Anna Pha

Last month, Superannuation Minister Jane Hume (also Minister for Women’s Economic Security [sic]) announced that a draft bill would be released soon for superannuation changes, including new compassionate grounds for early access to super for victims of domestic violence. They would be allowed to apply for up to $10,000 “as an important last resort lifeline.”

The announcement was the day after a series of nation-wide “March 4 Justice” rallies concluded with a major action in Canberra outside Parliament House. They demanded implementation of the fifty-five recommendations put forward in Respect@Work, the Australian Human Rights Commission’s 2020 report of the national inquiry into Sexual Harassment. The message was: “Enough is enough.”

The idea of women drawing on their superannuation savings to escape domestic violence is appalling. It reflects the government’s neoliberal approach to social issues, its appalling attitude towards women, and once again blames the victim for her plight just as it does the unemployed and sole parents (the majority being women).

The idea was raised three years ago in the federal government’s 2018 Women’s Economic Security Statement by the then Minister for Women Kelly O’Dwyer. As previously noted in the Guardian, around about seventeen per cent of women have experienced violence from a current or former partner (See #1952).

“At least one child is killed by a parent every month; one woman is murdered every week by a partner or former partner; another hospitalised every three hours. Domestic violence can be physically brutal or more hidden in its various non-physical forms,” the Guardian noted.

The 2018 Statement noted that workers can already get permission from the tax office to draw on their superannuation funds before reaching retirement age in extreme circumstances under “compassionate grounds” rules. The proposed changes would add family and domestic violence to the list of circumstances.

Apart from the practicalities of gaining approval from the Australian Taxation Office to withdraw up to $10,000, the final retirement sum will take a hit. The younger the woman fleeing a violent situation, the greater the loss on retirement.

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“GROSS INEQUALITIES

Even the way superannuation contributions are treated disadvantages women. Workers on incomes below $18,200 per annum – mostly women – do not receive a single cent of the more than $40bil the government forks out in super tax concessions. Sixty per cent of those superannuation tax concessions are handed out to the top twenty per cent of households – more likely to be dependent on men’s incomes. Whereas the fifty per cent at the lowest end of the income scale only receive eleven per cent, reflecting the gender inequality in wages (The Australia Institute).

Neither the Liberal Party nor the Labor Party have done anything to address this gross, built-in inequality.

As a result, women retire with forty-two per cent less in their superannuation accounts than men (2018 Statement). This is largely a result of the gender pay gap; women being more likely to work part time or as casuals; and the time that many women spend out of the paid workforce such as to raise children or care for an elderly relative. In addition, the new face of unemployment is women over forty-five, with more than seventy per cent of unemployed women on JobSeeker/Newstart for over a year (Sydney Morning Herald, 30-09-2020).

Continued on page 2

NOTICE: Next week the Guardian – Workers’ Weekly will not be printed as its staff will be on a short break. Our next issue (#1957) will be out on Monday the 19th of April. Sorry for any inconvenience.
GOVT TO HIT WOMEN’S SUPER

As the ATO pointed out, it would be very difficult to know whether a woman was being coerced to do so. The hearing heard reports that the scheme had opened up another frontier for people to financially abuse their partners.

According to the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority, 4.5ml Australians had withdrawn $34.4 billion via the early super access scheme by the 18th of October. More than half a million had completely drained their savings, including many women.

The government should be funding domestic violence services. It is criminal that it has cut funding, forcing many legal services, refuges and other services to close at a time when domestic violence is on the rise. Don’t be surprised if there is a token gesture in the May budget with an increase in funding that in effect partially restores previous cuts.

GOVT AGENDA

If the government gets away with this, not only will it hurt victims of domestic violence, but it will set the scene for further erosion of super funds. The next step will be withdrawing savings for a deposit on a house. Then to fund education in private schools for children of the not so wealthy. Permitting victims of domestic violence to draw down on their retirement savings also furthers the government’s aim of destroying industry funds. It must be defeated.

