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# GEO-STRATEGIC SCAN

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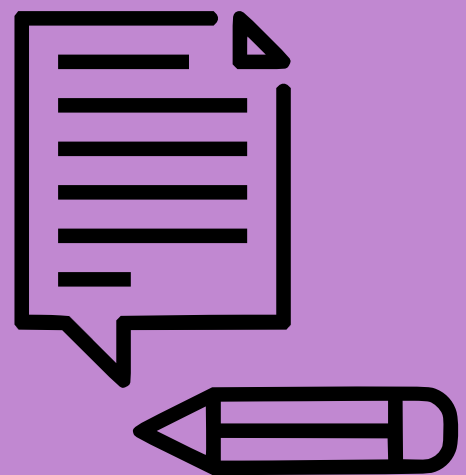
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## Russia-Ukraine Conflict: A Glance

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### BAKHMUT OFFENSIVE

The months-long battle for Bakhmut, one of the last urban centres in the eastern Donetsk province yet to fall to Russian forces, has proven one of the bloodiest of the war. Fighting around the eastern Ukrainian city of Bakhmut remained "particularly hot", President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said. The Wagner paramilitary group has led the charge, supported by some Airborne elements and other Russian units. Russian Su-35 jets are firing FAB-500M-62 bomb equipped with aerial guidance kit from standoff ranges, safe from Ukrainian Air Defence Units. Russians are upgrading their tanks to meet the challenges of the induction of western armour in the Ukraine's arsenal.

### COMMENTS

For Moscow, the fall of the city it calls by its Soviet-era name of Artyomovsk, would be its first major capture since mid-2022 and a boost in its wider war against Ukraine. It also claims to be decimating Ukrainian forces. While the battle for Bakhmut rages on, the Russians are hoping that the west will grow weary of the support being provided to Ukraine. The Russians might decide to shift their main effort of offensive effort from East to South to stall the Ukrainians Spring offensive.



Source: *The Financial Times*

## UKRAINE'S COUNTER OFFENSIVE

Ukrainian troops face a really difficult situation in the eastern city of Bakhmut, but Kyiv will take the "corresponding" decisions to protect them if they risk being encircled by Russian forces, President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said on April 04,2023. The Ukrainian leader told a news conference in Poland that Kyiv's forces in Bakhmut sometimes advanced a little only to be pushed back by Russian forces, but that they remained inside the city. Meanwhile, Ukraine has trained 40,000 storm brigade troops for counter-offensive. The new brigades drafted recently, will fight alongside regular troops bolstered by western tanks and other weapons to deal with counter offensive for Kiev. Poland will hand over five MiG-29s which after a dozen were handed over earlier.

### COMMENTS

Now in its second year, Bakhmut, in Ukraine's Donetsk region, has been one of the bloodiest and longest battles of Russia's full-scale invasion. A grim reality has settled in: the war will not end soon. Despite the heavy fighting in and around the eastern city of Bakhmut and other parts of the Donbas, the frontlines have not substantively changed in months and the share of Ukraine's economy has contracted by 29.1 %. Ukraine is preparing for a springtime offensive and will use the new inventory of weapons supplied by the West. If the Ukrainian Army cannot notch up success on the battlefield, continued material support may not be forthcoming. The leaks of intelligence summary on social media will force Ukraine to change its plans for the offensive. Ukrainian Minister's Emine Dzhaparova visit on April 11,2023 to New Delhi to put forth her points of view in wake of G-20 meet also indicates the need to find ways to end this conflict.

## FINLAND BECOMES THE 31ST MEMBER OF NATO

After Turkey lifted its veto on Thursday, Finland can become the 31st member of the military alliance. The Kremlin on April04,2023 branded Finland's NATO membership an "assault on our security" and said it would take countermeasures. Dmitry Peskov, a Russian spokesperson, said the move was an "encroachment" on Russian security. Finland said it would now work "relentlessly" to secure Sweden's membership of NATO. Meanwhile,Russia conducted a round of military exercise in its Kaliningrad Region involving Super Sukhoi's and S-400. Kaliningrad is a small Russian enclave, separated from the Russian mainland by more than 350 kilometres and sandwiched between Poland and Lithuania along the Baltic coast.

