

# DEFENCE & SECURITY REVIEW

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## **Evolve, Expand and Excel: Prime Minister Modi's Message to the Armed Forces**

DEBA R MOHANTY, DSR, April 13, 2021

On 6 March 2021, the last day of the two-day Combined Commanders' Conference (hereafter, CCC), the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi told the distinguished military gathering at Kevadia, Gujarat, in no uncertain terms that Indian armed forces need to be flexible and adaptive, accumulate combined strength, further Indian national interests and be the locomotive for promoting self-reliance in defence manufacturing by using indigenous weapons in order to increase the country's stature as a global power in an era of the fast-paced technological environment and fluid global security scenario. Needless to mention, his address to the armed forces included all stakeholders of national military power – from military-industrial capabilities to financial and human resources for propelling national military



### **DEBA RANJAN MOHANTY**

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power.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Chief of Defence Staff General Vipin Rawat also addressed the CCC, which was distinct from its previous editions on many counts with shuttle messages to stakeholders. First, the CCC, for the first time in its history, included the participation of junior and non-commissioned officers (known as PBOR – Personnel Below Officer Rank) in addition to the regular senior commanders, which itself is a significant departure from the past tradition. It also signifies the military's acceptance of proposals emanating from political executives. This decision has received sporadic outbursts from some retired military officers, who term such a departure as 'disruptive and disturbing'. Whether such apprehensions would worsen civil-military relations in India or the opposite remain to be seen. These are early days of national military transitions in most domains, all of which show mixed results thus far.

Second, for the first time, the CCC was held outside Delhi. Again, the military has accepted the symbolic change of place for all important events, an idea coming from the political executives again. Like the national events on military affairs as well as international military exhibitions (like DEFEXPO or AERO INDIA) are now slowly moving away from the national capital and held in places like Goa, Chennai, Lucknow and elsewhere. Lucknow was a serious candidate for hosting the recent edition of Aero India in February 2021, so Bengaluru may not be the only venue for aerospace exhibitions in future. It might lose this flagship event to either Lucknow or Hyderabad. Military events and programmes outside the national capital not only generate local enthusiasm but also enhance knowledge of the citizenry – a domain, which was hitherto reserved for upper echelons of the military

and the state. Forget military matters, even debates on military expenditure or resources allocations, having direct links to the economic health of India, have not received adequate public attention or Parliamentary scrutiny.

Third, for the first time, the CDS General Rawat addressed a combined military gathering – the position created recently to bring in much desired joint-ness among armed forces as well as all spectrum military planning and as the permanent chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee (CoSC), to act as a single point military advisor to the government. It is quite interesting to note that, unlike other countries, Indian civilian leadership approved a four-star General as CDS, which should otherwise have been



Combined Commanders Conference, Kevadia, Gujarat (Open Source)

criticized by the retired generals across services. Interestingly, the military's silent adherence to civilian propositions on reforms in higher defence management, again, signifies that the institution and its rigid traditional positions and responsibilities are slowly diluted to accommodate necessities of current and future times. The creation of additional divisions, senior positions, joint / tri-service positions has also happened without vocal opposition or adequate debate from the stakeholders.

Fourth, the Prime Minister stressed 'the importance of enhancing indigenisation in the national security system, not just in sourcing equipment and weapons but also in the doctrines, procedures and customs practiced in the armed forces. He emphasized the need to optimise manpower planning in both military and civilian parts of the National security architecture. He also called for a holistic approach, focused on breaking down civil-military silos and on expediting the speed of decision-making. He advised the Services to rid themselves of legacy systems and practices that have outlived their utility and relevance. In a few sentences in his brief speech, he said it all – the military

must evolve further, expand its strategic horizons beyond national borders to play the role of a global strategic stabilizer and excel in its warfighting capabilities in tune with times.

