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A. **. U.S. INDO-PACIFIC COMMAND**

1 . U.S. INDO-PACIFIC COMMAND / News / April 7, 2021

**Army Competing Every day in Indo-Pacific, Senior Leaders Say**

By Sean Kimmons Army News Service

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WASHINGTON -- As the Army’s largest service component command, U.S. Army Pacific continuously competes across a vast region between the north and south poles and from the west coast of the U.S. to India, its commander said Tuesday.

“Our daily focus is on competition,” said Gen. Paul LaCamera. “We’ve got to be ready to respond in crisis and we’ve got to be prepared to win in conflict.”

Ongoing training plays a key part in this, since the final area in any conflict is “still the most dangerous piece of ground on the face of the earth,” he said during a discussion with the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

“The focus of making sure that our forces are trained and ready to fight in that last 100 meters is absolutely critical,” he added.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has tempered some training over the past year, LaCamera said safety precautions, such as training bubbles and testing, have allowed many Soldiers to still interact with allies and partners.

“We have been able to adapt to that and we have been able to continue to train,” he said.

Later this year, the Army plans to hold another Defender Pacific exercise, which would see thousands of Soldiers head to the region to train.

Joint team

The Army’s role in great power competition with Russia and China is not necessarily to end up in conflict, but rather deter them, said Gen. James C. McConville, the Army’s chief of staff.

**To do this requires transformational changes that are currently underway in the Army, which include modernized equipment, a new talent management system, and updated doctrine and organizations, such as multi-domain task forces.**
“We’re in the process right now of taking a look at the future; the type of capabilities that we need to provide for the joint force,” McConville said during the event. “We are aligned with the joint force and we’re aligned with our allies and partners in the region. We know in the future, whether it’s in the Indo-Pacific or other places around the world, we’ll go as a joint team.”

**The Army expects to build at least two multi-domain task forces in the region and another one in Europe, he said. The MDTFs can provide long-range precision effects, such as fires and an intelligence, information, cyber, electronic warfare and space, or I2CEWS, element, and possibly air and missile defense and attack aviation capabilities.

The first MDTF, which is based out of Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, has already tested its capabilities during exercises in the region.**

“We’re not waiting to get it right before we start deploying it,” McConville said. “We’re getting good feedback from the commanders in the field on what they want this to do as we develop this organization moving forward.”

**McConville said it will be up to other government officials to decide where the task forces, or at least parts of them, could be strategically positioned in the future.**

“We’re providing options, which become dilemmas to our competitors,” he said. “And the politics or the policy of where they’re actually based and how they’re based will be worked out through the policymakers and the diplomats.”

2 . U.S. INDO-PACIFIC COMMAND / News / April 9, 2021

# U.S. Secretary of State Blinken’s Call with Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs Locsin

U.S. Embassy in the Philippines

  –  U.S. Embassy in the Philippines -- **Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken spoke today with Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs Teodoro Locsin, Jr. Both expressed their shared concerns with the massing of People’s Republic of China (PRC) maritime militia vessels in the South China Sea,** including at Whitsun Reef, and reiterated their calls on the PRC to abide by the 2016 arbitration ruling issued pursuant to the Law of the Sea Convention. Secretary Blinken also reaffirmed the applicability of the 1951 U.S.-Philippine Mutual Defense Treaty to the South China Sea. **Secretary Blinken and Secretary Locsin welcomed enhanced bilateral and multilateral cooperation on the South China Sea**. Secretary Blinken also discussed the Administration’s efforts to combat rising hate and violence against Asian-Americans.

B. **Government of India**

1. Government of India – Ministry of Defense / Press Release / April 1, 2021

## **CURTAIN RAISER: INDIAN ARMY TO PARTICIPATE IN MULTINATIONAL EXERCISE IN BANGLADESH : EXERCISE SHANTIR OGROSHENA-2021**Posted On: 01 APR 2021 4:53PM by PIB Delhi

Multinational Military **Exercise SHANTIR OGROSHENA 2021**(**Front Runner of the Peace**) will be held at Bangladesh to commemorate the birth centenary of **Bangladesh ‘Father of the Nation’ Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman** and mark glorious 50 years of liberation.  Indian Army contingent comprising of 30 personnel including Officers, JCOs and Jawans of a Battalion from The DOGRA Regiment will participate in the exercise along with contingent of Royal Bhutan Army, Sri Lankan Army and Bangladesh Army from 04 Apr to 12 Apr 2021. The theme of the exercise is “Robust Peace Keeping Operations”. **Military observers from USA, UK, Turkey, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Singapore will also be in attendance throughout the exercise.**

2. Government of India – Ministry of Defense / Press Release / April 5, 2021

## **Indian Navy Ships and Aircraft to participate in exercise La Perouse**Posted On: 05 APR 2021 1:12PM by PIB Delhi

**Indian Navy Ships INS Satpura (with an integral helicopter embarked) and INS Kiltan alongwith P8I Long Range Maritime Patrol Aircraft are participating, for the first time; in multi-lateral maritime exercise La Pérouse**, being conducted in the Eastern Indian Ocean Region from 05 to 07 Apr 2021. The Indian Navy ships and aircraft will exercise at sea with ships and aircraft **of French Navy (FN), Royal Australian Navy (RAN), Japan Maritime Self Defence Force (JMSDF) and United States Navy (USN)** during the three day exercise at sea.

