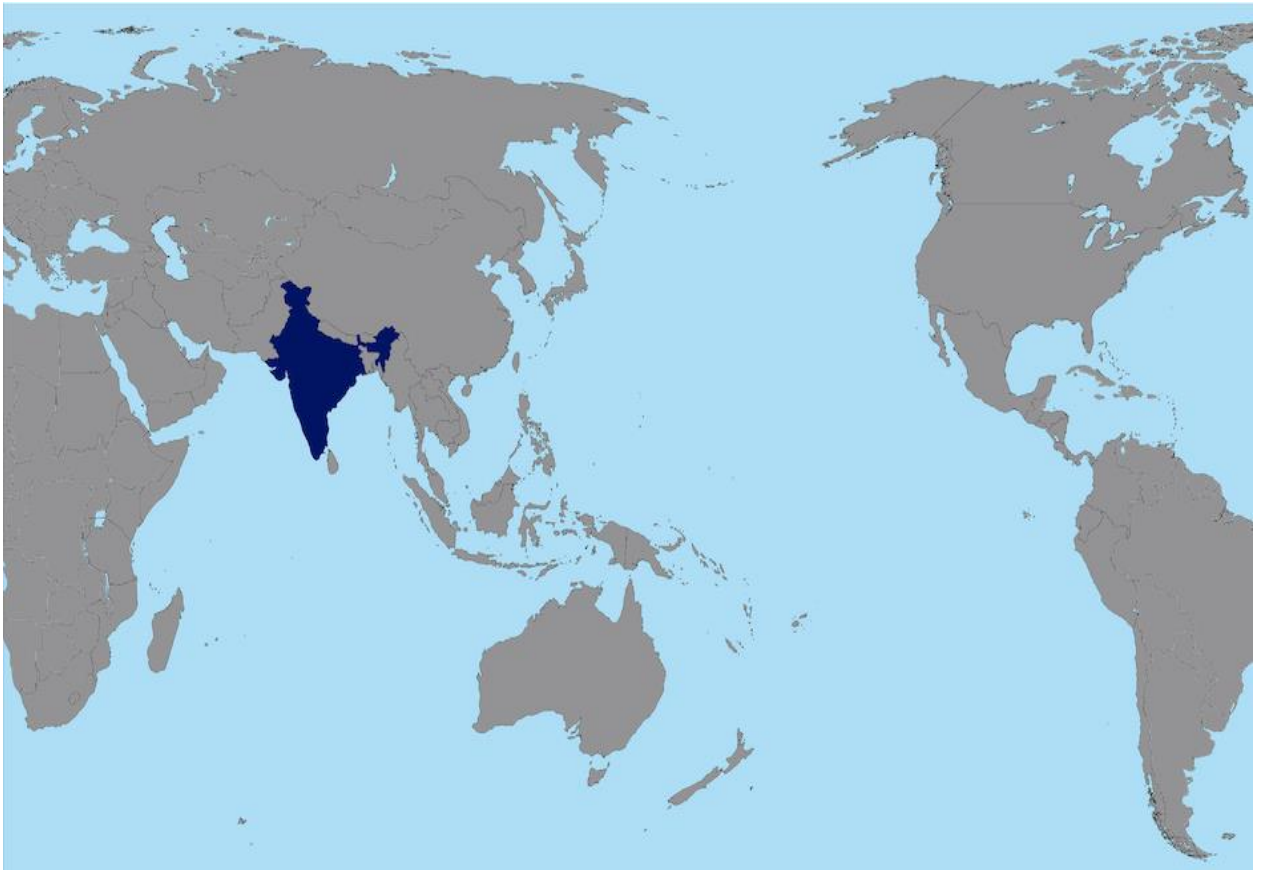


Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



DPG INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR FEBRUARY 2022



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DPG INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

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

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Abstract

The conflict in Ukraine drew the political and media attention, particularly in the US and Western Europe away from the Indo-Pacific, creating concern about whether the US would turn attention away from China, till recently described as its “pacing threat”. Though the US has reiterated its intention to remain militarily aloof and has maintained enhanced military levels in the Western Pacific, the concern remains. Partners, allies and neutrals in the Indo-Pacific will make their own assessments, with any turn away from the region forcing re-evaluation of national strategies and particularly the neutrals turning towards China.

The China Russia entente intensified as Presidents Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping met in Beijing for an in-person summit on February 4, 2022 and announced a “no limits” partnership. The joint statement released on the occasion provided a glimpse of the “multipolar” world both aspire to, spelt out the ideological differences between their governance models and those of the US, identified their developmental priorities and highlighted their areas of security and multilateral cooperation. They targeted increasing bilateral trade from the current \$ 140 billion annually to \$ 200 billion, including through a deal to deliver ten billion cubic metres of natural gas to China every year. As the month ended, GAZPROM inked a deal to design a new Soyuz Vostok pipeline that could supply China 50 billion metres of natural gas every year.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces, held a virtual summit on February 18, 2022. They agreed on a Roadmap to strengthen bilateral cooperation, including the signing of a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement that will open up new avenues for trade and investment.

The Fourth Quad Ministerial Meeting took place in Melbourne on February 11, 2022. A joint statement, released for the first time after a ministerial meeting, highlighted the progress the Quad has made so far and its intentions in the lead-up to the next summit to be hosted by Japan in the first half of 2022. Though cooperation continues to grow, the Quad’s ability to remain on track

with its commitments in the Indo-Pacific will be tested by differences between India and the other partners on condemning the Russian action in Ukraine.

Following the Quad ministerial, External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar co-chaired the 12th Foreign Ministers' Framework Dialogue and the inaugural Foreign Ministers' Cyber Framework Dialogue with his Australian counterpart Marise Payne. The bilateral partnership continues to forge ahead, with the conclusion of the first phase of the economic partnership agreement in the offing.

Dr. Jaishankar then travelled to the Philippines and agreed with his counterpart to step up engagement with this important South East Asian nation. India's growing cooperation with the Philippines was marked by a landmark deal to export Brahmos missiles, described as the most strategic military purchase the Philippines has made in years.

India renewed its attention to the maritime front, through a sharp increase in capital allocations for the Indian Navy and Coast Guard in the budget for FY 2022-23. The increase, however, still provides only part of the financial requirements for approved projects, as brought out in an analysis in this edition of the Indo-Pacific Monitor.

Two of India's long-running aircraft acquisition programmes drew to a close, with arrival of the 35th Rafale and the 12th P-8I contracted for with French and US manufacturers. Prime Minister Narendra Modi described the solution to long procurement lead times as lying in the Atmanirbhar Bharat and Make in India campaigns.

In other Indo-Pacific developments, India's growing security engagement with the Gulf region was displayed through the incoming high-level visits from the Sultanate of Oman and Saudi Arabia. The 40th Chinese naval escort task force commenced its operations in the Horn of Africa on February 4. The President's Review of the Indian Fleet off Visakhapatnam on February 21 and the following Exercise MILAN showcased India's maritime capability. The latter was attended by the Commander of the US Pacific Fleet and the Chief of the Australian Navy, in addition to ships and senior officers from 15 countries. Conflict continued in Myanmar, with little signs of reconciliation that could help alleviate the deepening crisis facing the nation. Indonesia invested in purchase of Rafale and F-15 aircraft to strengthen its Air Force. USS Ralph Johnson carried out a Taiwan Strait transit on February 26, while North Korea carried out yet another missile test on February 27.

Former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe sparked a debate when he called for discussion of the possible sharing of nuclear weapons and their placement on Japanese soil mirroring NATO practices in Europe, highlighting concerns regarding the US ability to focus on both Europe and East Asia simultaneously. PM Kishida promptly ruled out any change in Japan's anti-nuclear weapons stance.

The US released its new Indo-Pacific Strategy, as well as a Combined Space Operations vision, which are detailed in this report.