Military institutions are built on strong and exclusive principles and thus are designed to operate in silos, susceptible to outside influence, especially from the civilian bureaucracy and political executives as well as fiercely protectionist about the sanctity of the institution. Not only the Services, but all other elements like military industries or military R&D institutions also operate in silos, leading to a situation where seamless horizontal interactions are missing, lack of which are reflected in inter-services rivalries, unhealthy civil-military relations and an autarkic S&T and military-industrial models.

Even when there are signs of changes either in ideational or formal terms, the bulk of the serving officers resist changes from within, while retired military personnel get bitterly critical of changes in the public domain (reflected in media or elsewhere). This used to be a trend till a few years back. Even on allocations of financial resources for the military, the retired military officers as strategic affairs analysts used to lambast the government for neglecting the needs of the armed forces with meagre allocations. Interestingly, the past few years have not seen substantial increases in military expenditure in real terms, but the forces have been able to engage in a costly and long military standoff against the Chinese in the high altitude regions of the Himalayas. It is not about resources or deficient assets, it is more to do with rationalization of choices.

Significant amounts of institutional, organizational and esoteric changes have taken place in the Indian military in recent years, especially after the Modi government assumed power in 2014. Consider the following: a) creation of CDS, approval of Theatre Commands, new military divisions, constitution of defence planning committee (DPC) in the higher military organizational domains; b) approval of monetization of military estates and assets, private participation in military and government owned entities, dilution of stakes and public listing of strategic defence public sector units (DPSUs) in the stock markets (even strategic entities like Bharat Dynamics Limited, which manufactures missiles or Hindustan Aeronautics Limited, which manufactures varieties of aerospace systems), approval for corporatization of Ordnance Factory Board (OFB), negative and positive lists of military manufacturing and services for self-reliance and exports in the military production domains; c) draft policy for military production and exports (DPEP) and review of defence procurement procedure (DPP 2018) and scrapping of defence offsets in the procedural / process domains; d) abolition of 'multiple hats' syndrome in Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) by bifurcation of positions in the military R&D domain; and e)

last but not the least, attempts to rationalize financial resources by keeping the budgetary allocations within a low percentage of the national GDP, striving to ensure a balance between revenue and capital expenditures and even further an attempt to reduce imports and increase domestic production shares by mitigating import dependency as well as saving precious taxpayers' money. Never in the history of post-Independent India has the military sector experienced such diverse yet strong reforms in a short span of time, whose cumulative impacts can only be visible in time to come. Although ideational/doctrinal, procedural and structural reforms tend to receive maximum resistance from affected stakeholders, the Modi regime has faced little problem in carrying out a complex but comprehensive reform programme within the armed forces, a process which is likely to continue well into the future.

The process of reforms validates a clear vision marked by an overt intent to be a powerful military for the advancement of national interests and a set of directives from the political leadership for the eventual implementation of changes to be carried out by involved institutions. Most importantly, dedicated efforts in carrying out bold reforms in difficult times like the ongoing pandemic and continuing military standoffs at the Himalayas against the Chinese military connotes signs of decisive leadership and national resolve, which have been carried out diligently by the military. All these are valuable takeaways for the military leaderships from the CCC.

### **BRIEF: No.1**

## **Flexing Muscles Can Wait: QUAD MUST ENGAGE DEEPER FIRST**

**DEBA R MOHANTY**

Newly emerging Quad is attracting lots of attention of late. A recent high point in the evolution of this informal quadrangular grouping came in mid-March 2021, when the leaders of Quad reaffirmed that they would be striving to ensure that the Indo-Pacific is accessible, dynamic and governed by international law and bedrock principles such as freedom of navigation and peaceful resolution of disputes, and free from coercion. Sending a clear message to China, which is flexing its muscles in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond, the heads of Quad states – Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, US President Joe Biden, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Japanese PM Yoshihide Suga, in a virtual leadership level meet held on 13 March 2021, asserted that all countries should be able to make their own political choices, free from coercion.

