

EDITOR'S NOTE

The Indo-Pacific and China continue to draw the attention of the world. The world has been watching closely the foreign policy and China engagement and containment actions of the Biden administration. Will the Biden administration accommodate China or take forward the new status quo established under President Trump, was being asked. Very early, Biden signalled that he was in no rush to depart from the Trump administration's China policies. He immediately began enlisting the support of Western allies. There has been a tit-for-tat approach between the two with Americans exposing human rights abuses in Xinjiang and Tibet, and sanctions against Chinese companies and officials. The Chinese responded with counter sanctions and called for Washington to stop interfering in China's internal affairs. The US has also raised concerns on economic practices, and Taiwan. Both sides have also been issuing blunt statements.

Five Chinese companies including Huawei are backlisted by the US telecom regulator citing national security concerns. The US has also conveyed concerns on cyberattacks and economic coercion towards its allies. The US and China concluded their first high-level face-to-face meeting in Anchorage, Alaska without releasing a joint statement. The EU, UK, and Canada joined in for sanctions against China over alleged Xinjiang human rights issues. The US Senate introduced the Strategic Competition Act of 2021, seeking to counter the expanding global influence of China. The bill would place additional sanctions. It is also meant to support Indo-Pacific countries in developing infrastructure to counter China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga committed to working together to take on the challenges from China and promote peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait. The United States and Japan announced to invest together in areas such as 5G, artificial intelligence, quantum computing, genomics, and semiconductor supply chains. Meanwhile, China is concerned that more and more countries are joining the USA in efforts to counter China.

More recently Biden expanded the Trump-era ban on American investment in Chinese firms. The US Senate also passed the Innovation and Competition Act of 2021 that would boost the country's ability to compete with Chinese technology. The US would invest more than US\$ 250 billion in American semiconductor manufacturing, and accelerating 5G innovation. In small concessions, Biden withdrew a series of Trump-era executive orders that sought to ban new downloads of China-owned apps WeChat and TikTok, but asked the Commerce Department to launch national security reviews of apps with links to foreign adversaries, including China. Yet, the US and China agreed to cooperate to "tackle the climate crisis".

On the aerospace technology front, a top NATO General has urged 'alignment' between US and European sixth-generation fighter plans. DARPA successfully demonstrated its new Mobile Force Protection (MFP) system, which can launch semi-autonomous interceptors that shoot kinetic "streamers" at enemy drones in order to clog their propellers or rotors and bring them to the ground. US companies have also demonstrated anti-drone laser weapons. The first two Northrop Grumman B-21 Raider stealth bombers are now ready to commence ground testing before their planned first flight next year. The Pentagon has reviewed America's strategic and critical materials, and minerals that are not found or produced in the US in sufficient quantities, and attempts are being made to secure supply chains.

Meanwhile China has been pushing ahead development of its H-20 stealth bomber, the second FC-31 Gyr Falcon fifth-generation stealth fighter, and the third and fourth aircraft carriers. China and Russia continue to cooperate to counter the American sanctions. They have recommitted to joint CRJ-929 wide-body airliner programme that aims ultimately to compete with Boeing's 787 Dreamliner.

In West Asia, as the USA is getting set to leave Afghanistan, security dynamics continue to evolve. The Americans are likely to continue military presence in some form, including active airbases in the neighbourhood. India too is factoring in the Taliban coming into formal power structure. The Arab world continues to consolidate normalisation of diplomatic relations. Saudi Arabia and Syria, who have been at odds over Syria's close relationship with Iran, are talking to each other. Iran and Saudi Arabia have begun normalisation discussions themselves, facilitated by Iraq. Stability in West Asia is important for India, as India has closer relations with most countries.

Closer home, while India continues to gradually recover from the very deadly second wave of COVID-19, China-India border dispute talks failed to ease tensions. Negotiations ended without a joint statement on disengagement, implying that the two sides were not willing to compromise. Troops pulled back from Pangong Tso earlier, but other areas of friction remain along the disputed frontier, and no further de-escalation has been possible. Meanwhile China continues to fast-track new stretches of road-rail infrastructure across Tibet, and will soon open a new stretch of rail-line across Tibet later this year. China has also been inducting the latest military equipment and combat vehicles along the border. The Type 08 armoured vehicle, 122 mm-calibre self-propelled howitzer, and the PHL-03 long-range multiple rocket launcher system with extended range have been moved in. The PLA also commissioned an amphibious rescue vehicle, "useful in Galwan-like terrain". They inducted the new Type-15 light tanks that can manoeuvre well in Aksai Chin plateau. They also inducted the new HQ-17A anti-aircraft air defence missile system, and the new ZBL-09 infantry fighting vehicle, which can carry anti-tank guided missiles. The PLA has been actively exercising with new equipment in the region. Summer months are considered the campaign season. Both sides are clearly strengthening their defences.

