

# COMPARATIVE

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## CONNECTIONS

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**INDIA-EAST ASIA RELATIONS**

### **FOCUSED ON THE “QUAD” AND BORDER DISPUTES WITH CHINA**

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India’s relations with East Asia during 2021 were characterized by two major developments; increasing interaction with the United States, Japan, and Australia as part of the “Quad” and painstaking efforts at border disengagement and dispute management with China. Within these preoccupations, India continued a robust if undramatic set of engagements (mostly virtually) across East Asia. India’s active East Asia engagements were notable, coming as they did amid New Delhi taking up a nonpermanent seat of the United Nations Security Council, finding its footing with the new Biden administration, addressing a February coup next door in Myanmar, battling a major wave of the delta variant of the COVID-19 virus, and contending with the fallout of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in the summer, as well as participating in the COP26 Summit and the Summit for Democracies that President Biden hosted at the end of the year.

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## India & the Quad and AUKUS

Numerous interactions of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (“Quad”) involving senior officials, foreign ministers, and leaders occurred during 2021, picking up on the activity in 2020 but kicking it up a notch with a virtual meeting of leaders in March followed by an in-person meeting of the four leaders in September in Washington, DC. In February, US Secretary of State Blinken and his three counterparts from Australia, Japan, and India held a 90-minute call resulting in the release of four separate statements focusing on Myanmar and the coup there two weeks prior. According to the [US statement](#), the ministers expressed “the urgent need to restore the democratically elected government in Burma ...” and reiterated commitment to ASEAN centrality. The Australian [statement](#) said that “... we reiterated our serious concerns about the military coup in Myanmar and affirmed our commitment to its democratic transition” while the Indian statement stated that “[i]n the discussion pertaining to recent developments in Myanmar, the upholding of rule of law and the democratic transition was reiterated by India.” The Japan Foreign Ministry [statement](#) on Myanmar was most specific and was the only Quad statement to mention China, expressing serious concern with regard to the new China Coast Guard Law.”

In March a landmark virtual summit of the four Quad leaders was held, resulting in the five-paragraph “[Spirit of the Quad](#)” joint statement and a fact sheet. The Spirit of the Quad began by acknowledging “diverse perspectives” but a “commitment to quadrilateral cooperation” and a “shared vision for the free and open Indo-Pacific ... anchored by democratic values, and unconstrained by coercion.” The statement also announced plans to “establish a vaccine expert working group to implement our path-breaking commitment to safe and effective vaccine distribution; ... a critical- and emerging-technology working group to facilitate cooperation on international standards and innovative technologies of the future; and ... a climate working group to strengthen climate actions globally on mitigation, adaptation, resilience, technology, capacity-building, and climate finance.” The meaning and substance of the effort was clear, notwithstanding carefully worded diplomatic language: the quadrilateral was emerging as the leading grouping for the four countries’ cooperative engagement as an alternative to China and superseding their

continuing respective engagement in ASEAN-led organizations.

In September, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Japanese and Australian counterparts traveled to the United States for the first in-person meeting of Quad leaders. The joint statement of the meeting reviewed progress on announcements made in March, and a [fact sheet](#) addressed “ending the COVID-19 pandemic, including by increasing production and access to safe and effective vaccines; promoting high-standards infrastructure; combatting the climate crisis; partnering on emerging technologies, space, and cybersecurity; and cultivating next-generation talent in all of our countries.”

The September Quad Leaders’ Summit took place just a week after the announcement of AUKUS. Inevitably, India was asked to address both Quad and the recently announced Australia-UK-US trilateral security partnership (AUKUS) and what, if any, relationship existed between the two. India’s Foreign Secretary explained that “the Quad and the AUKUS are not groupings of a similar nature” with the Quad being focused on a “positive proactive agenda ... designed to cater to the requirements of the Indo-Pacific region.” He continued that “AUKUS is a security alliance between three countries. We are not party to this alliance. From our perspective, this is neither relevant to the Quad, nor will it have any impact on its functioning.” Regarding AUKUS’ impact on nuclear proliferation, Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla carefully noted that “I saw that the Australians have clarified that they are working on a nuclear-propelled submarine that means propulsion is based on nuclear technology, but it would not have any nuclear weapons and as such will not be in contravention with any of Australia’s or international commitments with regard to the issue of nuclear proliferation. But this as I’m saying is what I’ve seen, and I’m not saying it from any other perspective.” India’s External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar also “de-hyphenated” the Quad and AUKUS, telling an Indian interviewer “[w]ell, look, I’m not part of AUKUS. So, what AUKUS says, doesn’t say [is] for them to, to decide ... But very frankly, I don’t see a particular connection between any of that and the Quad ... it’s not that there’s any understanding that the four Quad countries, only deal among themselves. Everybody deals with everybody else.”

