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# Strategic Digest

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## The US DoD concludes Global Posture Review- Key highlights

On 30 Nov 21, the US Department of Defence announced the completion of the Global Posture Review. The review was guided by President Joe Biden's interim national security strategy released earlier this year. Briefing the media about the review, Mara Karlin, Deputy Undersecretary of Defence for Policy informed that President Joe Biden has accepted the recommendations formed by Secretary of Defence Lloyd J. Austin III on the Global Posture Review. "That guidance asserts that the United States will lead with diplomacy first, revitalize our unmatched network of allies and partners and make smart and disciplined choices regarding our national defence and responsible use of our military," Karlin said. "Nested within this guidance, the global posture review assesses DOD overseas forces and



footprint along with the framework and processes that govern our posture decision making."

The global posture review document has not been made public citing classification for security reasons and to protect the confidentiality of consultations with the US allies and partners. However, the US DoD has shared the key highlights. The main outcome of the review is the return to normal of determining military posture

around the world and tying that to America's strategic alignment.

As per the US DoD, it is no surprise that the Indo-Pacific is the priority region for the review, given the secretary's focus on China as America's pacing challenge. The review directs additional cooperation with allies and partners to advance initiatives that contribute to regional stability and deter Chinese military aggression and threats from North Korea. These initiatives include efforts towards greater regional access for military partnership activities, enhancing infrastructure in Guam and Australia and prioritizing military construction across the Pacific Islands. They also include new U.S. rotational aircraft deployments and logistics cooperation in Australia, which DOD announced in September. Few more initiatives are under discussion with the US allies and remain classified at this stage.

In Europe, the review looks to strengthen the U.S. combat deterrent against Russia and enable NATO forces to operate more effectively. The US DOD has already lifted the 25,000-man cap on active-duty troops in Germany imposed by the previous administration and the decision has been taken to permanently base a multi-domain task force and theatre fires command.

The posture review has recommended certain changes in the Middle East which include the redeployment of critically strained missile defence capabilities, and reallocation of certain maritime assets back to Europe and the Indo-Pacific. In Iraq and Syria, the review indicates that the US DoD posture will continue to

support the defeated Islamic State campaign and build the capacity of partner forces. As per the US DoD officials, the analysis from the review regarding the US force level in Africa supports an appropriately scoped posture to monitor threats from regional violent extremist organizations, support American diplomatic activities and enable allies and partners. In Central and South America and the Caribbean, the review looks at DOD posture in support of national security objectives, including humanitarian assistance, disaster relief and counterdrug missions.

Reacting to the global posture review by the US, Zhao Lijian, a spokesperson for China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said at a routine press conference on 30 Nov 2021 that the review fully exposed the US' true intention of militarizing the Indo-Pacific and sparing no effort to encircle and contain China. Zhao demanded that the US give up its Cold War mentality of creating imaginary enemies and stop making statements and actions that threaten international peace and stability.

### Russian Troop Deployment on The Ukrainian Border

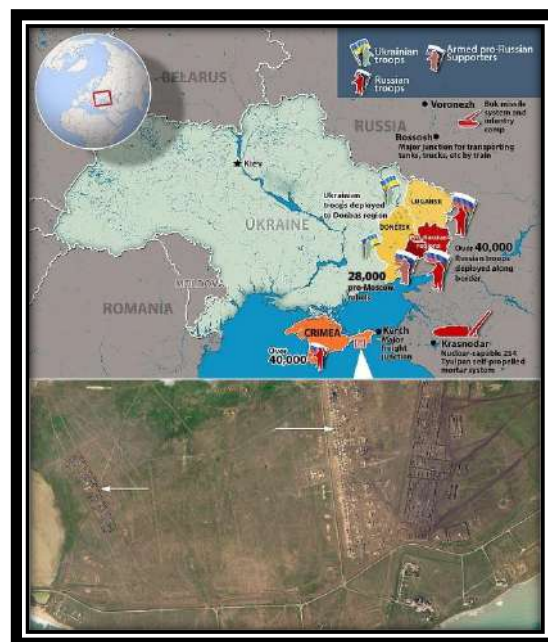
Ongoing reports of a large build-up of Russian troops along the Ukrainian border have set alarm bells ringing with fears of an imminent confrontation between Moscow and Kyiv. By Ukrainian estimates, Russia has deployed more than 1,14,000 servicemen along the northern, southern and eastern borders.

While the Kremlin has denied any offensive motivation behind the accretion, President Putin's rhetoric of Ukraine and the West's "superficial approach to Russia's red lines" and his call for "establishing serious long-term guarantees to ensure Russia's security" have raised the stakes of this simmering confrontation. Ukraine's allegation of uncovering an attempted Russian coup against President Volodymyr Zelensky has further raised the political temperature.

Given the history of the Russian takeover of Crimea in 2014, Ukraine is leaving no stone unturned to augment its defences.

