



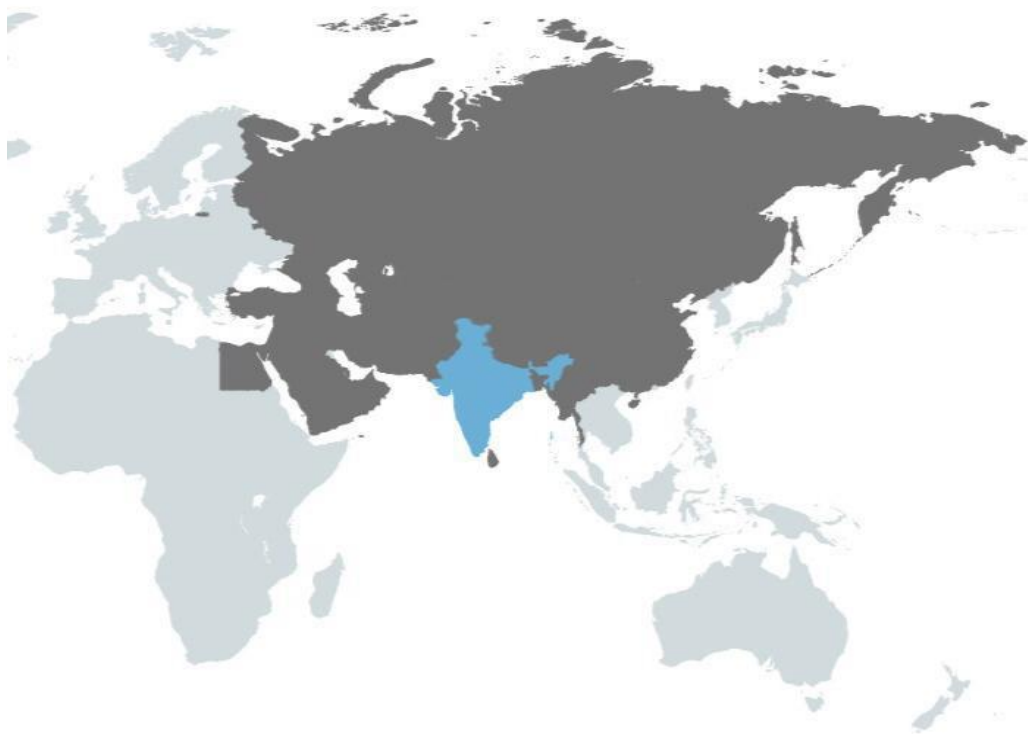
**Delhi Policy Group**

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



# INDIA STRATEGIC REVIEW

## OCTOBER 2020



Volume I, Issue 5 | October 2020

Delhi Policy Group  
Core 5A, 1st Floor, India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi- 110003  
[www.delhipolicygroup.org](http://www.delhipolicygroup.org)



# Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power

## DPG India Strategic Review

Vol. I, Issue 5

October 2020

### ABOUT US

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

Since 2016, in keeping with India's increasing global profile, DPG has expanded its focus areas to include India's regional and global role and its policies in the Indo-Pacific. In a realist environment, DPG remains mindful of the need to align India's ambitions with matching strategies and capabilities, from diplomatic initiatives to security policy and military modernisation.

At a time of disruptive change in the global order, DPG aims to deliver research based, relevant, reliable and realist policy perspectives to an actively engaged public, both at home and abroad. DPG is deeply committed to the growth of India's national power and purpose, the security and prosperity of the people of India and India's contributions to the global public good. We remain firmly anchored within these foundational principles which have defined DPG since its inception.

*The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the Delhi Policy Group as an Institution.*

### DPG INDIA STRATEGIC REVIEW

The DPG India Strategic Review (ISR) is a monthly survey of key developments, trends and policies pertaining to India's immediate and continental neighbourhood. It is compiled by a research team which is led by Sanjay Pulipaka, Senior Fellow, and includes Research Associates Mohit Musaddi, Antara Ghosal Singh, Sanket Joshi, Shreyas Deshmukh, Libni Garg and Anushka Nair. The ISR is based on open source official statements, reports and publications. Your comments and feedback may be addressed to Mohit Musaddi at [mohit@dpg.org.in](mailto:mohit@dpg.org.in). To subscribe, please [click here](#).

### Cover Image:

*World map*

© 2020 by the Delhi Policy Group

**Delhi Policy Group**  
Core 5A, 1st Floor,  
India Habitat Centre,  
Lodhi Road, New Delhi- 110003.  
[www.delhipolicygroup.org](http://www.delhipolicygroup.org)

# DPG India Strategic Review

Vol. I, Issue 5

October 2020

## Contents

<b>Overview: Exploring Alliances and Alignments</b>	
<i>Sanjay Pulipaka and Mohit Musaddi</i> .....	1
<b>India and China: A Prolonged Stand-off</b>	
<i>Antara Ghosal Singh</i> .....	9
<b>Russia: Strategic Partnerships and Alliances</b>	
<i>Anushka Nair</i> .....	11
<b>India and West Asia: New Alignments and Frameworks</b>	
<i>Sanket Joshi</i> .....	14
<b>India, CARs and PAI: The Afghan Redux</b>	
<i>Shreyas Deshmukh</i> .....	18
<b>India and the Neighbourhood: New Collaborations and Regional Security</b>	
<i>Mohit Musaddi</i> .....	24
<b>The Maldives and Sri Lanka: Engaging Major Powers</b>	
<i>Libni Garg</i> .....	29

## Overview: Exploring Alliances and Alignments

*Sanjay Pulipaka and Mohit Musaddi*

China's aggressive actions in Ladakh have prompted deeper national conversations in India on issues such as military preparedness, border infrastructure and foreign policy, among others. An emerging node in the ongoing discussion is how far India should go in considering closer alignment with the United States, short of a mutual defence commitment.

Alliances, as traditionally defined, envisage collective defence and action by two or more countries to deter aggressive behaviour by another country. However, in the past two decades, the nature of warfare has undergone significant shifts because of technological developments. In some instances, sharing of high-end technologies can have a far greater impact than pooling human resources during warfare. From an Indian perspective, the notion of armies from two countries fighting shoulder-to-shoulder is rather a 20<sup>th</sup> century or a Cold War construct. Moreover, India has one of the world's largest militaries in terms of personnel and does not require boots on the ground from its partners. What India needs instead is rapid technological upgradation of its defence forces, the sharing of advanced military equipment and intelligence, and a co-ordinated diplomatic strategy to meet the challenges from the northern and western fronts as well as the Indo-Pacific maritime domain.

Although not an alliance, India's most consequential relationship is with the United States. As [Secretary Pompeo](#) recently observed, "The United States is ready to do the things it can do to help deliver safety and security to the Indian people, and I'm confident that India will do the same for us all around the world...we are confident that together we can deliver the deterrence."<sup>1</sup> These new dimensions in Delhi's relationship with Washington have partly been hastened by Chinese actions, not only along India's borders but also across the Indo-Pacific region.

### China and the LAC: No Surprises

In the past few weeks, it is no surprise that the discussions pertaining to disengagement and de-escalation between India and China along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) have failed to make progress. While Beijing is adamant that the Indian forces should withdraw from the south bank of Pangong Tso, Delhi has been insistent on Chinese withdrawals as the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has [violated all established frameworks](#) along the LAC.<sup>2</sup> As India's External Affairs Minister (EAM) has noted, Chinese actions have disregarded



the multiple agreements starting from 1993 and have left the relationship “[profoundly disturbed](#)”.<sup>3</sup>

While the border stand-off continues, news reports suggest that China is assisting Pakistan to set up a new [surface-to-air missile system](#) near Lasadanna Dhok in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).<sup>4</sup> Earlier, in February 2020, “the Indian Coast Guard [had] sighted a Chinese warship in Pakistani waters.”<sup>5</sup> These developments further reinforce the perception that a two-front threat for India is very real.

After banning over 100 China-based apps, the Indian government has [reportedly](#) decided that all FDI proposals “with even minuscule Chinese holding will need government approval”.<sup>6</sup> There have also been [reports](#) that the Indian government is in talks with Taiwan on a trade deal.<sup>7</sup> This comes after the Chinese Embassy in India made an [ill-advised suggestion](#) to the Indian media to play down the Taiwan national day celebrations, which the media promptly discarded.<sup>8</sup> On the contrary, there were some [posters on the streets](#) around the Chinese mission celebrating Taiwan National Day.<sup>9</sup>

Divergences between India and China at both the bilateral and regional levels are becoming increasingly evident. Amidst the visit of US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo and Secretary of Defense Mark Esper to India, the Chinese Embassy in its statement [noted that](#) the “Indo-Pacific strategy proposed by the US is to stir up a confrontation among different groups and blocs and to stoke geopolitical competition.”<sup>10</sup>

### India and the US: ‘Force Multipliers’

There is growing convergence between India and the US on the evolving geopolitical dynamics in the Indo-Pacific in general and towards China in particular. The US policy towards China has at least three major elements.

First, US officials have started emphasising the distinction between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Chinese people and the need to free the latter from the former. For instance, [Secretary Pompeo remarked](#) that the CCP “rule with an iron fist. They ensure their continued political pre-eminence as their primary mission set inside of their country.”<sup>11</sup> Second, in addition to a trade war, the US is voicing concerns regarding China’s human rights violations. Washington is urging countries to take note of the “[gravest threat](#)” to religious freedom in Xinjiang Province.<sup>12</sup> Much to the discomfiture of Beijing, Washington has finally appointed a [Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues](#), who has already interacted with Lobsang Sangay, the President of the Central Tibetan Administration.<sup>13</sup> Third, the US has been vocal in calling out Chinese

territorial expansionism, as evident in Washington's diplomatic support to India at various international platforms. For instance, during the Quad and other meetings in Tokyo, Secretary [Pompeo stated](#) that the Chinese have amassed a large number of troops against India and added that the "world has awakened," and the US has "built out a coalition that will push back against the [Chinese] threat."<sup>14</sup>

As noted earlier, the US strategy towards China has amplified the alignments in the India-US relationship. This is what led the US Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun to [describe](#) the Washington-Delhi relationship as "a fundamental alignment along shared security and geopolitical goals, shared interests, and shared values."<sup>15</sup> Shortly after the Quad Foreign Ministers' meeting on October 6, 2020, the 3<sup>rd</sup> India-US 2+2 Dialogue was held in Delhi on October 27, where Delhi and Washington called for promoting freedom and ensuring supply chain resilience. They also concluded the BECA foundational agreement, which, along with COMCASA (2018) and LEMOA (2016), will help enhance interoperability between the Indian and American defence forces. LEMOA was [reportedly](#) used for the first time in September 2020 when the Indian Army acquired 11,000 sets of "extended cold weather clothing system (ECWCS)" from the US.<sup>16</sup> Reflecting on these new dimensions of the US-India bilateral defence relationship, Secretary Mike Pompeo pointed out that India and the US can be "[force multipliers](#)" not only for "the Indo-Pacific region but for the entire world".<sup>17</sup>

### Praxis: Russia and Alliances

On October 22, reflecting on an alliance framework with China, Russian President Vladimir [Putin observed](#) that, "we have always believed that our [Russia-China] relations have reached such a level of co-operation and trust that it [an alliance] is not necessary, but it is certainly imaginable, in theory."<sup>18</sup> President Putin's theoretical exploration of a possible Russia-China military alliance attracted considerable international attention, including in India. However, it is possible that Putin's statements were aimed towards US leaders who have continued to view Russia as the principal threat. For instance, US Presidential candidate Joe Biden recently [stated that](#) the "biggest threat to America right now in terms of breaking up security and our alliances, is Russia."<sup>19</sup> Therefore, it would appear that to some extent, Russia's discussions on alliances are also contingent on the outcome of the US elections.

With India, Moscow has been exploring new avenues to further strengthen the 'Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership'. On October 7, PM Modi discussed initiatives to enhance the [Delhi-Moscow partnership](#) with President Putin,

during a telephone conversation on the occasion of the Russian President's birthday.<sup>20</sup> Notably, the two leaders have spoken on the phone thrice since July 2020.