The China Russia Entente

As promised at their Virtual Summit on December 15, 2021, Presidents Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin met in Beijing for an in-person summit on February 4, 2022. Their growing bonhomie was strangely reminiscent of the expansion of China-US relations, which began with the Nixon visit to Beijing five decades ago, but grew at a frenetic pace after the decision to incorporate China into the WTO under the 'responsible stakeholder' premise. The objective then was to balance Soviet hegemony in Asia. Today, as China engages in a tango with Russia, it is to balance US hegemony.



Presidents Putin and Xi Jinping with their delegations at the China-Russia Summit in Beijing, February 4, 2022. Source: MOFA China

The 12-page Joint Statement released on the occasion encapsulates the differences between the US and its allies, on the one hand, and what the partners perceive is their target, China and Russia. It commences with a short introductory statement describing the change the world is going through and the actions of some actors “representing but the minority on the international scale (who) continue to advocate unilateral approaches to addressing international issues and resort to force; they interfere in the internal affairs of other states, infringing their legitimate rights and interests, and incite contradictions, differences and confrontations, thus hampering the development and progress of mankind”¹. The introduction calls on all states to “pursue well-being for all and to build dialogue and mutual trust, strengthen mutual understanding, champion universal values, respect the rights of people to independently determine their development paths of their countries, protect the United Nations driven international architecture and the international law-based world order and seek genuine multipolarity with the UN and its Security Council playing a central coordinating role”². It then focuses on four areas: Democracy and Human Rights, Advancing Peace and Developmental Cooperation, Security, and Multilateral Cooperation.

The democracy and human rights section is a litany of ideological differences between the governance models of China and Russia, on the one hand, and the liberal democratic model of the western world. These range from an understanding of what democracy is, democracy as a universal human right, the imposition of democratic standards on other nations as an act of hegemony, the abuse of democratic values to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries, and the need to promote and protect all categories of human rights, in accordance with the fundamental principles set out in the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. China and Russia portray themselves as having “long-standing democratic traditions”, but this is a political narrative few would accept.

The next ‘advancing peace and developmental cooperation’ section in effect makes the case for China-Russia relations to counter US hegemony. It covers the areas where China and Russia will work together, through linking development plans for the Eurasian Economic Union and the Belt and Road Initiative; developing the Arctic; cooperating with multilateral mechanisms including the UN; acting on the China-proposed Global Development Initiative; creating fair conditions for implementation of scientific advances to

¹ Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China on the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development, <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/5770>

² Ibid

enable identification of new drivers of economic growth and numerous other areas. The joint statement takes a swipe at the Western stand on ascertaining the origins of new corona virus infections, describing this investigation as a matter of science that must not be politicised.

The 'Security Cooperation' section identifies areas of security cooperation. Russia confirms its support for the One-China principle, describing Taiwan as an inalienable part of China and opposing any form of independence, and makes clear its intention of standing with China against attempts by other states to undermine security and stability in their common adjacent regions, counter interference in the internal affairs of sovereign countries under any pretext, and oppose colour revolutions. Both states condemn terrorism in all its manifestations, but simultaneously oppose interference in the internal affairs of other countries under the guise of combating terrorism and extremism. This in effect pits them against states desiring to act, even in self-defence, against cross-border terrorism, as practised by Pakistan. Both oppose US alliances, including the expansion of NATO and call on Western nuclear weapon states to reduce the role of nuclear weapons and ballistic missile defence in their national security policy. The contradiction between this call and China's sharp expansion of its nuclear capability escapes the partners. They express concern about AUKUS while ignoring the genuine security concerns raised by China's coercion that necessitate strengthening of hard power deterrence. China supports Russia's quest for long-term legally binding security guarantees in Europe. Then there are aspirational calls for the US to return to international arms control treaties and for great powers to commit to not being the first to place weapons in space. The partners express concern about the lack of compliance by the US with the Biological Weapon Convention and its commitment to eliminate Chemical Weapons. They go on to express their intention to deepen cooperation in the field of international information security, said that the Global Initiative in Data Security proposed by China and supported by Russia as a basis for international response to data security needs and express their intention to deepen information security cooperation. The section is essentially a call for the US to give up the strengths it says are needed for continued deterrence. They are unlikely to have an impact on US policy, but do signal the intent to cooperate on a large number of security related areas.

In the multilateral cooperation section, the two expressed their intent of fulfilling their responsibility as permanent members of the UNSC and contributing to global governance rather than submitting to a unilaterally imposed western ideology based. They acknowledged China's concept of constructing a "community with a common destiny for mankind" and called for the establishment of a great power relationship based on mutual respect,

peaceful coexistence and mutually beneficial cooperation. Describing their bilateral relations as superior to the political and military alliances of the Cold War era, they said there is no limit to their bilateral friendship, no forbidden areas of cooperation. They reaffirmed their intention to strengthen foreign policy coordination, pursue true multilateralism, strengthen cooperation on multilateral platforms, defend common interests and support the international and regional balance of power. Finally, they spoke of strengthening the G20 format, cooperation within BRICS, the SCO and the RIC formats, and of supporting ASEAN as a key element of the regional architecture.

Apart from the joint statement, the two sides spoke of increasing the annual level of trade from the current \$ 140 billion to \$ 200 billion. Agreements concluded included cooperation in anti-monopoly legislation and competitive policy; ensuring compatibility and interoperability of the GLONASS and BeiDou navigation satellite systems; a roadmap for high quality development of Russia-China trade in goods and services; a plan of consultation between the foreign ministries in 2022; MoU to promote investment in sustainable green development; one on sports cooperation; another on cooperation in the field of low carbon development, and one between Rosneft and Huawei Technologies on information development and digitisation³. Commercial contracts related to the export of ten billion cubic metres of natural gas to China via the Far Eastern route every year, and delivery of crude oil to refineries in Western China were also signed.

Like the US did in the aftermath of WW II, and more so after the demise of the Soviet Union, China is attempting to reshape the world in its favour. Its rhetoric of mutually beneficial cooperation directed towards a community of common destiny for mankind doesn't comport with the coercion it has displayed from Taiwan to South East Asia, and from Australia to India. However neither do the actions of any other country, including the US, at a similar stage of rise in global power. What China desires to establish in Asia is not substantially different from what the US established in the western hemisphere in the previous century. The difference of course, is that the past need not be a model for the future, and what was accepted in the Americas is unlikely to be accepted in Asia.

The liberal democratic model adopted by the West has shown up its numerous limitations, caused by deep political polarisation and excessive concern for individual rights at a time when technology has immeasurably strengthened individual reach and destructive power. On the other hand, China's sham

³ Vladimir Putin held talks in Beijing with President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67712>

“democracy”, eliminating the right of its citizens to choose competing ideologies and oppose government excesses, thereby resulting in the oppression of dissidents and minorities, may be attractive to authoritarian states, but is hardly likely to attract aspiring societies. The critical factor, however, is the sovereign right of each state to conduct its internal affairs the way it chooses. The western belief of their sole right to determine what democracy is, ignoring different models adopted by different societies, is equally obnoxious. A balance must be found, through continued dialogue and not by imposition of values (as was attempted in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan).

The goal of advancing peace and developmental cooperation will find acceptance by all. The methods chosen to achieve that goal, however, will differ from state to state. It is the use by contending great powers of coercion which causes concern and must be resisted.

The security section indicates further consolidation in the Russia – China relationship, at a time when the US relationship with Western Europe appears to be fraying. The economic synergy of the partners, particularly in the energy field, is in sharp contrast to the economic fragmentation of Europe due to BREXIT and the absence of a unifying US backed economic vision in the Indo-Pacific. Russia’s advanced weapon technologies will increasingly be available to China. In the long run, however, Russia becomes tied to China, that too as a junior partner. The disagreement over Ukraine threatens to isolate Russia from Western Europe and make it completely dependent on China. It is unlikely to respect Russia’s interests once this isolation is complete.

Insofar as the multilateral cooperation section is concerned, the US penchant for unilateralism, particularly during the Trump administration, has exacerbated great power competition, making it increasingly zero-sum even as global challenges to security mount. Whether the competing sides can be persuaded to concentrate on the mounting global challenges, such as climate change, finding ways to make the green transition happen, overcoming the growing reach of transnational crime, including in the cyber domain, etc or not will determine whether the world remains peaceful, or drifts into destructive conflict.