### COMMENTS

Russia does not believe NATO in Finland which shares 1,340kmlong border , as an immediate threat as Ukraine. However, it has brought to the fore the strategic prominence of the geographically detached region of Kaliningrad and the Baltic sea on April 06 ,2023. In 2008, NATO leaders promised both Ukraine and Georgia eventual membership, but without setting a date. Russia went to war against Georgia that year, and Russian troops remain in parts of Georgia, as they do in large sections of eastern Ukraine and Crimea, which Russia annexed in 2014.



## RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT

NATO countries are divided over what kind of political reassurances they might give Ukraine at the next NATO summit meeting, in mid-July, with the United States, Germany and France resisting pressure from Central and Eastern European allies to provide any detailed "road map" toward membership.

### NUCLEAR

A new "division" of submarines carrying nuclear-capable "super-torpedoes" will be created as early as 2024, according to Russian state media. Special-purpose submarines, carrying the Poseidon "super-torpedo," will join Russia's Pacific Fleet in the far eastern Kamchatka peninsula between the end of next year and the start of 2025, state news agency Tass reported on April 02, 2023. Currently, the entire Russian Pacific Fleet is carrying out snap drills involving practice missile launches and also involvement of nuclear capable strategic bombers and other war planes from the Pacific Fleet's air arm.



*Source: The Times*

### COMMENTS

Russia has been flashing its Nuclear weapons during the current conflict on many occasions. Therefore, Western understanding of how nuclear weapons factor into its decision-making processes needs to be rethought.

## PM Modi Holds Talks With Bhutan King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck

<https://www.outlookindia.com/national/pm-modi-holds-talks-with-bhutan-king-jigme-khesar-namgyel-wangchuck-news-275931>

- The talks on Tuesday between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Bhutan King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck covered entire gamut of bilateral ties including issues of respective national interests. Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra, when asked whether the Doklam issue figured in the talks, said India and Bhutan remained in close touch relating to security cooperation. At a media briefing, Kwatra said the visit of the Bhutanese King to India provided an opportunity to sketch a roadmap to further expand cooperation in diverse areas. The meeting between Modi and the Bhutan King covered entire gamut of bilateral ties including issues of respective national interest, Kwatra said.
- The King began his two-day visit to India on Monday amid some concerns in New Delhi over China's attempts to expand influence over Thimphu. Certain remarks by Bhutan Prime Minister Lotay Tshering on the Doklam tri-junction were seen by many as the Himalayan nation cosyng up to Beijing though Bhutan maintained that there is no change in its stance on the border dispute.
- Bhutan is a strategically important country for India. The strategic ties between India and Bhutan witnessed an upward trajectory in the last few years in the backdrop of a 73-day face-off between Indian and Chinese troops in Doklam tri-junction in 2017.
- The Doklam plateau is considered an important area for India's strategic interest. The standoff at Doklam tri-junction in 2017 began after China tried to extend a road in an area that Bhutan claimed belonged to it. India had strongly opposed the construction as it amounted to a unilateral change of status quo, resorting to military coercion against a small neighbour. The India-China face-off was resolved following several rounds of talks.
- In October 2021, Bhutan and China signed an agreement on a "three-step roadmap" to expedite negotiations to resolve their festering boundary dispute. Bhutan shares an over 400-km-long border with China and the two countries have held over 24 rounds of boundary talks in a bid to resolve the dispute.

### COMMENTS

The security deliberations during this visit reinforce the fact that the security concerns of India and Bhutan are indivisible and intertwined and substantiate the earlier impression of of Bhutan being underundue the Chinese pressure, which were speculated consequent to certain earlier remarks by Bhutan Prime Minister Lotay Tshering on the Doklam tri-junction.