Both in the context of the Quad and bilaterally, India's relations with Australia and Japan were active during the year.

### India-Australia

Though Prime Minister Modi and his Australian counterpart Scott Morrison had their first and only in-person meeting in the US on the sidelines of the United Nations meeting and first Quad leaders' summit, the first-ever India-Australia foreign and defense ministers' dialogue, or "2+2 Dialogue" was an important development during 2021. Australia's Foreign Minister Marise Payne and Defense Minister Peter Dutton traveled to New Delhi in September to participate. For now, the declared intention is to "[realize the full potential](#)" of the [Comprehensive Strategic Partnership \(CSP\)](#) that was agreed to during a June 2020 Leaders' Virtual Summit. In September 2021 New Delhi and Canberra stated that "the intention to expand cooperation under the 2+2 framework and to meet at least once in every two years to maintain the momentum." On defense and security issues, there were no major new initiatives announced though Australia "invited India to participate in future *Talisman Sabre* exercises, to empower operational compatibility between their [defense] services." For now, *Exercise Malabar* is the key bilateral defense interaction and both sides welcomed "the continued participation of Australia ..." The two countries did agree to "explor[e] longer-term reciprocal arrangements [for operational logistics support]" and "reinforce each other's maritime domain awareness through information sharing and practical cooperation." In this spirit, the ministers "welcomed the presence of a Liaison Officer from Australia at the Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region near New Delhi." While both countries flagged "growing maritime challenges" and specifically cited their June 2020 Joint Declaration on a Shared Vision for Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, specific reference in the "2+2" was made only to "build on existing commitments to combat challenges such as marine litter and single-use plastic waste, and target Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing." The aspirational tone was evident in the agreement to "*endeavor to increase* [emphasis added] cooperation in various [defense] technologies and continue the dialogue between the Defence Research & Development Organization of India and Defence Science & Technology Group of Australia." In terms of advancing together cooperation in the region, India's External

Affairs minister specifically referred to "our trilaterals with Japan, France and Indonesia and will hold these dialogues soon." However, in the wake of AUKUS, it is not clear if the latter two trilaterals might be further delayed (one meeting scheduled for September 2021 was not held).



Figure 2 Leaders at the India-Australia 2 + 2 Ministers Meeting. Photo: Twitter/@DrSJaishankar

On AUKUS, there was little in the public domain about India-Australia discussions on the agreement. Indian Foreign Secretary Shringla, [briefing the press](#) following the Modi-Morrison in-person meeting in the US, simply said that "... Prime Minister Morrison did briefly mention, you know, the rationale from the Australian side, in seeking to initiate the AUKUS alliance. He felt that the technology that they received was appropriate and you know, there was a brief discussion in that regard."

### India-Japan

Prime Minister Modi and Prime Minister of Japan Suga Yoshihide also met in person on the sidelines of the Quad meeting in Washington in September—though they had held a number of telephone calls and officials of the two governments had numerous topic-specific exchanges. Despite both high- and working-level meetings, however, India and Japan did not announce any major new initiatives, but reiterated mutual interest in enhancing "bilateral security and defense cooperation including the areas of defense equipment and technologies." Much of the [briefing](#) from Indian officials on the summit covered economic and development issues including the "Supply Chain Resilience Initiative" between India, Japan, and

Australia, skills development, a “Specified Skilled Workers Agreement,” and the India-Japan Digital Partnership.

In October, Modi and new Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio had a telephone call in which they expressed “satisfaction at the rapid progress in the Special Strategic and Global Partnership between India and Japan” and “agreed on the potential to further enhance cooperation in a variety of areas, including in high-technology and futuristic sectors” and “discussed the increasing alignment of perspectives, and robust cooperation, between India and Japan in the Indo-Pacific region. They reviewed the progress of cooperation under the Quad framework in this regard.” Prime Minister Modi “invited Japanese companies to benefit from India’s economic reforms through greater investment” and for Kishida to visit India at his “earliest convenience for a bilateral Summit meeting.”

## India & China

As discussed in [last year’s assessment](#), 2020, the 70<sup>th</sup> year of official ties, was the worst year in bilateral India-China relations since the Border War of October 1962. While 2020 closed with a September foreign ministers-level joint statement agreeing to begin disengagement along their disputed border, the process during 2021 was painstaking, and press releases by the two governments of a range of meetings appear to reveal distinctly different degrees of satisfaction and interpretation both specifically on the border issue, and overall bilateral relations.