As differences between the US alliance and the China-Russia axis expand, India’s policy of multi-alignment and balancing between both will be tested. Understanding of the need for greater focus on building national defence capability, and particularly maritime power, has been demonstrated in the sharp increase in budgetary allocations this year, particularly in the capital

allocations for the Indian Navy and Air Force. Providing India's diplomats the sinews they need to be taken seriously is a task India can neglect only at the peril of jeopardising its sovereignty.

The India UAE Partnership

Indo-Pacific focus is normally to east of India; in fact the Gulf region is not included in even the most recent US geographical definition of the Indo-Pacific⁴. It is, however, linked to the Indian Ocean by the Straits of Hormuz, described as the world's most important choke-point⁵. Roughly 80% of the 22.5 million barrels per day of crude oil flowing it passes through the Indian Ocean to consumers in Asia, including India⁶. It is home to over 8.6 million Indians⁷. As such, the India-UAE virtual summit of February 18, 2022 was an important regional development.

India's links with the UAE stretch back through millennia, but the bilateral comprehensive strategic partnership was launched only in August 2015, following Prime Minister Modi's visit. The partnership envisaged cooperation in a wide-ranging list of areas⁸. It blossomed thereafter, with summit level interaction in 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019, exchange of visits by External Affairs Ministers nine times after August 2015, and substantial other engagement⁹. 49 bilateral agreements have been signed so far¹⁰. 14 institutional mechanisms are in place to address sector-specific issues¹¹. Bilateral trade was nearly \$ 60 billion in 2019¹². The virtual bilateral summit on February 18 continued the previous momentum.

The highlight was undoubtedly signing of the India-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA). India's first trade agreement with a major trading partner after the FTA with Japan in 2011, the India-UAE CEPA is the first of a series of FTAs intended to enhance exports to one trillion dollars

⁴ Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf>

⁵ World Oil Transit Chokepoints, https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/special-topics/World_Oil_Transit_Chokepoints

⁶ Why the Strait of Hormuz is so Important, <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/06/13/business/strait-of-hormuz-importance/index.html>

⁷ Population of Overseas Indians, http://mea.gov.in/images/attach/NRIs-and-PIOs_1.pdf

⁸ Joint Statement Between the United Arab Emirates and the Republic of India, http://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/25733/Joint_Statement_between_the_United_Arab_Emirates_and_the_Republic_of_India

⁹ Bilateral Visits, <https://indembassyuae.gov.in/bilateral-visit.php>

¹⁰ Bilateral Agreements, <https://indembassyuae.gov.in/bilateral-agreement.php>

¹¹ Political Relations, <https://indembassyuae.gov.in/political-relation.php>

¹² India – UAE Bilateral Trade, <https://indembassyuae.gov.in/india-uae-trade.php>

each in merchandise and services by 2030¹³. It will result in the UAE eliminating duties on imports from India in 60% of its tariff lines, expanding to 97% of tariff lines in the next decade. The agreement contains strict rules of origin to prevent other nations from rerouting their exports through the UAE.

The joint statement following the virtual summit contains numerous other indicators of increasing cooperation¹⁴. The intent is to promote two way investments in infrastructure, including a dedicated investment zone for UAE companies and joint ventures focusing on establishment of a food corridor, as well as investment opportunities for Indian investors in specialized industrial advanced technology zones in the UAE. The energy front remains a focal area, with both countries committed to creating a just and equitable transition to a low-carbon future. A joint Hydrogen Task Force is to be set up to scale up technologies, with a special focus on production of Green Hydrogen. The leaders agreed to step up cooperation in critical technologies and mutually promote e-businesses and e-payment solutions. They also agreed to promote start-ups from both countries in areas such as fintech, edutech, health care, logistics and supply chain, agritech, chip design and green energy. The infrastructure required to connect farms (in India) to ports and to final destinations in the UAE is to be set up. Vaccine and healthcare cooperation is to be increased. An Indian Institute of Technology is to be established in the UAE. On the defence cooperation front, the focus remains maritime security, the fight against extremism and terror, and supporting international efforts to maintain peace and security in the Middle East.

India and UAE have much in common, providing the impetus for mutually beneficial cooperation. Its hydrocarbon reserves provide a dependable source of energy for India. The thriving expatriate based UAE economy attracts Indian Diaspora, who make up over a third of the UAE's population (the UAE has the highest Indian population in the Gulf region)¹⁵. Its high investible surplus complements India's need for external investment. At the same time, its zero tax rate provides an avenue for Indian investors to produce locally and export to the Gulf and other regions. India's relatively advanced state of technological development provides opportunities for the UAE to benefit. The countries share common threat perspectives, encompassing terrorism, maritime

¹³ Other FTAs in the pipeline include Australia, UK, Canada, Israel, the EU and the GCC.

¹⁴ Joint India-UAE Vision Statement – Advancing the India-UAE Comprehensive Strategic Partnership: New Frontiers, New Milestones, http://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/34877/Joint_IndiaUAE_Vision_Statement_Advancing_the_IndiaUAE_Comprehensive_Strategic_Partnership_New_Frontiers_New_milestones

¹⁵ Population of Overseas Indians, http://mea.gov.in/images/attach/NRIs-and-PIOs_1.pdf

security and transnational challenges. There are differences, as in Yemen, Iran and the outlook towards China, but these can be bridged.

Apart from the bilateral level, the Abrahams Accords open up opportunities for cooperation linking the UAE, Israel, the US and India. Foreign ministers of the four countries engaged virtually on October 18, 2021, while Dr. S Jaishankar, India's External Affairs Minister, was visiting Israel¹⁶. They are expected to meet in Dubai in March 2022. The focus will be technology and infrastructure, projects, enhancing political and economic cooperation and maritime security. Combining the US as the unifier, Israel as the innovator, the UAE's financial resources and India's skilled manpower and industrial infrastructure could lead to mutually beneficial growth in areas of critical and emerging technology, as well as infrastructure, defence production and health. A trilateral agreement between India, UAE and Israel at the Chambers of Commerce level envisages a business potential of \$ 110 billion by 2030¹⁷.

The India-UAE bilateral partnership provides a bridge for India to engage countries of the Arabian Peninsula more meaningfully, overcoming impediments imposed by an adversarial Pakistan. The emerging Western Quad comprising India, Israel, UAE and the US has the potential for substantial economic benefit to the four partners. The February India – UAE summit is thus another step in India's enhancing its influence in this vital part of the Indo-Pacific.

The Fourth Quad Ministerial Meeting

Less than 30 months after the first Quad ministerial meeting in New York on September 26, 2019, Quad foreign ministers came together on February 11, 2022, for their fourth ministerial meeting. In between, two leader-level summits had also occurred, one virtual, in March 2021, and the other in-person, in September 2021. The sheer frequency of interaction, coupled with the willingness to travel long distances, speaks of their shared concerns and growing comfort of their parent countries in working together.

The latest meeting, in Melbourne, provided an opportunity to take stock, iron out coordination issues and display their commitment to cooperation in pursuit of a shared vision and agenda. That the environment remains

¹⁶ New Grouping of India, UAE, Israel and US to meet next year, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/new-grouping-of-india-israel-us-and-uae-expected-to-hold-meeting-in-march-101639394229418.html>

¹⁷ India, Israel and UAE sign maiden trilateral deal to push W Asian partnership, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/india-israel-and-uae-sign-maiden-trilateral-deal-to-push-w-asian-partnership/articleshow/82432369.cms>

conducive was amply visible from their interaction with Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison, wherein he spoke of the opposition of all four Quad members to coercion and pressure, as well as their shared vision of an economically prosperous, stable and secure (Indo-Pacific) region one that enabled the sovereignty of all regional nations¹⁸. That there were differences in perception came out from India's response to a question about developments in Ukraine, wherein he pointed out that Ukraine was geographically disconnected from the Indo-Pacific, and India's stand had been made clear at the UN Security Council¹⁹.



Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison with Quad Foreign Ministers Marise Payne, Dr S. Jaishankar, Yoshimasa Hayashi and Antony Blinken at Melbourne on February 11, 2022.

Source: Australian PM

Unlike in previous ministerial meetings, a joint statement was released this time²⁰. On the vaccine partnership front, the ministers noted that the partners had collectively provided over 500 million vaccine doses already and pledged to donate more than 1.3 billion doses globally. They expressed satisfaction at

¹⁸ Remarks, Meeting with Quad Foreign Ministers, Melbourne, Vic, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/remarks-meeting-quad-foreign-ministers-melbourne-vic>

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Joint Statement by the Foreign Ministers of Australia, India, Japan and the Secretary of State of the United States following the 4th Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting, http://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/34854/Joint_statement_by_the_Foreign_Ministers_of_Australia_India_and_Japan_and_the_Secretary_of_State_of_the_United_States_following_the_4th_Quad_Foreign_Ministers'_Meeting

the rapid progress in expanding vaccine production at the Biological E facility in India, which would deliver at least one billion doses of the vaccine by the end of 2022. Delivery of the first batch was expected in the first half of the current year. In addition, the partners were assisting in training healthcare workers, overcoming vaccine hesitancy and augment infrastructure required, especially 'last mile' vaccine delivery. They mentioned coordinating response under a Global Action Plan (GAP) for Enhanced Engagement (the plan, discussed two days later, identified six lines of thrust to respond to the pandemic: getting shots in arms of at least 70% of the world population; bolstering the supply chain to ensure steady supplies of critical products and materials and remove medical supply chain bottlenecks; addressing information gaps and combating the spread of false information; supporting health workers to ensure their safety and well-being; ensuring acute non-vaccine interventions; and strengthening the global health security architecture²¹).

The ministers committed to further strengthening HADR cooperation and expressed satisfaction over their combined support to Tonga following the January 2022 volcanic eruption and tsunami. They expressed their intent to deepen engagement with regional partners to improve maritime security and to counter all forms of terrorism and violent extremism. They jointly condemned terrorist attacks in India, including at Mumbai and Pathankot, denounced the use of terrorist proxies and urged all countries to eliminate terrorist safe havens. They reaffirmed the UNSC call that Afghan territory should not be used to threaten or attack any country, shelter or train terrorists, or plan and finance terrorist attacks.

In other areas, they expressed their intention to coordinate efforts to assist Indo-Pacific partner nations to address the growing threat of ransomware and to counter cybercrime. They further committed to strengthening efforts to ensure that the vision for technologies, guided by principles set out after the September 2021 Quad Summit, were further shared by all like-minded supply chains. They welcomed Australia's proposal to host an Indo-Pacific Clean Energy Supply Chain Forum in mid-2022; US exchange programmes in cyber security, maritime security, countering disinformation and promoting transparency in governance, and said they were exploring a track 1.5 dialogue involving their respective strategic thinkers. They looked forward to Japan hosting the next Quad Leaders' Summit in the first half of 2022.

China's spokesperson responded by saying, "China believes that the so-called Quad group cobbled together by the US, Japan, India and Australia is essentially

²¹ COVID-19 Global Action Meeting, <https://www.state.gov/the-covid-19-global-action-meeting/>

a tool for containing and besieging China to maintain US hegemony. It aims to stoke confrontation and undermine international solidarity and cooperation". He stressed that "as the cold War is long over, the attempt to forge a so-called alliance to contain China wins no support and leads nowhere"²². It is unlikely that the reports of a respected regional survey, which found that 58.5% of the respondents welcomed the strengthening of the Quad, would have altered his views²³. China will doggedly continue propagating its narrative; however divorced it may be from reality.

The continued rapid evolution of the Quad is good news, both for India and for the Indo-Pacific. An ambitious and focused agenda for cooperation is in place, delivery on outcomes has begun and there is a sense of optimism and energy. This is in stark contrast to the earlier period where China had the momentum and could continue to look down on democratic partnerships, likening them to sea foam that would soon dissipate. The democracies have moved from rhetoric to coordinated action. This cannot but be cause for concern in China, irrespective of the façade it chooses to maintain.

In order to enhance regional influence, the Quad must deliver on its commitments to provide public goods. Vaccines and disaster relief are the low-hanging fruit. More complex will be delivering on maritime security, counter-terrorism, effectively countering disinformation and shaping the norms for emerging technologies. Delivery on this front will, however, yield disproportionate results in enhancing democratic influence.

Two critical limitations remain. The first is a shared economic agenda. Provision of security and maintenance of status quo will not be enough; there must be a common vision to direct the region's economies towards common prosperity. The Indo-Pacific economic framework under development by the US will have to find acceptance, indeed resonance, throughout the region if China's economic attractions and inducements are to be overcome. Failing this, the lure of enhanced trade and investment will lead to smaller and less developed nations making compromises on the democratic vision, strengthening China and its authoritarian example.

The second is effective, across-the-board deterrence against China's coercion. As things stand, the Quad focuses on soft balancing designed to provide

²² Foreign Ministry Spokesperson's Zhao Lijian's Regular Press Conference on February 11, 2022, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/202202/t20220211_10641714.html

²³ ISEAS State of Southeast Asia 2022 Survey Report, https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/The-State-of-SEA-2022_FA_Digital_FINAL.pdf

alternatives to China's coercive and authoritarian model, while AUKUS focuses on hard security. China's size and centrality in Asia is such, however, that the three allies will be hard pressed to deter China's expansionism and eventual breakout from the first island chain. Deterrence is effective only so long as China is convinced it cannot overcome opponents. In order to build such conviction, it may be necessary for India to step in at some stage. But that will happen only if India's immediate security concerns and the development gap are effectively addressed. There is benefit for Australia, Japan and the US to address this aspect on priority, delivering on the promise of their bilateral relations with India in addition to the commitments of the Quad.

The India Australia Bilateral

Following the Quad Ministerial Meeting on February 11, India's External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar continued with the bilateral leg of his visit to Australia. Addressing the press at a Joint Press Conference with his counterpart, the EAM spoke of a highly productive 12th Foreign Ministers' Framework Dialogue as well as the Inaugural Foreign Ministers' Cyber Framework Dialogue²⁴. The two sides covered a wide range of subjects pertaining to their bilateral, regional and global partnership. They shared experiences pertaining to the COVID challenge, as also of assisting other friendly countries with vaccines. They committed to building more trusted and resilient supply chains and ensuring broad inclusive growth in the Indo-Pacific. Progress in defence and security cooperation was discussed, as were shared concerns about terrorism and extremism. The Cyber dialogue enabled review of joint activities under the bilateral Framework Agreement.

Australia announced its intention of enhancing engagement in the North Eastern Indian Ocean by committing an investment of \$ 36.5 million in maritime and disaster preparedness as well as opportunities for trade, investment and connectivity²⁵. \$ 11.4 million of this goes to improve regional cooperation on maritime shipping, disaster resilience and information sharing. \$ 10.2 million goes towards increasing engagement on regional economic challenges and exploring opportunities in the digital sector in Bangladesh. The balance is committed to promoting infrastructure investment opportunities in the region for Australia business, improving its understanding of South Asian

²⁴ Remarks by External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar at the Joint Press Conference with the Foreign Minister of Australia, http://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/34858/Remarks_by_External_Affairs_Minister_Dr_S_Jaishankar_at_the_Joint_Press_Conference_with_the_Foreign_Minister_of_Australia

²⁵ Enhancing engagement in the North East Indian Ocean; <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/marise-payne/media-release/enhancing-engagement-north-east-indian-ocean>

markets and linking Australia, India and Bangladesh along an LNG supply chain.

In parallel, the two countries renewed the bilateral Memorandum of Understanding on Tourism Cooperation as Australia's Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment visited New Delhi and met his counterpart²⁶.