## Airstrikes on Myanmar Village Feared to have Killed 100

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/airstrikes-on-myanmar-village-feared-to-have-killed-100/articleshow/99420933.cms?from=mdr>

- Airstrikes by Myanmar's military on Tuesday killed as many as 100 people, including many children, who were attending a ceremony held by opponents of army rule, said a witness, a member of a local pro-democracy group and independent media. The military is increasingly using airstrikes to counter a widespread armed struggle against its rule, which began in February 2021, when it seized power from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi. More than 3,000 civilians are estimated to have been killed since then by security forces.
- A witness told The Associated Press that a fighter jet dropped bombs directly onto a crowd of people, who were gathering at 8 AM for the opening of a local office of the country's opposition movement outside Pazigy village in Sagaing region's Kanbalu township. The area is about 110 kilometers North of Mandalay, the country's second-largest city. About half an hour later, a helicopter appeared and fired at the site, said the witness. Initial reports put the death toll at around 50, but later tallies reported by independent media raised it to about 100. About 150 people had gathered for the opening ceremony and women and 20 to 30 children were among the dead, he said, adding that those killed also included leaders of locally formed anti-government armed groups and other opposition organisations.
- The United Nations, United States and others strongly condemned the attack and pledged to work toward holding the military accountable.
- This heinous act by the terrorist military is yet another example of their indiscriminate use of extreme force against innocent civilians, constituting a war crime," the opposition National Unity Government said in a statement. The NUG calls itself the country's legitimate government, in opposition to the army.
- The military government's spokesperson, Maj Gen Zaw Min Tun, acknowledged in a statement phoned to state television MRTV that the ceremony had been attacked, but accused anti-government forces in the area of carrying out a violent campaign of terror. He said the People's Defence Forces - the armed wing of the National Unity Government - had terrorized residents into supporting them, killing Buddhist monks, teachers and other people, while the military sought peace and stability.

## COMMENTS

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the military takeover and subsequent widespread popular opposition. Many opponents of military rule have taken up arms, after their peaceful efforts have been put down, leading to the large parts of the country now embroiled in conflict. The military has been conducting major offensives and has faced some of the toughest resistance in Sagaing. The resistance forces have no defence against air attacks. The death toll from Tuesday's air attack, if confirmed, could be the highest in this civil conflict so far.

In response to accusations of violence and abuses, the military government mostly accuses pro-democracy forces of terrorism. However, the United Nations and non-governmental organisations appear to have credible evidence of large scale human rights abuses by the military, which is triggering into a major humanitarian crisis.



*Source: Dhaka Tribune*

## India Keeps Watch on Developments Concerning its Security, Says MEA on Militarisation of Myanmar's Coco Islands

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/india-keeps-watch-on-developments-concerning-its-security-says-mea-on-militarisation-of-myanmars-coco-islands/articleshow/99301166.cms?from=mdr>

Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Arindam Bagchi reacted to the militarisation of Myanmar's Coco Islands and said that India keeps a constant watch on all developments concerning India's security and takes all necessary measures to safeguard the same.



## REGIONAL SCAN: BHUTAN AND MYANMAR

MEA spokesperson was asked about the Myanmar Islands in the Bay of Bengal, which have long been the subject of geopolitical intrigue. It is alleged that since the early 1990s, Myanmar has allowed a Chinese signals intelligence facility on the Coco Islands. According to recent reports, satellite photographs of the Coco Islands have raised concerns for India about the increased activity. With the Coco Island developments, India may soon face a new airbase close by in a country increasingly tied to Beijing.

### COMMENTS

China has made large investment in Myanmar to access Indian Ocean sea lanes. The ongoing civil war in Myanmar for more than two years now, has isolated it internationally and makes its ruling military junta increasingly fragile. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands provide India's Eastern Fleet strategic depth in the Bay of Bengal and command approaches to the Strait of Malacca. Huge Chinese investments in Myanmar through the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor to access Indian Ocean sea lanes are being made so as to facilitate bypassing the Strait of Malacca, which is a critical shipping sea lane for China's East coast. The militarisation of the Coco Islands by the Myanmar alongwith with other related Chinese developments inland, may pose important security challenges to India.



Source: OpIndia

## Deadly Blasts Target Police Officials In Pakistan's Quetta

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/4/10/deadly-blast-hits-police-vehicle-in-pakistans-quetta-official>

The Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), a separatist group, claimed responsibility for the first attack. Attacks came only days after Pakistan's top intelligence agency arrested a "high-value target" in an operation against a Baloch rebel group in the province. The nationalist groups have made demands to share the resources, and have for two decades initiated a movement for complete independence.