On the disputed border, three rounds of negotiation, the 21<sup>st</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup>, and 23<sup>rd</sup> of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on border affairs, were held via videolink in March, June, and November respectively. In March, an [official Chinese statement](#) said the two sides “appraised the disengagement of the front-line troops of both countries in the Bangong Lake area ...” While [India’s MEA press release for the March 2021](#) meeting noted the disengagement on the north and south sides of the lake, it also highlighted discussions on the Western sector, which the Chinese statement did not. In June, the Chinese [statement](#) said the two countries “... agreed to consolidate the disengagement progress of the border troops of the two countries and properly settle the remaining issues in the western sector of the

China-India boundary ...” [India’s statement](#) appeared to be less satisfied, saying the “two sides had a *frank exchange of views* [emphasis added] on the situation along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the Western Sector of the India-China Border areas” and went on to say that “[b]oth sides agreed on the *need to find an early resolution* [emphasis added] to the remaining issues along the LAC in Eastern Ladakh ...” In November, a [readout](#) on the Chinese embassy website noted that India and China had “agreed to consolidate the existing outcomes of the disengagement, strictly abide by the agreements and protocols and the consensus reached between the two sides, prevent the situation on the ground from relapsing.” The 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting in November appeared to highlight even greater differences. While the Chinese spoke of an agreement “to consolidate existing outcomes of the disengagement,” India’s press release said the “two sides should continue their discussions to resolve the remaining issues along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Eastern Ladakh” and that “the two sides had candid and in-depth discussions on the situation along the LAC in Western Sector.” Other engagements regarding border disputes included the [12<sup>th</sup>](#) and [13<sup>th</sup>](#) meetings of the India-China Corps Commanders in August and October, respectively. A 14<sup>th</sup> round of the India-China Corps Commanders meetings is pending.

A readout of an hour-long meeting between India’s External Affairs Minister Dr. S Jaishankar and PRC State Councilor Wang Yi on the sidelines of the Sept. 16 SCO Summit in Dushanbe highlighted discussion on border disengagement as well as the overall state of bilateral relations. The Chinese official [readout](#) stated that “the frontier troops of both countries disengaged in the Galwan Valley and the Pangong Lake areas, and the overall situation in the border area was de-escalated.” However, it was noted that “China-India relations still stay at a low level, which is not in the interest of either side.” In Beijing’s view, “the rights and wrongs of what happened in the China-India border area last year are very clear and the responsibility does not lie with the Chinese side.” According to the [Chinese readout](#), “[India’s EAM] Subrahmanyam Jaishankar agreed with Wang Yi’s general assessment of China-India relations ... India has not changed and does not want to change the strategic assessment of India-China relations. India is willing to work with China to push bilateral relations out of a slump.”

An Indian [readout](#) offered starkly different perspectives. India's MEA statement noted that "two sides had made some progress in the resolution of the remaining issues along the LAC in Eastern Ladakh and had completed disengagement in the Gogra area. However, there were still some outstanding issues that needed to be resolved." India's External Affairs minister continued to press for an "early resolution of the remaining issues along the LAC in Eastern Ladakh ..." in order to address the "low ebb" of relations and stated that "a prolongation of the existing situation was not in the interest of ... either side as it was impacting the relationship in a negative manner." He also "underlined that it was necessary to ensure progress in resolution of remaining issues so as to restore peace and tranquility along the LAC in Eastern Ladakh noting that *peace and tranquility in the border areas has been an essential basis for progress in the bilateral relations* [emphasis added]." In framing overall bilateral relations, Jaishankar "conveyed that India had never subscribed to any clash of [civilizations] theory. He said that India and China had to deal with each other on merits and establish a relationship based on mutual respect. For this, it was necessary that China avoid viewing our bilateral relations from the perspective of its relations with third countries."

The bottom line is that during 2021 India-China relations inched along the path of disengagement and de-escalation along their disputed borders. The two sides have fundamental differences not only relating to the border, but the role and sequencing of border issues in the overall relationship, with China seeking to make border issues one element of overall relations and India emphasizing border progress as key to overall relations. This is not a new pattern and remains the framework of what has become an increasingly troubled, and yet ongoing and interactive relationship.

It is worth noting, however, that despite deeply troubled bilateral relations, India and China continued exchanges together in the Russia, India, and China or RIC format, and in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Specifically, for example, the [18<sup>th</sup> round](#) of the Foreign Ministers of the Russian Federation, the Republic of India and the People's Republic of China (RIC) conference via videolink in late November included a 35-paragraph communique on issues ranging from the global pandemic to Syria. In late April, India's External Affairs minister called Wang Yi to thank him "for

his sentiments and apprised him of the ongoing efforts to meet the challenge posed by the second wave of COVID-19 pandemic in India." External Affairs Minister Jaishankar "highlighted ... that Indian entities were already in the process of commercially procuring required products and raw materials from suppliers in China [and] this process would be facilitated if various transport corridors and cargo flights remained open and the necessary logistics support ensured expeditiously." Foreign Minister Wang Yi reportedly said China "would ensure that all the required materials flow to Indian entities without any delay ... Chinese companies would be encouraged and supported to deliver requisite materials ... [a]irports, customs and airlines would also be instructed to smoothly facilitate movement of goods ... [c]hartered flights from India would be welcome and specific problems raised by the Indian side sorted out quickly."