The exercise La Pérouse, led by French Navy, has participation by FN Ships Tonnerre, an amphibious assault ship and frigate Surcouf. United States Navy is represented in the exercise by amphibious transport dock ship Somerset. Her Majesty’s Australian Ships (HMAS) Anzac, a frigate and tanker Sirius have been deployed by RAN for participation in the exercise while Japan Maritime Self Defence Ship (JMSDF) is represented by the destroyer Akebono. In addition to the ships, integral helicopters embarked onboard ships will also participate in the exercise.

Exercise La Pérouse will witness complex and advanced naval operations including surface warfare, anti-air warfare and air defence exercises, weapon firing exercises, cross deck flying operations, tactical manoeuvres and seamanship evolutions such as replenishment at sea.

**The exercise will showcase high levels of synergy, coordination and inter-operability between the friendly navies**. Participation by the Indian Navy in the exercise demonstrates the shared values with friendly navies ensuring freedom of seas and commitment to an open, inclusive Indo-Pacific and a rules-based international order.

3. Government of India – Ministry of External Affairs / Press Release / April 5, 2021

**Passage of USS John Paul Jones through India’s EEZ**

April 09, 2021

The Government of India’s stated position on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea is that the Convention does not authorise other States to carry out in the Exclusive Economic Zone and on the continental shelf, military exercises or manoeuvres, in particular those involving the use of weapons or explosives, without the consent of the coastal state.

The USS John Paul Jones was continuously monitored transiting from the Persian Gulf towards the Malacca Straits. We have conveyed our concerns regarding this passage through our EEZ to the Government of U.S.A through diplomatic channels.

4. Government of India – Ministry of External Affairs / Press Release / April 13, 2021

## **Visit of Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of France to India (April 13-15, 2021)**

* H.E. Mr. Jean-Yves Le Drian, Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of France, is on an official visit to India from April 13-15, 2021.
* External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar, hosted the visiting Foreign Minister for bilateral talks at Hyderabad House on April 13, 2021. In the context of the changes in a Covid-impacted world, both Ministers recognised the immense opportunities for greater collaboration in diverse sectors such as trade and investments, defence and security, health, education, research and innovation, energy and climate change.
* Bilateral trade with France has witnessed a steady rise in the last decade reaching USD 10.75 billion in 2020. To tap the full potential of bilateral trade and economic relations, both sides recognised the importance of fast tracking the discussions on an India-EU trade and investment agreement.
* **Dr S Jaishankar and Mr. Le Drian also held discussions on a number of regional and global issues of mutual interest reiterating their shared commitment to a multipolar world and faith in multilateralism. They explored ways to strengthen cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, including the India-France-Australia Trilateral mechanism, addressing emerging challenges in the maritime and space domains and working together in the area of climate action and biodiversity protection. In this regard, India welcomes France’s decision to take up the "Maritime Resources” pillar of India’s Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI).**
* Mr. Le Drian will be participating along with the Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Shri Prakash Javadekar at a panel discussion on Climate Change in Delhi. He will also participate in the Raisina Dialogue. In the second leg of his tour, he will be visiting the National Centre for Biological Sciences and ISRO in Bengaluru on April 15, 2021.

C. **India Think Tanks**

1 India Think Tanks - Chennai Centre for China Studies / Article / April 1, 2021

# QUAD vs. RCEP: A Geo-economic Appraisal ; By Dr R Srinivasan

The Quad Summit held on 12 March 2021 has been hailed as agenda-setting for Australia, India, Japan, and the US towards the geopolitical challenges prevalent in the Indo-Pacific. While the Joint Press Release did not name China directly, it highlighted the “democratic values” of the Quad. The Joint Statement also reaffirmed the groupings “strong support for ASEAN’s unity and centrality as well as the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific”.

Furthermore, the specific inclusion of East and South China Seas and the assertion that the Quad Members will “continue to prioritize the role of international law in the maritime domain, particularly as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and facilitate collaboration, including in maritime security, to meet challenges to the rules-based maritime order” in the above maritime spaces leaves very little to the imagination as to its import.

The Joint Statement also highlighted that the members of the grouping will combine their national capacities in “medical, scientific, financing, manufacturing and delivery, and development” which is an expression of their intention to build resilient supply chains and preclude coercion, again an apparent reference to China. Quad’s other issues of concern, apart from COVID19, are North Korea, climate change, cyberspace, counter-terrorism, quality infrastructure investments, etc., that the grouping wishes to prioritize and address.

**There is a clear articulation of support for ASEAN’s ‘unity, centrality and outlook ‘but it remains to be seen how the ASEAN perceives such an offer as also how the Quad would deliver on these.** In this context, it would be worthwhile to take a look at few developments in Southeast Asia to arrive at some deductions.