## Pakistan To Launch New Military Operation Against Islamist Militants -Statement

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/pakistan/pakistan-to-launch-new-military-operation-against-islamist-militants/articleshow/99324511.cms>

Pakistan plans to launch a new nationwide operation to root out Islamist militants, in a potentially costly move for a country already facing full-blown economic and political crises. One analyst said the operation would also serve as a pretext for the government to delay provincial elections it had been under pressure to hold next month. Pakistan is in danger of defaulting on its debt, with an IMF bailout programme stalled since November, while a bruising political battle is raging between the government and former Prime Minister Imran Khan. The last time it launched an all-out operation against Islamist militants was in 2014, and it cost the country billions of dollars and resulted over a million people being displaced and hundreds being killed.

### COMMENTS



Source: Al Jazeera

Pakistan, a nuclear-armed country of 220 million people, has seen a rise in attacks by Islamist militants in the last few months, particularly since negotiations with the TTP militant group broke down last year. Former Prime Minister Khan has been pushing for elections amid rising anger at the government about decades-high inflation and a crippling economic slowdown as it tries to navigate tough IMF-backed economic reforms. The political crisis has already severely affected economic decision-making.

Pakistan's government unfairly exploits Balochistan's rich gas and mineral resources. The attacks have been growing in numbers ever since the involvement of China through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Moreover, the TTP's violent attacks will only raise the people's ire against the Pakistan State and the army for their inability to provide security. Pakistan is bolstered by its patronage of radical outfits. From a financial standpoint, terrorism hampers the growth of business and investment. This growing security instability in Pakistan does not augur well for India or regional security. Moreover, Army Chief General Asim Munir has also signaled a hawkish approach to India through his statements and alleging India's involvement in terror-related incidents in Pakistan. India underlined that it was high time the world also called upon this epicenter of the terror state. We will keep monitoring for future implications.

## Pakistan Criticizes India's Move To Host G20 Meeting in Srinagar

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/4/11/pakistan-criticises-indias-move-to-host-g20-meeting-in-srinagar>

India's decision to host a meeting of Group of 20 (G20) countries in Srinagar, part of Indian-administered Kashmir, has been slammed by Pakistan, which called it an "irresponsible move". Indian government announced Srinagar as the venue for the G20 Tourism Working Group meeting scheduled to take place from May 22 to 24. For a country that has a grandiose vision about itself, and its place in the world, India has once more demonstrated that it is unable to act as a responsible member of the international community.

### COMMENTS

India took over the presidency of the G20, an economic cooperation bloc comprised of 19 countries and the European Union, in December of last year. The G20 tourism track meeting will be the international event to be held in Jammu and Kashmir.

Diplomats and delegates from G20 member states, guest countries, and several international organizations have been invited to participate in the event, as part of India's G20 Presidency.

India, a remarkable tourist destination offers many experiences, including 40 UNESCO World Heritage sites, the world's highest mountain ranges, etc. Being one of the world's oldest civilizations, India is an all-embracing confluence of religions, traditions, and customs.

India is witnessing a revival of inbound arrivals and domestic travelers. India should capitalize on the G20 to achieve the pre-Covid numbers and exceed them and lay out the long-term agenda for promoting sustainable tourism globally.

Tourism in India supports and sustains local economies by creating economic opportunities and employment for local communities. The G20 presidency provides a strong platform for India to promote its agenda of developing sustainable/ green tourism practices, spreading digitization in the sector, expanding skill development etc.

## Pakistan Is An IMF Member, Not A Beggar: Ishaq Dar

<https://www.geo.tv/latest/480996-pakistan-an-imf-member-not-a-beggar-ishaq-dar>

Rubbishing rumours that officials from IMF refused to meet him at the Bretton Woods institutions' spring meetings, Finance Minister Ishaq Dar clarified he postponed his visit to the US on PM Shehbaz Sharif's request — in view of the political situation. "Pakistan is a member of the IMF and not a beggar," Dar said in a fiery speech. He said a constitutional crisis was created as the Supreme Court bench got shrunk from nine to three judges with the verdict to release Rs 21 billion for holding elections in Punjab. As a cabinet member, it was his responsibility to look into the funding arrangements. In such circumstances, he had to drop his visit on the PM's directives. There was nothing unusual in it because he would participate in the IMF and World Bank meetings virtually.