NEW CPA CENTENARY FLAG

Keep the Red Flag flying! Use it for May Day!

Sydney Vigil
STOP USA BLOCKADE ON CUBA
Also solidarity with Venezuela & Gaza
12:30 pm Saturday April 17
Sydney Town Hall

$20 including p&p
60x90 cm 100% Polyester
Order yours today: Send cheque/po/stal order to: CPA, 74 Buckingham St, Sunny Hills, NSW 2010
Phone 02 9699 8844 for credit card

CABINET SHUFFLE DOES NOT BODE WELL

Last Monday, Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced a cabinet reshuffle that saw Defence Minister Linda Reynolds and Attorney-General Christian Porter lose their portfolios. Replacing them is Peter Dutton, who will become the next Defence Minister and leader of the House of Representatives, and Michaelia Cash as the new Attorney-General and Industrial Relations Minister.

Other changes: Karen Andrews as Minister for Home Affairs and Stuart Robert will move from government services to become Employment Minister, replacing Cash. Melissa Price will also return to cabinet and will retain the portfolio for Defence Industry.

However, the news that caught the most attention was the new cabinet taskforce on women’s equality, safety, economic security, health and wellbeing. The taskforce will be chaired by prime minister Scott Morrison and Women’s Minister Marise Payne. It will “include all women from the ministry as well as Treasurer Josh Frydenberg and Finance Minister Simon Birmingham” (SMH). As part of the new taskforce, Financial Services Minister Jane Hume will gain an additional portfolio, women’s economic security.

Speaking on the significance of the new taskforce, Morrison stated that Payne is “effectively the prime minister for women.” Further stating that “these changes will shake up what needs shaking up [...]. What we must do is address the government’s agenda with the changes we are making.”

Prior to the shake-up Labor leader Anthony Albanese said there was little point in making changes to the cabinet: “Shuffling the deck will not change the basic reality that this government is dealing unwell to women.”

It’s hard to argue with Albanese’s remarks.

The creation of this taskforce, with the elevation of women to the cabinet: “She was an outstanding Chief Executive, stated that “she was an outstanding employee.” Further stating that “these responsibilities is lack of economic independence and where-with-all. No woman should have to face such a choice. It is the government’s responsibility to provide the necessary support systems and financial means for them to be able to safely leave a relationship and be protected from a former partner. It is not just necessary for the women but also for the protection of any children involved. Women have a right to grow up in a safe and healthy environment.”

Instead of cutting funding to domestic violence services the government should be increasing it.

Women need access to paid domestic violence leave, immediate shelter, ongoing housing, legal and social services, and a range of other assistance if they are to be safe and their children resettled in a new life. The recent legislation to dismantle the Family Court will put women at further disadvantage than they already are (See Guardian #1951).

GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITY

Enabling women to draw $10,000 from their superannuation fund, in particular when they are younger, could cost tens of thousands of dollars in final retirement savings.

In effect, it would present the choice of remaining within an abusive and violent situation or undermining their retirement income – a choice their abuser would not be faced with. Already one of the major reasons that women remain in abusive relationships is lack of economic independence and where-with-all. No woman should have to face such a choice.

It must be defeated.
In late March, floods covered 60% of New South Wales, with tens of thousands of people evacuated from their homes. This event has been referred to in the media as a once in a 100-year event. Rainfall on the NSW coast during this time reached more than 400mm, according to the ABC. In contrast, Sydney usually reaches 132mm in total over March, which means that these rainfall levels were significantly above average.

The cause of the floods has been attributed in part to the La Nina trade winds that bring the cool air of the south to Australia, which also probably contributed to the cooler weather we have experienced this summer. The other cause has been climate change.

It seems that year after year we face another natural disaster. Before these floods, we had the bushfires in 2020, and before that we had the drought wreaking western NSW across the Murray-Darling Basin. This basin is commonly thought of as Australia’s ‘food bowl’.

