

## EDITOR'S NOTE

As the conflict in Ukraine nears 100 days, despite very significant Western financial and military hardware support to Ukraine, Russian troops keep inching forward and making territorial gains in Eastern Ukraine. They have just seized Lyman and have moved closer to encircling Sievierodonetsk. Russia has also been using powerful new weapons, including thermobaric explosives that have caused massive destruction and mayhem, leading to fresh accusations of genocide.

In a virtual address to Stanford University students, President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine said that for Ukraine to defend its freedom required more financial aid, more weaponry, stronger sanctions against Russia, and war crime tribunals to try Russian soldiers. Yet, Zelensky has conceded that the Russians continue to make gains in Eastern Ukraine. Meanwhile, the Biden administration will despatch long-range multiple launch rocket systems to Ukraine for the defence of the Donbas region.

During the US House vote for the \$40 billion military and humanitarian aid bill for Ukraine, there were some dissenting voices. Dr. Kevin Roberts, the head of Heritage Foundation, the prominent conservative think tank, felt that the massive "Ukraine aid package puts America last", and was reckless and ill-considered. He highlighted that the US was facing record inflation, high debt, high crime, and an energy crisis. The US has been facing over 8 per cent inflation, the highest in many decades. By the end of 2021, the federal government had \$28.43 trillion in debt. Nearly 57 Republicans ultimately voted against the package. There is increasing advocacy of "America First". Yet, the Senate overwhelmingly approves \$40 billion in aid to Ukraine.

Russia's sea blockade of Ukraine has deepened the global food crisis. Ukraine's grain exports by sea have been cut off. Land routes are long and expensive. This, topped by hot weather, droughts, and unseasonal rains, is hurting wheat crops in other parts of the world. Grain prices are soaring to near-record highs. President Putin has offered to unblock the Ukrainian port of Odessa on condition that the sanctions against Russia are relaxed. Russia has enjoyed the advantage of higher oil and grain prices, being a major exporter of both.

Quad Summit 2022 was held in Tokyo on May 24, 2022. It was the fourth summit, and the second time in person. The key feature was the launch of a new initiative for continuous collaboration in the maritime domain, space, climate change, health, and cybersecurity. A Quad Fellowship would now mean sponsoring 100 students from the other three countries to study in the United States each year for graduate degrees in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Quad members will also cooperate on 5G supplier diversification, advanced interoperability, and telecommunications cybersecurity. Quad strengthens its commitments to the free, full, and open sharing of space-based civil Earth observation data. Quad will deepen collaboration in digital connectivity, transportation infrastructure, clean energy and climate resilience. The leaders agreed to hold next year's in-person summit in Australia.

This issue of *Defence and Diplomacy* covers a range of geopolitical subjects. The ousted Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan continues to rage about what he publicly calls a US conspiracy against him. In the massive political rallies that he continues to hold, he has made this a rallying cry for his millions of supporters. He calls the new dispensation "traitors" installed by "a foreign conspiracy" plotted in the United States. Khan has also accused Pakistan's military and the opposition led by current Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif of conspiring in favour of the US. Both the US State Department and Pakistan Army have denied all such allegations. Could this "anti-Americanism" be backed by his Chinese masters or have Russian support, some are wondering. No Pakistan Prime Minister has completed a full term. All

elected governments in Pakistan must contend with the military and the judiciary to survive. With the annual inflation rate at 13.4 per cent, a serious debt crisis, continued breeding ground for terrorism, ethnic-religious fissures, and continued mess in Afghanistan, Pakistan is heading for years of instability.

After the twenty-year war in Afghanistan, the US military forces departed, leaving it for the Taliban to rule. President Biden said the United States should learn from its mistakes and that the withdrawal marks the end of “an era of major military operations to remake other countries”. The conflict had killed tens of thousands of people and displaced millions. Amid the Ukrainian war, the Afghan crisis actually represents a forgotten conflict. The rivalry between the Taliban and the Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) continues to bleed the country dry. The new regime’s inability and ineptitude to take on the incoming attacks are visible. There are tough times ahead for Afghan citizens, and women and children in particular.

China continues to see an economic slowdown, partly due to Zero-Covid stringent lockdowns, demographic profile, and also due to global factors. Yet, China unveiled a white paper in January 2022 covering the five-year plan for space exploration that continues the push into lunar space and beyond. The very ambitious goals include strengthening space infrastructure, developing next-generation spacecraft for carrying people to space, and plans to land humans on the Moon in the coming years. Exploring extra-terrestrial natural resources and harnessing energy are other areas of Chinese space thrust.