Given the current security dynamic in the Indian subcontinent, acquiring defence equipment from Russia has also acquired greater urgency. [Reportedly](#), Delhi is in "advanced talks" with Moscow to purchase two-dozen lightweight tanks that could be used for "high altitude areas".<sup>21</sup> Amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, India and Russia have also been co-operating in the pharmaceutical sector, which received a further boost when the Drug Controller General of India (DGCI) allowed Reddy Laboratories to conduct [Phase II and Phase III](#) trials of the Sputnik-V vaccine in India.<sup>22</sup>

### Middle East: Three No's and Minilaterals

Meanwhile, political realignments in the Middle East have continued to gather steam. On October 23, [Sudan](#) became the third country after the UAE and Bahrain to normalise relations with Israel.<sup>23</sup> These developments have completely negated the Arab states' policy of "Three No's – no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, and no negotiations with Israel."<sup>24</sup> Instead, it appears that Trump's unconventional approach of building rapprochements is finding cautious approval from the most unlikely quarters. For instance, according to an [Arab News/YouGov poll](#), "52 per cent of Palestinians in the occupied territories support US efforts to play a bigger role in mediating between Israelis and Palestinians".<sup>25</sup> Therefore, to quote [Walter Russell Mead](#), "it's clear the region is moving away from the predictable sterility of the past towards something genuinely new".<sup>26</sup>

Given the growing fluidity in the Middle East, the big powers are attempting to create structures in order to shape the region to their advantage. For instance, in October, the Israeli Ambassador to India said that a [trilateral](#) involving India, the UAE and Israel is "very much in the realm of possibility".<sup>27</sup> EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar had also [remarked](#) that the UAE is on the crossroads of international trade in the West.<sup>28</sup> Delhi and Tel Aviv, on the other hand, already co-operate across various sectors, including defence, technology and healthcare. Similarly, India must work with other like-minded Middle East partners to come up with its vision of plurilateral frameworks.

On the other hand, China has also articulated a need to create regional frameworks in the Middle East involving multiple actors. On October 10, [in a meeting](#) between Iran and China, Foreign Minister Wang Yi proposed to "build a regional multilateral dialogue platform" in the Middle East.<sup>29</sup> However, the contours of the new dialogue platform are unclear. At the same time, Beijing

has also maintained high-level contacts with the Taliban and has articulated willingness to extend the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to include Afghanistan. In return, China will get access to Afghanistan's mineral resources, and the Taliban will be acquiescent on the [human rights](#) issues in Xinjiang.<sup>30</sup>

### Déjà vu: Afghanistan on the Precipice

The fragility in the Afghan peace process is increasingly becoming evident. Even though the intra-Afghan dialogue is in its infancy, Washington seems to be in a hurry to withdraw its troops. As a consequence, major players in the Afghan peace process have reached out to various international actors to boost their negotiating positions. During October, the Chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation (HCNR) Abdullah [Abdullah visited India](#) to "discuss peace efforts".<sup>31</sup> In the peace talks, the Taliban are emerging as a dominant player. However, in the quicksand of Afghanistan's notorious ethnic politics, ability to hold on to power over a period of time by mono-ethnic political groups is not guaranteed. While the probable emergence of a fragmented polity in Afghanistan may worry observers, the political situation in neighbouring Pakistan has also become unstable.

### Pakistan

Islamabad is in the midst of multiple crises and uncertainties. Rising inflation and depleting foreign currency reserves have resulted in a [coalition of 11 parties](#) calling for the removal of Imran Khan.<sup>32</sup> In addition to the dire state of the Pakistan economy, there is discontent that provincial autonomy in Pakistan is being disrespected. The [news reports](#) that Pakistan's military abducted the Chief of Police in the Sindh province and forced him to sign the arrest warrant of Nawaz Sharif's son-in-law Captain Safdar Awan raised serious questions on whether federalism is being rapidly eroded.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, the Central government is reportedly planning to "[gift](#)" the twin islands Bundal and Buddo, located near Karachi, to China, as part of CPEC.<sup>34</sup> Recently, the Imran Khan government passed a [presidential ordinance](#) that allowed the federal government to take over the islands from the Sindh government. Sindh has "vowed to resist the centre's move, alleging that it was against the Constitution."<sup>35</sup>

Pakistan faced setbacks on international platforms as well. On October 23, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) announced that Pakistan would continue to remain on its "grey list" as it had failed to make progress on the [FATF recommendations](#).<sup>36</sup> Out of the 39 members of the FATF, [only Turkey](#) spoke in favour of Pakistan.<sup>37</sup> While the next review is scheduled for February 2021, the

Pakistani leadership will be troubled by a lack of support from the international community. Moreover, on October 27, the Indian government designated 18 individuals based in Pakistan “as terrorists under a new clause of India’s anti-terror law”.<sup>38</sup>

On Kashmir, Pakistan has been unable to generate international traction. Through various multilateral platforms, New Delhi has conveyed to Pakistan that Kashmir is an integral part of India and, therefore, any administrative restructuring in the state is an internal matter. For instance, on October 15, [India’s Permanent Representative](#) to the UN remarked that “Pakistan’s attempts to rake up this issue of Jammu and Kashmir in the UN Security Council have practically no takers.”<sup>39</sup>

### Collaborations in the Neighbourhood

In the last few months, India has increased its outreach in the neighbourhood. On October 21, the Indian [Research and Analysis Wing](#) (R&AW) Chief made a dash to Kathmandu and interacted with the senior leadership, including Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli.<sup>40</sup> This visit will be followed by the Indian Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General MM [Naravane’s visit](#) to Nepal early next month.<sup>41</sup> Delhi’s outreach to Kathmandu needs to be looked at in the backdrop of increasing reports of Chinese incursions in Nepal. Contrary to the Nepal Foreign Ministry’s claim that no Chinese encroachments have taken place in the Humla district, a team led by a Nepali Congress ([NC](#)) [parliamentarian](#) visited the border areas and concluded that the PLA has indeed occupied large chunks of Nepali territory.<sup>42</sup> If true, there may be growing concerns with Nepal’s neighbours that Kathmandu is deliberately overlooking the incursions.

In October, India’s Chief of Army Staff (COAS) and the Foreign Secretary (FS) [travelled to Nay Pyi Taw](#) to interact with Myanmar State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the Commander-in-Chief General Hlaing.<sup>43</sup> A major outcome of the meeting was an agreement for India to deliver Myanmar its [first-ever submarine](#).<sup>44</sup> The FS also conveyed India’s support for a speedy return of the displaced persons of [Rakhine State](#).<sup>45</sup>

The Rohingya crisis continues to undermine regional security on India’s eastern frontiers. In September 2020, the Bangladesh Foreign Minister said that Riyadh might deport the [Rohingyas living in Saudi Arabia](#) (estimated at 54,000) and impose a migration ban on Bangladesh if Dhaka is unable to provide them with citizenship.<sup>46</sup> Notably, in a [telephone conversation](#) on October 22, the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi proposed a tri-partite ministerial-level meeting between China, Myanmar and Bangladesh on the issue after the Myanmar general elections, which are scheduled for November 8, 2020.<sup>47</sup> The



issue was also discussed between Bangladesh and the US during Deputy Secretary of State, Stephen [Beigun's visit to Dhaka](#) on October 14-16.<sup>48</sup> Other issues discussed between the Deputy Secretary and the Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina included American assistance to Bangladesh during COVID-19 and an emphasis towards a free and open Indo-Pacific region.<sup>49</sup>

Washington has significantly increased interaction with Indo-Pacific countries. After visiting Delhi, US Secretary of State Mike [Pompeo also visited](#) Sri Lanka (October 28), the Maldives (October 28), Indonesia (October 29) and Vietnam (October 29).<sup>50</sup>

In the Maldives, Secretary Pompeo met with President Ibrahim Solih and Foreign Minister Abdulla Shaheed, and announced "plans to open a [US Embassy in Male](#)".<sup>51</sup> India has also [strengthened institutional linkages](#) with the Maldives. The Indian High Commissioner in the Maldives has interacted with members of the Civil Service Commission of the Maldives and has also held discussions with the Maldivian Housing Development Corporation Chairman.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, on October 15, a delegation from the Exim Bank of India met with the Maldives Foreign Minister, where Delhi's support for the Greater Male Connectivity Project (GMCP) was discussed, and a [line of credit](#) worth USD400 million was signed.<sup>53</sup>

With the Sri Lankan President, Secretary Pompeo [discussed](#) post-pandemic recovery, and reaffirmed their shared commitment to a "free and open Indo-Pacific region".<sup>54</sup> In October, Sri Lanka also received a [Chinese delegation](#) led by CCP member Yang Jiechi.<sup>55</sup> Eager to put to rest perceptions about potential debt-traps, China extended a grant of [USD90 million](#) to Sri Lanka.<sup>56</sup> President Rajapaksa Gotabaya appreciated the Chinese assistance and remarked that the Hambantota Port Deal is instrumental in generating employment, and hence, cannot be considered as "debt-trap".<sup>57</sup>

## Conclusion

India's most-consequential and mutually reinforcing relationship is with the US. Given their converging interests, it is crucial that this 'most consequential relationship' translates into broader and more institutionalised co-operation that includes bilateral and multilateral elements. Recently, Delhi has [expressed concerns](#) that the sanctions committees of the UN, especially the ones that deal with terrorists and terrorist organisations, are "being politicised".<sup>58</sup> To ensure that the UN is representative of current realities, large democracies like India must have a more prominent voice. In the [Joint Statement](#) of the Third US-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue, the US "reaffirmed its continued strong support for India's permanent membership in a reformed UNSC".<sup>59</sup> India, on its part,

has demonstrated a steady commitment to the UN and associated bodies. On the occasion of the UN's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Government of India "released a [commemorative postage stamp](#)".<sup>60</sup>

There may also be concerns in some quarters that India's close relationships with the great and major powers are coming at the cost of its Neighbourhood First policy. At the same time, India's growing bonds with major powers provide India with an opportunity to carry out third-country projects in the immediate neighbourhood with like-minded big powers.

## India and China: A Prolonged Stand-off

*Antara Ghosal Singh*

On October 17, India's External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar said that "the border clashes between India and China have left the Sino-Indian relationship [profoundly disturbed](#)".<sup>61</sup> During the month, India and China have maintained "[stable but confrontational](#)" positions at the LAC, even as talks continued between the two sides at the military and diplomatic level for "a comprehensive disengagement of troops" at all friction points.<sup>62</sup>



*IAF's Apache helicopter in the Ladakh region. Source: India Today/Reuters*

The seventh round of the corps commander's talks between India and China took place at Chushul on October 12. After a marathon meeting of 12 hours, a [joint press release](#) stated that "the two sides had a sincere, in-depth and constructive exchange of views" and the discussions were "positive".<sup>63</sup> However, as with previous discussions, the seventh round of corps commanders' meeting failed to make a significant breakthrough on the ground in terms of actual disengagement.

China is now reportedly [asking](#) for a "de-escalation of armoured and artillery units before disengagement," and India has turned down the [demand](#) on the grounds that "the flatter terrain on the Chinese side, as well as the infrastructure available to the People's Liberation Army (PLA), allows them to redeploy in a shorter time span."<sup>64</sup> However, both sides are still [continuing discussions](#) through diplomatic and military channels to "peacefully resolve the impasse along the LAC as per the agreements reached between the two foreign



ministers during their meetings in Moscow on September 10".<sup>65</sup> The [incident](#) of India handing over a PLA soldier, apprehended in the Demchok area of Ladakh, is believed to have set a positive atmosphere before the talks.<sup>66</sup> The dates for the next commander level talks have not yet been decided and could coincide with the 12th [BRICS](#) (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) summit, which is reportedly due to be held on November 17. Both Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping are expected to participate in the event.<sup>67</sup>

Meanwhile, the construction of strategic infrastructure along the LAC led to a war of words between the two sides. PM Modi, on October 3, [inaugurated the Atal Tunnel](#) which connects Manali to Leh (Ladakh).<sup>68</sup> On October 12, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh [inaugurated 44 new bridges](#), including eight in Ladakh, 10 in Jammu and Kashmir, two in Himachal Pradesh, four in Punjab, eight each in Uttarakhand and Arunachal Pradesh, and four in Sikkim.<sup>69</sup> China's foreign ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian criticised the move while [commenting](#) that it "doesn't recognise the so-called Ladakh Union Territory illegally set up by India or Arunachal Pradesh and opposes infrastructure building aimed at military contention in disputed border areas".<sup>70</sup> India [reiterated](#) that "Arunachal Pradesh is an integral and inalienable part of India. This fact has also been clearly conveyed to the Chinese side on several occasions, including at the highest level... the union territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh have been, are, and would remain an integral part of India," and that China has "no locus standi to comment on India's internal matters."<sup>71</sup>

Delhi's engagement of Taipei has become a new friction point between China and India. The Chinese embassy in India "advised" Indian media not to highlight Taiwan National Day in the light of the 'one-China' policy. India's Ministry of External Affairs ([MEA](#)) spokesperson responded by pointing out that "there is a free media in India and reports as it sees fit."<sup>72</sup> Subsequently, there were reports that India may initiate discussions on a [trade deal](#) with Taiwan.<sup>73</sup> Although the news was not officially confirmed, the Chinese foreign ministry cautioned New Delhi to [approach Taiwan](#) related matters prudently and follow the "One-China" principle.<sup>74</sup> The Chinese state media further issued threats by stating that "if India takes the move to support 'Taiwan independence', China has every reason to support [separatist forces](#) in Northeast India."<sup>75</sup>

The crisis along the LAC, which is in its sixth month now, is getting murkier and more complicated by the day and marks an uncertain future for India-China relations.