### India-Southeast Asia/ASEAN Relations

India-ASEAN relations in 2021 were almost entirely virtual and devoid of any major developments. India's engagements with specific with ASEAN member countries were notable; especially those with Vietnam and Myanmar.



Figure 2 The 18<sup>th</sup> India ASEAN Virtual Summit Photo: ASEAN

In August, External Affairs Minister Jaishankar attended virtually the ASEAN-India Foreign Ministers' Meeting and East Asia Summit Foreign Ministers' Meeting. India's Minister of State for Commerce and Industry, Anupriya Patel, attended the "ASEAN Economic Ministers + India Consultations" held virtually in September 2021. The main high-level interaction was the 18<sup>th</sup> India-ASEAN Summit, held virtually, on Oct. 28. An [official Indian account](#) of the interaction highlighted the upcoming 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the India-ASEAN partnership in 2022 and declared it the India-ASEAN Friendship Year and mentioned "the synergies between the

ASEAN Outlook for the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) and India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI).” On the cusp of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership coming into effect, Prime Minister Modi “underlined the importance of diversification and resilience of supply chains for post-COVID economic recovery and in this regard, the need to revamp the India-ASEAN FTA.” Earlier in the year, India's Minister of Commerce & Industry, Consumer Affairs & Food & Public Distribution and Textiles, Piyush Goyal, complained strongly about India-ASEAN trade and called for a series of actions.

### India-Myanmar Relations

India's immediate response to the military coup in Myanmar on Feb. 1 expressed “deep concern,” reiterated India's “always steadfast support for the process of democratic transition” and said that India believes “the rule of law and democratic process must be upheld.”

Throughout the year, India addressed the Myanmar situation in the course of relations with third parties, including Quad members and others. For example, at the June meeting of the East Asia Summit (EAS) Senior Officials Meeting, an Indian official “expressed India's support for the ASEAN process and conveyed that as a friend and close [neighbor] of Myanmar, India will continue to play a constructive and meaningful role in resolving the current situation there.”

Perhaps the most important event in India-Myanmar relations during the year took place in late December. India's Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla paid a two-day working visit to Myanmar for discussions on humanitarian support, security and India-Myanmar border concerns, and the political situation in Myanmar with the State Administration Council, political parties, and members of civil society. In the midst of the visit, an Indian MEA [briefing](#) highlighted the expected issues of democracy, Indian adherence to the ASEAN approach based on the five-point consensus, shared development projects, and importantly raised the issue of a recent ambush in southern Manipur state. Given the long-running issue of northeastern rebel groups allegedly using Myanmar to launch attacks within India, the MEA statement pointed out that both countries “reiterated their commitment to ensure that their respective territories would not be allowed to be used for any activities inimical to the other.”

### India-Vietnam

India and Vietnam relations were also active during the year. In January, the 13th India-Vietnam Defense Security Dialogue was held virtually. Reportedly, “new areas of [defense] cooperation were also discussed” but not specified or announced. In March, New Delhi and Hanoi held consultations on UNSC issues given their overlap as nonpermanent members of the UNSC during the year. A 2<sup>nd</sup> India-Vietnam Maritime Security Dialogue was held in April. And Modi and Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh spoke by phone in July after the latter's appointment and highlighted that 2022 would mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations.

### India-Republic of Korea

India and Korea continued to maintain engagement in the midst of the pandemic. On Jan. 8, the two held their first high-level consultation on global issues. This was especially useful given India's role starting in 2021 as a nonpermanent member of the UN Security Council during 2021 and 2022. A statement on the consultations noted that the “Korean side asked for continued attention and support of India, a new non-permanent member of the Security Council, regarding the Korean Peninsula peace process” including “preparations for the 2021 UN Peacekeeping Ministerial to be held in Korea in December 2021.” Another area of discussion was UN peacekeeping in which the “Korean side went on to ask India, a significant contributor in the area of peacekeeping, to participate and cooperate actively for the success of the ‘2021 UN Peacekeeping Ministerial’ to be hosted by Korea in early December 2021.” India, for its part, explained that its priorities in its role at the UN were “a focus on counter-terrorism, peacekeeping and peacebuilding, and maritime security.” Both sides agreed to hold such consultations on a “regular” basis without providing a specific date.

In March, ROK's new Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong had his [first telephone call](#) with India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar. They “took note that the two countries have maintained their special strategic partnership at the highest level based on the deep friendship and trust between President Moon Jae-in and Prime Minister Narendra Modi ...” and agreed to “actively seek ways to resume high-level exchanges, including the foreign ministerial

joint committee meeting and the foreign and defense (2+2) vice-ministerial meeting, as soon as the COVID-19 situation improves.” Also in March, India and Korea together participated in the [15<sup>th</sup> round of consultations](#) among the US, Japan, Australia, India, Korea, New Zealand, and Vietnam on COVID-19 response issues. While not defense or strategic related per se, such a grouping of allies and close partners creates an additional web of linkages among key Indo-Pacific countries.