I ask readers to throw their minds back to the events in late 2018, and early 2019 when we had up to a million fish die and wash-up on the banks of Menindee lakes. An independent investigation was set up to analyse what caused the fish mortality, and the report found that high flows following the drought caused major algal blooms that suffocated the local fauna. It is not likely that dry conditions will follow in the next year or so after these major flows, we might be looking at a similar situation if not properly managed.

Some may think that once the flooding ends, the problem is now resolved. But this is not the case. Rainfall, river flows, and water levels all have significant impacts on wildlife.

Increased nutrients in water can be dangerous for both our health and the health of our wildlife because they deplete the available oxygen in the water. It is either caused by ‘blackwater’ from flooding, where nutrients from dead organic matter on land are washed into our waterways, or by draughts that limit the water available.

Increased flows can especially affect waterways if there has been significant agricultural runoff. Agricultural plains have high amounts of nutrients from fertilisers. These nutrients can lead to algal blooms and non-potable water.

The Hawkesbury river reached a max height of 12.9m during the floods. In contrast, current levels of lower Hawkesbury river now sit below 2m. Mainstream media refers to a historical moment where water heights reached 19m in 1867 as “the highest in living memory”, but this “living memory” is only the living memory of colonists.

There is a lot of attention on the importance of fire management led by First Nations people, but there is less emphasis on the importance of First Nations people’s water management.

The “Echuca Declaration,” published in 2009 by the Murray and Lower Darling River Indigenous Nations (MLDRIN), states that “RECOGNISING and REAFFIRMING that each of the Indigenous Nations represented within Murray and Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations is and has been since time immemorial sovereign over its own lands and waters” and that “water has a right to be recognised as ecological entity, a being and a spirit and must treated accordingly.”

The “Echuca Declaration” denounces the Commonwealth of Australia for not only the theft of land and water, but also for “causing ecosystem collapse, sewage water quality degradation, extreme stress upon river ecologies and species extinction at a scale and rate which is unprecedented.”

The “Echuca Declaration” demanded the government give MLDRIN a water quantity for “cultural flows,” “cultural flow benefits” and for there to be consultation and involvement both ways between MLDRIN and the various state governments and between Indigenous scientists and Western scientists.

The First People’s Water Engagement Council was set up in 2010 as a national body in response to First Nations demanding their water rights but was abolished by the Abbott government in 2014.
The CPA is just commencing the process of Party-wide discussion of the draft Political Resolution to be adopted by the 14th Congress to be held in Sydney on 29-31 October 2021. The upcoming break might be a good opportunity for all Party comrades to exercise their rights to participate under our internal democracy to analyse, discuss, amend and develop the Party document that will guide the Party’s political work for the next four years.

The Political Resolution aims to analyse our Party activity since the 13th Congress, how decisions were implemented, our successes and errors. This is a fundamental process for the dialectics of social change.

The building of a strong working-class party is one of the strategic tasks for advancing socialism in Australia.

The 13th Congress decided to take the Party to the People. All Party activity stemmed from the decision to have an organisation that is seen and taken to the people through activity.

Since the last Congress, the CPA has experienced some substantial growth in membership and a growth in our diversity. Many people are seeing in the CPA an organisation representing the interests of the working class and all the popular strata. Comrades have joined the CPA from all parts of the country where the Party has branch activity. It was also interesting that more and more people reached out looking for the most effective way to defeat capitalism since the last federal elections. Many have come from other political parties, including those who had pursued social democracy as a way for social change. It has become clearer to many that social democracy is not the answer for workers in Australia.

Since last Congress, we experienced many positive developments with a more active Sydney District Committee and the beginnings of establishing a NSW State Committee. A branch has been established in Wollongong, quickly becoming an active highly visible branch in the area as well as contributing to rallies and being active in Sydney to support comrades there. There has also been growth in other regional branches in NSW. All the other CPA branches in Brisbane, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth have continued to develop, and there is also good potential for branches in Canberra and Darwin.