## Russia: Strategic Partnerships and Alliances

*Anushka Nair*

October 2020 marks the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the 'Declaration on the India-Russia Strategic Partnership', which has been upscaled to a 'Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership'. To commemorate the declaration, the Indian Embassy in [Moscow shared](#) some of the co-operative projects that played an indispensable part in the consolidation of this strategic partnership, including the BrahMos cruise missile, the INS Vikramaditya and the Kudankulam nuclear power plant in Tamil Nadu.<sup>76</sup> The Russian Foreign Ministry also issued a [Press Release](#) acknowledging the steady development of the Indo-Russian bilateral co-operation.<sup>77</sup> The Indian Ambassador in Moscow gave an [extensive interview](#) on the occasion of the 20-year anniversary of formalised co-operation, where he highlighted political ties, trade and investment, defence and security and energy among others as key areas of co-operation between India and Russia in the past two decades.<sup>78</sup>

Prime Minister Narendra Modi [conveyed birthday greetings](#) to Russian President Vladimir Putin via telephone on October 7.<sup>79</sup> While expressing appreciation for President Putin's initiatives to strengthen the India-Russia Strategic Partnership, PM Modi also said that he was [keen on hosting](#) his Russian counterpart in India for a bilateral summit as soon as it was safe to do so.<sup>80</sup> Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister [met with](#) the Indian Ambassador on October 20 and discussed issues in the context of the upcoming Council of Heads meeting of the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation (SCO).<sup>81</sup>

Reports suggest that India is in [discussion](#) with Russia to acquire two dozen lightweight Sprut tanks in a deal worth USD68 million.<sup>82</sup> The tanks will be of particular importance to India because, at 18 tonnes, they can be airlifted by transport aircraft for deployment in mountainous terrains.

India test-fired a naval version of the jointly developed [BrahMos](#) supersonic cruise missile from stealth destroyer INS Chennai in the Arabian Sea.<sup>83</sup> In October, the Indian Air Force (IAF) also reportedly "test-fired an [air-launched version](#) of the BrahMos... from a Sukhoi fighter aircraft from the Bay of Bengal".<sup>84</sup> In September 2020, India had tested a surface-to-surface version of the missile. A [defence ministry statement](#) said that the BrahMos as a 'prime strike weapon' would "ensure the warship's invincibility by engaging naval surface targets at long ranges, thus making the destroyer another lethal platform of the Indian Navy".<sup>85</sup>

After nearly five years of flight tests, the Russian Navy this month successfully test-launched a [Tsirkon hypersonic missile](#), fired from the White Sea at a sea target situated 450 km away in the Barents Sea.<sup>86</sup> President Putin [lauded the test launch](#) as a great event for Russia, stating that the development of advanced and globally unrivalled weapons systems would ensure Russian defence capabilities for years to come.<sup>87</sup> The Admiral Gorshkov frigate, from which the launch was conducted, is reportedly set to conduct another [three launches](#) by the year-end.<sup>88</sup>



*Russia's Admiral Gorshkov frigate launching a Tsirkon hypersonic missile in the White Sea on October 06, 2020 Source: Russian Defence Ministry's press service/TASS*

The Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) announced on October 17 that Dr Reddy's Laboratories and the RDIF had received the required clearance from the Drug Controller General of India ([DGCI](#)) to proceed with adaptive Phase II and III trials of the Sputnik V Covid-19 vaccine in India.<sup>89</sup> The trials in India are [expected to proceed](#) while incorporating weekly inputs from ongoing Phase III trials in Russia. India will join the United Arab Emirates, Belarus and Venezuela on the list of countries agreeing to domestically conduct late-stage clinical trials of the Russian vaccine.<sup>90</sup> President Putin has meanwhile announced the registration of Russia's [second Covid-19 vaccine](#) candidate, christened 'EpiVacCorona', being developed by Siberian biotech firm Vector.<sup>91</sup> Russia's

Deputy Prime Minister Tatyana Golikova has [reportedly been inoculated](#), along with nearly 100 other volunteers.<sup>92</sup>

The 27 EU foreign ministers approved a plan, including travel bans and asset freezing, proposed by France and Germany in response to Moscow's suspected involvement in the poisoning of Russian opposition leader [Alexei Navalny](#).<sup>93</sup> The Kremlin has [condemned these measures](#), labelling them 'consciously unfriendly'.<sup>94</sup> President Putin stated that he personally facilitated Alexei Navalny's [safe passage](#) to Berlin for treatment, despite travel restrictions on him in relation to ongoing judicial and criminal investigations.<sup>95</sup>

Edward Snowden, a former security contractor with the National Security Agency of the United States, who fled the US and sought asylum in Russia, has now been granted [permanent residency](#) by the Russian government, according to his lawyer.<sup>96</sup> Snowden, who fled the United States in 2013 after leaking files on the NSA's domestic and international surveillance programmes, had previously stated that he would be [ready to return](#) to the US if guaranteed a trial.<sup>97</sup> Developments pertaining to Alexei Navalny and Edward Snowden will contribute to further deterioration in the relations between Russia and the West.

On the other hand, on October 22, the Russian President remarked that although a [Russia-China military alliance](#) is "not necessary, but it is certainly imaginable".<sup>98</sup> While Russia and China have so far avoided a military alliance, both countries have hailed the [significance](#) of their 'strategic relationship' and continued military co-operation through bilateral and multilateral war games and military exercises.<sup>99</sup> Amid simmering tensions in both countries' relations with the United States, the possibility of an alliance between Moscow and Beijing has become a subject of discussion.



## India and West Asia: New Alignments and Frameworks

*Sanket Joshi*

The '[G20 Riyadh Summit](#)' on the theme of 'Realising Opportunities of the 21st Century for All' will be held virtually on November 21-22, 2020.<sup>100</sup> In light of this, Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a telephone conversation with Saudi Arabia's [King Salman](#) where the two leaders also discussed "joint opportunities to develop bilateral relations within the Saudi-Indian Strategic Partnership Council".<sup>101</sup> In the recent past, India and Saudi Arabia have also enhanced co-operation in the energy sector, particularly at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic has [eroded one-third](#) of the global energy demand.<sup>102</sup>



*India's External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar, National Security Advisor Ajit Doval attend Saudi Arabia's 90<sup>th</sup> national day celebrations in Delhi, September 24, 2020.*

*Source: Twitter/@KSAembassyIND*

On October 14, Saudi Arabia hosted the '[G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors](#)' meeting through video conferencing.<sup>103</sup> India's Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman participated in this meeting where it was agreed to extend the G20 '[Debt Service Suspension Initiative \(DSSI\)](#)' for a period of six months until June 2021.<sup>104</sup> Minister Sitharaman also said that the "[debt restructuring](#) should help low-income countries to overcome fiscal stress caused by the Covid-19 pandemic".<sup>105</sup> Meanwhile, at the G20, [Dr. Jitendra Singh](#), Minister of State, Prime Minister's Office, highlighted India's initiatives against corruption and unaccounted money (black money).<sup>106</sup>



*Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman participated in the G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors (virtual) meeting hosted by Saudi Arabia, October 14, 2020.*

*Source: Twitter/@FinMinIndia*

## India-UAE: Prospects for Healthcare Co-operation

On October 19, a '[UAE-India Healthcare Conference 2020](#)' was held to explore new avenues for partnership in healthcare, pharmaceuticals, medical devices and alternative medicines.<sup>107</sup> India's Ambassador to the UAE praised the UAE government's initiatives to explore avenues for Indian companies to set up manufacturing facilities for [vaccines and generic medicines](#).<sup>108</sup> The UAE will provide financial incentives and create a full ecosystem to support [healthcare manufacturing](#) companies from India".<sup>109</sup> Other initiatives to promote co-operation between India and the UAE include an 'India-UAE Food Dialogue' to promote [food security and trade](#) and an assessment of the potential for the UAE state-owned Caracal to [manufacture carbines](#) for the Indian Army.<sup>110</sup>

## India-Israel: COVID-19 Cooperation and Prospects for a New Regional Trilateral

India-Israel relations have continued to gather momentum in recent months. On October 5, Israeli Prime Minister [Benjamin Netanyahu](#) held a telephone conversation with PM Narendra Modi.<sup>111</sup> The two leaders discussed bilateral co-operation to combat COVID-19 and agreed to hold a digital conference on [solar energy](#) to jointly achieve more inexpensive solutions.<sup>112</sup>

The 'Abraham Peace Accord' between Israel and the UAE has changed the geopolitical dynamics of West Asia (Middle East). In light of this, Israel's

Ambassador in Delhi spoke about the “possibility of a new trilateral bloc, [‘India-Israel-UAE’](#), emerging in West Asia”.<sup>113</sup> The Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi also [spoke with](#) India’s External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar about bilateral co-operation aimed at addressing the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>114</sup>

To strengthen Israel-India [water co-operation](#), Israel is likely to have a separate ‘water attaché’ in Delhi from January 2021. Tel Aviv is also planning to appoint an honorary counsel general in Northeast India to increase its presence and collaborations in the region.<sup>115</sup>

## Investments

During October, India explored several initiatives to increase two-way trade and investments in West Asia. On October 19, the [Oman-India Joint Commission](#) held their 9<sup>th</sup> (virtual) meeting, co-chaired by India’s Minister of State for Commerce and Industry and his Omani counterpart. Both sides agreed to expedite internal procedures to sign and ratify the protocol amending the India-Oman Double Taxation Agreement and conclude the India-Oman Bilateral Investment Treaty.<sup>116</sup> The Public Investment Fund (PIF) of Saudi Arabia is in talks with [‘Lulu Group International – Supermarket Chain’](#) to buy a minority stake.<sup>117</sup> An Israeli company, [‘NeoLync’](#), is among the shortlisted companies under the ‘production-linked incentive (PLI)’ to manufacture mobile phones in India.<sup>118</sup>

## The ISIS Threat

The presence of the Islamic State (IS) and its offshoots in the Indian subcontinent continue to pose a major national security threat for India. According to a charge sheet filed by India’s National Investigation Agency (NIA), Al-Hind module, an offshoot of IS was planning to establish ISIS dominated areas inside the [dense forests](#) surrounding the South Indian states of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala.<sup>119</sup> NIA also busted a 14-member [module of the IS](#) that returned from Syria and Iraq. While arresting two of its alleged operatives; it has been reported that at least 13 to 14 individuals from Bengaluru had travelled to Iraq and Syria in 2013-14.<sup>120</sup>

## Regional Security Issues

The United States has imposed new sanctions on 18 [Iranian banks](#), as Washington seeks to increase pressure on Tehran.<sup>121</sup> This is in light of the UN arms embargo on Iran, which came to an end on October 18 as part of Resolution 2231 of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) 2015. The US strongly opposed this, with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo reiterating that

"any [arms sales to Iran](#) would result in sanctions".<sup>122</sup> In a rebuke to the US, China reiterated its commitment to the JCPOA, while Foreign Minister Wang Yi "proposed a [regional multilateral dialogue](#) forum in West Asia (Middle East) to de-escalate tensions".<sup>123</sup>

In a significant development, Turkey tested the Russian [S-400 missile defence system](#), a development that could further stoke tensions between Ankara and Washington as the United States opposes Turkish purchase of S-400s on the ground that it compromises shared NATO defence systems.<sup>124</sup> It must be noted that India has also purchased Russian S-400 system and is also looking to engage with American defence companies. In October, Washington purchased the iron dome missile defence system from Tel Aviv.