The highest-level in-person meeting between India and the ROK occurred on March 26-27 when Minister of Defense Suh Wook traveled to New Delhi for meetings with his counterpart Rajnath Singh. According to a [statement](#) issued by Korea after the meeting, “[b]oth Ministers noted that the ‘Roadmap for Defence Industries Cooperation between the Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea’ signed last year created a mutually beneficial framework for bilateral cooperation” and “Minister Suh also asked Minister Singh and the Indian government’s special attention on the Biho anti-aircraft defense system where Korean companies are invested as well as export of minesweepers, etc.”

India and the ROK continued defense and security discussions between their respective national security secretariats as well, with an in-person visit by Second Deputy Director of National Security, Kim Hyoung-zhin to New Delhi in early December for the 3<sup>rd</sup> India-Republic of Korea Strategic Dialogue. A statement affirmed that “[b]oth sides agreed to further strengthen and deepen mutually beneficial strategic cooperation” including emphasis on “[indigenization], joint development and joint production in the [defense] sector” and “[p]artnership in critical and high technologies and supply chain resilience...”

### **India & The Pacific Islands Region**

India continued to remain engaged in the Pacific Islands region as well. In April, India and New Zealand held the 3<sup>rd</sup> Round of Foreign Office Consultations. In June, India’s Minister of State for External Affairs and the Vice President & Minister of State of the Republic of Palau held a virtual interaction to review bilateral relations and cooperation through the Forum for India Pacific Island Cooperation (FIPIC). Another important Pacific Islands region meeting was the signing of India-Fiji MoU for cooperation in the

field of agriculture and allied sectors. It was announced that under the MoU, a Joint Working Group would be established. And in November India and the Federated States of Micronesia reviewed bilateral relations.

### **Conclusion**

Given all of India’s other preoccupations during the year (the Delta variant COVID-19 crisis and the Afghanistan end game), India managed fairly robust engagement with and regarding East Asia during 2021. Much of this was proactively driven by new Biden administration’s initiative to advance the Quad. The other major element was essentially defensively driven: handling the India-China border forces’ disengagement and dispute management resulting from the previous year’s clashes. As politics and policies unfold in the Quad member countries, much official effort will have to be expended to sustain and further advance the baselines established for Quad cooperation, and so, too, for AUKUS. How this effort proceeds will be an important variable shaping India’s engagement with East Asia both via the Quad but also bilaterally. Similarly, the trajectory of India-China relations seems to point toward an unshakeable “strategic distrust” and “strategic competition” but perhaps it can be handled as intense but managed competition without another kinetic flare up. There are few bright spots for India’s economic engagement with East Asia via RCEP or CPTPP. Whether arrangements with the US and other Quad countries can compensate for India’s lack of membership in other trade and commercial arrangements (e.g., APEC) remains to be seen.

# CHRONOLOGY OF INDIA-EAST ASIA RELATIONS

## JANUARY—DECEMBER 2021

**Jan. 8, 2021:** First Korea-India High-level Policy Consultation on Global Issues [is held](#).

**Jan. 12, 2021:** 13th India-Vietnam Defense Security Dialogue is co-chaired by Indian Defense Secretary Dr. Ajay Kumar and his Vietnamese counterpart Sr. Lt. Gen. Nguyen Chi Vinh, deputy Defense minister.

**Jan. 20, 2021:** India's Defense Minister Rajnath Singh and Singapore's Defense Minister Ng Eng Hen, hold 5<sup>th</sup> India-Singapore Defense Ministers' Dialogue. A [statement](#) issued after the meeting highlights "the Signing of the Implementing Agreement on Submarine Rescue Support and Cooperation ... between the Indian Navy and Republic of Singapore Navy."

**Jan. 28, 2021:** India's External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar [outlines](#) stabilization of Sino-Indian relation's three determinants (mutual respect, mutual sensitivity, and mutual interest) and eight principles (adherence to past agreements in their entirety; strict observance and respect for the LAC; maintenance of peace and tranquility in border areas; recognition that a multi-polar Asia is an essential constituent of a multi-polar world; reciprocity in relationships; pursuit of aspirations by both with sensitivity; management of divergences and disputes; and taking the long view) in a keynote speech at the 13th All India Conference of China Studies.

**Jan. 28, 2021:** India and Japan [hold](#) 5<sup>th</sup> round of "Act East Forum," which focuses on cooperation in India's northeast states.