The bilateral relationship has taken rapid strides since the upgrading of the partnership in June 2020. There is frequent high-level interaction. Bilateral trade has soared to \$ 17.75 billion in the first eight months of the current financial year, up sharply from \$ 12.29 billion in 2020-21²⁷. Negotiations for the first phase of a comprehensive economic cooperation agreement are expected to conclude shortly, with the full agreement expected to be ready for signature by end 2022. Defence interaction has increased sharply and an Australian warship had arrived in Visakhapatnam for Exercise MILAN at the time of writing. Plurilateral cooperation in the Quad format has also increased. There are signs of greater understanding of India's sensitivities in Australia.

If Australia and India, the two strongest nations in the Eastern Indian Ocean are to become anchors for regional stability, much more will need to be done. At the regional level, they will need to coordinate effectively through both ASEAN centric mechanisms and IORA. Trilateral cooperation between India, Indonesia and Australia, conceived in 2017, will have to move beyond occasional meetings to concrete areas of cooperation. Intelligence and information sharing and defence industry cooperation will have to be stepped up. Discussions to evolve a common approach towards emerging challenges, including those generated by critical and emerging technologies will have to be speeded up. The results of Australia's elections, to be held later this year, will determine whether the momentum generated so far will be enhanced, maintained or dissipated.

Engaging the Philippines

Though India and the Philippines established diplomatic relations in 1949, the distance factor coupled with developmental and Cold War imperatives inhibited meaningful cooperation. Participation in the East Asia Summit and other ASEAN-related structures maintained the relationship, with no bilateral issues. Prime Minister Modi visited Manila in 2017 for the 31st ASEAN and 12th

²⁶ Strengthening economic and tourism ties with India, <https://www.trademinister.gov.au/minister/dan-tehan/media-release/strengthening-economic-and-tourism-ties-india>

²⁷ Department of Commerce Export Import Data Bank, <https://tradedat.commerce.gov.in/eidb/iecnttopnq.asp>

East Asia summits, while President Duterte visited New Delhi for the India-ASEAN Commemorative Summit and Republic Day celebrations in January 2018. MoUs for cooperation in Defence Industry and Logistics, Agriculture and Education, among others, were signed in 2017, while MoUs on sharing of White Shipping Information, Tourism, Science and Technology Cooperation and Cultural Exchanges were signed during the State visit of India's President to Manila in 2019.



India's External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar with the Philippines Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro L. Locsin, Jr. at Manila on February 14, 2022. Source: Department of Foreign Affairs, the Philippines.

Joint Commissions / Working Groups exist on Bilateral Cooperation, Joint Defence Cooperation, Trade and Investment, Defence Industry and Logistics, and Tourism Cooperation. Defence exchanges include a visit by the Philippines Secretary of National Defense to India in March 2018; Philippines participation in India's DEFEXPO exhibitions; occasional intelligence exchanges and high level interaction; visits by Indian Navy and Coast Guard ships and training exchanges.

The visit of Dr. S. Jaishankar, India's Minister for External Affairs to Manila from February 13-15, 2022 marks a significant step in evolution of the bilateral relationship²⁸. The EAM met his counterpart and reviewed regional as well as

²⁸ Visit of External Affairs Minister to the Philippines (February 13-15, 2022), https://www.eoim Manila.gov.in/news_letter_detail.php?id=103

bilateral developments. They agreed to strengthen their engagement in counter-terrorism and defence and maritime security, focusing on enhancing defence capability as well as military training and capacity building. They agreed to explore expanding cooperation in areas such as agriculture, infrastructure, health and pharmaceuticals, tourism, ICT and Science and technology. They also agreed on the need for a simplified visa regime between India and the Philippines. They agreed to cooperate closely at multilateral fora and their commitment to a multifaceted partnership that would facilitate the developmental aspirations of both nations. The EAM also met the Philippines Secretaries of Defense, Finance and Agriculture to discuss strengthening of cooperation in their respective areas.

The Philippines Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Teodoro L. Locsin Jr., committed to exchanging more visits and engaging more expansively in dialogue to better steer the direction of bilateral relations. He described India as “our partner in promoting peace and security in the region, as well as in advocating the rule of law in the face of armed ambition and the anarchy that follows it”. He added, “As maritime countries, the Philippines and India, both at the crossroads of the busiest sea lanes in the world, know the critical role of the rule of law in maintaining stability on the water – that most unstable element yet so vital to the life and thriving of nations”²⁹.

With 16.5% of ASEAN’s population, 6.9% of its land area and 16.9% of its EEZ, the Philippines forms a large part of the first island chain that acts as a barrier to the projection of Chinese power into the Pacific. It also lies astride the routes China’s maritime power will have to adopt when it heads towards the Indian Ocean. It has been the victim of China’s assertion through grey zone coercion in the South China Sea, resulting in the effective loss of control over Scarborough Shoal and Whitsun Reef. Long an ally of the US, it had turned away during the Rodrigo Duterte Presidency, but has clearly signaled its unhappiness with China’s behavior, with President Rodrigo Duterte telling fellow ASEAN leaders how much he abhors China’s harassment of the Philippine resupply missions in the South China Sea³⁰.

²⁹ Remarks of Secretary of Foreign Affairs Teodoro L. Locsin Jr. for the Luncheon in Honour of His Excellency Subrahmanyam Jaishankar Minister of External Affairs of the Republic of India, <https://dfa.gov.ph/dfa-news/statements-and-advisoriestupdate/30114-remarks-of-secretary-of-foreign-affairs-teodoro-l-locsin-jr-for-the-luncheon-in-honor-of-his-excellency-subrahmanyam-jaishankar-minister-of-external-affairs-of-the-republic-of-india>

³⁰ Richard Javad Heydarian, “Xi’s good neighbour speech falls flat at ASEAN”, <https://asiatimes.com/2021/11/xis-good-neighbor-speech-falls-flat-at-asean/>

The sale to the Philippines of India's Brahmos missiles, described as the "most strategic purchase the Armed Forces of the Philippines has made in years"³¹, provides an excellent opportunity to take the bilateral relationship forward. Given the realities of China's attempts to diminish India's regional standing in the emerging era of great power competition, India would do well to expand this opportunity by expanding its soft power influence to encompass more. India's Quad partners are unlikely to complain.

India's Defence Budget 2022 – A Maritime Perspective

The sharp rise in capital allocation for India's maritime services in the defence budget for 2022 would definitely have been noticed by Indo-Pacific nations. To recapitulate, the Indian Navy (IN) has been allocated Rs 47,591 crores (about \$ 6.3 billion) under the capital head, up substantially from the allocation of Rs 33,254 crores (about \$ 4.4 billion) at the same stage in February 2021, but only marginally from the revised estimates of Rs 46,022 crores (\$6.1 billion) for the current financial year. The increase, according to the Ministry of Defence, underlines the importance of overall maritime security and is "aimed at building up of assets such as acquisition of ships and aircraft, augmentation of infrastructure, establishment of coastal security network and building up technical and administrative support structures"³². Additionally, the capital budget of the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) has been raised from Rs 2,650 crores in 2021-22 to Rs 4246 crores in 2022-23³³.

Long described as the Cinderella service, the IN's budgetary allocations were just 2% of the overall defence budget in 1947-48 and remained in single digit percentages of the overall armed forces allocations for 38 years following independence. The exception was in 1955-57, when acquisition of INS Vikrant raised them to 10.1% of the defence budget. The strategic vacuum following British withdrawal from East of Suez in 1971 did not change India's continental orientation. The Navy's budget share rose to 12.5% in 1985-86 as the needs of securing energy flows for India's industrial growth was accepted. It has generally remained above 10% thereafter, peaking at 19.29% in 2012-13, thus creating the impression of a nation increasingly ready to assume regional responsibility.