## Conclusion

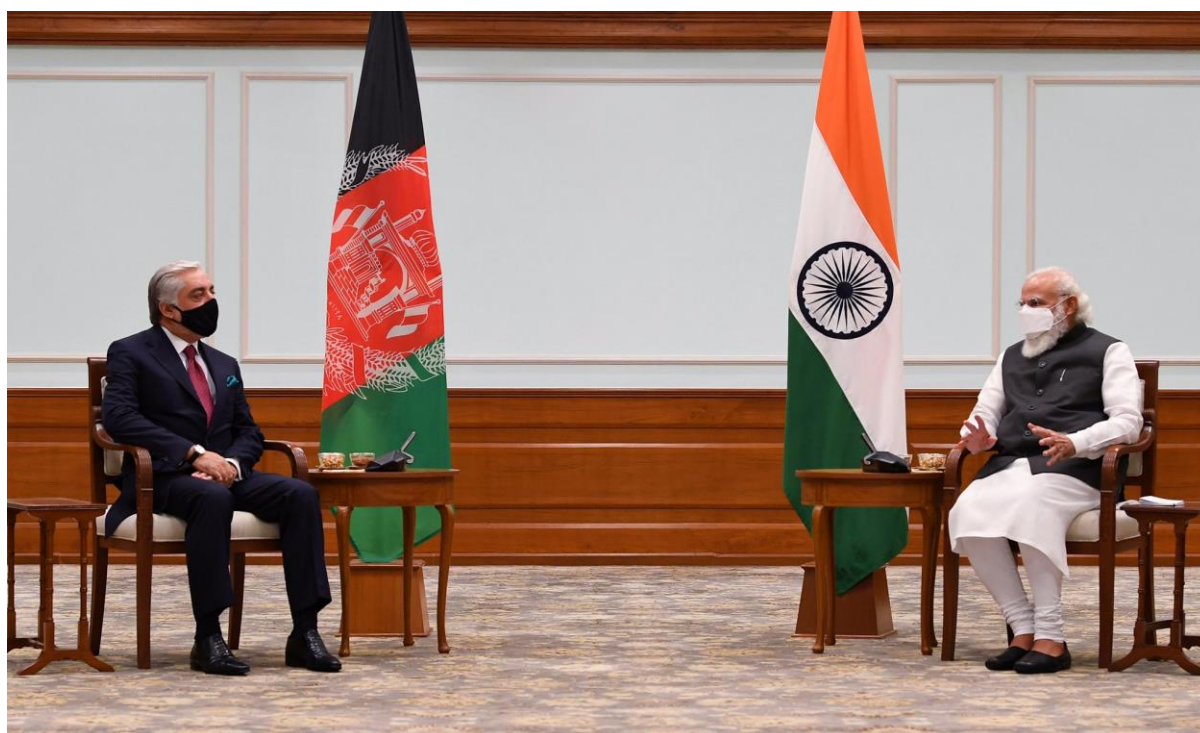
In recent months, the Abraham Accord has promised to drastically change the geopolitical dynamics of West Asia. India must take advantage of the growing convergences in the region by building up its own coalitions. The 'India-Israel-UAE' trilateral bloc is a distinct possibility that could serve mutual interests in energy security, cybersecurity and digital technologies, as well as counter-terrorism, intelligence sharing and arms deals.



## India, CARs and PAI: The Afghan Redux<sup>1</sup>

*Shreyas Deshmukh*

The [intra-Afghan dialogue](#) between the Taliban and the Afghan establishment was launched in Doha in September 2020.<sup>125</sup> Since then, recent developments indicate that the geopolitical situation in Afghanistan is rapidly heading towards pre-1995 civil war conditions. A [tweet by the US President](#) Donald Trump announcing the withdrawal of all US troops from Afghanistan by Christmas has put more pressure on the fragmented Afghan establishment.<sup>126</sup>

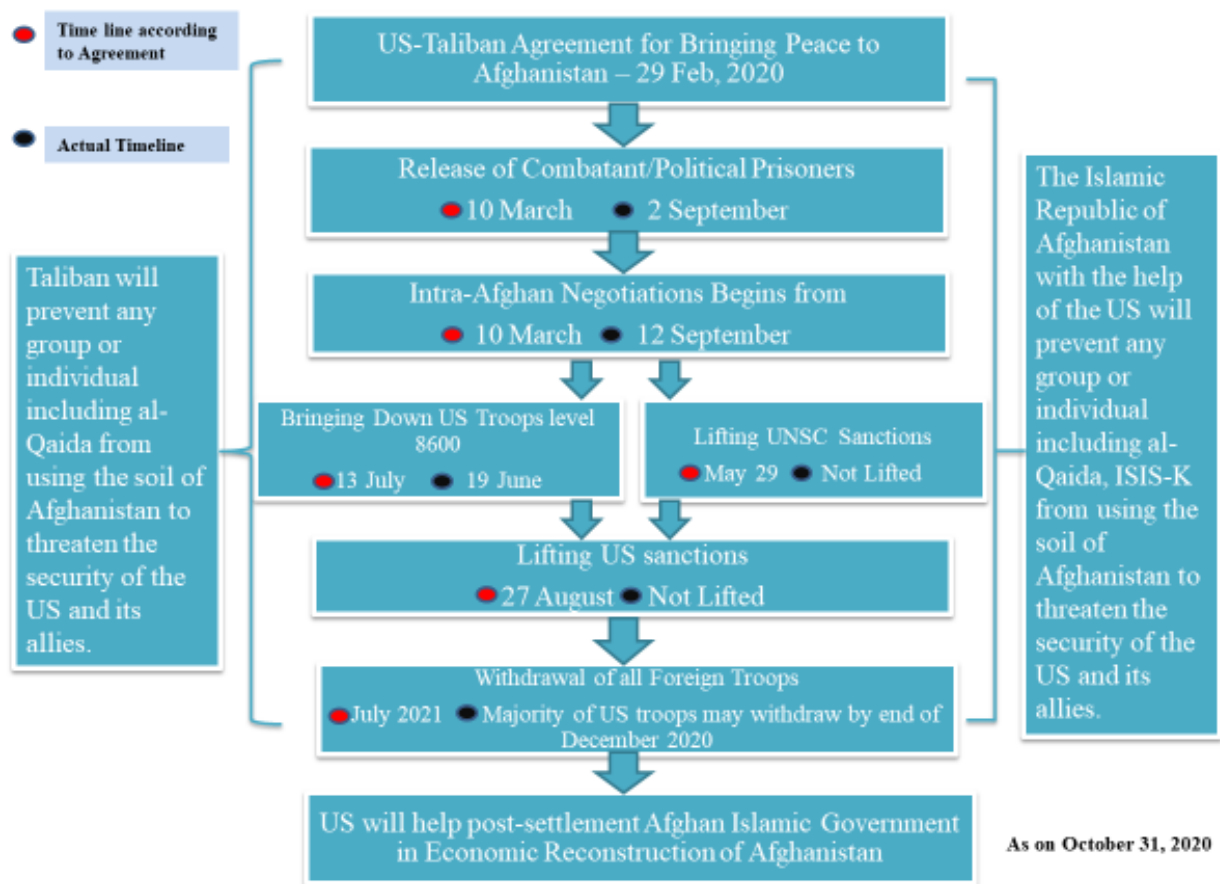


*Prime Minister Narendra Modi meets Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, Chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation of Afghanistan, October 08, 2020. Source: Flickr/MEA Photo Gallery*

As a result, the major players have [reached out](#) to their international partners in order to strengthen their negotiating positions.<sup>127</sup> The Chairman of the High Council of National Reconciliation of Afghanistan (HCNRA) Abdullah Abdullah [visited](#) India from October 06-11.<sup>128</sup> Leaders such as Marshal Dostum and Atta Noor have also [visited India](#) since the peace talks began.<sup>129</sup> [On the other hand, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar](#), leader of the Hizb-e-Islami, proposed an [alliance with the Taliban](#)<sup>130</sup> and also [visited Pakistan](#), where he stated that Washington has “no choice except to leave the country”.<sup>131</sup>

<sup>1</sup> CARs stands for Central Asian Republics, and PAI stands for Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran.

The Taliban has [intensified its attacks](#) all over the country and has taken control of the major highways.<sup>132</sup> The Afghan National Army (ANA) successfully [repelled major offensives](#) by the Taliban in the north and central provinces,<sup>133</sup> but it [lacks air support](#) from American troops.<sup>134</sup> The US-Taliban deal signed on February 29, 2020, which restricts attacking each other. However, the fierce, short battle, which began in the second week of October in Lashkargah, the capital of Helmand province, forced US troops to send [aerial support](#) to the ANA.<sup>135</sup> Overall, the Taliban has managed to retain the upper hand in both the negotiations and in the [battleground](#) and has declined offers of a [ceasefire](#).<sup>136</sup>



Source: Compiled by the author from various sources

### Intra Afghan Dialogue

The intra-Afghan peace talks are in the very early stages, and, discussions pertaining to power-sharing and the nature of the governance structure are yet to begin. The Afghan establishment is fragmented with [multiple agendas](#) of

different power brokers.<sup>137</sup> That includes safeguarding democratic values, women rights, rights of minorities and personal interests of political patrons.

The Taliban does look more homogeneous with a clear agenda, which is a complete withdrawal of foreign troops and establishment of the Islamic Emirate based on the [Hanafi School's](#) interpretation of the Sharia.<sup>138</sup> Taliban may want to conclude negotiations before the new US administration assumes responsibility and simultaneously pressurise the Afghan government by establishing firm control over large swathes of the country.

## Regional Actors

At present, the entire focus of the entire US strategy appears to be based on containing and eliminating the threat of Al-Qaeda and increasing the status of the Taliban, calling them a partner in the fight against the Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISKP). Yet, a surge in the level of violence by the Taliban raised concerns in the [US military leadership](#).<sup>139</sup> The US is waiting for the initial breakthrough in the intra-Afghan dialogue to [reduce force level](#) to 4,500.<sup>140</sup>

The US is also intensifying efforts to engage with Central Asian states on trade and connectivity. While it appears that Washington seems to be retreating from the region, it is keen on working with friends and allies (such as Bahrain, Israel, UAE and Qatar) in managing geopolitical dynamics in Central and West Asia.

On the other hand, Russia is supporting the US-led peace process and is patiently waiting for the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan. The US and Russia came out with two [joint statements](#) after the US-Taliban deal.<sup>141</sup> At present, Moscow is geopolitically stretched with multiple commitments in the Black Sea, Caspian Sea, Syria, Libya, Armenia and Ukraine. Therefore, Russia does not have the political and economic capital to play an active role in Afghanistan. However, it has maintained contacts with all actors, [including the Taliban](#).<sup>142</sup>

China is positioning itself to play an important regional role after the US withdrawal. It is maintaining a high-level contact with the Taliban bilaterally and through Pakistan. Moreover, strengthening China-Iran relations will have a major impact on the future of China's Afghan policy, as it has already initiated projects to bring Afghanistan under the CPEC (BRI) umbrella. This may result in a regional trade and connectivity bloc ([CARs+Pakistan+Afghanistan+Iran](#)), headed by China.

Pakistan is primarily focused on fortifying gains achieved from four decades of war before the situation [again deteriorates](#) in its tribal areas bordering Afghanistan.<sup>143</sup> It is building fences and sealing the Durand Line to ensure greater control on trade and border crossings. Negotiations with the Taliban and Afghanistan government have continued for early [repatriation of Afghan refugees](#).<sup>144</sup>

China, the US and the Afghan establishment understand the importance of the role of Pakistan in bringing stability to Afghanistan. Ambassador Khalilzad and the commander of Resolute Support mission General Austin Miller [held a meeting](#) with the Pakistan Chief of Army Staff General Bajwa in the first week of October.<sup>145</sup> The recent visit of Abdullah Abdullah to Islamabad is also crucial in this regard.<sup>146</sup> From Pakistan's perspective, ensuring a stable governance structure in Afghanistan with the Taliban as lead ensures greater control within Kabul. Islamabad will hope that the security situation in its eastern borders will also be addressed with these developments.

## A Crucial Visit

The visit of Abdullah Abdullah to India came immediately after his visit to Pakistan. Although such a balancing act was expected, his visit nevertheless comes at a crucial juncture of the intra-Afghan peace process when the [rules of engagement](#) are about to be finalised, and actual negotiations are imminent.<sup>147</sup> He was, therefore, received by [Prime Minister Modi](#), the External Affairs Minister and the [National Security Advisor](#).<sup>148</sup>

India's '[principled position](#)' on Afghanistan (sovereign, peaceful, united, democratic, inclusive, stable and secure) has prevented Delhi from taking sides and interfering in the internal politics of Kabul. During his visit to Delhi, Abdullah Abdullah appreciated India's stance, but also signalled that a [hasty US withdrawal](#) from Afghanistan might have adverse consequences.<sup>149</sup> For the Afghan establishment, a delay will provide much needed time to build consensus, retain much of the present Constitution and at the same time incorporate the Taliban's idea of an Islamic Emirate.

## Pakistan

While much of the discussion on India's western frontiers focused on Afghanistan, the domestic political situation in Pakistan has become volatile in the past month. After two years in power, the Imran Khan-led government is facing serious challenges such as rising inflation, food crisis, the sectarian divide and depleting foreign currency reserves. As a result, 11 opposition parties have formed the [Pakistan Democratic Movement](#) (PDM) coalition against the



ruling party Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI). The opposition coalition has organised rallies in the major cities including Gujranwala, Karachi, and Quetta. While the main focus is on Imran Khan, the opposition has also openly criticised the role of the military establishment in politics. It needs to be seen whether such tactics by the opposition can impact the political situation and the security dynamics of Pakistan.<sup>150</sup>



*People assemble at the Bagh-e-Jinnah in Karachi, Pakistan for an anti-government rally organised by the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), October 18, 2020.*

*Source: ANI*

## Central Asia

The political situation in Central Asia is also becoming volatile. Two Central Asian states, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, conducted elections in October. Emomali Rahmon, ruling [Tajikistan](#) since 1992, was re-elected as the President for another seven-year term.<sup>151</sup> Kyrgyzstan, though, has descended into [political chaos](#) after the results of the recently held elections were allegedly rigged.<sup>152</sup> Violent public protests and demonstrations have ensued, and it is expected that the next presidential elections will be held before January 2021.