The Party has also overcome some internal challenges but successfully met the issues by the commitment and hard work of Party members to build the Communist Party of Australia. COVID-19 in 2020 affected the way we do things, but Party activity and the work of branches was adapted to new conditions. Party branches organised meetings online and stayed active according to the limitations of the new reality and many impressive initiatives were put in practice. In fact, some of the new ways of working will continue to be utilised to enhance our reach and accessibility, particularly for remote members.

Despite COVID-19, the Party leadership successfully implemented the Health, Workers’ Rights and Socialism campaign, which had the key objective of keeping the Party structure active. The pandemic could not stop Communists and the labour movement from exercising their right to protest. Comrades participated in many struggles including Black Lives Matter and the May One Movement in which Party members played an active role as well as supporting workers on strike.

Ultimately the key objective is to campaign to prevent workers paying for the crisis, something the bourgeoisie and the Morrison government will try to enforce. To this, Communists say: “workers Won’t Pay for the capitalist crisis.”

From early April, all party members will get involved in the Party-wide discussion of the Congress documents. It is expected that the collective discussion will deliver the best way forward to be adopted by the 14th Congress in October. We encourage all Party members to participate with discipline, criticism and self-criticism, putting the Party ahead of any other personal or group interest. Discussions will take place at the branch, district and state levels.

The Central Committee will also invite all members to contribute articles for the Congress discussion journals that have been planned for May and June.

We ask all Party members to take this opportunity and actively participate in the process towards the 14th National Congress of the CPA. Stay safe!
On average, one veteran dies from suicide in Australia every two weeks. At this point, more veterans have lost their lives by suicide than have been killed on active duty since 2001 ...
PROTECT WOMEN

Say NO to forcing women into their retirement to escape violence!

Fight for publicly-funded programs that provide shelter, ongoing help and social services.

That’s what the

COMMUNIST PARTY OF AUSTRALIA - WWW.CPA.ORG.AU
MEN’S SUPER!

women to sacrifice escape domestic

ended government de immediate housing, legal and

CPA fights for
On 20th March, the organisers of the creative arts festival Dark Mofo put out a chilling call to First Nations people on Instagram: “we want your blood.” Once you read the text beneath the picture, the hair begins to stand on end. The criticism was that they were asking for blood donations to be used for one of the festival’s performance pieces. The piece, entitled “artwork” in question entitled “Union Flag” was to drench the British flag in the blood of First Nations people. This immediately drew swaths of criticism from First Nations peoples and was roundly condemned in the arts community and beyond.

Dark Mofo is an annual festival held in Hobart, Tasmania, known for its controversial artworks and performance pieces. It originally started as a nudist run into the freezing waters of the Tasman Sea and has since grown into a full-blown modern art festival. In 2017, it was featured live and covered itself in its entrails and, in 2013, a light show sent seven people to hospital with chemical burns.

The controversial Union Flag “artwork” was created by Spanish artist Santiago Sierra and was set to be one of the key works at the festival. It was purportedly meant to symbolise the blood shed by First Nations peoples at the hands of the British colonists. While the symbolic imagery is clear, the intentions behind the festival featuring the “artwork” are not. It would be easy to get sidetracked and simply dismiss this as another instance of “cancel culture” or “political correctness gone mad,” as right-wing talking heads love to wheel out every time something like this happens, but to do so would be a grave error. The controversy is not only centred around a national discussion about Indigenous history and Australia’s brutal settler-colonialism, but it also reveals the broader forces of capitalistic profiteering.

Let us begin at the micro-level with the artist. Sierra came forward calling the criticising of his piece “superficial and spectatoral” and complained that he has been “left without a voice,” even going so far as to say that critics have “built up the indignation to a fever pitch” and that he has been “left alone” and “speak to the blind to any other considerations.” As Marx wrote in the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844: “Capital is dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks. The time during which the labourer works, is the time during which the capitalist consumes the labour-power he has purchased of him.” The “vampire-like” nature of capitalism here however is no metaphor. There is nothing that capitalism will not commodify and sap to the very last drop until every resource on earth is entirely consumed. First Nations people the world over know this from brutal first-hand experience. This artwork goes a step further than simply purchasing labour-power, it adopts the guise of being penniless and asks for donations. No remuneration was offered to those giving blood, all the profits of the “artwork” would go to the festival and the artist. They ask for donations with out remuneration in the time in which there should be reparations. This is yet another egregious, literal example of the “vampire-like” nature of capitalism’s impact on First Nations peoples.

