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# Strategic Digest

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**Japan and Vietnam Strengthen Defence Cooperation**

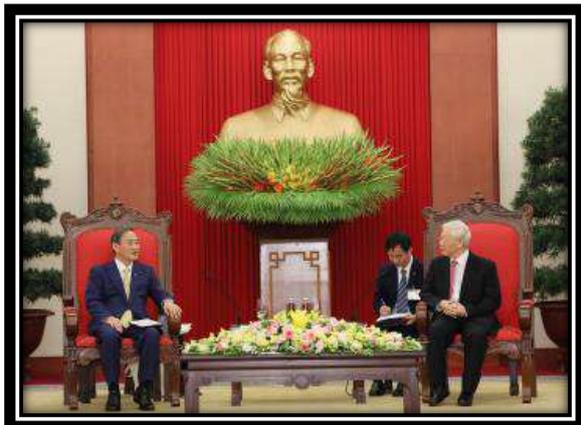
**Japan Launches the *Taigei*-class Submarine**

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**Sri Lanka Enters Geopolitical Sweet Spot**

## Japan and Vietnam Strengthen Defence Cooperation

Japanese Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide visited Vietnam and Indonesia from October 18-21 in his maiden overseas trip after assuming office on September 16. Both Indonesia and Vietnam are important pillars in Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision. During the visit, Suga underscored Japan's support for the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), articulated in 2019, and emphasised the need to advance the common principles of the rule of law, openness, freedom, transparency and inclusiveness.



Source: [mofa.go.jp](http://mofa.go.jp)

In Vietnam, Suga pointed out that “developments contrary to the rule of law and openness upheld by the ASEAN outlook have been unfolding in the South China Sea” and expressed Japan's strong opposition to actions that escalate tensions. This was an obvious reference to China's assertion of sovereign rights over these waters, its militarisation of features, and creeping annexation of isles and islets.

Japan has pursued defence cooperation in the region through its Vientiane Vision focussing on strengthening the rule of law, maritime security, and capacity building. During the Suga visit, Japan reached a substantial agreement with Vietnam to advance technological cooperation and transfer of defence equipment. The proposed agreement, reportedly termed “Agreement Concerning the Transfer of Defence Equipment and Technology” is expected to enable Japan export equipment to Vietnam including surface combatants such as offshore patrol vessels, maritime patrol aircraft, radar and surveillance equipment, and communications and information systems. Earlier, in July 2020, Tokyo had extended a USD 349 million loan to Hanoi to support the latter's procurement of six patrol vessels for its coast guard.

Vietnam has a long history of asserting its independence vis-à-vis China and is a key pillar for maintaining peace, stability and prosperity in Southeast Asia. As the current ASEAN Chair, Vietnam has welcomed the idea of enhancing the grouping's cooperation with Australia, India, Japan and United States in the field of freedom of navigation as part of the larger effort to expand ASEAN's external relationships and affirm its central role in the regional architecture.

## Japan Launches the *Taigei*-class Submarine

Japan's Mitsubishi Heavy Industries (MHI) has unveiled a new 3,000-ton class of diesel-electric submarine called *Taigei*. The submarine was reportedly built at an estimated cost of USD 758.7 million and is expected to enter service in March 2022. The *Taigei* will join the nine *Oyashio*-class and 11 *Soryu*-class submarines to take Japan's submarine fleet strength to a total of 22, in keeping with the 10-year vision outlined by the 2010 National Defense Program Guidelines.



Source: [navalnews.com](http://navalnews.com)

Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force has confirmed that *Taigei* boasts a length of 84 metres, a beam of 9.1 metres, and a draught of 10.4 metres. The submarine is powered by a diesel-electric engine generating 6,000 horsepower. It uses lithium-ion batteries, as was the case with the last two of the *Soryu*-class of submarines.

While the *Taigei*'s external appearance is similar to that of the *Soryu*, there are however significant differences in the internal composition of the two classes of submarines. These include: an improved sonar and combat command system, new acoustic absorbent materials and a floating floor structure to make the submarine quieter, and Torpedo Counter Measures that improve survivability by deploying decoys to evade enemy torpedoes.

The *Taigei* class comes 11 years after the first *Soryu* was launched in 2009. For its part, the *Soryu* was launched 13 years after the first *Oyashio* in 1996. A total of seven *Taigeis* has been planned, in addition to the last of the 12 *Soryus* being built.