In particular, the month of March 2021 witnessed hectic activities among the Quad members and others on how to deal with China in coming times. In addition to high level meets at different levels involving these states, significant importance has been attached to the recent visits of US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin and Secretary of State Antony Blinken to important Asian countries like Japan, South Korea and India and holding in-depth discussions on defence and strategic matters. Two developments have also attracted much attention: a) navies of Quad members and France conducted "La Pérouse" exercise in the Bay of Bengal from April 4 to 7, 2021, and b) Taiwan's diplomatic support to India on its strategic vaccine diplomacy against China as well as its willingness to join Quad, which is dubbed as 'Quad Plus'.



Foreign Ministers of USA, INDIA, AUSTRALIA and JAPAN

While members of Quad are becoming increasingly vocal about their displeasure about assertive Chinese behaviour as well as its provocative (in the Himalayas involving Indian forces) and preparatory military conducts in South China Sea and in particular against Taiwan, along with friendly countries like France and UK as well as watchful countries like Germany and other European countries, some opinions from these countries have also proposed a proactive flexing of military muscles from the Quad side as well. Statements emanating from highest level leaderships, especially from the US, appear blunt on possible military actions.

While flexing of Chinese muscles can always work in favour of a possible retaliatory response from Quad, assertions of Quad muscle flexing may help the Chinese

articulate an equally formidable counter narrative. Unlike their Western counterparts, the Chinese tend to wait for an opportune moment to open their mouths and position themselves upfront, which typifies the Middle Kingdom as 'a mystery wrapped in ubiquities' in global politics, for the first time Chinese reactions to recent statements from Quad leaderships have been vocal and clear. Use of terms like 'selective multilateralism', 'Covid politics' or for that matter China arguing that no 'small cliques' should be formed, and accused some countries of trying to 'sow discord' among regional nations by 'hyping' the 'China threat' – all these show a new China which is vocal and not shy of counter attacks in diplomatic and strategic domains. Even the Chinese media has gone to the extent of terming India as a 'Negative Asset for BRICS and SCO'. Scholars like Liu Zongyi from the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies argue that 'the Quad will create disruption in the region', while Chinese journalists vehemently assert that 'India shouldn't play with fire, or it will end up burning itself'.

As the Quad formative process takes shape and counter responses emerge from China, India should craft its policies with an eye on complementing its grand strategic objectives. Indian political leaderships have been vocal, while military leaderships appear pragmatic at a time when they are engaged in a long military standoff with China since April 2020. Indian Army Chief General Naravane's opinion that Quad may have military cooperation but it may not be a military alliance. India's nuanced posture suggests some thing: let's build our relationships deeper first, which at least preempts any immediate overt military posturing. If meeting of minds happen between the members and friends at a deeper level, hard power options can always be a corollary.

## **BRIEF: No.2**

### **From Cyber to Cartographic Warfare: China Goes Beyond Military Standoffs in the Himalayas**

**DEBA R MOHANTY**

It is now accepted, albeit grudgingly, by most of Indian political and military leaderships, that China's recent strategic postures vis-à-vis India have gone beyond overt military standoff in the high altitude of Himalayas. Call it a 'fusion strategy' or a 'hybrid form of warfare', new but not entirely unknown non-military tactics have also been employed by the Chinese that permeated deep into Indian mainland and

threaten to disrupt critical Indian assets on the one hand and a well crafted strategy of perception warfare.



It must be noted here that initial process of disengagement of Indian and Chinese troops from select friction points has led to violent clashes between the two militaries in an around Galwan Valley in mid-June 2020, in which about two dozen Indian

soldiers were killed. It was then only in early 2021 that both sides agreed to disengage troops in a phased manner after a series of protracted negotiations between the political and military leaderships of both countries, a process which continues till date. Given the hard and non-conciliatory postures adopted by both sides, the process of disengagement is likely to prolong well into future, although a new round of (11th of its kind) of talks between the Corps Commanders will start from 9 April 2021. Neither side, it is assumed, is much optimistic about outcomes of such high level military talks for the very simple reason that fundamental differences not only remain but postures of both countries are hardened further. Emerging developments at global stage also necessitate China to harden its stance, while India is definitely not in a mood to bend either.