Drones are where the action is unfolding globally. Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated India’s biggest Drone Festival—Bharat Drone Mahotsav 2022, on May 27, 2022 in New Delhi. More than 70 exhibitors, including start-ups, showcased their drones. All departments of the government, including the armed forces, participated. It was meant to boost the indigenous demand and production of drones and services.

India-Japan-Philippines make an important maritime trilateral. The Philippines had been in the process of shedding a misguided

policy of conciliation towards China. Opportunities were opening up for investments and a broad new relationship with Japan and India. With an eye on China, Japan has planned 2 + 2 talks with the Philippines and India. China's growing maritime assertiveness, among others, would be discussed by the foreign and defence ministers. But there has been a change of government in the Philippines with Ferdinand Marcos Jr. winning the presidential election, and he will take charge at the end of June 2022. The country has been battered by the pandemic and a deep recession. The decisive victory may mean a reset of the Philippines' relations with China and the United States as he seeks closer ties with Beijing. In the South China Sea, China is embroiled in maritime disputes with several countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam and the Philippines. So, Marcos would have to walk the troubled path carefully. Meanwhile, the \$375 million India's BrahMos deal with the Philippines will have to be watched.

The Caspian Sea is the world's largest inland body of water. It is bound by Russia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Iran and Turkmenistan. All of these are rich in fossil fuels having rich oil and gas deposits. India imported 212.2 million tonnes of crude oil in 2021-2022, paying \$119 billion. Oil import dependence was 85.5 per cent. Crude oil accounted for 25 per cent of India's total imports. India currently sources crude oil from 42 countries. The top 20 sources of India's oil imports account for over 95 per cent of India's oil imports and the top 10 countries accounted for over 80 per cent. Sixty per cent is from Persian Gulf countries. The USA has now become a net exporter of crude oil and also the world's largest producer. Ever since, the USA has become India's 4th largest source of oil imports. Russia's share in India's oil importers was 2.3 per cent which puts it among India's top 10 sources. Kazakhstan is landlocked. Transportation is an issue. Chabahar port in Iran would give access to India. ONGC Videsh did invest in Kazakh oil block. Oil and natural gas continue to dominate the discourse of the bilateral relations between Azerbaijan and India. India's GAIL has a memorandum of understanding with the Azerbaijani firm, SOCAR, to explore opportunities in petrochemical projects. Despite increased US pressure India continued to buy

oil from Iran, albeit in reduced quantities. As there are renewed discussions on removing sanctions, the trade may go up again. Energy transfer from Turkmenistan was initially planned through the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) natural gas pipeline. India is also part of the 'Ashgabat Agreement', which is meant to establish an International Transport and Transit Corridor between the Governments of Iran, Oman, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. During the first-ever visit of the President of India to Turkmenistan in April 2022, the possible energy corridors were discussed.

Rare earth minerals are critical for most modern technologies. Resource and mining dominance of a few countries has started to bother the world. China's growing control of metals such as lithium and cobalt, which are the core of the electric transport revolution, is of concern. Reshaping the world according to these critical minerals is heading for the metallic equivalent of the Cold War. It is not just about mining but the entire supply chain from mine to end-product.

Myanmar-China relations, though fairly close, have seen ups and downs. Clashes between ethnic Chinese rebels and the Myanmar military near the China-Myanmar border bothers both sides. The second issue is about China-funded debt traps. There are issues about human trafficking. Of concern to India is that China is the most important supplier of military aid and maintains extensive strategic and military cooperation.

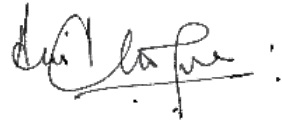
Amidst the continued "nuclear sabre-rattling" through the Ukraine war, Russia conducted the first full flight test of the new 'Sarmat' intercontinental ballistic missile which has a maximum range of about 18,000 kilometres. Sarmat's dummy warhead successfully hit its intended target on the Kamchatka Peninsula in Russia's Far East in April 2022. In all likelihood, the missile will be equipped with 10 or more warheads. While it will not upset the existing strategic balance, newer capabilities will revive the nuclear arms race.

All this and much more are covered in this issue of *Defence and Diplomacy*. We in Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS) continue to encourage strategic studies in interdisciplinary academic fields, looking at conflict and peace strategies, international relations and

diplomacy, economics, and military power with greater emphasis on aerospace power. We invite more of our readers to put pen to paper or punch computer keys to generate articles and contribute to our journals to enrich them further.

Happy Reading.

Jai Hind!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anil Chopra', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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