ASEAN came together as a trading bloc in 1992 and over the last two and a half decades it has developed itself into a vibrant economic entity accounting for nearly 30 percent of global GDP. During this time**, China emerged as the largest trading partner for the ASEAN, with EU, Japan, and the US next in that order**. China commands a little over 15 percent of all ASEAN trade accounting for nearly US $ 134 billion and US $ 211 billion in exports and imports respectively. In comparison, Japan accounts for US$113/124 billion, the United States US$129/83billion and India is only US$ 39/19 billion of the ASEAN trade volume, respectively.

China’s investments in ASEAN are pegged at US$ 108 billion (2017) which is about one-third of the US ‘investments in the region at US$ 329 billion (2017). However, the nature of investments has a marked difference, **with countries borrowing from China increasingly falling into a debt trap that they could ill afford to service**. A telling pointer in this regard is the acquisition of the only port in Cambodia’s Koh Kong Province by a Chinese firm on a 99-year lease for US$3.8 billion. China’s support to Cambodia at UNSC on human rights violations case during Pol Pot Regime and Cambodia returning the favor by blocking an ASEAN statement on the Chinese affairs in the South China Sea are important considerations for their bilateral engagement.

During the 1997 Asian economic crisis, there were numerous challenges for the ASEAN countries and these were further accentuated in 2008 at the time of the global financial crisis. For the ASEAN States, the Chinese investments for infrastructure development under the Belt Road Initiative have been a boon, improving connectivity and promoting trade. In this scenario, Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership **(RCEP) was first floated by China in 2012. However, this partnership remained dormant in view of overwhelming American investments in the region, and the US-led Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). US’ decision to withdraw from TPP in 2017 apparently created a vacuum and was filled in by the RCEP**. With at least four ASEAN countries as part of the TPP (Brunei, Singapore, Vietnam, and Malaysia), apart from Australia and Japan, the US’ decision created a potential situation in which even Japan would have got entangled in a trade war with the US.

Trump Administration’s stand on the TPP provided an opportunity in 2017for China to take lead through the RCEP with 15 members. In November 2020, the China-led RCEP emerged as the worlds’ largest trading bloc with Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, and 10 ASEAN countries. It is noteworthy that Australia, at the height of Quad-led Malabar naval exercises, hastened to join RCEP citing ‘room for individual member’s interests and priorities. It now appears that China is well set to formalize the RCEP into a reality by 1st January 2022 and once that is done, China’s exports will rise by US$248 billion, with Japan seeing an extra US$128 billion and South Korea US$63 billion,.

**The material gains RCEP is holding out to national economies of its members is more compelling for the ASEAN members that have disputes with China in the South China Sea**. Outside the ASEAN, Japan, South Korea and Australia joining the framework only demonstrate the compulsions of economics vis-a-vis notions of compliance with free and open Indo-Pacific order.

**Under such conditions, the ability of the Quad to achieve its stated objectives will depend on its ability to offset the advantages of RCEP. ASEAN’s capacity to keep its flock together focused on the geopolitical challenges that China is purportedly posing in the Indo-Pacific, overriding the temptaations of market economics, will also be crucial to the success of Quad.**

D. Philippine government

1 Philippine government – Department Of National Defense / Press Release / April 8, 2021

**Press Statement on the US admonition to China**

**The U.S. admonition to China against the use of force on Philippine public vessels and aircraft, which are performing their constitutional mandate to protect and defend Philippine rights in the South China Sea, including the West Philippine Sea, is an additional affirmation of the long-standing partnership between our two countries. This also demonstrates the strength of our alliance and mutual commitment to promote the rules-based international order.**

We are continuously in talks with the U.S. on the matter of mutual defense. Both parties are committed to undertake their obligations under the Mutual Defense Treaty so that neither stands alone in these issues involving the two states' inherent right of self-defense, individually and collectively.

**As the situation in the West Philippine Sea evolves, we keep all our options open in managing the situation, including leveraging our partnerships with other nations such as the United States**. We remain committed to protecting and defending our national interests, while upholding the security and stability in the region through peaceful and rules-based approach.

2 Philippine government – Department Of National Defense / Press Release / April 11, 2021

**SND, US SecDef hold telephone conference**

Secretary of National Defense Delfin N. Lorenzana and US Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III held a telephone conference today (Sunday, 11 April 2021).

**The two defense chiefs discussed the situation in the West Philippine Sea and recent developments in regional security. Both are looking forward to the conduct of Exercise Balikatan, which was cancelled last year. Sec Austin reiterated the importance of the VFA and hopes that it would be continued. Secretary Lorenzana committed to discuss the matter with the President as the final approval lies with him.**

Secretary Lorenzana likewise sought the assistance of Secretary Austin to expedite the delivery of the Moderna vaccines the country has ordered. To which, Secretary Austin replied that he would look into the issue and bring it to the attention of the office concerned.