Meanwhile, India has continued to enhance its co-operation with its partners in Central Asia and will soon operationalise an [air corridor](#) between India-Uzbekistan and others in the region.<sup>153</sup> The President of Turkmenistan, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, held a telephone conversation with the President of India on October 15. Collaboration between Indian and Turkmen

companies, particularly in the [pharmaceutical sector](#), and the status of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline project were discussed.<sup>154</sup>

On October 28, the 2nd meeting of the [India-Central Asia Dialogue](#) was held through videoconference. During the meeting, India announced a provision of USD1 billion Line of Credit for developmental projects in fields such as connectivity, energy, IT, healthcare, education and agriculture. India also hosted the [19<sup>th</sup> Meeting](#) of the SCO Ministers responsible for Foreign Economy and Foreign Trade Activities, which focused on Covid-19 response, Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) and exchange of information on MSMEs.<sup>155</sup>

The timing of the conference was crucial on the backdrop of the ongoing Afghan Peace process. Peace and political stability in Afghanistan will also pave the way for regional development and help in improving the North-South connectivity.

### Defence Updates

- ❖ The Russian and Kazakh defence ministers signed an agreement in the Kazakh capital on October 16 on [bilateral military co-operation](#) to replace a deal that has been in place since 1994. It covers issues including military education and training, arms and equipment deliveries and participation in bilateral and multilateral drills and exercises.<sup>156</sup>
- ❖ Joint Secretary (DIP) of the Indian Ministry of Defence, while speaking at the inaugural session of the [India-Kazakhstan Defence Co-operation Expo](#) on October 13, said that several Indian companies are in talks with Kazakh defence industries for co-development and co-production of defence equipment. India and Kazakhstan are looking at exploring opportunities that provide win-win solutions to industries on both sides.<sup>157</sup>

## India and the Neighbourhood: New Collaborations and Regional Security

*Mohit Musaddi*

India's neighbourhood is dotted with fluid political dynamics. Myanmar is going through an election process which will have a deep impact on the overall political transition of the country. In Nepal, there is uncertainty associated with Prime Minister Oli's administration. Bhutan and Bangladesh have a relatively more stable political system. These developments have constituted India's outreach in the neighbourhood.

### Myanmar



*Myanmar Navy's new Kilo-class submarine participates in the Bandoola naval exercise, October 16, 2020. Source: Diplomat/Wikimedia Commons*

India and Myanmar took stock of their bilateral relationship via multiple channels in October. On October 1, Delhi and Nay Pyi Taw virtually held the 19<sup>th</sup> round of [Foreign Office consultations](#) where the two sides reviewed relations, including border infrastructure, India's ongoing projects in Myanmar and ways to enhance power and energy co-operation.<sup>158</sup> This was followed by a [high-level visit](#) of the Indian COAS and the FS to Myanmar on October 4-5.<sup>159</sup> Ahead of the Myanmar general elections on November 8, the Indian delegation called on State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the Myanmar Commander-in-Chief General Hlaing. Key discussions during the visit

included consensus for early operationalisation of the Sittwe Port, India's proposal to establish a USD6 billion oil refinery in Myanmar, and a grant of USD2 million for the construction of a border *haat* bridge in Chin state.<sup>160</sup> Notably, the foreign secretary also [inaugurated a liaison office](#) of the Embassy of India in Nay Pyi Taw.<sup>161</sup>

India handed over a Kilo-class [submarine to the Myanmar](#) Navy, giving Nay Pyi Taw its first-ever submarine.<sup>162</sup> [The transfer](#) took place in October during Myanmar's Bandoola fleet exercise and comes at a time when Delhi is engaged in military tensions with China.<sup>163</sup>

## Nepal

India's R&AW chief Samant Goel [called on](#) Nepal Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli on October 21 in Kathmandu.<sup>164</sup> Even though no official details of the meeting have been revealed, such high-level interactions between India and Nepal constitute preliminary steps to resolve the differences that have crept up in recent months. The visit also comes at a time when PM Oli has [reshuffled his Cabinet](#) and reassigned the Defence Ministry portfolio to himself.<sup>165</sup> The former Defence Minister Ishwar Pokhrel has been critical of India in the past and is [reportedly](#) part of the main faction that has opposed Nepal's attempts to mend ties with India.<sup>166</sup> COAS General Naravane is set to [visit Nepal](#) in November in what will be the first Indian high-level visit since the boundary dispute gained momentum.<sup>167</sup> Therefore, PM Oli's move to keep the defence portfolio could also ensure that the discussions with the COAS are cordial, productive and mutually beneficial. During his visit, the COAS will also be conferred the rank of an Honorary General of the Nepal Army.<sup>168</sup> It is a [reciprocal arrangement](#) between the two countries, and the Nepal Army Chief was conferred the honorary rank in the Indian Army in January 2019.<sup>169</sup>

The COAS may also discuss China's territorial encroachments in Nepal's Humla district. Beijing has reportedly constructed infrastructure on Nepal's side of the border. Although the claims have been refuted by the Nepal Foreign Ministry, a team led by [Nepali Congress](#) (NC) parliamentarian concluded in October that a damaged pillar had been replaced by the Chinese "in such a way that a large chunk of Nepal's territory [has] gone to China".<sup>170</sup> The team came to such a conclusion after an [11-day visit](#) to the Nepal-China border areas and has claimed that China may have occupied "up to one-and-half kilometres" of Nepali territory.<sup>171</sup> On October 28, a major [border customs point](#) (Tatopani), along the Nepal-China border was operationalised.<sup>172</sup>

On October 2, the Indian Ambassador to Nepal [handed over](#) "forty-one ambulances and six school buses to various governmental and non-



governmental organisations... across 30 districts of Nepal". Since 1994, the Indian Embassy has gifted 823 ambulances and 160 school buses.<sup>173</sup> On October 8, a [school](#) built with Indian financial assistance in the Kailali District of Nepal was jointly inaugurated by the Embassy of India and local representatives under the 'Nepal-Bharat Development Co-operation' Agreement.<sup>174</sup> On the same day, the Indian Ambassador to Nepal met Nepal's Civil Aviation minister to "discuss ways to [promote tourism](#) in both countries".<sup>175</sup>

## Bangladesh

India and Bangladesh entered into an '[air-bubble agreement](#)', nearly eight months after travel suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>176</sup> The [air bubble](#) was inaugurated by the Indian High Commissioner in Bangladesh on October 28.<sup>177</sup>

Delhi and Dhaka have also been working on building border infrastructure in the recent past. The incoming Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh visited the border areas in October and took stock of [ongoing projects](#) including a Special Economic Zone (SEZ), Integrated Check Posts (ICP) and the under-construction India-Bangladesh railway project.<sup>178</sup> [Another railway link](#), from Haldibari (India) to Chilhati (Bangladesh), is reportedly being revived, with work likely to be completed by December 2020.<sup>179</sup> Along with that, Delhi and Dhaka are reportedly also "negotiating the modalities" for a meeting of the [Joint Rivers Commission](#).<sup>180</sup> The two countries are expected to sign a "Framework Agreement for sharing of waters of six joint rivers".<sup>181</sup> The Commission will also discuss water-sharing of the Teesta River, which has stalled in the past.<sup>182</sup>

Amidst increasing Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean region, the US Deputy Secretary of State, Stephen [Biegun, travelled to Dhaka](#) on October 14 for a two-day visit. He met Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen and other senior officials. Discussions included American assistance to Bangladesh, the need for a more permanent solution to the Rohingya crisis and emphasis towards a "free, open, inclusive, peaceful and secure Indo-Pacific region, with shared prosperity for all".<sup>183</sup> Biegun had also visited India from October 12-14, ahead of the US-India 2+2 ministerial meeting.

Taking forward defence co-operation, India and Bangladesh held the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the bilateral naval exercise '[Bongosagar](#)' in the Bay of Bengal on October 3.<sup>184</sup> The exercise which was aimed at "developing inter-operability and joint operational skills", was followed by the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the IN-BN

Coordinated Patrol (CORPAT) on October 4-5.<sup>185</sup> Prime Minister Modi and Sheikh Hasina are expected to hold a virtual summit in December 2020.



*The second edition of the India-Bangladesh bilateral exercise 'Bongosagar' underway in the Bay of Bengal, October 3, 2020. Source: Twitter/@indiannavy*

## Bhutan

On October 16, India allowed [market access](#) to five Bhutanese agricultural commodities. These include areca nuts, mandarins, apples, potatoes and ginger.<sup>186</sup> The Indian National Plant Protection Organisation (NPPO) will [further examine](#) the possibility of allowing market access to Bhutan for other agricultural products such as carrots, peas and soya bean.<sup>187</sup> This will be a significant boost for Bhutan's agricultural sector, particularly given the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. India and Bhutan have also entered into a '[transport bubble](#)' agreement to restart commercial passenger services during the pandemic.<sup>188</sup> Further, on October 29, the Small Development Project Committee (SDPC) from Bhutan and India "[approved 70 projects](#)" worth approximately USD16.7 million (Nu1.25 billion) for Bhutan's 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan.<sup>189</sup> The approved projects include development in areas such as "water supply, urban infrastructure... and health and education" among others.<sup>190</sup>

On October 8, India also handed over the [7<sup>th</sup> medical consignment](#) containing a portable digital x-ray machine to the Government of Bhutan.<sup>191</sup> Since the outbreak of COVID-19 in the subcontinent, India has delivered several consignments of essential medicines and medical equipment to Bhutan.

Moreover, "India is also collaborating with Bhutan for conducting [Phase-III trials](#) of the COVID-19 vaccine candidates".<sup>192</sup>

Corresponding to the Land Customs Station (LCS) that was made operational in Ahllay, Pasakha, by the Government of India in July 2020, a [new route](#) from the Torsha tea garden (India) and Ahllay (Bhutan) was made operational on October 16.<sup>193</sup> This will further help decongest the Jaigaon-Phuentsholing route, which is the main point of transit between India and Bhutan.

In spite of COVID-19 and the associated economic slowdown, India has been consistent in its 'Neighbourhood First Policy', whether it be through economic and military assistance in Myanmar and Bangladesh, or through development projects in Nepal and Bhutan.

## The Maldives and Sri Lanka: Engaging Major Powers

*Libni Garg*

### The Maldives

This month saw a further strengthening of ties between India and the Maldives. In his United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) speech, the Maldivian Foreign Minister Abdulla Shahid [thanked](#) India for its provision of a USD250-million soft loan arrangement for COVID-19 assistance, calling it the “single largest financial assistance from a donor during this pandemic.”<sup>194</sup>

On September 29, the Maldivian Housing Development Corporation chairman [met](#) with the Indian High Commissioner to discuss developmental opportunities in Hulhumale with Indian assistance.<sup>195</sup> Furthermore, members of the Civil Service Commission of the Maldives held [talks](#) with the Indian High Commissioner to revive training with India’s National Centre for Good Governance (NCGG).<sup>196</sup> To this end, [online training courses](#) are scheduled to commence soon.<sup>197</sup>

The Indian Embassy in Male also [revealed](#) that under the USD800-million line of credit extended by India to the Maldives in March 2019, a 100-bedded cancer hospital and a 22,000-seater cricket stadium in Hulhumale would be built.<sup>198</sup>



*Line of Credit Agreement worth USD400 million was signed between Exim Bank of India and the Government of Maldives for undertaking the Greater Male' Connectivity Project. Source: India Exim Bank*

New Delhi's support to the Greater Male Connectivity Project (GMCP) was operationalised on October 12, as a [Line of Credit Agreement](#) of USD400 million was signed between India's EXIM Bank and the Maldivian Ministry of Finance to fund the project.<sup>199</sup> During their visit, the delegation from the Exim Bank also met with the Maldivian Foreign Minister.<sup>200</sup> Besides, the India-Maldives air bubble, which was announced in August, was operationalised, and [flights between Mumbai and Male](#) commenced from October 15.<sup>201</sup>

As a part of his visit to Indian Ocean countries, US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo [visited](#) the Maldives on October 28 where he met with President Solih and Foreign Minister Shahid.<sup>202</sup> During the visit, he announced Washington's [intent](#) to open an Embassy in the Maldives, thereby "underscoring the United States' unshakeable commitment to the Maldives and the Indo-Pacific region."<sup>203</sup> With this, the US attempts to strengthen its presence in the Indian Ocean amidst strategic competition with China.