Amid military standoffs, what has started bothering both Indian military and political leaderships is related to China's employment of non-military options like continuing cyber attacks on critical Indian infrastructures as well as key military targets, embedded economic interests in Indian market despite bans on many Chinese import items or investments in major Indian companies, growing involvement of Chinese nationals in illegal financial trading and hawala transaction activities through proliferated bogus and shell companies within India and last but not the least engagement of Indians in anti-national activities funded by the Chinese as well as growing spying activities in both military and non-military domains within India. A new form of perception warfare by the Chinese has also been employed for quite some time. Such tactics not only include traditional methods like narrative building through deep fakes by using media as well as technology-enabled tools to influence minds and perceptions.

Although it is not new, but it is interesting to note that Chinese attempts at what is called 'cartographic warfare' have happened at a time when both countries have

been in a military standoff position for a year now. This form of narrative building by creating deep fakes in cartographic materials, specifically targeting ill defined borders in 4,000 km long Line of Actual Control from the northern Himalayas to Eastern Arunachal Pradesh.

Growing number of arrests made by Indian police, security forces, enforcement and investigative agencies involving Chinese nationals engaged in hawala / money laundering, spying, bribes to government officials in the last couple of years provide enough evidences of Chinese involvement in no-contact / cyber / perception warfare, which complements their actions in borders in achieving strategic objectives. Although India denies any foul play, but the recent report by a US based firm Recorded Future suggesting a malware-induced cyber attacks by China-linked threat activist group - RedEcho - on Mumbai power infrastructure in October 2020 aroused much suspicion. A similar kind of attempted cyber attack was claimed by government



Satellite Imagery: China and Neighbourhood (Google)

authorities of Telengana, which has also been denied. Most recent news relates to a well-designed Chinese attempt at creating a Chinese village in disputed area in Arunachal Pradesh. Reacting to this development, noted Indian expert Professor Brahma Chellaney said: "let us not forget that in the South China Sea, China has redrawn the geopolitical map without firing a single shot." Experts like Claude Arpi argue that the Chinese change the status of an area which may be previously uninhabited to inhabited with people either from Tibet or mainland China. In the process, they change the demography in a disputed area. Use of faulty satellite images through deep imagery fakes is known as 'cartographic warfare', which is employed by countries like China to its advantage. Such assertions on territorial

claims on disputed areas create cartographic nationalism especially among the populace adjacent to border areas.

The fact that India has been able to stand up to most of the challenges from China is a testimony to its national resolve to deal with adversary neighbor on an equal footing. Indian resilience appears to have surprised the Chinese, but knowing the Chinese sense of the 'long term' in terms of 'hundred years' as grand strategic plans, India can not afford to sit idle or complacent after a formidable display of national will. It has no choice but to enhance its national power multifold in a determined manner in order to manage adversaries in the north as well as the west.

## DSR NEWS DIGEST MARCH 2021

### **1 March 2021: "TO COUNTER CHINA, INDIAN ARMY TO MARK 'UNHELD AREAS' WITH EXPEDITIONS, STUDIES"**

The Indian Army is firmly pushing for mountaineering expeditions as well as research studies to publicise and consolidate India's legitimate territorial claims in areas along the northern borders to counter the salami-slicing tactics of an expansionist China. For starters, the Army is launching a major skiing expedition called 'ARMEX-21', which will traverse the distance from the Karakoram Pass to Lipulekh Pass in about 80-90 days through areas close to the LAC in the Ladakh, Himachal, Garhwal and Kumaon sectors. The specially-trained personnel will negotiate forbidding mountain ridges, glaciers and multiple passes ranging from 14,000-feet to 19,000-feet like Parang La, Lamkhaga and Malari. "China's blatantly expansionist policy to grab territory needs to be effectively countered. While the Army rebalances with additional forces and firepower to the northern borders, it's also essential to show and mark our presence in 'unheld' areas through mountaineering and other expeditions there," said a senior officer from the Army. ([The Economic Times](#))