## IMF Deal: UAE Likely To Commit Financial Support To Pakistan This Week

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/1059879-imf-deal-uae-likely-to-commit-financial-support-to-pakistan-this-week>

The UAE is likely to commit \$1 billion this week in financing to help Pakistan meet one of the final conditions for an IMF deal that Islamabad needs to avert a default. The IMF has asked Pakistan to secure assurances on external financing from friendly countries and multilateral partners to fund its balance of payment gap for this fiscal year.

## IMF Deal: UAE Likely To Commit Financial Support To Pakistan This Week

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/1059879-imf-deal-uae-likely-to-commit-financial-support-to-pakistan-this-week>

Cash-strapped Pakistan has received the nod for funding of up to \$ 2 billion from Saudi Arabia, a move that will help the country secure the much-required bailout from the IMF. IMF has imposed the condition on Pakistan that it should secure \$ 3 billion from other countries for the revival of its \$ 6.5 billion bailout package.

### COMMENTS

Pakistan has taken tough measures including increasing taxes and energy prices, and allowing its currency to weaken. IMF is still insisting on its demand for a further increase in the interest rate according to inflation and opposing the annual subsidy and is unwilling to budge from its demand for Pakistan to collect money in terms of the Petroleum Development Levy (PDL). The Fund is also assessing the coalition government's proposed fuel discount plans for lower-income groups by raising fuel prices for wealthy motorists.



## REGIONAL SCAN: PAKISTAN

The cash-strapped nation of 220 million people is going through one of its biggest economic crises in history as it raised interest rates to an all-time high after consumer prices quickened to a fresh record.

The amount of money sent home by Pakistani citizens working abroad increased to a seven-month high of \$2.5 billion in March 2023, helping improve the country's balance of payments. Remittances are a sizable source of foreign financing and help to increase foreign exchange reserves. The inflows are typically used to finance the country's current account deficit. The rise in remittances is encouraging for the nation, which has been struggling to reach an agreement with the IMF for a bailout. The deal between IMF and Pakistan will also unlock other bilateral and multilateral financing avenues for Pakistan to shore up its foreign exchange reserves, which have fallen to four weeks' worth of import cover, and help it steer out of a balance of payment crisis. Meanwhile, IMF has cut its growth forecast for the country to 0.5% from the 2% estimate earlier as the nation faces a dollar shortage, leading to supply chain disruptions and companies stopping production.

Pakistan has completed all requirements to receive critical bailout money from the IMF. The funds can only be released after signing a staff-level agreement (SLA), and the Government of Pakistan is fully committed to fulfilling its obligations as agreed with the IMF.

## Pakistan Court Imposes Heavy Fine On Chinese Firm for Contract Violation

<https://www.msn.com/en-in/news/world/pakistan-court-imposes-heavy-fine-on-chinese-firm-for-contract-violation/ar-AA19E2k3>

Pakistan has imposed a penalty of \$2.48 million on Chinese petroleum firm China National Petroleum Corporation was penalised for allegedly violating its contract with Petroleum Exploration (Private) Limited. The court alleged that the Chinese firm violated the contract it signed with the Pakistani firm Petroleum Exploration (Private) Limited.

### COMMENTS

The local Pakistani firm filed a petition before a Pakistan sessions court against the CNPC, that the Corporation has violated a contractual obligation. The court has listened to the argument and ruled the case in favour of Petroleum Exploration (Private) Limited. China is one of the few allies of Pakistan which are providing assistance to the cash-strapped country, however, China's motive in helping Islamabad has been a matter of concern for many. Currently, the country's economy is on the brink of collapse.



Source: The Republic



With rising inflation, the Pakistani administration has also increased fuel prices, making the life of ordinary Pakistani citizens harder. After this move by the Pakistani court against the CNPC, it will be interesting to see how the struggling country's only ally will react to the case. We will keep monitoring the situation.