The Chinese Ambassador to the Maldives held [talks](#) with Foreign Minister Abdulla Shahid and the Maldivian Finance Minister on October 15 regarding economic co-operation between Beijing and Male in the context of COVID-19.<sup>204</sup> On October 14, the Ambassador had also met with the Maldivian Minister of Commerce Science and Technology to [discuss](#) China-Maldives co-operation in the field of the digital economy, new infrastructure and smart cities.<sup>205</sup>

## Sri Lanka

This month saw multifaceted engagements between India and Sri Lanka through SLINEX-20 (Sri Lanka-India Naval Exercise) and numerous meetings between Indian and Sri Lankan representatives to build inter-sectoral linkages. During the month, Colombo also received high-level delegations from Washington and Beijing.

On October 6, India's Deputy High Commissioner to Colombo [met](#) the Vice-Chancellor of the Kotelawala Defence University, which is Sri Lanka's joint service academy for members of the Army, Navy and Air Force. The two representatives [discussed](#) areas of collaboration in research and development along with linkages between scholars, think-tanks and academic institutes.<sup>206</sup>

On October 12, the Indian High Commissioner to Colombo held [talks](#) with Sri Lanka's Water Supply Minister Vasudeva Nanayakkara to discuss areas of co-operation between the two countries in the development of water supply infrastructure. The Indian Embassy in Sri Lanka maintained that access to clean water remains a top priority for both New Delhi and Colombo and, to that end,



India had provided credit to build the greater Dambulla Water Supply project in Sri Lanka, along with two other projects, which are underway.<sup>207</sup>

The Indian High Commissioner also [met with](#) the Sri Lankan Minister of Energy on October 15 to explore means to deepen co-operation in the energy sector.<sup>208</sup> On October 17, the High Commissioner [called](#) on the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Gunawardena, and they discussed the implementation of the agreements made by the Prime Ministers at the virtual bilateral summit in September.<sup>209</sup> In a related development, India's Deputy High Commissioner to Colombo [met](#) with Prof. Kapila Gunawardena from the Ministry of Buddhasasana, Religious and Cultural Affairs to discuss the implementation of the USD15-million grant for the promotion of Buddhist ties between the two countries that was announced by PM Modi during the summit.<sup>210</sup>

The Indian and Sri Lankan navies also conducted the 8<sup>th</sup> edition of the annual bilateral maritime exercise, [SLINEX-20](#) between October 19 and 21 off the coast of Trincomalee in Sri Lanka. The exercise attempts to "enhance interoperability, improve mutual understanding and exchange best practices and procedures for multifaceted maritime operations between both navies."<sup>211</sup>



*A Chinese delegation, led by Yang Jiechi, with Sri Lankan leadership headed by President Rajapaksa in Sri Lanka on October 9, 2020. Source: Foreign Ministry, Sri Lanka*

Beijing's outreach to Colombo in October was led by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) member Yang Jiechi. On October 9-10, Sri Lanka [hosted](#) a Chinese delegation led by Jiechi and the Chairman of China's International Development Co-operation Agency, Wang Xiatao.<sup>212</sup> A team of Sri Lanka's top

leadership, including President Rajapaksa, Prime Minister Rajapaksa, Foreign Minister Gunawardena and Foreign Secretary Colombage held [talks](#) with the visiting delegation. The Sri Lankan leaders [requested](#) the Chinese leaders to facilitate market access to some of Sri Lanka's unique commodities that could find demand in the Chinese domestic market".<sup>213</sup> A USD90-million grant was extended by Beijing to Colombo after President Rajapaksa reportedly asked the Chinese delegation to help refute the allegation that Chinese-funded projects leave recipients vulnerable to debt-traps.<sup>214</sup> Simultaneously, President Rajapaksa also [claimed](#) that the Hambantota port deal was not a "debt trap" as it provided income and employment opportunities.<sup>215</sup> This was in marked contrast with the Sri Lankan Foreign Secretary's [statement](#) a few months ago who had characterised the deal with China as a mistake.<sup>216</sup> The Foreign Secretary's remarks were understandable as the Hambantota Port has failed to generate revenue and employment thus far.

[Reportedly](#), Colombo is also engaged in talks to procure a USD500-million concessional loan from Beijing.<sup>217</sup> If granted, the loan will bring Sri Lanka's total borrowings from China to USD1 billion this year.<sup>218</sup> After the conclusion of the high-profile visit from the Chinese delegation, US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo [visited Colombo](#) on October 28 in what was viewed as a measure to counterbalance Beijing's influence in a key Indian Ocean country.<sup>219</sup>

US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo's visit to Sri Lanka was preceded by an acrimonious diplomatic exchange between Beijing and Washington. In a press [briefing](#) regarding the visit, a State Department official urged Colombo to make "necessary decisions to secure its economic independence". This may have been a reference to the Chinese debt-trap that Sri Lankans may find themselves in.<sup>220</sup> The briefing induced a sharp criticism from China, which [accused](#) the US of using Secretary Pompeo's visit to "interfere in China-Sri Lanka relations and to coerce and bully Sri Lanka."<sup>221</sup> The much-anticipated visit included discussions around the China-Sri Lanka relationship. During a press briefing with Foreign Minister Gunawardena, Secretary Pompeo [said that](#) the US believes that a "strong, sovereign Sri Lanka" could be a "beacon for a free and open Indo-Pacific."<sup>222</sup> He [held](#) that Beijing's interactions of "bad deals, violations of sovereignty and lawlessness on land and sea" indicate that the Chinese Communist Party is a "predator", unlike the US which is "a friend and as a partner."<sup>223</sup> On Colombo's behalf, Minister Gunawardena [conveyed](#) that "Sri Lanka is a neutral, non-aligned country committed to peace" which will continue relations with the US and "other countries."<sup>224</sup>

An important domestic development in Sri Lanka was [passing](#) of the controversial 20<sup>th</sup> Amendment on October 22 which widens the mandate of the

President.<sup>225</sup> The Amendment nullifies the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, which was passed in 2015 in order to strengthen the Parliament at the expense of the President's power. The 20<sup>th</sup> Amendment is controversial because [according](#) to critics, it provides the President "unbridled powers".<sup>226</sup> Having been passed by a 156-65 vote, it has reinforced the strong influence that the Rajapaksas enjoy in Sri Lankan politics.<sup>227</sup>

\*\*\*



## ENDNOTES

### I. Overview: Exploring Alliances and Alignments

- <sup>1</sup> "Secretary Michael R. Pompeo With Rahul Shivshankar of Times Now", [US Department of State](#), October 27, 2020
- <sup>2</sup> Shishir Gupta, "China draws up a peace plan on Ladakh. India sees right through it", [Hindustan Times](#), October 30, 2020
- <sup>3</sup> "Border clashes have left Sino-Indian relationship 'profoundly disturbed', says EAM Jaishankar", [ANI](#), October 17, 2020
- <sup>4</sup> Krishn Kaushik, "China is helping Pakistan set up missile systems in PoK: New Intel says", [The Indian Express](#), October 9, 2020
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>6</sup> Sidhartha, "FDI with even the smallest Chinese holding will need government nod", [The Times of India](#), October 19, 2020
- <sup>7</sup> "India considers trade talks with Taiwan as both spar with China", [The Times of India](#), October 20, 2020
- <sup>8</sup> Shubhajit Roy, "Posters near Chinese embassy in Delhi on Taiwan National Day trigger Beijing-Taipei war of words", [The Indian Express](#), October 11, 2020
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>10</sup> "Statement of the Chinese Embassy in India solemnly refuting China-related false allegations of US senior officials during their visit to India", [Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of India](#), October 27, 2020
- <sup>11</sup> "Secretary Michael R. Pompeo With Shekhar Gupta of The Print", [US Department of State](#), October 27, 2020
- <sup>12</sup> Tom Allard and Kate Lamb, "Pompeo urges Indonesia to focus on China's treatment of Uighurs", [Reuters](#), October 29, 2020
- <sup>13</sup> "Designation of a United States Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues", [US Department of State](#), October 14, 2020
- Also see, Elizabeth Roche, "Head of Tibetan government-in-exile meets US special coordinator", [Mint](#), October 16, 2020
- <sup>14</sup> "China has deployed 60K soldiers on India's northern border: Pompeo", [The Times of India](#), October 10, 2020
- <sup>15</sup> Department of State, [Twitter Post](#), October 15, 2020, 5:30 AM IST
- <sup>16</sup> Manu Pubby, "India acquires 11,000 extreme cold gear sets from US army", [The Economic Times](#), October 29, 2020
- <sup>17</sup> "Secretary Michael R. Pompeo With Rahul Shivshankar of Times Now", [US Department of State](#), October 27, 2020
- <sup>18</sup> "Vladimir Putin Meets with Members of the Valdai Discussion Club. Transcript of the Plenary Session of the 17th Annual Meeting", [Valdaiclub](#), October 22, 2020
- <sup>19</sup> David Aaro, "Biden says Russia is the biggest threat to America's security", [Fox Business](#), October 25, 2020
- <sup>20</sup> Sohini Sarkar (ed), "PM Modi dials Putin, wants to host him as soon as global health crisis wanes", [Hindustan Times](#), October 7, 2020
- <sup>21</sup> Manu Pubby, "India in advanced talks with Russia to acquire Sprut light tanks for use in high altitude areas", [The Economic Times](#), October 5, 2020
- <sup>22</sup> Swati Bharadwaj, "Dr Reddy's gets DCGI go-ahead to conduct Phase 2/3 human trials of Sputnik V in India", [The Times of India](#), October 17, 2020
- <sup>23</sup> "Sudan-Israel relations agreed, Donald Trump announces", [BBC](#), October 24, 2020
- <sup>24</sup> Felicia Schwartz and Nicholas Bariyo, "Israel, Sudan Agree to Normalize Ties in U.S.-Brokered Deal", [The Wall Street Journal](#), October 23, 2020
- <sup>25</sup> Caline Malek and Robert Edwards, "Palestinians in occupied territories want US to solve conflict with Israel: survey", [Arab News](#), October 25, 2020
- <sup>26</sup> Walter Russell Mead, "Trump's Middle East Metamorphosis", [Hudson Institute](#), October 19, 2020
- <sup>27</sup> Syed Shafiq, "India, Israel & UAE – The New 'Trilateral Block' On Way – Israeli Envoy", [The Eurasian Times](#), October 12, 2020
- <sup>28</sup> "UAE central to India's extended neighbourhood; both share fast-growing ties", [The Times of India](#), August 26, 2020
- <sup>29</sup> "China calls for regional dialogue amid efforts to establish strategic partnerships", [Tehran Times](#), October 11, 2020
- <sup>30</sup> "Seduced by China's Belt and Road Initiative, Taliban also forsake Uyghurs", [The Economic Times](#), October 14, 2020
- <sup>31</sup> Shivani Kumar, "Abdullah Abdullah concludes visit in India", [Hindustan Times](#), October 11, 2020
- <sup>32</sup> Bhavi Mandalia, "Opposition power show against Imran government in Pakistan, mass mobilization in Karachi", [Pledge Times](#), October 18, 2020
- <sup>33</sup> Pia Krishnankutty, "Police-vs-Army crisis in Pakistan, Sindh cops revolt as IG 'abducted' to sign arrest warrant", [The Print](#), October 21, 2020
- <sup>34</sup> Smriti Chaudhury, "Pakistan On Verge of Losing Strategic 'Twin Islands' to China Under 'Debt-Trap' CPEC Project?", [Eurasian Times](#), October 13, 2020
- <sup>35</sup> Faiza Ilyas, "Twin islands along Karachi's coast are not viable for development", [Dawn](#), October 11, 2020
- <sup>36</sup> "Pakistan to remain on global terror financing 'grey' list", [Al Jazeera](#), October 23, 2020
- <sup>37</sup> Shishir Gupta, "Erdogan's Turkey sole supporter of Pak for removal from Grey List at FATF Paris Plenary", [Hindustan Times](#), October 24, 2020
- <sup>38</sup> Karan Manral (ed.), "India designates 18 terrorists based in Pakistan under anti-terror law", [Hindustan Times](#), October 27, 2020
- <sup>39</sup> Nayanima Basu, "No takers' for Pakistan's attempts to raise Kashmir at UN, Indian envoy Tirumurti says", [The Print](#), October 15, 2020
- <sup>40</sup> "India's RAW chief Samant Kumar Goel arrives in Nepal", [My Republica](#), October 21, 2020
- <sup>41</sup> "Army Chief To Visit Nepal Next Month Amid Row Over Map", [NDTV](#), October 15, 2020
- <sup>42</sup> "NC lawmaker-led team reports Chinese encroachment in Humla", [The Himalayan Times](#), October 11, 2020
- <sup>43</sup> "Visit of Chief of Army Staff and Foreign Secretary to Myanmar", [The Ministry of External Affairs](#), October 5, 2020
- <sup>44</sup> "India Transfers Myanmar's First Submarine Amid Tensions with China", [The Diplomat](#), October 27, 2020
- <sup>45</sup> Kallol Bhattacharjee, "India has an 'abiding interest' in resolving crisis in Rakhine State", [The Hindu](#), October 5, 2020
- <sup>46</sup> Areeb Ullah, "Rohingya fear deportation after Saudi Arabia calls on Bangladesh to give minority passports", [Middle East Eye](#), October 14, 2020
- <sup>47</sup> Md. Kamruzzaman, "Myanmar will take back Rohingya from Bangladesh: China", [Anadolu Agency](#), October 25, 2020
- <sup>48</sup> "Deputy Secretary Biegun's Travel to India and Bangladesh", [US Department of State](#), October 9, 2020
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>50</sup> "Updated – Secretary Pompeo's Travel to India, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Indonesia, and Vietnam", [US Department of State](#), October 28, 2020
- <sup>51</sup> "Secretary Pompeo Travels to Maldives to Announce New U.S. Presence in Key Indo-Pacific Nation", [US Department of State](#), October 28, 2020
- <sup>52</sup> India in Maldives, [Twitter Post](#), September 29, 2020, 3:50 PM IST.
- Also see: "NCGG and Maldives Civil Services Commission sign MOU on Training and Capacity Building", [Press Information Bureau of India](#), June 9, 2019.
- <sup>53</sup> "Indian bank extends \$400 million credit for Greater Male Connectivity Project", [The Indian Express](#), October 12, 2020
- <sup>54</sup> Secretary Pompeo's Meeting with Sri Lankan President Rajapaksa, [US Department of State](#), October 28, 2020
- <sup>55</sup> Meera Srinivasan and Ananth Krishnan, "High-powered Chinese delegation visits Sri Lanka", [The Hindu](#), October 8, 2020
- <sup>56</sup> Bharatha Mallawarachi, "China grants \$90M to Sri Lanka after visit by top official", [AP News](#), October 11, 2020
- <sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