Japan's continuing military modernisation is being driven by the need to shore up deterrence in the face of the concentration of large military forces in its vicinity, the persistence of territorial and maritime disputes in the region, North Korea's provocative conduct including nuclear weapons and ballistic missile tests, China's growing military might and belligerence, and America's wavering commitment during the presidency of Donald Trump.

## US Appoints Special Coordinator on Tibet

On October 14, the US Department of State appointed Assistant Secretary Robert A. Destro of the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labour as America's Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues. The announcement to this effect noted that "consistent with the Tibetan Policy Act, Special Coordinator Destro will lead U.S.

efforts to promote dialogue between the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and the Dalai Lama or his representatives; protect the unique religious, cultural, and linguistic identity of Tibetans; and press for their human rights to be respected.” It further specified his job description as someone who will “address the humanitarian needs of Tibetan refugees and promote sustainable economic development and environmental conservation in Tibetan communities on the plateau.”



*Lobsang Sangay meeting Robert Destro at the State Department  
Source: thetibetpost.com*

Created first in 1997, the post of Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues was vacant since Trump assumed office in January 2017. The manning of the post on the eve of the November 2020 US presidential election is part of the series of US initiatives on Hong Kong, Xinjiang, Taiwan and Tibet – the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act of 2019, the scrapping of special

status for Hong Kong in response to China’s new National Security Law, the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2020, the Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative of 2019, the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act in 2018, and the pending Tibet Policy and Support Act introduced in 2019.

After his appointment, Destro met Lobsang Sangay, the President of the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA). This was the first time that the head of CTA was received at the State Department, signalling US acknowledgement of the CTA and Tibet’s democratically elected leader. China’s foreign ministry reacted to the development saying that it constitutes interference in its domestic affairs and undermines development and stability in Tibet.

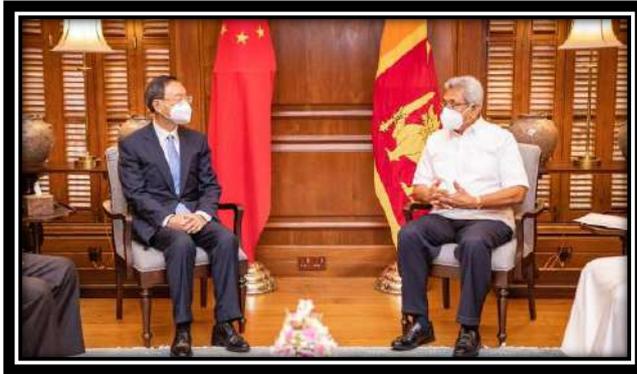
### **Sri Lanka Enters Geopolitical Sweet Spot**

Sri Lanka appears to have entered a geopolitical sweet spot in its ties with major world powers. During his official visit to Sri Lanka on 27-28 October, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo held wide ranging discussions with the Lankan leadership on issues relating to security, economic development, post-pandemic recovery, and democratic freedom. He spoke of forging a US-Sri Lanka partnership in promoting a free and open Indo-Pacific, which would be



*Source: indiatoday.in*

in contrast to China's predatory economic diplomacy and violations of sovereignty on land and at sea.



Source: news.cgtn.com

Pompeo's visit occurred within 20 days of the 9 October visit by a high-powered Chinese delegation led by communist party politburo member Yang Jiechi. During the visit, China had agreed to provide a USD 89.5 million grant for livelihood development in Sri Lanka. In an apparent bid to counter the deepening of Chinese influence, the United States is promising an

economic partnership based on transparent trade and investment aimed at securing Sri Lanka's long-term economic independence.

Even as China and the United States are explicitly competing for influence, Russia is attempting to deepen ties with Sri Lanka by expanding areas of cooperation. The Russian Ambassador in Colombo has conveyed his government's interest in assisting Sri Lanka to set up coal and natural gas power plants as well as explore the possibility of installing a nuclear power plant and extend technical know-how and training to Sri Lanka's Atomic Energy Authority.

Sri Lanka is naturally keen to strengthen its economic and security ties with all countries, but it also wants to keep itself away from big power politics so as not to compromise upon its sovereignty and strategic autonomy. As Foreign Minister Dinesh Gunawardena noted in the press conference following his meeting with Pompeo, "Sri Lanka is a neutral, non-aligned country, committed to peace" and "hopes to continue relations with the United States and other countries".