## Damning Proof Of Pakistan Army's Exorbitant Profits From Arms Exports to Ukraine

<https://newindian.in/exclusive-damning-proof-of-pakistan-armys-exorbitant-profits-from-arms-exports-to-ukraine/>

As the debt-ridden Pakistan struggles through one of the worst economic crises in its history with stampedes at food distribution centers becoming a regular affair, explosive evidence has come to light revealing the Pakistani Army earned exorbitant profits from export of enormous quantities of arms and ammunition to Ukraine through the Western countries. Despite claiming neutrality in the Ukrainian conflict, the terror state's deceitful facade has been completely exposed by the documents obtained. Between February and March this year alone, 42,000 rounds of 122 MM BM-21 Multi Barrel Rocket Launchers were shipped from Pakistan and routed to Ukraine via the US, the UK and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Pakistan has received \$ 364 million so far from the above arms sales while another \$ 309 million is still pending. Out of the \$364 million, strangely, the bulk of the profit, that is 80 percent share has gone to the Pakistan Army headquarters in Rawalpindi.

### COMMENTS

Pakistan has been sending hundreds of containers loaded with arms and ammunition, including artillery rockets, to Ukraine since the beginning of its war against Russia last year. Pakistan is sending arms and ammunition in a bid to strengthen its defence relationship with Ukraine. Last year, the UK used the Pakistani air force based in Rawalpindi as the air bridge to transfer Ukraine-destined arms from a British air base in the Mediterranean to Avram Iancu Cluj International Airport in Romania. Recently, a Pakistani firm signed an MoU with a Polish firm to supply defence equipment to Kyiv and the Canadian firm is acting as an intermediary. In exchange, Ukraine has promised Pakistan to help upgrade its Mi-17 helicopters. The Pakistani government and its non-state actors have also been activated to help Ukraine in the war. An example is a Pakistan-origin British billionaire named Mohammad Zahoor, who is married to a Ukrainian beauty queen, who is constructing a £1m housing project for Ukrainian refugees in Germany. Pakistan Army is also considering returning at least 44 T-80UD (out of 350 tanks) main battle tanks back to Ukraine. Pakistan and Ukraine enjoy close military and industrial relationships. Last year, the two countries committed to optimizing their military relations with a focus on defence production, training, and intelligence sharing. Pakistan, discredited for being a terror sponsor worldwide, is using the Russia-Ukraine war as an opportunity to regain its status as a faithful Western ally. As Pakistan is struggling to keep its economy together, the Pakistani Military Controlled Complex is rushing to mint money by supplying cheap ammunition via Western countries – Germany, Poland, and the United Kingdom. Interestingly, Pakistan has kept its military support to Ukraine clandestine lest it affects its relationship with Russia. Pakistan is currently dependent on Russian wheat and is pleading with Russia for discounted oil amid its economic crisis. We will keep monitoring the future implications.

# China Concludes Fiery Military Drills Encircling Taiwan

<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/military-drills-warning-to-taiwan-secessionists-forces-china/2868338>

Wang Wenbin, the spokesman for China's Foreign Ministry, said the "Joint Sword" three-day drills held by People's Liberation Army (PLA) since Saturday, "encircling Taiwan island are a stern warning to Taiwan secessionist forces and their collusion with external forces and necessary actions to safeguard national sovereignty, territorial integrity."

## COMMENTS

China successfully initiated an extensive fire and fury military exercise to "encircle" Taiwan following Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen's visit to US after her ten days trip to Central America. This is not the first time that China has been commencing such activities. During Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan in August 2022, China conducted its largest-ever military exercises around Taiwan which included a number of fighter jets, vessels, and missile launches. The Chinese Foreign Minister affirmed that the "biggest danger" to peace in the Taiwan Straits is posed by secessionist acts of "Taiwan independence" and the backing of external forces. Apart from the Foreign Minister the spokesperson of the Ministry Wang Wenbin made it clear that they would forcefully reject all types of 'Taiwan independence' secessionist acts if they were to maintain peace and stability in the Taiwan Straits.



Source: ABC News

Once again China reiterated the internal community to recognise the one-China principle and oppose all forms of separatist efforts advocating "Taiwan independence". While referring to US, Wenbin was very vocal about Washington exploiting Taiwan. He stated that US is using Taiwan as a pawn and is trying to contain China.