First Nations peoples, domestically and internationally, have been ruthlessly exploited under the reign of capitalism and colonialism for centuries, for what was once abundant lands are being sucked dry. This controversy is not simply a question over the merits of an “artwork.” The question is how to listen to the criticism of those affected and to act in accordance with them. This is what it means to build genuine class solidarity. Art can and does serve a critical function in society, it can call into question the existing order of society in a way in which words cannot always express. It can, to recontextualise Marx’s quote on religion, be “the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions.” But this Union Flag/Jack piece is not a demonstration of that principle. It is shameless and barefaced profiteering off the historical and on-going suffering of First Nations people.
Top officials from China and the Unit-
ed States (US) exchanged verbal blows at the Alaska Summit last week, after US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, and US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan opened the session by making false and unwarranted acu-

lications about China’s governance and international affairs. In the summit’s opening remarks, Blinken accused China of threatening a “rules-based order that maintains global stability” by their actions regarding Xinjiang, Hong Kong, Taiwan, cyber attacks on the US, and economic coercion in other nations. In an attempt to put additional pressure on the Chinese officials, he pointed out that US-allied countries, as well as important neighbours and trading partners – China, South Korea and Japan – were also concerned.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Chinese Director of the General Commission for Foreign Affairs Yang Jiechi responded in an uncustomary way by pointing the finger back at the US to address their own human rights record and stop interfering in China’s internal affairs. The Chinese delegates asser-
tively clarified that the US does not repre-
sent international public opinion, and that China will not be shaken by unwelcoming and threatening behaviour.

The US maintains a military presence in the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait, and just days before the summit put sanctions on Chinese ministers. While the mainstream media describes these actions as essential for countering human rights violations and cyberattacks, the reality is that China has improved living conditions for its population and sustains a non-interference policy with other nations. The US government’s demands are in no way an e-

other nations. The US government’s demands for countering human rights violations and sustaining a non-interference policy with other nations, as well as important neighbours and trading partners – China, South Korea and Japan – were also concerned.

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sent international public opinion, and that China will not be shaken by unwelcoming and threatening behaviour.

While the Trump administration was inclined to cast increasing warning attitudes towards China, the new Biden administra-
tion also revealed its illusion of US moral superiority. Curiously, the Chinese officials on the “secret sauce of America,” that is, the ability to confront challenges and come out more united as a country, in contrast, pointed out that the US does not have the qualifications to speak to China in such a condescending manner. It is indeed condescending coming from the US in such a condescending manner. It is indeed condescending coming from the US in such a condescending manner. It is indeed condescending coming from the US in such a condescending manner.

Interestingly, it is uncommon for Chinese officials to criticise other countries, and it is perhaps unlikely this would have resulted under different conditions. Firstly, how the US officials engaged with the Chinese ministers were guests in their country was deeply insulting and provocative, rather than following shared protocols. Secondly, China is making massive strides in making fruitful ties with nations worldwide and continues to develop its own country peacefully. It is especially strong in its position compared to historical times and has more confidence to defend its own interests.

For instance, at the Boxer Protocol in 1901, an unequal treaty was signed when eight Western powers invaded China. The treaty allowed Western troops to be stationed in China and forced Beijing to pay the equivalent of ten billion dollars in today’s value of silver. However, due to shifting power dynamics, China is making massive strides in making fruitful ties with nations worldwide and continues to develop its own country peacefully. It is especially strong in its position compared to historical times and has more confidence to defend its own interests.