**Feb. 1, 2021:** India [issues](#) three-sentence statement on the military coup in Myanmar, noting "developments ... with deep concern" and expressing the belief that "the rule of law and democratic process must be upheld."

**Feb. 17, 2021:** Ninth Round of India-Japan Consultations on Disarmament, Non-Proliferation and Export Control are [held](#) virtually.

**Feb. 18, 2021:** India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Brunei Second Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohd. Yusof [hold](#) a telephone consultation "to take stock of bilateral relations."

**Feb. 18, 2021:** US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and foreign ministers of Australia, India, and Japan (the "Quad") [speak](#) together for the first time since the Biden administration began.

**Feb. 21, 2021:** 10<sup>th</sup> Round of the India-China Corps Commanders Level meeting [is held](#) online.

**Feb. 24, 2021:** India, Australia, and France Trilateral Senior Officials Meeting [reviews](#) and discusses cooperation on Maritime Security, Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), Blue Economy, Protection of Marine Global Commons, Combating Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported (IUU) Fishing, and Cooperation in Multilateral forums.

**Feb. 26, 2021:** India's External Minister S. Jaishankar and China's State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi [hold](#) a 75-minute telephone call in which they discuss border disputes, dis-engagement after clashes in 2020, and agree to establish a hotline.

**March 9, 2021:** India's External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar, and ROK's new Minister of Foreign Affairs, Chung Eui-yong, hold their first telephone consultation.

**March 9, 2021:** India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi [holds](#) telephone call with Japan's Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide.

**March 12, 2021:** India and China [hold](#) the 21<sup>st</sup> meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Cooperation on Border Affairs via video.

**March 12, 2021:** First Quad Virtual Leaders' Summit [releases](#) a Joint Statement "The Spirit of the Quad" and the [publication](#) of a more detailed fact sheet.

**March 26–27, 2021:** ROK Minister of Defense Suh Wook [visits](#) India for talks with India’s Defense Minister, Rajnath Singh.

**April 6, 2021:** India and Vietnam [hold](#) second maritime security dialogue in a virtual format.

**April 9, 2021:** Government of India [issues](#) a statement regarding the passage of United States navy ship, the *USS John Paul Jones*, through India’s exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

**April 10, 2021:** 11<sup>th</sup> Round of the India-China Corps Commanders conference [held](#) online.

**April 26, 2021:** Prime Minister Modi and US President Biden [have](#) phone conversation on bilateral and international issues.

**April 26, 2021:** Modi and Japan’s Prime Minister Suga [speak](#) by phone on a range of topics.

**April 28, 2021:** 23<sup>rd</sup> India-ASEAN Senior Officials meeting is [held](#) online.

**April 30, 2021:** India’s EAM S. Jaishankar and China’s FM Wang Yi [spoke](#) by phone to discuss cooperation on the second wave of COVID-19 emergency in India, as well as border disputes.

**May 4, 2021:** India, Australia, and France [hold](#) their first-ever trilateral meeting on the sidelines of the G7 foreign ministers meeting in London. A Joint Statement is released but not available on the Australia DFAT website as of Dec. 21, 2021.

**May 6, 2021:** India issues statement noting US support for the initiative of India and South Africa at the World Trade Organization (WTO) for relaxation in norms of the agreement on TRIPS.

**May 7, 2021:** PM Modi and Australian PM Scott Morrison [have](#) a telephone call in which Modi “sought Australia’s support for the initiative taken at the WTO by India and South Africa to seek a temporary waiver under TRIPS in [the] context [of the second wave of COVID-19].”

**May 24–28, 2021:** Jaishankar [visits](#) the US for discussions with Secretary of State Blinken, other Cabinet members and senior officials of the Biden administration dealing with bilateral relations. He has interactions with business forums on economic and COVID-related cooperation between India and the US.

**May 25, 2021:** India and New Zealand [hold](#) the third round of foreign office consultations.

**June 10, 2021:** India’s Minister of State (MoS) for External Affairs and Parliamentary Affairs Shri V. Muraleedharan [holds](#) virtual meeting with Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia H.E. Mahendra Siregar. MoS thanked the Indonesian government for relief materials sent to India for fighting COVID19. Both leaders expressed commitment to further strengthen India-Indonesia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

**June 17, 2021:** MoS V. Muraleedharan and Senior Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Singapore Sim Ann [hold](#) a virtual interaction. MoS “thanked the Singaporean government for facilitating supply of relief material, especially oxygen tanks, which were sent to India for fighting the COVID19 pandemic.” They also “expressed commitment to further strengthen India-Singapore Strategic Partnership.”

**June 22, 2021:** India and Fiji [sign](#) an MoU for cooperation in agriculture and allied sectors.

**June 25, 2021:** India and Indonesia [hold](#) sixth round of foreign office-level consultations following a gap of almost two years. They review the state of their Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and strengthen their Shared Vision of Maritime Co-operation in the Indo-Pacific.