From these statements it could be analysed that China is trying to justify its missile strikes against Taiwan and waters near it. The effects of these operations are not just felt in Taiwan; Japan also expressed grave worries. Last year when China launched its military drill post Nancy Pelosi's visit Tokyo's defence minister affirmed that five ballistic missiles have landed Japan's exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

In context of India, China also recently named places in India's Arunachal Pradesh which China calls South Tibet. If and when PLA conquers Taiwan, it will likely embolden China to press her territorial claims elsewhere, including Bhutan and India.

# South Korea and India Agree to Bolster Ties in FM Talks

<https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20230408001500325>

SEOUL, April 8 (Yonhap) -- The top diplomats of South Korea and India have agreed to further bolster the countries' relationship during their talks in New Delhi, Seoul's foreign ministry said Saturday. Foreign Minister Park Jin held talks with his Indian counterpart, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, on Friday, after Park arrived in India earlier in the day for a two-day trip, marking the 50th anniversary of the establishment of their diplomatic ties.

## COMMENTS

This year marks the commemorative 50 years of diplomatic ties between South Korea and India. The visit by the South Korean Foreign Minister is symbolic and detrimental to shaping bilateral relations between the countries further. FM Park stressed that bilateral relations between the two countries have been growing and that South Korea as a member of the G20 appreciates the Presidency of India. The visit further amplifies South Korea's eagerness to work with India in manufacturing high-tech goods and creating supply chain resilience. Defence procurement and creating capabilities have long shaped the relations between the two. Both South Korea and India face security threats from their neighbouring countries and therefore security cooperation is also called for. South Korean FM stressed particularly aerospace and IT.

Security cooperation is also called for in the Indo-Pacific to deal with Chinese belligerence and it must be in the interest of India as well as South Korea to work closely and monitor the growing situation in the region. Semiconductors have lately been shaping the geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific and therefore, it is time that a tech giant like Korea may look towards India to forge cooperation in creating chips and semiconductors. However, South Korea and India may further bolster their relations creating areas of cooperation beyond defence and technology.

Economic Cooperation is another dominating characteristic of bilateral relations between the two. Especially now with India's G20 Presidency, India and South Korea may work closely in strengthening trade, post-pandemic value chain disruptions and a continuing global crisis. India's vision of 'One Earth. One Family. One Future' aligns with addressing these grave concerns with a good sense of cooperation between member states of G20, including South Korea.



Another dimension that has been and shall continue to shape bilateral ties is the export of cultural assets. India and South Korea share a very strong base of cultural domination that is attributed as dynamic and expansive. Therefore, the export of cultural assets will not only signal a cordial relationship but also shape people-to-people interactions.

***The visit by FM Park has amplified that South Korea considers India to be a natural partner with multiple emerging and existing areas of cooperation, with defence and technology being the steering force to bolster bilateral ties.***

# Arab States Are Normalizing With The Assad Regime

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/13/world/middleeast/assad-syria-middle-east.html>

Saudi Arabia, like many other Arab states, had refused to engage with President Bashar al-Assad of Syria for more than a decade after he crushed his country's Arab Spring uprising — bombing, gassing and torturing his own people in a conflict that morphed into a long-running war that is still in progress, as per the report.

## COMMENTS

After a decade of hostile relations post the 2011 civil war, Syria is looking to improve ties with its Arab counterparts. Multiple regional crises in West Asia have reached their zenith due to which the Arab governments prefer de-escalation and regional cooperation over conflicts with both Turkey and Iran and among themselves. This can be one of the potential reasons behind restoring diplomatic ties between Saudi Arabia (West Ally) and Syria, on 12th April, 2023; soon after the Saudi-Iran deal.

Another rationale behind the Arab states looking to include Syria in the Arab League, is that many countries like Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain are eyeing the post war reconstruction contracts. Normalization ties with Syria can also be seen as a measure to counterbalance Iran's influence on Assad's regime. This diplomatic move (supported by Russia, China, and Iran) is a shift away from the Western influence. It can be interpreted as a component of a larger trend towards establishing a multipolar order in the Middle East.



*Source: Atlantic Council*