- <sup>58</sup> Nayanima Basu, "No takers' for Pakistan's attempts to raise Kashmir at UN, Indian envoy Tirumurti says", [The Print](#), October 15, 2020
- <sup>59</sup> "Joint Statement on the third India-U.S. 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue", [Ministry of External Affairs](#), October 27, 2020
- <sup>60</sup> "Release of Commemorative Postage Stamp on 75th Anniversary of United Nations", [Ministry of External Affairs](#), October 23, 2020

## II. India and China: A Prolonged Stand-off

- <sup>61</sup> "Border clashes have left Sino-Indian relationship 'profoundly disturbed', says EAM Jaishankar", [ANI](#), October 17, 2020
- <sup>62</sup> "LAC stand-off: India rejects China's demand, but talks on", [The Times of India](#), October 23, 2020
- <sup>63</sup> "Joint Press Release of the 7th Round of India-China Military Commander-Level Meeting", [Ministry of Defence](#), October 13, 2020
- <sup>64</sup> Amrita Nayak Dutta, "8th round of India-China military talks to focus on fixing buffer zones along LAC", [The Print](#), October 26, 2020
- <sup>65</sup> "LAC stand-off: India rejects China's demand, but talks on", [The Times of India](#), October 23, 2020
- <sup>66</sup> "India-China dispute: India hands over soldier who crossed border", [BBC.com](#), October 21, 2020
- <sup>67</sup> "Narendra Modi, Xi Jinping to attend virtual BRICS summit in November; first meet since Ladakh stand-off", [Firstpost](#), October 5, 2020
- <sup>68</sup> "World's longest highway tunnel opened in Himachal Pradesh", [The Hindu](#), October 3, 2020
- <sup>69</sup> Amrita Nayak Dutta, "Rajnath inaugurates 44 bridges in border areas – 8 of them in Ladakh amid LAC standoff", [The Print](#), October 12, 2020
- <sup>70</sup> "India says China has no 'locus standi' to speak on Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh", October 15, 2020, [The Print](#)
- <sup>71</sup> "China Has No Locus Standi To Comment: India On Ladakh Remark", October 15, 2020, [NDTV](#)
- <sup>72</sup> Geeta Mohan, "Indian media is free, MEA tells China after embassy objects to 'National Day of Taiwan' reportage", [India Today](#), October 9, 2020
- <sup>73</sup> "India, Taiwan consider trade deal; Beijing asks New Delhi to respect 'One China policy'", [Firstpost](#), October 21, 2020
- <sup>74</sup> "Amid talk of India-Taiwan trade pact, Beijing says respect 'one-China' stand", October 21, 2020, [The Times of India](#)
- <sup>75</sup> Long Xingchun, "India to invite trouble playing Taiwan card", [Global Times](#), October 18, 2020.

## III. Russia: Strategic Partnerships and Alliances

- <sup>76</sup> India in Russia, [Twitter Post](#), October 04, 2020, 2:30 PM
- <sup>77</sup> MFA Russia, [Twitter Post](#), October 04, 2020, 1:38 AM
- <sup>78</sup> Press Release, "Transcript of Interview of Ambassador DB Venkatesh Varma to Doordarshan India on the occasion of 20th Anniversary of Strategic Partnership between India and the Russian Federation", [Indian Embassy in Moscow](#), October 16, 2020
- <sup>79</sup> Press Release, "Phone call between Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and H.E. Mr Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation", [Ministry of External Affairs](#), October 07, 2020.
- <sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>81</sup> Press Release, "Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Igor Morgulov and Ambassador of India to Russia D.B. Venkatesh Varma", [Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#), October 20, 2020.
- <sup>82</sup> "India May Soon Acquire Russia's High Altitude Sprut Light Tanks to Counter China in the Himalayas", [Sputnik News](#), October 05, 2020.
- <sup>83</sup> "India successfully test-fires naval version of BrahMos missile", [The Hindu](#), October 18, 2020
- <sup>84</sup> "India test-fires air launched version of BrahMos supersonic cruise missile", [The Economic Times](#), October 30, 2020
- <sup>85</sup> Press Release, "BrahMos Supersonic Cruise Missile Successfully Test Fired from Indian Navy's Stealth Destroyer, INS Chennai", [Press Information Bureau](#), October 18, 2020
- <sup>86</sup> "Russian Navy Frigate Successfully Test-fires Tsirkon Hypersonic Missile", [TASS News Agency](#), October 07, 2020
- <sup>87</sup> "Putin hails Tsirkon hypersonic missile's successful test as major event for Russia", [TASS News Agency](#), October 07, 2020
- <sup>88</sup> "Russia to hold three more test launches of Tsirkon hypersonic missile by year-end", [TASS News Agency](#), October 09, 2020
- <sup>89</sup> Press Release, "RDIF and Dr. Reddy's receive DCGI's approval to conduct clinical trial for Sputnik V vaccine in India", [Russian Direct Investment Fund](#), October 17, 2020.
- <sup>90</sup> "Russia receives renewed approval for COVID-19 vaccine trials in India: RDIF", [Reuters](#), October 17, 2020.
- <sup>91</sup> Press Release, "Meeting with members of the Government", [The Kremlin](#), October 14, 2020.
- <sup>92</sup> "Russia Approves 2nd Coronavirus Vaccine – Putin", [The Moscow Times](#), October 14, 2020.
- <sup>93</sup> "EU foreign ministers agree to sanction Russia", [Deutsche Welle](#), October 12, 2020.
- <sup>94</sup> "Russia vows to 'respond in kind' to EU sanctions on Putin aides", [Deutsche Welle](#), October 15, 2020.
- <sup>95</sup> "Putin Says He Helped Navalny Leave Russia For Treatment After Poisoning", [RFE/RL](#), October 22, 2020.
- <sup>96</sup> "Edward Snowden obtains open-ended Russian residence permit", [TASS News Agency](#), October 22, 2020.
- <sup>97</sup> "Lawyer: Snowden granted permanent residency in Russia", [AP News](#), October 22, 2020.
- <sup>98</sup> "Russia-China Military Alliance 'Quite Possible,' Putin Says", [The Moscow Times](#), October 23, 2020.
- <sup>99</sup> "Putin: Russia-China military alliance can't be ruled out", [AP News](#), October 23, 2020.

## IV. India and West Asia: New Alignments and Frameworks

- <sup>100</sup> "G20 Leaders' Summit to be held virtually, under the theme of Realizing opportunities of the 21st Century for all", [G20 Saudi Arabia 2020](#), September 28, 2020
- <sup>101</sup> Ramadan Al Sherbini, "Saudi Arabia's King Salman & India's PM Modi discuss cooperation prospects", [Arab News](#), September 30, 2020.
- <sup>102</sup> "India has sufficient supplies of crude oil, LNG: Pradhan", [The Hindu Business Line](#), September 29, 2020.
- <sup>103</sup> Ministry of Finance, [Twitter Post](#), October 14, 2020, 9.45 PM
- <sup>104</sup> Ministry of Finance, [Twitter Post](#), October 14, 2020, 7.24 PM
- <sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>106</sup> Union Minister Dr. Jitendra Singh addresses 1st ever Ministerial Meeting of G-20 Anti-Corruption Working Group, [DD News](#), October 22, 2020.
- <sup>107</sup> India in Dubai, [Twitter Post](#), October 19, 2020, 9.10 PM
- <sup>108</sup> "UAE to provide incentives to Indian healthcare firms with strong R&D facilities: Envoy", [Tribune India](#), October 19, 2020
- <sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>110</sup> Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), [Twitter Post](#), October 19, 2020, 8.28 PM

Also see, Manu Pubby, "UAE firm selected for carbines in talks with Indian defence majors to set up plant", [The Economic Times](#), October 12, 2020.

<sup>111</sup> PM Of Israel, [Twitter Post](#), October 5, 2020, 6:01 PM IST

<sup>112</sup> PM of Israel, [Twitter Post](#), October 5, 2020, 6:01 PM IST

<sup>113</sup> Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, "Excellent possibility for India-Israel-UAE trilateral in West Asia: Israel Envoy", [The Economic Times](#), October 10, 2020.

<sup>114</sup> "Foreign minister, Indian counterpart discuss ties", [Jordan News Agency](#), October 5, 2020.

<sup>115</sup> "Israeli Embassy to have 'Water Attache' in India from January; North-East Consul: Ambassador", [The Economic Times](#), October 19, 2020

<sup>116</sup> "9th Session of India-Oman Joint Commission Virtual Meeting held", [Ministry of Commerce and Industry](#), October 19, 2020.

<sup>117</sup> "Kerala-based Lulu Group in talks with Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund to sell minority stake", [The New Indian Express](#), October 07, 2020

<sup>118</sup> Dr. Ron Malka, [Twitter Post](#), October 9, 2020, 10:54 AM

<sup>119</sup> Neeraj Chauhan, "Islamic State group Al-Hind plotted to build province in jungles of South India: NIA charge sheet", [Hindustan Times](#), October 3, 2020.

<sup>120</sup> "Neeraj Chauhan, "14-member IS module that returned 'disillusioned' from Iraq, Syria busted: NIA", [Hindustan Times](#), October 8, 2020.

<sup>121</sup> Pranshu Verma, "U.S. issues additional sanctions against Iranian banks", [The New York Times](#), October 8, 2020

<sup>122</sup> Zack Budryk, "Pompeo warns any arms sales to Iran will result in sanctions as embargo expires", [The Hill](#), October 18, 2020.

<sup>123</sup> "China calls for regional dialogue amid efforts to establish strategic partnerships", [Tehran Times](#), October 11, 2020.

<sup>124</sup> "Turkey reportedly test-fires S-400 air defense system", [Defense News](#), October 17, 2020.