**June 28, 2021:** MoS V. Muraleedharan, [holds](#) virtual interaction with Vice President and Minister of State, J. Uduch Sengebau Senior, of the Republic of Palau. The Ministers reviewed bilateral relations including through the Forum for India Pacific Island Cooperation (FIPIC).

**July 10, 2021:** PM Modi [has](#) phone call with Pham Minh Chinh, prime minister of Vietnam. Modi congratulated Pham Minh Chinh on his appointment as prime minister, expressed confidence that the India-Vietnam Comprehensive Strategic Partnership will continue to become stronger, that the India-Vietnam Comprehensive Strategic Partnership can contribute to promoting regional stability, prosperity, and development, as well as their similar vision of an open, inclusive, peaceful, and rules-based Indian Ocean Region, thanking him for assistance during the second wave of COVID-19 in India, and noting that 2022 will mark 50 years of bilateral relations and invites the Vietnamese prime minister for a visit.

**July 14–16, 2021:** India’s foreign secretary travels to New York for meetings at the United Nations, including a meeting with the US Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas Greenfield.

**July 14, 2021:** India’s Minister of External Affairs S. Jaishankar [holds](#) meetings with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on the sidelines of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Foreign Ministers’ Meeting in Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

**July 27–28, 2021:** Blinken makes first trip to India as secretary of State. He [meets](#) External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, national security advisor and holds a bilateral meeting with Prime Minister Modi. Jaishankar [said](#) at a post-meeting media briefing that “On the other side of India, the Indo Pacific presents a different set of challenges to stability, growth and prosperity. Under the aegis of the quad framework, we are engaged on maritime security, HADR counterterrorism, connectivity and infrastructure, cyber and digital concerns, COVID-19 response, climate action, education, and resilient and reliable supply chains. The secretary and I discussed not only opportunities for further collaboration on all these issues, but also the importance of observing international law, rules and norms, including UNCLOS. Our ability to work more closely, bilaterally, in the Quad and elsewhere, benefits the international community as a whole.”

**July 31, 2021:** India and China [conduct](#) the 12th round of talks between their corps commanders at Chushul Moldo Meeting Point in Eastern Ladakh.

**Aug. 2–6, 2021:** Former Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott [visits](#) India in capacity of Australian prime minister’s special trade envoy for India. On Aug. 5, he meets Modi to discuss ways to strengthen bilateral trade, investment and economic cooperation to realize the full potential of the India-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

**Aug. 6, 2021:** India [issues](#) statement on India-China “Disengagement at Patrolling Point 17A” in the wake of the 12<sup>th</sup> round of Corps Commanders talks. It says “both sides agreed on disengagement in the area of Gogra” where troops have been in a face-off situation since May 2020 and that both sides have ceased forward deployments in this area in a phased, coordinated and verified manner.

**Aug. 6, 2021:** India’s Minister of State for External Affairs Rajkumar Ranjan Singh [leads](#) India’s delegation to the 28th ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Foreign Ministers Meeting held virtually.

**Aug. 11, 2021:** India and Singapore [conduct](#) 15th round of Foreign Office Consultations. In addition to discussing bilateral issues, the consultations [took](#) place in the context of Singapore taking over as country coordinator for India at ASEAN for a three-year period from 2021–2024.

**Aug. 12, 2021:** Quad Senior Officials Meeting [is held](#) by video conference. Each participant country—India, Australia, Japan, and the United States—[issues](#) a statement about the meeting.

**Sept. 9, 2021:** India and Japan [hold](#) their 6<sup>th</sup> Maritime Dialogue.

**Sept. 11, 2021:** India–Australia first 2+2 Dialogue held in-person in New Delhi with Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne and Defense Minister Peter Dutton. A joint statement is [released](#), focusing on three broad topics: cooperation during the COVID-19 pandemic; shared vision for the Indo-Pacific, regional, and multilateral cooperation; and strengthening bilateral cooperation. Following the dialogue, the two Australian ministers [called](#) on Prime Minister Modi during which bilateral relations were discussed and Modi “renewed his invitation to Prime Minister Morrison to visit India at his earliest convenience.”

**Sept. 16, 2021:** India’s External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar [meets](#) Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on the sidelines of the 21<sup>st</sup> SCO Meeting of the Heads of State in Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

**Sept. 22–25, 2021:** Prime Minister Modi [travels](#) to the United States to address the UN, [participate](#) in the first in-person leaders-level Quad Summit, and [hold](#) bilateral talks with the US, Japan, and Australia.

**Sept. 23, 2021:** Modi [has](#) first in-person meeting with Australia’s PM Morrison while they both visit the United States.