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INDEPENDENT & PEACEFUL AUSTRALIA NETWORK WEBINAR ON DEFENCE AND FOREIGN POLICY

Eileen Whitehead

The lockdowns brought about by the pandemic have proved there is a silver lining to every cloud. It has introduced me to “zooming” and a wealth of wonderfully informative webinars: this one held on 25th March by IPAN, being no exception.

The two main speakers – Vince Scappatura, a doctoral candidate from the Deakin University’s School of International and Political Studies and Dr Alison Broinowski, AM an Australian academic, journalist, writer and former Australian diplomat – spoke at length about Australia’s current situation as trading partners with China and allies of the US.

Vince Scappatura gave a solid presentation called The Australian/US Alliance: Military & Defence, which was primarily concerned about Australia being dragged into yet another conflict with the US. He spoke about the militarisation of the region and the implications for conflict, now that the US empire is in decline and currently fomenting instability in the region by focussing on China in a newly fabricated Cold War.

He referred to the Anzus Treaty formed in 1951 as the cornerstone of Australian security, symbolic of a wider special relationship based on our mutually shared values. However, he saw this as a danger currently when the US continually depicts China as a “threat to open and free regional and global order.”

This has led to a secret defence plan between Australia and the US to counter China’s influence in the region, with a strategic fuel reserve placed in Darwin, making it very difficult for any future Australian Prime Minister to say “no” to the US in the event of a crisis.

Instead of the alliance being between two equal partners, the US is reinterpreting its status as a “protector” in its fabricated depiction of China as a threat to an open and free regional and global order. In his view, he sees the current furore, generated by the US, about the militarisation of the islands in the South China Seas as hypocritical, considering the placement of its bases surrounding China.

Furthermore, he sees challenges from China as being exaggerated for political gain.

He spoke of Pine Gap as the most significant US intelligence-gathering facility outside the US, giving Australia “everything and nothing” and hardwiring Australia into US wars whether we choose to participate or not. It makes us a nuclear target and plays a part in America’s great power rivalry with China.

According to the New York Times, one of US Secretary of State Antony Blinken’s primary objectives is to “try to coalesce sceptical international partners into a new competition with China.” And, more worryingly, is Lloyd Austin, US Defence Secretary’s remarks during his conference hearing in January, 2021, affirming his commitment to “a more resilient and distributed force posture in the Indo-Pacific, supported by new operational concepts.” Scappatura sees noises coming from Washington about the Chinese threat to Taiwan as nonsense, as are the noises coming from Washington about the US Defence Secretary’s remarks during his conference hearing in January, 2021, affirming his commitment to “a more resilient and distributed force posture in the Indo-Pacific, supported by new operational concepts.”

Scappatura sees noises coming from Washington about the Chinese threat to Taiwan as nonsense, as are the fears being sounded about China’s regional economic power and threat to sovereignty.

Dr Alison Broinowski had some different slants regarding foreign diplomacy, where foreign policy reactions remain negative and bipartisan. She pointed out the importance of popular input into foreign policy and how it’s shaped and determined and felt that we don’t have enough input in Australia. The democratic system is not sufficiently respected so how can we achieve peace when Australian foreign policy is always framed around war: the country was settled by British armed forces; the settlers fought the indigenous people for over 200 years, and we always supported the British in their wars and invasions. So when the US enters into wars it’s now automatically expected that Australia goes too.

A recent survey about people’s opinions of this sycophantic subservience to the US showed that eighty-eight per cent of Australians want change. Therefore foreign policy has to change. The UN Charter states that nations should:

• Practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours, and
• Unite our strength to maintain international peace and security, and
• Ensure, by the acceptance of principles and the institution of methods, that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interests, and
• Employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples.

She also blamed the myth of the “war on terror” from 2001 – which nations have mistakenly acted on and which has created unforgivable death and destruction ever since – saying the Anzus Treaty plays no part in this. She made a valid point referring to Kim Beazley, when Australian Ambassador to the US, realising that the US would defend Australia only if defending its own bases here: hence the US troops in Darwin. By allowing foreign troops on our soil, we have surrendered our sovereignty and independence. Currently, we are just a mouthpiece for the US government and our government must be told that this has to stop.