However, notwithstanding the articulation of the SAGAR doctrine by PM Modi in 2015, the Navy's budget share shrank on his watch, from just under 16% in

³¹ By Gregory Poling, Director of Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NQs-DT5YWcY>

³² Union Budget 2022 23, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1794415>

³³ Ibid

2015-16 to 14.75% during 2016-17 and 14% in 2021-22. The rhetoric of substantial increase in the Navy's capital allocation (from 33,254 crores in 2021-22 to Rs 46,022 crores in 2022-23), however, hides that fact that the projected requirement based on approved projects in 2021-22 was Rs 70,920.78 crores³⁴. Thus, the Navy was initially allotted less than 47% of the projected need last year; this went up to about 65% of the projected need at the RE stage. The non-availability of published information precludes assessment of what proportion of the projected need the Navy's capital budget for 2022-23 actually represents.

In the absence of allies, India needs to build a credible maritime force for the future. This will necessarily include acquisition of the necessary numbers of ships, submarines and aircraft; bridging capability gaps and construction of the required infrastructure. India is presently about 35% below the assessed requirement of 200 ships and submarines.

On the submarine front, the second SSBN is expected to enter service in 2022, but missile range limitations and numbers don't yet add up to an assured underwater deterrent capability. The submarine replacement programme is running far behind schedule. Two of the Shishumar class are over 36 years of age, while the other two are approaching 30. Eight of the Sindhughosh class are over 30 years old. All six Scorpenes may be in service by early next year, but Project 75I for another six is yet to take off. The nuclear attack submarine project still awaits sanction.

On the surface fleet front, a second aircraft carrier is expected to commission this year, but this will still not suffice to provide at least one carrier on each coast (due to maintenance requirements). The picture on destroyers is somewhat better, with only the three Rajput class over 35 years old and in need of replacement. The three Delhi class are all under 25 years old and can be expected to continue beyond the end of this decade, as can the Kolkata class, which are less than eight years old. Follow on ships of the Visakhapatnam class will suffice to maintain current force levels. The position on the frigate front is similarly comfortable, with additional Talwar and Nilgiri class ships under construction and holding out the promise of adding to force levels in the years ahead. Among smaller ships, the Khukri class are all over 30 years old, as are the five of the Sukanya class OPVs. The absence of MCM capability is gaping limitation. Amphibious capability also needs modernisation and the move towards stand-off beaching.

³⁴ 23rd Report of the Standing Committee on Defence (2021-22), Seventeenth Lok Sabha, https://eparlib.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/820696/1/17_Defence_23.pdf

On the aircraft front, the numbers of P-8I aircraft in the inventory are only a fraction of what is required to maintain effective surveillance over the Indian Ocean. The numbers of ASW and utility helicopters available is insufficient to provide for even the designed capability to frontline warships, leave alone the numbers required to make up for aircraft undergoing maintenance. Unmanned systems like the MQ-9A UAVs had held out hope, but the reported decision to hold back their procurement from the US is a setback.

More is also needed on the infrastructure front, particularly in fortifying the Andaman and Nicobar islands. There will also be need for increased funds to enable capacity building for IOR nations. On the other hand, unlike the other services, the IN should have no difficulty in expending its capital allocations for the current year, as it has historically done. The setting up of a non-lapsable fund for the armed forces is still work in progress. That cannot but be good news for a Navy that has historically expended its full allocation and received additional funds at the RE stage year after year.

Since budget shares provide the clearest indication of strategic priorities and political leaders putting the nation's resources where their mouth is, the Navy's allocations send a signal to Indo-Pacific partners. They will now watch to see whether these allocations are maintained.

Military Acquisition Programmes

Deliveries in two of India's major aircraft acquisition programmes approached a close this month. In the first, three single-seat Rafales under a € 7.8 billion contract signed in September 2016 in partial fulfilment of the MMRCA requirement were handed over on January 25, 2022 and arrived in India on February 15. Delivery of the 36th aircraft, a trainer version, is expected in April 2022. The Rafales are based at Ambala (17 Sqn) and Hasimara (101 Sqn). The MMRCA competition, begun with the IAF's projection of a requirement of 126 aircraft in 2001, continues, with a Request for Information floated by the IAF for 114 aircraft in 2018 still going through the procurement process.

In the second, the 12th P-8I Neptune, contracted for in December 2016 under the options clause, was delivered to India on February 19, 2022³⁵. The acquisition programme began when the Ministry of Defence signed a US\$ 2.1 billion agreement for 8 P-8Is in January 2009, becoming the aircraft's first international customer. Delivery began in December 2012, though the first aircraft arrived in India only in May 2013. The first eight aircraft were assigned

³⁵ Indian Navy Expands Fleet with Delivery of 12th P-8I, <https://boeing.mediaroom.com/news-releases-statements?item=131007>

to INAS 312, based at INS Rajali, near Arakkonam. The options clause for four additional aircraft was exercised in July 2016, resulting in the creation of INAS 316, based at Goa. The Defence Acquisition Council had, in May 2019, cleared the procurement of six more aircraft through the FMS route³⁶. The Biden administration had, on April 30, 2021, approved the sale at a cost of \$ 4.2 billion³⁷. The contract for these additional aircraft has, however, not been announced yet.

The timelines above indicate the slow nature of India's procurement process. Urgent operational needs take the back seat to process driven procurement, resulting in the continued usage of platforms well beyond their useful life and imposing high maintenance costs. Egypt, Qatar, Indonesia and the UAE are now in the queue for new Rafales and production capacity constraints will mean India will have to wait a long time for delivery as and when it decides to place an order. Similarly, Germany, New Zealand, Norway, South Korea and the USN have already placed orders for the Poseidon and are awaiting delivery. India will have to wait as and when it makes up its mind, resulting in a continued gap in capability.

Addressing a webinar on Atmanirbharta in Defence on February 25, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that the solution to long procurement lead times "lies in the Aatmanirbhar Bharat campaign and Make in India"³⁸. The key for this lies in breaking the monopoly of the public sector. Substantial headway has been made in unshackling the private sector, especially small and medium enterprises. Defence corridors are under construction in Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh. Export opportunities have opened up, as is evident from the recent order placed on Brahmos Aerospace by the Philippines. It is time for the nation's armed forces to explore a partnership with India's private sector defence industry to grow the nation's comprehensive national power.

Other Indo-Pacific Developments

West Asia

The 11th India-Oman Joint Military Cooperation Committee (JMCC) Meeting took place on January 31, 2022. It reviewed progress in military-to-military engagement, including joint exercises, industry cooperation and various

³⁶ Defence Acquisition Council, Chaired by Raksha Mantri, Shri Rajnath Singh, approves Capital Procurement for the Services amounting to over Rs 22,800 crores,

<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1594075>

³⁷ India – P-8I and Associated Support,

https://www.dsca.mil/sites/default/files/mas/India_21-13.pdf

³⁸ PM's Address at the post-budget webinar Atmanirbharta in Defence – Call to Action',

infrastructure projects. The JMCC decided to identify new avenues and examine areas for joint ventures to enhance defence industry cooperation; conduct a HADR exercise involving all three services and enhance the scope and complexity of existing joint exercises³⁹. The two countries also decided to combat drug trafficking prevalent in the North Arabian Sea. On completion, the Omani delegation visited the Indian Navy's training schools at Kochi as well as the Indigenous Aircraft Carrier Vikrant at Kochi Shipyard⁴⁰. The Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman, Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser bin Mohsin Al Rahbi, visited India 13 – 17 February 2022, to consolidate the bilateral relationship and explore new avenues for defence cooperation⁴¹. The Indian Air Force and the Royal Air Force of Oman participated in bilateral exercise Eastern Bridge-VI at Air Force Station Jodhpur from February 21-25, 2022⁴².

Lt. Gen. Fahd bin Abdullah Mohammed Al-Mutair became the first ever Commander of the Royal Saudi Land Forces to visit India, from February 14-16, 2022⁴³. The visit reciprocates that of General MM Naravane, Chief of the Army Staff, to Saudi Arabia in December 2020 and marks a breakthrough in development of bilateral relations.

An attempted Houthi drone attack on Saudi Arabia's Abha airport on February 10 left 12 people, including citizens of India, injured due to shrapnel⁴⁴. The US condemned the attack and sought to reassure Saudi Arabia about its commitment to Saudi defence⁴⁵. The Saudi intervention in Yemen, which began in March 2015, has not yet produced a result, calling into question the efficacy of external interventions in domestic insurgencies.