### **4 March 2021: "BRAHMOS MISSILES' SUPPLY: INDIA SIGNS KEY PACT WITH PHILIPPINES FOR SALE"**

On 3 March 2021, India signed a key pact with the Philippines for the sale of BrahMos cruise missiles. Philippine Defence Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, who was present at the pact's signing ceremony in Manila, has reportedly said that his country is buying BrahMos missiles from India. Philippine Department of National Defense (DND) said on Facebook that Defence Undersecretary Raymundo Elefante and India's Ambassador to the Philippines Shambu S. Kumaran signed an "implementing arrangement" for "procurement of defence material and equipment". India and Russia have been planning to export the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile to the Philippines and several other countries, Russian Deputy Chief of Mission in India Roman Babushkin had said on 12 November 2020 in an online briefing. A number of countries including in the Gulf region have shown interest in procuring the missile. ([PTI/Economic Times](#))

### **5 March 2021: "MODI, SWEDISH PM DISCUSS DEFENCE COLLABORATION; INDIA SAYS AWARE OF GRIPEN-MAKER SAAB'S PITCH"**

Amid interests shown by Swedish company Saab to manufacture its Gripen fighter aircraft in India, Prime Ministers of both countries noted defence is an important area of a long-standing collaboration during their meeting on 4 March 2021. Saab, a global defence and security giant, has been eyeing the Indian market for its Gripen fighter aircraft for a long time and has made a strong pitch on multiple occasions in the recent past that it is completely aligned with the 'Make in India' policy of the government and "is ready to build products and solutions here in India, by Indians, for India and for export". In its offer for the Indian Air Force's tender for 114 Multi-Role Fighter Aircraft, Saab had earlier proposed to

develop and assemble the first 18 aircraft in Sweden and the remaining 96 to be made in India. Noting that Gripen is already operational in Sweden, Czech Republic, Hungary, Thailand and South Africa among other countries, Saab had said its offer was moulded to meet all the requirements of the Indian Air Force and the defence and security needs of the country in general. ([PTI/Business Standard](#))

#### **14 March 2021: "QUAD LEADERS: COMMITTED TO FREE, OPEN, SECURE AND PROSPEROUS INDO-PACIFIC REGION"**

The leaders of the four-nation Quad have reaffirmed that they are striving to ensure that the Indo-Pacific is accessible, dynamic and governed by international law and bedrock principles such as freedom of navigation and peaceful resolution of disputes, and free from coercion, sending a clear message to China, which is flexing its muscles in the region and beyond. After holding the first virtual Leaders' Summit of Quadrilateral alliance on 13 March 2021, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, US President Joe Biden, Australian PM Scott Morrison and Japanese PM Yoshihide Suga asserted that all countries should be able to make their own political choices, free from coercion. "To strengthen our quest for a region that is open and free, we have agreed to partner to address the challenges presented by new technologies and collaborate to set the norms and standards that govern the innovations of the future," the leaders said in a joint statement. (PTI)

#### **15 March 2021: "INDIA SET FOR QUAD-PLUS NAVY DRILL AS US DEFENCE SECRETARY BEGINS ASIA TOUR"**

India is now steadily cranking up its naval exercises with the "Quad" countries and other key strategic allies, even as US secretary of defence Lloyd Austin began his first tour to Asia to bolster military cooperation and ensure "credible deterrence" against China. Austin's visit to New Delhi from March 19 to 21, after touring Japan and South Korea with secretary of state Antony Blinken, came amidst the continuing military confrontation between India and China. With India, US, Japan and Australia making clear their intent to deter any "coercion" in the Indo-Pacific during their leaders' Quad summit on 13 March, their navies will join France for its "La Pérouse" exercise in the Bay of Bengal from April 4 to 7, 2021. India will deploy its frontline warships and P-8I maritime patrol aircraft from the Eastern Naval Command at Vizag for this Quad-plus-France exercise. "France has initiated this exercise of like-minded countries with strategic congruence over the Indo-Pacific," said an official. ([Times of India](#))