Guardian
The visit of the US Secretary of Defense, Lloyd Austin, to India barely two months after the Indian Union Ministry of Defence held an evaluation meeting and made new decisions. President Miguel Diaz-Canel shared his findings about problems facing the country, which he clustered under three headings: (1) errors in the implementation of the new regulations, (2) combating the COVID-19 pandemic and (3) food production.

It was in Japan and South Korea – both close military and strategic allies of the US in Asia – where the US Secretary held his next stop. It being next in his itinerary indicates that the Pentagon views India as of the same status as Japan and South Korea. Lloyd underlined this importance during his visit when he described the India-US as a “central pillar” of American policy for the Indo-Pacific region.

That the India-US strategic alliance is centred on the military relationship has been clear from the outset. Successive US administrations ranging from Clinton to Bush to Obama and Trump have pursued the goal of enlarging what is called the Indo-Pacific region, now called the Asia-Pacific region.

In Austin’s meeting with defense minister Rajnath Singh, it was agreed to strengthen the two countries’ defence relationship by utilizing the three so-called foundational agreements – LHDCA, COMCASA and BECA. This would lead to the interlocking and growing dependence of the Indian armed forces on the American military. As per Rajnath Singh, the Indian side agreed to enhance cooperation with the US through the Indo-Pacific Command, Central Command and Africa Command, thereby widening the scope for joint operations and coordination. The Austin visit was preceded by the India-US V-22 Joint Strike Fighter and ATC-22U exercises.

The Austin visit was preceded by the first summit level virtual meeting of the leaders of the Quad, the four countries – the US, India, Australia and Japan – held on March 12. The Quad, notwithstanding the official posture, is evolving into a strategic forum to counter China. For those who see the Quad as a new front to bring China to the bargaining table on the border issues, it is important to note that the Indian government has signed the Indo-Pacific strategy of the United States beginning with the Joint Vision Statement issued during Obama’s visit to India in 2017. The revival of the Quad during the Trump presidency also preceded the border clashes in Ladakh.

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The 25-year strategic cooperation roadmap provides for comprehensive bilateral collaboration in many sectors. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif signed a 25-year comprehensive strategic partnership agreement in Tehran marking a milestone in bilateral relations between the two countries.

The 25-year strategic cooperation roadmap between the two nations sets out comprehensive bilateral collaboration in many sectors. According to the official Irna news agency, the final details of the agreement were finalised Saturday 27th March at a meeting between “Wang, Ali Larijani, advisor to the supreme guide (Ayatollah Ali Khamenei) and the Islamic Republic’s special representative for strategic relations with China.”

Broadly speaking, the pact envisages Chinese investments of around $400bil in Iran’s energy and infrastructure sectors, in exchange for Tehran guaranteeing Beijing a stable supply of oil and gas at competitive prices.

In a meeting held on Saturday in Tehran, Ali Larijani and Wang Yi, Foreign Minister of the Asian giant, expressed their satisfaction with the scope of this project. The two sides also reviewed ways to develop the main aspects of political, economic and strategic ties between the two countries, while stressing the need for close consultations to promote their long-term strategic cooperation.

“The Islamic Republic of Iran decides independently on its relations with other countries and, unlike some countries, does not change its position because of a phone call,” the Iranian authority has made clear.

For his part, the Chinese Foreign Minister reiterated that Beijing’s relations with Tehran will not be affected by the events and will remain permanent and strategic.

Referring to the historic and friendly relations between Tehran and Beijing, Wang stressed the importance of bilateral cooperation under the 25-year strategic partnership agreement and expressed satisfaction with the finalisation of the agreement.

The two sides further explored ways to develop political, economic and strategic ties, stressing the need for close consultations between the two countries to promote long-term cooperation.

“The Islamic Republic of Iran decides independently on its relations with other countries and, unlike some countries, does not change its position because of a phone call.”

President Xi Jinping and President Hassan Rouhani.

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