³⁹India & Oman review progress in military-to-military engagements during 11th Joint Military Cooperation Committee Meeting in New Delhi, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1794410>

⁴⁰Oman Delegation Visits Southern Naval Command, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1795568>

⁴¹CRNO Visit to India (13-17 Feb 22), <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1798323>

⁴²Exercise Eastern Bridge VI at Air Force Station Jodhpur, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1800081>

⁴³Historic Visit of Lieutenant General Fahd bin Abdulah Mohammed Al-Mutair, Commander Royal Saudi Land Forces to India, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1798511>

⁴⁴Shrapnel injures 12 at Saudi Abha airport as drone intercepted, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/saudi-led-coalition-says-destroyed-drone-launched-towards-abha-airport-4-injured-2022-02-10/>

⁴⁵Statement by National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan on Houthi Attack Against Saudi Arabia, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/02/10/statement-by-national-security-advisor-jake-sullivan-on-houthi-attack-against-saudi-arabia/>



General MM Naravane, Chief of Army Staff and Lt Gen Fahd bin Abdullah Al-Mutair, Commander of the Royal Saudi Armed Forces, in South Block on February 15, 2022.
Source: PIB

The 40th Chinese naval escort task force took over from the 39th task force in the Gulf of Aden on February 4⁴⁶. China has now maintained a naval presence in the region for over a decade, amply demonstrating its intention of remaining in the region permanently.

⁴⁶PLA Navy conducts regular rotation of escort taskforces at Gulf of Aden, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2022-02/07/content_10129685.htm

India

Vagir, the fifth of India's Kalvari class submarines, commenced sea trials on February 1, 2022⁴⁷. The boat will commission later in the year, with the last also likely to commission by end 2022 or early 2023. Absence of a decision on the follow-on project leaves the future of MDL's trained workforce for submarine building uncertain.

Responding to an appeal from the Government of Kiribati seeking support in managing the first COVID-19 outbreak in the country, the Government of India dispatched relief material including medical supplies and personal protective equipment on February 12, thus reaffirming its commitment to provide HADR support as an early responder in the Pacific Islands⁴⁸.



Indian Air Force and Royal Air Force of Oman personnel at Air Force Station Jodhpur during Exercise Eastern Bridge VI. Source: PIB

The President of India and the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces reviewed the IN Fleet at Visakhapatnam on February 21⁴⁹. The theme of "75

⁴⁷First Sea Sortie of Fifth Scorpene Submarine Vagir, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1794765>

⁴⁸India sends medical supplies to Kiribati after Covid-19 triggers a state of disaster, http://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/34861/India_sends_medical_supplies_to_Kiribati_after_Covid19_triggers_a_state_of_disaster

⁴⁹Indian Navy Showcases Latest Indigenous Acquisitions During the President's Fleet Review, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1800087>

Years in Service of the Nation" provided the backdrop for the 12th edition of the President's Fleet Review. The Review included sailing past 44 ships of the Indian Navy, Coast Guard, SCI and MoES, a flypast by IN aircraft, a high speed steam past the Presidential yacht and demonstrations by Marine Commandos along the waterfront. The Presidential Address during the review included references to SAGAR, the role of the Indian Navy in providing aid to friendly nations and in evacuation of Indian citizens, and the substantial indigenous content of IN warships⁵⁰.

The 11th edition of Exercise MILAN – 2022 kicked off in Visakhapatnam on February 25⁵¹. Ships from 15 countries arrived the previous day. The US participated for the first time, being represented by USS Fitzgerald and a P-8A Poseidon⁵². The exercise, comprising a harbour and phase from February 25-28 and a sea phase from March 01-04, is intended to harness collective maritime competence through collaboration; thus its theme of "Camaraderie, Cohesion, Collaboration". It includes an international subject matter expertise exchange; and international maritime seminar; a demonstration of submarine rescue capability; a maritime expo showcasing Atmanirbhar Bharat, a city parade, sports activities, social, cultural and professional interactions and exercises at sea. Exercise MILAN represents India's cooperative maritime vision, as set out in SAGAR, building bridges of cooperation with like-minded countries using the regional seas.

Personnel from the 30th Infantry Regiment of Japan's Ground Self Defense Forces arrived in India on February 25 for the Joint Exercise Dharma Guardian 2022, at the Foreign Training Node at Belgavi (Karnataka) from February 27 to March 10, 2022. The 12 day exercise has a counter-terrorism focus⁵³.

South East Asia

A joint statement on behalf of the High Representative of the EU and the Foreign Ministers of Albania, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Norway, Republic of Korea, Switzerland, the UK and the US on the anniversary of the coup in Myanmar said, "Over 14 million people are in humanitarian need, the

⁵⁰Address by the President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind on the Occasion of Presidential Fleet Review – 2022, <https://static.pib.gov.in/WriteReadData/specificdocs/documents/2022/feb/doc202222117201.pdf>

⁵¹MILAN 2022, <https://www.in-milan.in/Index.aspx>

⁵²US Forces participate in Indian Navy-led Exercise Milan for the first time, <https://www.c7f.navy.mil/Media/News/Display/Article/2947493/us-forces-participate-in-indian-navy-led-exercise-milan-for-first-time/>

⁵³Japanese Ground Self Defence Forces Contingent Arrives in India for Joint Exercise "Ex Dharma Guardian – 2022", <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1801085>

economy is in crisis, democratic gains have been reversed, and conflict is spreading across the country”⁵⁴. It called on the military regime to “immediately end the State of Emergency, allow unhindered humanitarian access, release all arbitrarily detained persons, including foreigners, and swiftly return the country to the democratic process”. Indonesia urged the Myanmar military “to swiftly implement the Five Point Consensus (5PC) without further delay and immediately provide access to the ASEAN Special Envoy to be able to commence its duty according to the mandate of ASEAN leaders”⁵⁵. The ASEAN Chair also asked the Myanmar authorities to “take concrete actions to effectively and fully implement the 5PC” while underlining the urgency for immediate cessation of violence and timely delivery of humanitarian assistance to those most in need⁵⁶. The UN Security Council also expressed deep concern at the continuing state of emergency imposed by the military and reiterated its call for release of all who were arbitrarily detained and pursuance of dialogue with all parties concerned”⁵⁷. Myanmar’s Foreign Ministry, however, said that the proposal for ASEAN’s envoy to meet with “unlawful associations and terrorist groups” was “not only contrary to the principles of the ASEAN charter but also undermined ASEAN’s counter-terrorism efforts”⁵⁸. The World Court, meanwhile, began hearing preliminary arguments in a case brought against Myanmar demanding that it halt alleged acts of genocide against its Rohingya Muslim minority⁵⁹. International pressure on the Myanmar junta for dialogue and reconciliation remains ineffective even as the humanitarian crisis deepens.

The US State Department notified Congress of its determination approving the sale of 36 F-15ID aircraft and related equipment at an estimated cost of \$ 13.9 billion on February 10⁶⁰. Indonesia also formalised a deal to purchase 42 Rafale aircraft from France during the visit of the French Defence Minister Florence

⁵⁴Joint Statement on the Situation in Myanmar, <https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-on-the-situation-in-myanmar/>

⁵⁵Press Release, <https://kemlu.go.id/portal/en/read/3221/berita/press-release>

⁵⁶ASEAN Chairman’s Statement on the Situation in Myanmar, https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Consolidated_Draft_Chairmans_Statement_on_the_Situation_in_Myanmar-4.pdf

⁵⁷Security Council Press Statement on Myanmar, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2022/sc14785.doc.htm>

⁵⁸Myanmar junta urges ASEAN envoy not to engage with ‘terrorist groups’, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/myanmar-junta-urges-asean-envoy-not-engage-with-terrorist-groups-2022-02-21/>

⁵⁹World Court Myanmar genocide case clouded by representation dispute, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/world-court-open-jurisdiction-hearings-myanmar-genocide-case-2022-02-21/>

⁶⁰Indonesia F-15ID aircraft, <https://www.dsca.mil/sites/default/files/mas/Press%20Release%20-%20Indonesia%2022-13%20CN.pdf>

Parly to Jakarta on February 10⁶¹. Ms Parly also announced the beginning of submarine R&D cooperation with Indonesia. The commonality in French aircraft fielded by India and Indonesia offers the opportunity for bilateral, or trilateral cooperation.