#### V. India, CARs and PAI: The Afghan Redux

<sup>125</sup> "Welcoming the Launch of Afghanistan Peace Negotiations", [US Department of State Press Statement](#), September 10, 2020

<sup>126</sup> Eric Schmitt, "Trump's Tweets on Troop Withdrawals Unnerve Pentagon", [The New York Times](#), October 15, 2020

<sup>127</sup> "Iran comprehensively supports Afghan-led peace process: Abdullah", [Tehran Times](#), October 20, 2020

<sup>128</sup> "Official Visit of Chairman of the High Council of National Reconciliation of Afghanistan (October 06-11, 2020)", [Ministry of External Affairs Government of India](#), October 7, 2020

<sup>129</sup> Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, "India opens a communication channel with key non-Pashtun leader of Afghanistan", [The Economic Times](#), September 26, 2020

Also see, Suhasini Haidar, "Once U.S. leaves, Pakistan will gain more space in Afghanistan, says Ata Mohammad Noor", [The Hindu](#), October 24, 2020

<sup>130</sup> Shadi Kahn Saif, "Afghanistan: Hekmatyar ready to join hands with Taliban", [Anadolu Agency](#), September 19, 2020

<sup>131</sup> "Hekmatyar in Pakistan: 'US Defeated in Afghanistan'", [Tolo News](#), October 20, 2020

<sup>132</sup> "Taliban ambush kills dozens of Afghan forces in northern province", [Al Jazeera](#), October 21, 2020

<sup>133</sup> "Takhar's Baharak District Cleared of Insurgents: MoD", [Tolo News](#), October 6, 2020

<sup>134</sup> Lyse Doucet, "Taliban conflict: Afghan fears rise as US ends its longest war", [BBC](#), October 20, 2020

<sup>135</sup> "US launches first air strikes against Taliban since accord", [Dawn](#), October 13, 2020

<sup>136</sup> "Taliban blame US forces for violating Doha agreement", [The News](#), October 19, 2020;

Also see, "Taliban won't agree to ceasefire unless reason behind war is discussed", [Business Standard](#), September 17, 2020

<sup>137</sup> "No Compromise on Type of Govt in Talks, Says Saleh", [Tolo News](#), September 15, 2020

<sup>138</sup> "Doha: General Meeting of Both Sides Held", [Tolo News](#), October 14, 2020

<sup>139</sup> Tom Bowman, "Gen. Milley: 'We're Trying To End A War Responsibly, Deliberately'", [NPR](#), October 14, 2020

<sup>140</sup> "Defense Chief Says U.S. Will Cut Troops In Afghanistan Below 5,000", [Tajikistan News.Net](#), August 9, 2020

<sup>141</sup> "Joint Statement on the Signing of the U.S.-Taliban Agreement", [US Department of State](#), March 6, 2020

<sup>142</sup> "Taliban delegation visits Russia after Trump says talks 'dead'", [Al Jazeera](#), September 14, 2020

<sup>143</sup> "13 security personnel, 7 private guards martyred in two attacks in Ormara, North Waziristan", [Dawn](#), October 16, 2020

<sup>144</sup> "Kabul ready to make compromises for peace", [Anadolu Agency](#), September 29, 2020

<sup>145</sup> "Khalilzad meets Gen Qamar amid push for Afghan truce", [The Express Tribune](#), October 8, 2020

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>147</sup> "Doha Delegates Say Rules Agreement May Be Close", [Tolo News](#), October 12, 2020

<sup>148</sup> "Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, Chairman, High Council for National Reconciliation of Afghanistan meets Prime Minister", [Ministry of External Affairs Government of India](#), October 8, 2020

Also see, "NSA Ajit Doval meets Afghan peace negotiator Abdullah Abdullah in Delhi", [Hindustan Times](#), October 7, 2020

<sup>149</sup> "Early withdrawal of US troops will have consequences: Abdullah Abdullah", [Hindustan Times](#), October 8, 2020

<sup>150</sup> "Explained Ideas: What is the Pakistan Democratic Movement, and what is it trying to achieve?", [The Indian Express](#), October 27, 2020

<sup>151</sup> "Tajikistan longtime leader re-elected for another 7-year term", [Associate Press](#), October 12, 2020

<sup>152</sup> "Kyrgyz Parliament Gives Newly Elected PM Japarov Presidential Powers", [RFERL](#), October 16, 2020

<sup>153</sup> "Govt to soon finalize air corridor between India-Uzbekistan & other Central Asian countries: Ambassador of India to Uzbekistan", [FICCI Press Release](#), October 21, 2020

<sup>154</sup> "Telephone conversation between President of India and President of Turkmenistan", [Ministry of External Affairs Government of India](#), October 15, 2020

<sup>155</sup> "India hosts meeting of SCO Ministers handling economy and foreign trade", [PIB](#), October 28, 2020

<sup>156</sup> "Russia, Kazakhstan Replace Decades-Old Military Cooperation Agreement", [RFERL](#), October 16, 2020

<sup>157</sup> "Indian companies in talks with Kazakhstan defence industries for co-production: Sanjay Jaju (IAS)", [PSUWatch](#), October 15, 2020

## VI. India and the Neighbourhood: New Collaborations and Regional Security

- <sup>158</sup> "India - Myanmar Foreign Office Consultations", [Ministry of External Affairs of India](#), October 1, 2020
- <sup>159</sup> "Visit of Chief of Army Staff and Foreign Secretary to Myanmar", [Ministry of External Affairs of India](#), October 5, 2020
- <sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*
- Also see, Bipul Chatterjee and Prashant Sharma, "Bipul Chatterjee and Prashant Sharma", [The Economic Times](#), October 17, 2020
- <sup>161</sup> "Press Release on the Inauguration of the Liaison Office of the Embassy of India in Nay Pyi Taw", [Embassy of India, Yangon](#), October 5, 2020
- <sup>162</sup> Kallol Bhattacharjee, "India to handover Kilo class attack submarine to Myanmar", [The Hindu](#), October 16, 2020
- <sup>163</sup> Blake Herzinger, "India Transfers Myanmar's First Submarine Amid Tensions with China", [The Diplomat](#), October 27, 2020
- <sup>164</sup> Anil Giri, "India intelligence chief's sudden dash for Kathmandu raises many an eyebrow", [The Kathmandu Post](#), October 22, 2020
- <sup>165</sup> Anil Giri and Tika R Pradhan, "With a Cabinet rejig, Oli sows seeds of conflict in the ruling party", [The Kathmandu Post](#), October 15, 2020
- <sup>166</sup> Shishir Gupta, "Nepal PM Oli sends a quiet message to India with a change in his cabinet", [Hindustan Times](#), October 15, 2020
- <sup>167</sup> Shubhajit Ray and Yubaraj Ghimire, "Army chief MM Naravane heads to Nepal amid moves to repair ties", [The Indian Express](#), October 15, 2020
- <sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>169</sup> Shishir Gupta, "Nepal PM Oli sends a quiet message to India with a change in his cabinet", [Hindustan Times](#), October 15, 2020
- <sup>170</sup> "NC lawmaker-led team reports Chinese encroachment in Humla", [The Himalayan Times](#), October 12, 2020
- <sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>172</sup> Anish Tiwari, "Tatopani border point comes into operation", [The Kathmandu Post](#), October 29, 2020
- <sup>173</sup> "Government of India gifts 41 ambulances and 6 school buses to government and not-for profit organizations in 30 districts of Nepal", [Embassy of India, Kathmandu](#), October 2, 2020
- <sup>174</sup> "India Builds Shree Saraswati Secondary School, Kailali District", [Embassy of India, Kathmandu](#), October 8, 2020
- <sup>175</sup> "India, Nepal discuss increased flight connectivity and tourism circuits", [Deccan Herald](#), October 9, 2020
- <sup>176</sup> "Bangladesh to resume flights to India from October 28 under 'air bubble' arrangement", [The Hindu](#), October 17, 2020
- <sup>177</sup> Bulbul Dhawan, "Air bubble between India and Bangladesh inaugurated: Check destinations and arrival guidelines here", [Financial Express](#), October 29, 2020
- <sup>178</sup> "Improving border infra to further fortify ties with B'desh: Envoy", [The Sentinel](#), October 11, 2020
- <sup>179</sup> "India-Bangladesh Rail Link Work Likely To Be Completed By December: Official", [Outlook India](#), October 6, 2020
- <sup>180</sup> Kallol Bhattacharjee, "India, Bangladesh in talks for Joint Rivers Commission meeting", [The Hindu](#), October 23, 2020
- <sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>183</sup> "Deputy Secretary Biegun's Visit to Bangladesh", [US Department of State](#), October 16, 2020
- <sup>184</sup> "Indian Navy (IN) – Bangladesh Navy (BN) Bilateral Exercise Bongosagar and IN-BN CORPAT", [Ministry of Defence](#), October 2, 2020
- <sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>186</sup> "Press Release: Opening of new market access for export of Bhutanese agricultural commodities to India", [Embassy of India, Thimphu](#), October 16, 2020
- <sup>187</sup> "Export of potatoes and four other agri-products resume", [Kuensel](#), October 17, 2020
- <sup>188</sup> "Air Travel Arrangement", [Embassy of India, Thimphu](#), October 1, 2020
- <sup>189</sup> "Committee approves 70 small development projects", [Kuensel](#), October 30, 2020
- <sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>191</sup> "Press Release: Provision of Portable Digital X-Ray Machine to Bhutan", [Embassy of India, Thimphu](#), October 8, 2020
- <sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>193</sup> "Press Release: Formal notification of Torsha tea garden-Ahlay route for Bhutan's bilateral and transit trade with India", [Embassy of India, Thimphu](#), October 19, 2020

## VII. The Maldives and Sri Lanka: Engaging Major Powers

- <sup>194</sup> Abdulla Shahid, "Statement by His Excellency Abdulla Shahid, Minister of Foreign Affairs at the General Debate of the 75th Session of the United Nations General Assembly", [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Maldives](#), September 29, 2020.
- <sup>195</sup> HDC, [Twitter Post](#), September 29, 2020, 3:14 PM IST.
- <sup>196</sup> India in Maldives, [Twitter Post](#), September 29, 2020, 3:50 PM IST.
- Also see, "NCGG and Maldives Civil Services Commission sign MOU on Training and Capacity Building", [Press Information Bureau of India](#), June 9, 2019.
- <sup>197</sup> India in Maldives, [Twitter Post](#), September 29, 2020, 3:50 PM IST.
- <sup>198</sup> "India to build 100-bedded hospital, 22,000-seater stadium in Maldives", [Business Standard](#), October 1, 2020.
- Also see, India in Maldives, [Twitter Post](#), September 30, 2020, 9:34 PM IST.
- <sup>199</sup> "Exim Bank Extends Line of Credit of USD 400 Million to the Government of the Republic of Maldives", [India Exim Bank](#), October 12, 2020.
- <sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*
- Also see, India in Maldives, [Twitter Post](#), October 12, 2020, 11:03 PM IST.
- <sup>201</sup> India in Maldives, [Twitter Post](#), October 15, 2020, 2:53 PM IST.
- <sup>202</sup> "Secretary Pompeo Travels to Maldives to Announce New U.S. Presence in Key Indo-Pacific Nation", [U.S. Department of State](#), October 28, 2020.
- <sup>203</sup> "On U.S. Intent to Open an Embassy in Maldives", [U.S. Department of State](#), October 28, 2020.
- <sup>204</sup> Abdulla Shahid, [Twitter Post](#), October 15, 2020, 2:51 PM IST
- <sup>205</sup> Ambassador Zhang Lizhong, [Twitter Post](#), October 14, 2020, 3:18 PM IST
- <sup>206</sup> India in Sri Lanka, [Twitter Post](#), October 6, 2020, 5:31 PM IST.
- <sup>207</sup> India in Sri Lanka, [Twitter Post](#), October 12, 2020, 2:29 PM IST.
- <sup>208</sup> India in Sri Lanka, [Twitter Post](#), October 15, 2020, 2:40 PM IST.



- <sup>209</sup> India in Sri Lanka, [Twitter Post](#), October 17, 2020, 9:30 PM IST.
- <sup>210</sup> "India and Sri Lanka hold talks on implementation of USD 15 million grant", [Colombo Gazette](#), October 8, 2020
- <sup>211</sup> Ministry of Defence, "Indian Navy – Sri Lanka Navy Maritime Exercise SLINEX-20 off Trincomalee", [Press Information Bureau](#), October 18, 2020
- <sup>212</sup> "Sri Lanka and China discuss economic revival and COVID-19 assistance", [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka](#), October 9, 2020
- <sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>214</sup> "China grants \$90 mn to Sri Lanka after visit by top official", [The Hindu](#), October 11, 2020.
- <sup>215</sup> "Hambantota port not a 'debt trap' by China: Sri Lanka President", [The Indian Express](#), October 9, 2020.
- <sup>216</sup> "Will have 'India first' policy, China port deal a mistake: Sri Lanka", [The Times of India](#), August 26, 2020.
- <sup>217</sup> Meera Srinivasan, "Sri Lanka in talks to secure \$500 mn in Chinese loans", [The Hindu](#), October 12, 2020
- <sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>219</sup> Waruna Karunatilake and Mohamed Junayd, "Pompeo to visit Sri Lanka and Maldives as China threat looms", [Reuters](#), October 20, 2020
- <sup>220</sup> "Briefing With Assistant Secretary David R. Stilwell, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, and Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Dean R. Thompson, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs. On Secretary Pompeo's Travel to India, Sri Lanka, Maldives, and Indonesia", [U.S. Department of State](#), October 22, 2020.
- <sup>221</sup> "Media Statement 20201026", [Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka](#), October 26, 2020.
- <sup>222</sup> "Secretary Michael R. Pompeo and Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Dinesh Gunawardena at a Press Availability", [U.S. Department of State](#), October 28, 2020.
- <sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>225</sup> Meera Srinivasana, "Sri Lanka: Controversial 20th Amendment passed", [The Hindu](#), October 22, 2020.
- <sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*





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

[www.delhipolicygroup.org](http://www.delhipolicygroup.org)