#### **17 March 2021: "KALYANI JV AMONG TOP BIDDERS FOR DRDO MISSILES"**

Kalyani Rafael Advanced Systems (KRAS), a joint venture between India's Kalyani group, led by Baba Kalyani and Israel's Rafael Advanced Defense Systems, has emerged among a handful of bidders to integrate the missile sub-parts program invited by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). Rafael is willing to offer the interceptor made of new technology as a part of the Derby missile as a part of India's low-level quick reaction missile system (LLQRM) project. ([Economic Times](#))

#### **17 March 2021: "CORPORATISATION OF OFB WILL IMPROVE ITS PRODUCTS' QUALITY AND EXPAND ITS MARKET: PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE"**

The corporatisation of Ordnance Factory Board (OFB) will improve the quality of its products and expand its market, said Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence in its latest report tabled in Lok Sabha on 16 March 2021. As part of the Atmanirbhar Bharat package, the central government had announced on May 16, 2020 that it would improve autonomy, accountability and efficiency in ordnance supplies by corporatisation of the OFB. The Ministry of Defence informed the Parliamentary Committee that it has appointed a consultant to suggest "organisational structural changes and business continuity plan" for the new entity or entities to continue on a sustainable basis. "The study by the consultant is presently under progress. The Standing Committee recommend that the details be shared with them and at the same time would like to say that the ministry should weigh all the pros and cons in favour of the OFB before arriving at any finality on the findings of the consultants," the Committee stated. ([PTI/ Outlook India](#))

#### **19 March 2021: "MAJOR BOOST TO INDIAN ARMY: DEFENCE MINISTRY SIGNS CONTRACT WITH BDL TO SUPPLY 4,960 ANTI-TANK GUIDED MISSILES TO ARMY"**

Giving more firepower to the Indian Army, the Ministry of Defence will soon provide 4,960 MILAN-2T Anti-Tank Guided Missiles (ATGMs) to the forces. The development came after a deal was signed between Acquisition Wing of Ministry of Defence (MoD), Ministry of Defence and Defence Public Sector Undertaking (DPSU) Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL) on 18 March 2021. As per the deal, BDL will provide 4,960 MILAN-2T Anti-Tank Guided Missiles to the

Indian Army. The Milan-2T is a Tandem Warhead ATGM with the range of 1,850 metres, produced by BDL under license from MBDA Missile Systems, France. These missiles can be fired from ground as well as vehicle-based launchers and can be deployed in Anti-Tank Role for both offensive & defensive tasks. Induction of these missiles will further enhance the operational preparedness of the Armed Forces. Induction is planned to be completed in three years. ([PTI / ZeeBiz](#))

#### **22 March 2021: "INDIAN ARMY TO GET 1,300 'MADE IN INDIA' SPECIALIST VEHICLES"**

On 21 March 2021, Indian Ministry of Defence signed a contract with Mahindra Defence Systems Limited (MDSL) for buying 1,300 Light Specialist Vehicles for the Indian Army, at a cost of Rs 1,056 crore. "The induction of vehicles is planned to be completed in four years. The Light Specialist Vehicle is a modern fighting vehicle and will be authorised to various fighting units for carriage of Medium Machine Guns, Automatic Grenade Launchers as well as Anti-tank Guided Missiles," the Defence Ministry said in a statement. The Light Specialist Vehicle is indigenously designed and developed by MDSL. These combat vehicles are extremely agile with all-round protection against small arms fire and will assist small independent detachments, which are required to operate this weapon platform in the operational area. ([ANI/Times of India](#))

#### **24 March 2021: "COMMISSIONING OF ICG 'VAJRA' AHEAD OF SCHEDULE A MILESTONE: LARSEN AND TOUBRO"**

The commissioning of Coast Guard ship "Vajra" ahead of schedule, was a milestone achievement in the shipbuilding journey due to the numerous challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, a top official of Larsen and Toubro said on 23 March 2021. 'Vajra', meaning 'Thunderbolt', was formally commissioned by Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat at a ceremony held at the Chennai Port Trust on the same day. Larsen and Toubro defence and smart technologies whole-time director Jayant D Patil said the commissioning bears the testimony to team Larsen and Toubro's grit, focus and commitment to promises made as also the unique infrastructure, in-house capabilities to swiftly augment the Indian Navy and Coast Guard fleets even in most challenging situations. ([PTI/Economic Times](#))