East Asia

North Korea carried out its first missile test for the month, and the eighth for the year, on February 27, less than two weeks ahead of the South Korean Presidential elections on March 9⁶². The US INDOPACOM said it was “aware of the DPRK’s missile launch this morning and are consulting closely with the Republic of Korea and Japan, as well as other regional allies and partners”⁶³. It went on to condemn the launch.

USS Ralph Johnson, an Arleigh Burke class guided-missile destroyer, conducted a routine Taiwan Straits transit on February 26, remaining clear of the territorial waters of both the PRC and Taiwan⁶⁴. The transit is in consonance with international law, which provides complete freedom for warships to operate outside a nation’s territorial waters. Even within territorial waters, warships enjoy the right of innocent passage, as per UNCLOS. China, however, said, “It is hypocritical and futile for the US to conduct this provocative action in an attempt to bolster the Taiwan independence forces by making some gestures”⁶⁵.

Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi and the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken shared concerns on February 2 about North Korea’s nuclear and missile activities and the threat they posed to peace and stability⁶⁶. They agreed to work together and with South Korea towards complete denuclearisation of North Korea and to strengthen the deterrence and response capabilities of the Japan-US alliance. Meanwhile, Japan’s former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said Japan should discuss possible sharing of nuclear

⁶¹Communiqué – 42 Rafale for Indonesia, https://www.defense.gouv.fr/english/salle-de-presse/communiqués/communiqué_42-rafale-pour-l-indonesie

⁶²N. Korea resumes missile tests with first launch in a month, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/nkorea-fires-unidentified-projectile-skorea-military-says-2022-02-26/>

⁶³US INDOPACOM Statement on DPRK Missile Launch, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/2947617/usindopacom-statement-on-dprk-missile-launch/>

⁶⁴7th Fleet Destroyer Transits Taiwan Strait, <https://www.c7f.navy.mil/Media/News/Display/Article/2947525/7th-fleet-destroyer-transits-taiwan-strait/>

⁶⁵Chinese military slams US warships transit through Taiwan Straits, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2022-02/26/content_10135533.htm

⁶⁶Japan – US Foreign Ministers’ Telephone Talk, https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_003079.html

weapons in a fashion similar to that by NATO members in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, opening up the possibility of US nuclear weapons being stationed in Japan⁶⁷. China saw this as potentially unlocking Japan's militarism⁶⁸. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida weighed in by describing any nuclear-sharing deal as unacceptable, given Japan's stance on maintaining the three non-nuclear principles⁶⁹. Irrespective of what Japan finally decides, the debate promises to be an interesting, one that will shape the future of the Indo-Pacific.

The 12th China-EU defence and security policy dialogue was held via video link on February 25⁷⁰. Continued discussion of China-EU defence cooperation at a time when the EU faces the Russian challenge and has announced its own Indo-Pacific Strategy indicates that economic interests continue to dominate strategic ones in the EU's perspective.

GAZPROM inked a contract to design a new Soyuz Vostok Pipeline via Mongolia that could supply China as much as 50 BCM of gas every year⁷¹. This is in addition to the earlier 2014 deal to supply 38 BCM of gas annually through the Power of Siberia pipeline and the early February 2022 announcement of a smaller deal to supply 10 BCM from fields in Russia's Far East. Russia has evidently anticipated Western Europe's actions to wean itself from energy supplies as a result of its action in Ukraine and moved to find alternate markets.

The Southern Pacific

Yet another controversy broke out between Australia and China, with the former accusing Chinese Navy warships in the Arafura Sea of shining a military grade laser at one of its P-8A maritime patrol aircraft and potentially endangering lives⁷². Australia condemned this unprofessional and unsafe military conduct. China refuted the allegation, saying its vessel had maintained safe, normative and professional operations throughout its encounter with the

⁶⁷Japan Should Discuss NATO-Like Nuclear Weapons Sharing, Abe Says, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-27/japan-should-discuss-nato-like-nuclear-weapons-sharing-abe-says>

⁶⁸Alert! Abe's remarks are unlocking Japan's militarism: Global Times Editorial, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202202/1253381.shtml>

⁶⁹Kishida calls idea of Japan sharing nukes with US unacceptable, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2022/02/28/national/politics-diplomacy/kishida-nuclear-sharing-abe/>

⁷⁰12th China-EU defense and security policy dialogue held via video link, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2022-02/25/content_10135419.htm

⁷¹Gazprom Paves Way to New China Gas Deal as Sanctions Hit Russia, <https://www.bloombergquint.com/business/gazprom-paves-way-to-new-china-gas-deal-as-sanctions-hit-russia>

⁷²Australia accuses China of shining laser at warplane, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-60446928>

Australian aircraft⁷³. It also accused Australia of deliberately spreading false information and making irresponsible claims.

The US

The US Department of Defence announced its intention of spearheading a National Defense Science and Technology strategy informed by the 2022 National Defense Strategy (yet to be released), structured around three strategic pillars: mission focus, foundation building and succeeding through teamwork. The Technology Strategy is intended to chart a course for the US military to strengthen its technological superiority amidst a global race for technological advantage. Critical technology priorities were identified as Biotechnology, Quantum Science, future generation wireless technology, advanced materials, trusted AI and autonomy, Integrated network system-of-systems, microelectronics, space technology, renewable energy generation and storage, advanced computing and software, human-machine interfaces, directed energy, hypersonics, and integrated sensing and cyber⁷⁴.

A group of Democratic congressmen renewed a legislative fight to push the US to ratify UNCLOS⁷⁵. Proponents argue that the military uniformly support ratification, while opponents argue that the treaty forfeits a level of sovereign power on the part of the US, and that the protections UNCLOS offers for utilising natural resources in the deep seabed could be worked out through bilateral negotiations with foreign nations. They also disagree with the premise that ratifying the treaty will assist in managing the behaviour of revisionist states such as China. Nations will wait and see whether this new attempt is successful.

The White House released the Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States on February 12, 2022⁷⁶. An analysis of this strategy has been published separately⁷⁷.

⁷³China slam's Australia's groundless accusations on PLA Navy's operations against ADF aircraft's approach, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2022-02/21/content_10133744.htm

⁷⁴USD (R&E) Technology Vision for an Era of Competition, https://www.cto.mil/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/usdre_strategic_vision_critical_tech_areas.pdf

⁷⁵The fight for UNCLOS is back with the Indo-Pacific in mind, <https://breakingdefense.com/2022/02/the-fight-for-unclos-is-back-with-the-indo-pacific-in-mind/>

⁷⁶Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States, February 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf>

⁷⁷DPG Policy Brief: The New US Indo-Pacific Strategy, <https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/publication/policy-briefs/the-new-us-indo-pacific-strategy.html>

Foreign ministers of Japan, South Korea and the US came together at Honolulu on February 12 and released a joint statement⁷⁸. They underscored the importance of the three countries working together across the range of regional and global security and economic priorities and addressing current challenges together.

The US joined Australia, Canada, France, Germany, New Zealand and the UK in jointly releasing their Combined Space Operations Vision⁷⁹. The stated objective is to address the overarching need to encourage responsible use of space, recognise challenges to space sustainability, threats presented by technological advances, and the increasingly comprehensive and aggressive counterspace programmes of other states. The exclusion of Asian partners in this vision is noteworthy.

⁷⁸Joint Statement on the US-Japan-Republic of Korea Trilateral Ministerial Meeting, <https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-on-the-u-s-japan-republic-of-korea-trilateral-ministerial-meeting/>

⁷⁹DoD and Partners Release Combined Space Operations Vision 2031, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/2941594/dod-and-partners-release-combined-space-operations-vision-2031/>



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