Atmanirbharata, Make-in-India, in defence production remains the flavour of the season and is being pushed at the highest levels. India announced the second negative list for defence imports with 108 new items. The first negative list released last year included towed artillery guns, short-range surface-to-air missiles, cruise missiles and offshore patrol vessels, among others. The new list restricts next-

generation corvettes, airborne early warning systems, tank engines and radars, and will come into effect under a staggered timeline of four and a half years.

This issue of *Defence and Diplomacy* looks at many important geostrategic issues. Security of any nation is based on the national strategy. Prime Minister Modi has already ordered formulation of a new national doctrine. From this must flow a National Security Strategy evolved through national consensus. A document crafted by the best acknowledged brains in the country, and must cut across political, religious and ideological lines.

Strategic think tanks around the world are talking about the possible invasion of Taiwan by China in the coming few years and what would be the US' response. There are complexities and challenges for both China and the United States. The Taiwanese have voted strongly for a pro-democracy and freedom supporting government. They have a resolute will to defend. Taiwan is no walkover even for a militarily strong China. While the USA is building alliances and strengthening military assets in the region, there are many challenges to deter a near peer power very close to China's own homeland.

Power deficient Pakistan is taking support from China for its civil nuclear programme to generate electricity. The recent operationalisation of the second Karachi nuclear plant has greatly increased the percentage share of nuclear-based electricity generation. But there are complexities. Already having incurred high debts in the Belt and Road Initiative project, the dependence on China on the strategic nuclear power sector, currently supported only by China, pushes them more into Chinese arms. Pakistan is already facing serious balance of payments issues, and this adds to the financial woes. Pakistan has also had a history of nuclear accidents, and safety standards have been an issue. This becomes worse with plants situated next to major population centres like Karachi. Terrorism is another area of concern. The risk of fissile material going into rogue hands is highest in Pakistan.

The link between wildfires and climate change is being established by environmentalists. There are many implications, including reduced green cover, and economic and social issues. Clearly, human factors that cause these fires need to be addressed. India also has seen

a significant increase in forest fires. There is a need for strengthening policy initiatives and implementation. Also, technology can greatly reduce fire incidents and mitigate effects.

For long the economic growth of West Asian countries was linked to crude oil sales. Alternative sources and renewable energy are fast reducing dependence on oil. The revenue generated from oil remains concentrated with the state (Sheikhdoms) and the masses often perceive the distribution and development as uneven. This has its political frictions and fallouts. Also, high fluctuation in global crude prices for a few years now has had its dynamics. More progressive regimes diversified into trade and other sources for national income. Qatar and the UAE have been considered somewhat progressive on this count.

Despite initial unfounded apprehensions, the India-US relations under the Biden regime are seeing significant convergences. The broad foreign policy framework seems to maintain continuity. The USA continues to see India as a major player to ally with in the Indo-Pacific region. Clearly, there is a growing convergence on how to deal with China. India, being an immediate neighbour of China, has to do some level of balancing in its options and actions. There continue to be divergent views on India's historical close links with Russia. Foreign policy establishment in the USA does understand, and to some extent, respects, India's position. The USA is still trying to understand and factor in the "strategic autonomy" approach adopted by India. Clearly, the way ahead is closer relations in the interest of both sides.

Indo-US strategic cooperation is most visible in the deepening maritime engagement and military exercises. The signing of security enabling defence agreements and defence cooperation has paved the way for further high-end arms transfers and greater interoperability between the militaries. The two navies have a great role in enforcing freedom of seas, show of force and deterrence. They are operating much more often with other QUAD and European navies.

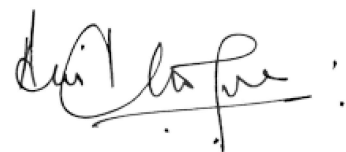
Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in a country in the world, but it has played a decisive role in cementing regional reconciliation, and in turn gained from stability. Despite 87 per cent practising Islam, the State ensures that the Republic is not an Islamic

state but a 'Religious' State where its citizens are free to worship any god of their choice. Multilateralism has been Indonesia's policy approach. Indonesia's strategic location, astride the major maritime route and choke points, makes it important to have a mature global approach. It has enhanced its maritime cooperation with countries in the region, including India.

The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World, the book by the very experienced diplomat and India's current Foreign Minister, S. Jaishankar, is being read with great interest across the globe. It talks of strategic autonomy for India in a time of changing global politics and shift of power centres. Undoubtedly, a must read for all practitioners of global security and strategy.

Defence and Diplomacy remains an important publication of CAPS that covers a wide spectrum of topics by young research scholars. With a fast-changing world and shift of focus to the Indo-Pacific, we are trying to focus more on India's neighbourhood. CAPS journals and Issue Briefs have a wide circulation and are also available online on the CAPS website. It is our endeavour to put issues in balanced perspective. Reading ensures our mental wellness, boosts our confidence and enriches our knowledge. CAPS remains a one-stop place for geopolitics, strategy, security, and aerospace issues.

Wishing you all happy reading!



Air Marshal **Anil Chopra**
Director General, CAPS