**Sept. 23, 2021:** Modi [has](#) first in-person meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Suga.

**Sept. 24, 2021:** Modi [meets](#) President Biden, during which they “exchanged views about the Indo-Pacific region, and reaffirmed their shared vision for a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific region.”

**Sept. 24, 2021:** Modi participates in the first in-person Quad Leaders’ Summit for which India’s Ministry of External Affairs [provides](#) a [readout](#). In addition to [issuing](#) a Quad Joint Statement, a [Fact Sheet](#) is also [issued](#). The White House also [provides](#) a video of the opening session.

**Oct. 8, 2021:** Modi and Japan’s new Prime Minister Kishida Fumio [hold](#) a brief telephone call following the latter taking office. The two leaders reportedly “expressed satisfaction at the rapid progress in the Special Strategic and Global Partnership between India and Japan,” “agreed on the potential to further enhance cooperation in a variety of areas, including in high-technology and futuristic sectors,” and “discussed the increasing alignment of perspectives, and robust cooperation, between India and Japan in the Indo-Pacific region. They reviewed the progress of cooperation under the Quad framework in this regard.” Modi invited “Japanese companies to benefit from India’s economic reforms through greater investment” and Kishida to visit India at his earliest convenience for a bilateral Summit meeting.”

**Oct. 27, 2021:** Modi [attends](#) the 16th East Asia Summit held virtually and makes brief remarks.

**Oct. 28, 2021:** Along with the United States, India co-hosts the 4<sup>th</sup> Indo-Pacific Business Forum (IPBF) and India’s External Affairs Minister [provides](#) brief opening remarks.

**Oct. 28, 2021:** Modi virtually attends the 18<sup>th</sup> ASEAN-India Summit, hosted by ASEAN Chair Brunei Darussalam, marking his ninth “attendance” at the annual event. The two sides [issue](#) a final statement entitled “ASEAN-India Joint Statement on Cooperation on the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific for Peace, Stability, and Prosperity in the Region.”

**Oct. 30, 2021:** Modi and Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong [meet](#) on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Rome, for their first in-person meeting in the post-pandemic period. Topics of discussion reportedly included “global efforts to combat climate change and the forthcoming COP26,” “efforts to contain the COVID-19 pandemic through expedited vaccination efforts and ensuring supply of critical medicines”, and “ways to enhance people to people ties, including early normalization of movement between both countries.”

**Oct. 31, 2021:** Modi [meets](#) President of Indonesia Joko Widodo on the sidelines of G20 Summit. The tone of bilateral relations was lukewarm, with a statement saying simply that the “leaders held discussions on the recent course of India-Indonesia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership” and “emphasized the importance of Indo-Pacific cooperation.” India and Indonesia, along with Italy, will form the “troika” of the G20 during 2022-2023 when India will host the G20 Summit.

**Nov. 12, 2021:** India and Vietnam [hold](#) the 11<sup>th</sup> round of Political Consultations and the eighth round of strategic dialogue between their foreign ministries. Both sides expressed “satisfaction over the sustained momentum in their multifaceted bilateral relations, despite the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic, with frequent high-level engagements through virtual platform.”

**Nov. 26, 2021:** 18th Meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Russian Federation, the Republic of India, and the People’s Republic of China (RIC) [is held](#) via video-conference. A 35-paragraph communique was issued on issues ranging from the global pandemic to Syria.

**Nov. 30, 2021:** Minister of State for External Affairs Rajkumar Ranjan Singh [holds](#) virtual interaction with Hon. Kandhi A. Elieisar, Secretary (Minister), Department of Foreign Affairs of the Federated States of Micronesia to review bilateral relations, development cooperation between India and FSM, including through the Forum for India-Pacific Island Cooperation (FIPIC), and climate action.

**Dec. 1, 2021:** Mongolian parliamentary delegation led by Gombojav Zandanshatar, chairman of the State Great Hural, visits India and [meets](#) India's President Ram Nath Kovind who reportedly told the delegation that "As Mongolia's 'third [neighbor]' and 'spiritual [neighbor],' India looks forward to continued cooperation to further deepen its strategic partnership with Mongolia."

**Dec. 3, 2021:** Second Deputy Director of National Security of the Republic of Korea Kim Hyoung-zhin [visits](#) New Delhi for the Third India-Republic of Korea Strategic Dialogue between the National Security Council Secretariats of India and the ROK.

**Dec. 17, 2021:** Vuong Dinh Hue, president of the National Assembly of Vietnam [leads](#) a parliamentary delegation to India to mark the fifth anniversary of their Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and to look forward to the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of bilateral relations to be celebrated in 2022. India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar addressed the delegation during their stay.

**Dec. 22-23, 2021:** India's Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla [pays](#) a two-day working visit to Myanmar for discussions on humanitarian support, security and India-Myanmar border concerns, and the political situation in Myanmar with the State Administration Council, political parties and members of civil society.