#### **24 March 2021: "AWARE OF CHINA DEVELOPING INFRASTRUCTURE IN BORDER REGIONS OPPOSITE INDIA: GOVERNMENT"**

On 23 March 2021, the Indian government said it was aware that China is developing infrastructure in the border regions opposite India in Tibet and Xinjiang autonomous regions, and that it keeps constant watch on all developments having a bearing on country's security and takes all the necessary measures to safeguard its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Replying to a written question in Lok Sabha, Minister of State for External Affairs V Muraleedharan said India is also focusing on improving infrastructure in the border regions to facilitate economic development as also to meet the country's strategic and security requirements. ([Indian Express](#))

#### **26 March 2021: "QUAD MILITARY COOPERATION, NOT MILITARY ALLIANCE', SAYS ARMY CHIEF MM NARAVANE"**

Chief of Army Staff General MM Naravane said on 25 March 2021 that there will be military cooperation among the member nations of the Quad but it will not be a military alliance like NATO. His comments came two weeks after the top leadership of the Quad grouping of India, the US, Japan and Australia vowed to expand cooperation in the Indo-Pacific at a time China was increasing its military assertiveness in the region. "It will not be a military alliance. There will definitely be military cooperation, both bilaterally between the countries of the Quad and as a quadrilateral also. But it would not be a military alliance in that sense," the Army Chief said. ([PTI/Republic World](#))

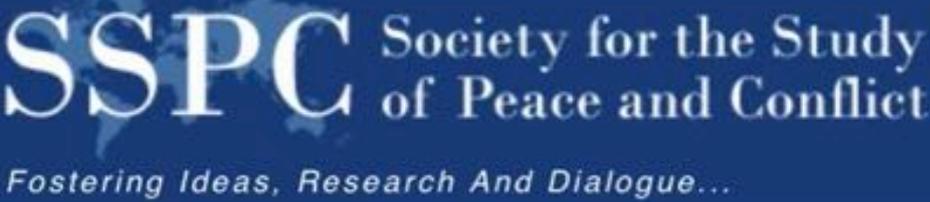
#### **26 March 2021: "INDIA AND SOUTH KOREA EXPLORE NEW AVENUES TO BROADEN DEFENCE TIES"**

India and South Korea explored new avenues to further expand their defence and military ties and reaffirmed support to multilateral initiatives to promote lasting peace and stability in the region and beyond. A host of issues, including geopolitical developments in the region and ways to boost bilateral strategic partnership, figured in the wide-ranging talks between Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and his South Korean counterpart Suh Wook on 25 March 2021. "They reaffirmed their support to multilateral initiatives to promote lasting peace and stability in the region and beyond," the Indian Ministry of Defence said in a statement. ([PTI/ Economic Times](#))

**30 March 2021: “S JAISHANKAR MEETS IRANIAN COUNTERPART; DISCUSSES BILATERAL COOPERATION”**

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar met his Iranian counterpart Javad Zarif on 29 March 2020 and discussed bilateral cooperation, including on the strategic Chabahar Port. Jaishankar, who arrived in the Tajik capital to attend the 9th Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process (HoA-IP) ministerial conference, and met leaders of other participating countries on its sidelines. In September 2020, Jaishankar had made a stopover in Tehran while on his way to Russia to attend a meeting of the foreign ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and discussed strengthening bilateral cooperation and reviewed regional developments with Zarif. Located in the Sistan-Balochistan province on the energy-rich Iran's southern coast, the Chabahar port is being developed by India, Iran and Afghanistan to boost trade ties. ([PTI/ Economic Times](#))

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