

# *INSIGHT* SOUTHEAST ASIA

Looking Eastwards From New Delhi



*Southeast Asia & Oceania  
Centre  
Monthly Newsletter*

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## Southeast Asia & Oceania Digest

### March 2022

As great power competition continues in Southeast Asia, the US and China may be seen courting ASEAN nations in different ways. But Russia's invasion of Ukraine has shifted attention to Europe, with the NATO upping its defence in the continent. It remains to be seen if the conflict turns out to be a sustained crisis and compels leaders across the world to focus energies in Europe. The US already seems to be torn between its security interests in Europe, and its commitments to Asia, and more particularly the Indo-Pacific. Even though the Biden administration has clarified that American troops won't be fighting the war in Ukraine, Washington may be increasingly drawn to the crisis given recent escalations.

### Quad Foreign Minister's Summit held in Melbourne

The Quad foreign ministers met in Melbourne on 11 February, 2022 to discuss security issues in the Indo-Pacific region. Dr. S. Jaishankar represented India and its views on the evolving security dynamics. The [joint statement](#) reiterates ASEAN centrality and significance of ASEAN-led architecture in the region, as well as support to ASEAN partners for implementation of the ASEAN outlook on Indo-Pacific. The ministers reviewed the progress on vaccine production and distribution, and HADR cooperation in the region. A number of issues discussed included cyber security, rules-based trading system and economic resilience, cooperation in emerging technologies, and resilience of energy supply chains. The impact of the crisis in Afghanistan and Myanmar on regional stability was also discussed.

The Quad has maintained that it is not a military alliance and seeks to address

traditional as well as non-traditional security issues in the region like climate change. The White House said after the meeting that it views India as a [leader in South Asia and Indian Ocean](#), and as a "driving force" in the Quad. India is the only Quad member which is not a formal treaty ally of the US.

### External Affairs Minister visited the Philippines

Dr. S. Jaishankar [visited the Philippines](#) from 13-15 February, 2022. He met his counterpart Teodoro L. Locsin Jr., and other leaders in the government such as Defence Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez III, and Agriculture Secretary Dr. William Dar to discuss scope of strengthening bilateral cooperation in their respective sectors. He also met with the Indian community in Manila. The Philippines has recently finalised a deal worth US\$ 375 million to purchase the BrahMos missiles from India, which will act as a primary deterrent in its conflict with China. Beijing's incursions into the Filipino EEZ in the South China Sea have increased in the past few years. New Delhi and Manila have found alignment in their foreign policy as both come closer to maintain balance of power in the region.

### External Affairs Minister talks about India-ASEAN relations at Munich Security Conference

Dr. S. Jaishankar attended the Munich Security Conference and participated in a panel discussion "A Sea Change? Regional Order and Security in the Indo-Pacific" on 19 February, 2022. He said [India's relations with ASEAN](#) were going strong and disregarded a poll suggesting ASEAN's lack of trust in India. Under India's Act East Policy since 2014, New Delhi has made an outreach to Southeast Asia for cooperation on areas like defence and security, as well

as people-to-people relations. A number of high-level visits and increased interaction in the defence industry sector suggests greater congruence in the foreign policy of India and the ASEAN nations.

Dr. Jaishankar also underscored that the Quad is not an Asian NATO, and that India's relations with China would largely depend on the status quo at their shared borders in the Himalayas. He left for France after the conference to hold bilateral talks with his counterpart in Paris, and attend the "EU Ministerial Forum for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific".

### **Indonesia finalises arms deals with France and the US**

Jakarta will acquire [42 Rafale fighter jets](#) worth US\$ 8.1 billion from France's Dassault Aviation. The deal will expectedly strengthen the relationship between the two countries and bring greater alignment of their strategic perspectives. Indonesia is the second largest client of Dassault after Singapore in Southeast Asia. It has also ordered two Scorpene vessels and signed a Memorandum with France for development of submarines. Additionally, Jakarta will buy [F-15 advanced fighter jets](#) and communication systems from the US for US\$ 13.9 billion.

President Jokowi has underlined that such deals should not only be limited to purchases but also focus on areas of joint production and development, investment in domestic defence industries, and technological transfer. Indonesia has aspirations to be a regional power in the Indo-Pacific, and its large economy and strategic location add heft to such ambitions. It can be expected that more defence acquisitions, coupled with more funds for such acquisitions, may follow as Indonesia seeks to rejuvenate its defence power and assert greater influence on the regional security environment.

### **Singapore conducts its Airshow**

The [2022 Singapore Airshow](#) was held from 15-18 February, even as the participation was affected due to COVID-19 pandemic. The largest aviation trade show in the Asia-Pacific region, it was attended by around 600 companies representing more than 70 Percent of the top 20 aviation companies. The Tejas Light Combat Aircraft from India made its debut at the event which included 39,000 trade visitors from around 39 countries. The representation of the Singapore Airforce included Airbus helicopters 225M. India aims to increase its defence exports to US\$ 5 billion and domestic defence production to US\$ 25 billion by 2025. Southeast Asia can be a lucrative market for its exports given the changing security environment and increasing interest of ASEAN nations in purchasing arms from India.

### **ASEAN holds Foreign Ministers' Retreat in Cambodia**

The annual ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Retreat was held on 17 February, 2022 in Cambodia. It was joined by representatives from all ASEAN nations [except Myanmar](#). The five-point resolution by ASEAN for the Myanmar crisis, which includes abstaining from use of violence by military forces, has largely failed as the junta regime in Naypidaw continues crackdown on protestors. The crisis in Myanmar remains the biggest challenge for ASEAN, and has cast doubts over ASEAN's ability to maintain regional peace and stability. Cambodian foreign minister Prak Sokhonn, also the ASEAN envoy to Myanmar, may travel to Myanmar in March to meet Senior General Min Aung Hlaing. He also expressed an intent to meet the National Unity Government leaders who have formed a shadow government in opposition to the junta rule in Myanmar.