This includes sending an SOS to the West for fast-tracking top-of-the-line weapons imports. President Biden, meanwhile, has reassured Ukraine of the United States' "unwavering support". The US has also signed a new Charter for Strategic Partnership with Ukraine. These developments indicate the possibility of a major escalation in Eastern Europe. The pertinent question, therefore, is what are the motivations behind this Russian troop build-up?

Its genesis can be traced to the geopolitical tussle between Russia and the West with Russia seeking to preserve its core strategic space of "near abroad" i.e. its



sphere of influence. This includes Central Asia and the region encompassing Belarus and Ukraine. The latter is particularly significant given the geostrategic buffer that it has traditionally provided Russia against invasion by the West. The fact that Russia considers Kyiv as the cradle of Russian civilisation highlights the importance that Moscow attaches to Ukraine. This was reiterated recently by both President Putin and his predecessor Dmitri Medvedev in widely disseminated long-read articles.

Ukraine's continuing Westward drift, anchored in the 2014 "revolution" which led to the overthrow of a pro-Russian Ukrainian President in favour of a pro-Western one, has raised the geopolitical stakes for Russia. Kyiv's stated goal of joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) would place the military organisation right at Russia's doorstep. With the Baltic countries already members of NATO, Russia's apprehensions of being encircled by an adversary are real and pressing.

Perhaps, Russia believes that an inflection point in this tussle is on the horizon. Ukraine's refusal to implement the Minsk-II agreement, which inherently favours Russia to build its equities in Ukraine, indicates the dilution of Russian leverages, previously wielded in arresting Kyiv's westward drift. President Zelensky, who won the election in 2019 with his manifesto promising cultivation of ties with Russia, appears to have gone back on that promise.

A troop-build-up might be an ominous sign but it is unlikely that a Russian invasion is in the offing soon. Coercive diplomacy has long been part of Russia's playbook to reiterate its red-lines to compel the adversary to accommodate Russia's core concerns. Russia's escalation dominance and the West's indeterminate commitment to Ukraine in the event of an armed hostility with Russia put the Kremlin in pole position in this ongoing standoff. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that Russia will settle for anything less than a neutral Ukraine.

### **Advancing Japan's Interoperability with Indo-Pacific partners**

In mid-November, Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) conducted several joint exercises with key allies in pursuit of a Free and Open Indo Pacific. For instance, JMSDF together with the US Navy conducted an anti-submarine warfare exercise for the first time in the South China Sea. The aim was to augment tactical interoperability between the allies and bolster deterrence. The exercise involved JS Kaga and JS Murasame, P-1 patrol aircraft and submarine, USS Milius and P-8A maritime aircraft. Separately, Japan-Australia bilateral exercise "Nichi-Gou Trident" was conducted south of Shikoku from November 10-12. During this exercise, asset protection of Australian forces, in keeping with Article 95-2 of the Japan Self-Defense Force Law was conducted. This is the first time JSDF have protected warships beyond the US Navy. JMSDF sent Murasame-class destroyer JS Inazuma to escort the Australian navy's Anzac-class frigate HMAS Warramunga. Japanese defence ministry indicated that "protection of the Australian military represents enhanced interoperability and closer co-operation

with our special strategic partner Australia.” Earlier, Japan and Australia have finalised the Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA).

Subsequently, Japan together with the US, Australia, Canada and Germany conducted a multilateral naval exercise, called the ANNUALEX in the Philippine Sea from November 21-30. The primary objective of this tactical exercise reportedly is to augment maritime communication tactics, anti-submarine warfare and air warfare operations, replenishments-at-sea, and maritime interdiction manoeuvres. The idea is to enable the navies to manoeuvre in difficult maritime environments with integrated surface and air engagements, and bolster mutual “war-fighting readiness, maritime superiority, and power projection in the Indo-Pacific”. JMSDF conducts this annual exercise with key Indo-Pacific partners to bolster strategic coordination, and further hone and advance existing combat interoperability amongst allies and strategic partners, boosting readiness across all platforms. The goal is to advance navy-to-navy cooperation and preserve regional security.



It is important to note that ANNUALEX 2021 marks the first time in two decades that a German naval warship participated in a multilateral maritime exercise in the Indo-Pacific. Germany, with its recent Indo-Pacific outreach, expects to augment naval interoperability and further advance maritime cooperation with key Indo-Pacific powers. To demonstrate its commitment to the Indo-Pacific,

Germany intends to despatch a frigate every two years. In a separate development, the German frigate, Bayern, conducted a joint exercise with the JMSDF in the Pacific in early November. Japanese defence ministry confirmed that Bayern is the first German naval warship to make a port call in two decades. Previously in August, the frigate performed training in the Gulf of Aden with their Japanese counterparts. Furthermore, Japan and Germany signed an Agreement on Security of Information which enables the exchange of confidential information and intensifies cooperation on security policy and military technology. In recent months, Japan has intensified its defence and security cooperation with not just Germany but other European stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific, especially France and the UK. Strengthening maritime security cooperation with various allies is imperative to maintaining regional peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific.