

About the Journal of Indian Ocean Studies

The Journal of Indian Ocean Studies is a publication of the Society for Indian Ocean Studies (SIOS). Having completed thirty years of publication, the Journal, published three times a year-in April, August and December, aims at bringing out articles contributed by defence experts, diplomats, eminent scholars and renowned thinkers on the various aspects of the Indian Ocean and the littoral regions of South and Southeast Asia, Africa, the Gulf and Australia.

The Editorial Advisory Board comprising strategists and former practitioners of foreign affairs and defence as well as distinguished scholars on economy, history, etc. of the region provide regular guidance and advice. The Journal has a vast readership among the Parliamentarians, think-tanks, maritime establishments, universities and institutions of excellence in various fields as also individual scholars.



Prints Publications Pvt Ltd

Viraj Tower 2, 4259/3, Ansari Road,
Darya Ganj, New Delhi-110 002

Tel. : +91-11-45355555

Fax: +91-11-23275542

Email: contact@printspublications.com

Website : www.printspublications.com

Society for Indian Ocean Studies (SIOS)



Journal of **INDIAN OCEAN** Studies

ISSN 0972-3080

Vol. 31, No. 2

May - August 2023

JOURNAL OF INDIAN OCEAN STUDIES

VOL. 31, NO. 2

MAY - AUGUST 2023



**India and Australia: Maritime Outlook
in the Indo-Pacific Region**



Prints Publications Pvt Ltd

New Delhi

www.printspublications.com

EDITORIAL TEAM

Editor-in-Chief : Ambassador Sudhir T. Devare (Retd.)

Managing Editor : Ambassador J. K. Tripathi (Retd.)

EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD

Admiral Arun Prakash (Retd.)

Former Chief of Naval Staff

Lt. Gen. Shamsher Singh Mehta (Retd.)

Trustee,
Pune International Centre

Prof. P. V. Rao

National Professor, ICSSR
Visiting Professor, NALSAR

Prof. Swaran Singh

Professor of Diplomacy, JNU
Chairman,
Association of Asian Scholars

Prof. Vinayshil Gautam

Vice Chairman,
Foundation of Organisational
Research and Education (FORE)

Amb. Sheelkant Sharma (Retd.)

Former Secretary General,
SAARC

Amb. Biren Nanda (Retd.)

Former Ambassador to
Indonesia and Australia

Vice Admiral Anup Singh (Retd.)

Director Strategic Studies, SIOS

Commodore C. Uday Bhaskar (Retd.)

Director,
Society for Policy Studies,
Former D. G., IDSA

Dr. Krishnendra Meena

Associate Professor,
School of International Studies,
JNU and Secretary General, SIOS

Note : All views expressed herein are in no sense official and the opinions of contributors and Editor in the published articles are not necessarily those of the Society for Indian Ocean Studies.

Subscription:

Subscription and orders for the journal should be sent to the Publishers:

Annual Subscription Price:

National (INR) 1500.00 | International (US\$) 150.00

Online version free with Print Subscription

All remittances must be paid in favor of Prints Publications Pvt Ltd payable at New Delhi.

ELECTRONIC VERSION : This Journal can be accessed at www.printspublications.com

PERIODICITY : This Journal is published three times a year in – **April, August and December**

Copyright @ Society for Indian Ocean Studies

Published and printed on behalf of Society for Indian Ocean Studies (SIOS)

By Mr. Pranav Gupta, Prints publications Pvt Ltd, at Printext, New Delhi, India

All business correspondence should be addressed to:



Prints Publications Pvt Ltd

Viraj Tower 2, 4259/3, Ansari Road,
Darya Ganj, New Delhi-110 002
Tel. : +91-11-45355555
Fax: +91-11-23275542

Email: contact@printspublications.com
Website : www.printspublications.com

Guidelines to Authors

Readers are encouraged to contribute articles for the Journal of Indian Ocean Studies. Generally, a theme for each issue is decided three months in advance. Articles are therefore expected to fall within/connected to the theme. However, papers/articles related to aspects of maritime economy, maritime security and geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific, will also be welcome. The following template/style is preferred:

Word Length: 3000-3500

Introductory: The article should not include an abstract, but an introduction or preamble is preferable. If desired, group headings may be used to discuss factors.

Citations: Footnotes

To enquire about the next Issue's theme and for sending articles, the Managing Editor may be contacted at:-

Email: jitutrrips@hotmail.com

Phone: +91 9650691602



Society for Indian Ocean Studies (SIOS)

Society for Indian Ocean Studies, 2, Lado Sarai Institutional Area, New Delhi-110030

Journal of Indian Ocean Studies

Vol. 31, No. 2

May-August, 2023

CONTENTS

Editorial	(i-iv)
SUDHIR T. DEVARE	
ARTICLES	63-138
BIREN NANDA	63-74
<i>India and Australia: Strategic Maritime Partners in the Indo-Pacific</i>	
IQBAL SINGH SEVEA	75-84
<i>Australia-India Relations in an Evolving Indo-Pacific</i>	
GG DWIVEDI	85-92
<i>India-Australia Maritime Outlook in the Realm Indo-Pacific</i>	
SHUBHAMITRA DAS	93-102
<i>The Engagement of India and Australia in the Indo-Pacific</i>	
AKSHAY K. SINGH AND SANJAY KUMAR MISHRA	103-113
<i>Unfolding the Changing Arc of Indo-pacific Strategic Architecture and India's Tangled Interests beyond Indian Ocean Region (IOR)</i>	
TSSHERING CHONZOM BHUTIA	115-126
<i>Strategic Shifts in the Indo-Pacific and India-Australia Partnership</i>	
KALESH MOHANAN	127-138
<i>India-Australia Relations in the Era of Indo-pacific</i>	
Regional New & Views	139-144

Editorial

India and Australia, situated at the two ends of the Indian Ocean are today active supporters of the relatively new construct of the Indo-Pacific which has come to assume a key feature of the global geopolitics. Today the main elements of this concept which focuses on the principle of a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' are seen to be influencing the external and defence policies of a number of countries of this vast region. China's growing aggressiveness, be it with respect to the South China Sea or Taiwan, or with India or the Island countries of South Pacific, seems to be the main cause for this fresh approach. The acceptance of the term Indo-Pacific since the last decade has led to a contestation for balance of power in the region between China, and the U.S and its allies.

Both India and Australia have reasons of their own to be wary of the volatile geopolitical developments around their regions. To start with they have different perceptions about the geographical scope of the Indo-Pacific. For India the Indo-Pacific covers the entire region extending from the east coast of Africa and the Persian Gulf to Australia, Southeast Asia and across the Pacific to the west coast of the U.S, whereas in the Australian understanding it extends from the eastern Indian Ocean to the entire Pacific Ocean. Moreover, Australia, an ally of the U.S was till a few years ago was seen to be close to China, especially because of its heavy dependence on the latter in the economic field. In the last ten years or so, however, their apprehensions of China's assertive actions within Australia as well as in the Indo-Pacific region have led to a revision in its policy to China. And this has had a marked impact on Australia-India relations which today are among the fastest growing relationships in the Indo-Pacific region. India's rise as a growing maritime and economic power as well as its rapidly improving ties with the U.S have also no doubted contributed to it. The shared values of pluralism, democratic governance and Commonwealth traditions have opened a friendly dialogue between the two. The visits at the Prime Ministerial level between the two countries have become frequent and regular resulting in the signing of a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Signing of a Free Trade Agreement in 2022, the Civil Nuclear Transfer to India Bill enabling supply of uranium from Australia to India, presence of nearly 7 lakh persons of Indian origin and

(ii) *Sudhir T. Devare*

growing number of Indian students in Australia and Malabar Naval Exercises hosted by Australia in August 2023 etc. have all given a new dynamism to the bilateral relations.

India's joining the QUAD, the quadrilateral grouping of four democracies, of which two are allies of the U.S is a significant development which marks a new strategic linking of India's relations with the members of Quad including Australia.

The Indian Ocean acts as a uniting bond between the two. Over the years, the Australian perception of the importance of the Indian Ocean has changed considerably even as opportunities for cooperation in the IOR and especially with India have expanded multi-fold.

Both India and Australia regard the maritime dimension as central to their future bilateral relationship as also for the security and economic development of the broader Indo-Pacific. It is for this reason we felt it appropriate and advisable to have an issue of our Journal devoted to the Maritime Outlook in the Indian Ocean region.

In his article Amb. Biren Nanda, former High Commissioner to Australia has highlighted the strategic, security and maritime aspects of cooperation along with the underpinning of economic and people-to-people ties which have grown very rapidly. India is strengthening partnerships that balance China's rise without compromising India's strategic autonomy. He also points out to the convergences and divergences in the strategic outlooks with Australia. Referring to the strategic drivers he brings out an important distinction, namely that while India prioritizes its border dispute with China and the latter's growing presence in the Indian Ocean, Australia is concerned with the U.S-China rivalry and China's assertiveness in the wider region. Another difference is that while India supports the emergence of a multipolar world order that is inclusive Australia is committed to its security alliance with the U.S.

Dr Iqbal Singh Sevea, Director, Institute of South Asian Studies, Singapore in his article has emphasized the deepening commitment in Australia-India relations as seen in the ongoing negotiations on the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement in which sectors such as agriculture, mining, critical minerals and space cooperation are included which he finds are not incorporated by India in any previous trade agreement. Such commitment the author believes is reflective of the evolving geopolitical and geoeconomic context. Speaking about Australia's recently released Defence Strategic Review (DSR) he notes

two aspects particularly relevant to Australia -India relations. One, the U.S is no longer the unipolar leader in the Indo-Pacific and the other is that the region is being defined by ‘an emerging multipolar distribution of power.’ Consistent with Australia’s ‘whole of government’ approach there are three key elements significant to the future of India-Australia relations-bilateral strategic relations, expanding trade relations and agreement over critical minerals.

Major General Dwivedi (Retd) in his article finds that the Australian White Paper of 2013 and Prime Minister Modi’s address at the Shangri-la Dialogue in 2018 share a common vision of the Indo-Pacific as the global geopolitical-economic centre. Both are key stake-holders with overlapping concerns about strategic, security and environmental challenges and Quad can be a facilitator to address them. The author suggests that to counter China’s predominance it was necessary to strengthen capacity of nations of the Indo-Pacific and the western Pacific. Soft diplomacy can also play a useful role in that regard.

Prof Shubhmitra Das in her paper has observed that countries on the Indian Ocean littoral felt an urgency to engage with each other and play a constructive role for a new regional order bereft of wars and conflicts. Cooperation of like-minded countries has become the norm. The India-Australia engagement, according to her has grown due to physical positioning, maritime character of their foreign policy and the increasing closeness between India and the U.S. There was however one question whether the engagement was limited to balance China and carry out the U.S agenda and what was the plan of action of the two.

In their article Prof Akshay K. Singh and Sanjay K. Mishra have described the Indo-Pacific as a key theatre of engagement of the countries of the region. They regard the Indo-Pacific Ocean Initiative IPOI enunciated by India at the East Asia Summit in 2019 as very useful for open, non-treaty-based global cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. They also find the Malabar Exercise held recently near Sydney as significant given the fact that Australia had withdrawn from this Exercise in 2007 on account of China’s protest.

Dr Tshering in her paper states that Australia was the first to discuss the idea of Indo-Pacific, but it was in the context of leveraging opportunities arising from Asia’s rise. Now Australia shares with a number of countries including India the vision for maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. In overall terms the common values of democracy and pluralism have brought

(iv) *Sudhir T. Devare*

the two countries together with Prime Minister Albanese visiting India in March 2023 and Prime Minister Modi going to Australia in May 2023.

Commander Kalesh Mohan in his paper believes that the Asian seas are witnessing a historical anomaly of simultaneous rise of two homegrown maritime powers, namely China and India, against the backdrop of the U.S over the global commons. The author finds that India's security is tied with its regional complex to the Indian Ocean and vice versa. In recent years, the India-Australia relationship has charted a new trajectory of transformational growth even as many Australian analysts consider the strategic interests as 'essentially congruent'. An array of institutional dialogue mechanisms have been put in place to promote bilateral cooperation. The author dwells at length on the growing defence ties between the two countries. Though he also regards that several spheres of action and influence are overlapping, making an enhanced dialogue necessary.

Maritime security has come to assume a critical element in Australia's defence and foreign policy considering that it now subscribes actively to such initiatives as QUAD, AUKUS and IPOI. India's concerns across the Indian and Pacific Oceans have too grown considerably and with that its quest for partnerships with the like-minded countries. Australia and India find a valuable platform for strategic cooperation against expansionist threats as also for multiple areas of economic cooperation including exploration of living and non-living resources, trade, oceanic research and climate change. We therefore expect the Indo-Pacific to be a region for a fast growing and enduring partnership between India and Australia.

Sudhir T. Devare
Editor-in-Chief

28th September, 2023



India and Australia: Strategic Maritime Partners in the Indo-Pacific

Biren Nanda*

ABSTRACT

In this article the author analyses the strategic, security and maritime aspects of cooperation between India and Australia and describes how this relationship is underpinned by growing economic and people to people ties. It addresses a number of important questions including, what are the strategic drivers in the Australia-India Relationship? What are the areas of convergence in the strategic outlooks of the two countries? What are the areas of divergence in the strategic outlooks of the two countries? Why both countries must cooperate within the Regional Security Architecture. What are our doubts and reservations about each other? What common challenges are Australia and India likely to face in the future? How can we develop the Regional Security Architecture for the Indian Ocean region? What is the Evolving Asian Maritime Landscape in the Eastern Indian Ocean? How do we assess the development of India-Australia Defense and Security Ties? How has Civil Nuclear Cooperation consolidated the Strategic Ties between the two countries? What are the prospects for India-Australia Economic and People to People Ties? How does India look at Australia?

What are the Strategic Drivers in the Australia-India Relationship?

China's rise and assertive behavior has been a source of concern to both India and Australia. While India prioritizes its territorial disputes with China and China's growing presence in the Indian Ocean, Australia is concerned about growing tensions in Sino-US relations and the undesirable prospect of having to choose between its ally and its leading trade partner.

Both India and Australia do not wish to alienate China, but both countries do not wish to see the emergence of a China dominated Sino-centric order.

**Ambassador Biren Nanda is a retired career diplomat and former High Commissioner of India to Australia.*

India is working to strengthen strategic partnerships that balance China's rise without compromising its strategic autonomy. This is the driving force behind its growing strategic ties with the United States, Japan and Australia. India and Australia established their strategic partnership in 2009. Bilateral strategic ties have undergone steady development since. There have been regular exchanges of high level visits between India and Australia since 2014.

What are the areas of convergence in the strategic outlooks of the two countries?

First, India is working to strengthen strategic partnerships that balance China's rise, without compromising its strategic autonomy. This is the driving force behind its growing strategic ties with the United States, Japan, and Australia.

Second, India and Australia are well positioned to meet maritime security challenges in the Indian Ocean Region. 'The 'Declaration on a Shared Vision for Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific,' the "Indo-Pacific Oceans Partnership" and the Mutual Logistics Support Agreement' (MLSA) will help realize the potential for practical cooperation on maritime issues.

Third, the two countries have cooperated closely in ASEAN-centric regional institutions, including by reinforcing the EAS's role as the primary forum for consultation amongst leaders in the wider Indo-Pacific region. India and Australia can also focus on targeted cooperation in several multilateral forums they are both members of, including the Commonwealth, Indian Ocean Rim Association, the ASEAN Regional Forum and the ADMM+.

Fourth, Australia and India have shared perspectives on global challenges like international terrorism.

¹ Prime Minister Modi announced the IPOI at the 14 East Asia Summit in Bangkok in November 2019. The initiative will drive deeper engagement between India and regional partners to collaboratively safeguard the oceans; enhance maritime security; preserve marine resources; build capacity and fairly share resources; reduce disaster risk; enhance science, technology and academic cooperation; and promote free, fair and mutually beneficial trade and maritime transport. Australia has undertaken to be a lead partner on the maritime ecology pillar.

What are the areas of divergence in the strategic outlooks of the two countries?

First, there are nuanced differences in the threat assessments of Australia and India. India is more concerned about the Chinese threat across the continental domain. Australia is concerned about the Chinese threat in the maritime domain, Chinese interference in Australia's domestic politics, Chinese attempts at economic coercion and the fear that it would eventually be forced to choose between its alliance partner – the US- and its economic partner –China. However, both countries remain wary of China's destabilizing activities in their respective neighborhoods.

Second, while India supports the emergence of a multipolar order that is inclusive and protects the interests of all stakeholders, Australia is committed to its security alliance with the United States, which it regards as the leading and dominant power in the region. However, India and Australia agree to work together to uphold 'rules-based order', and are increasingly convergent on the threat to 'good order' in the region.

Third, while both India and Australia have stressed that the QUAD is not an anti-China alliance, the context in which the QUAD was revived cannot be overestimated. India's perspective within the Quad is quite distinct: it upholds multipolar stability and an equitable regional order based on cooperation and not dominance. Furthermore, despite the common embrace of the Indo-Pacific as the regional architecture, the US and its allies are mainly focused on Asia Pacific security and their military deployments also correspond to the Asia Pacific. India must meet her continental challenges on her own.

Fourth, While India and Australia have taken divergent positions on Ukraine they have agreed to focus on what is occurring in the Indo-Pacific.²

Why both countries must cooperate within the Regional Security Architecture

India and Australia are well placed to cooperate in addressing the challenges in the Indian Ocean Region. The two countries have cooperated closely in

² (2022, March 21). "India-Australia Virtual Summit: Modi, Morrison calls for enhanced cooperation." The Hindustan Times. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/indiaaustralia-virtual-summit-modi-morrison-call-for-enhanced-cooperation-101647852544353.html>

ASEAN centric regional security institutions. Both countries can seek to reinforce EAS's role as a forum for consultation amongst leaders in the wider Indo-Pacific region. India and Australia can also focus on targeted cooperation in multilateral forums they are both members of like the IORA and the IONS. In the eastern Indian Ocean, India and Australia can cooperate in shaping a regional architecture in the Bay of Bengal which is emerging as a zone of economic and strategic competition in the region, and where China is developing connectivity corridors for its western provinces to the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean. These corridors have the potential for creating growing security challenges for India and Australia in the future. The two countries must also cooperate in ensuring the security of SLOCs and vital choke points for international shipping in the Eastern Indian Ocean.

What are our doubts and reservations about each other?

Australian security analysts support engagement with India, but doubt India's capabilities, citing India's domestic challenges, India's continental security challenges and the lack of sufficient investment in her navy. Moreover, India is seen as being tied up in security issues with China and Pakistan in South Asia and unable to play a significant role in the Indian Ocean. India's security issues with its' neighbors have on occasion constituted an irritant in relations between Australia and India.

As an Indian academic put it India-Australia bilateral relations have been "hindered by a combination of historical baggage, geopolitical uncertainty, suspicion and skepticism". A body of opinion in India observes the lack of political consensus on foreign policy issues between the two major political parties in Australia, the excessive leverage China has in matters related to Australia's trade and limitations in capacity and critical mass relative to India's other partners in the Quad. The Strategic partnership India has with Australia also appears to lack the range and depth of the partnerships India has with the US and Japan. From India's perspective, despite her strategic tilt towards the United States and participation in a web of 2+2 Dialogues tri-laterals and the Quad, India will have to bear the burden of the twin security challenges – maritime and continental – largely on her own, whereas Australia can rely for its' security on the alliance with the United States.

There are nuanced differences in the strategic outlooks of the two countries. While India supports the emergence of a multipolar order that is inclusive and protects the interests of all stakeholders, Australia is committed to the security alliance with the United States which it regards as the leading and dominant power in the region. India and Australia agree to work together to uphold the “rules based order” but what exactly constitutes the “rules-based order” may require further clarity. On the other hand there is a near consensus on identifying the threat to the “good order.” Strategic divergences also exist between India, Japan and the United States but these relations are sustained by greater common ground in a wide range of areas including on connectivity, infrastructure building and maritime security.

Two issues have stimulated considerable debate amongst strategic and security experts in Australia. The first relates to Australia’s participation in the *Malabar exercises* and second relates to the *Quad*. The AUSINDEX series of exercises have over years increased in their complexity and the two navies are considerably enthused about the progress made. This augurs well for the future. We should not underestimate the significance of these exercises by comparing them to the Malabar, which have taken place regularly since 1992. Australia was finally included as a permanent member of ‘Exercise Malabar’ in 2020 amid the standoff with China in Eastern Ladakh.

On the Quad, there are two distinct perspectives. One regards the Quad as an alliance to contain China and therefore provocative and undesirable. The second view regards the Quad as never having amounted to much and unlikely to do so in the future, given the hesitations of its constituent members.

What common challenges are Australia and India likely to face in the future?

India and Australia face a number of common challenges emanating from the geopolitical trends in Asia. **First**, China’s aggressive behavior on the India-China LAC, the South China Sea and in the South Pacific will likely continue over time. **Second**, there will continue to be concerns over the reliability and consistency of the United States as an ally or a partner. **Third**, middle powers in the region – Japan, India and Australia will play a vital role in maintaining the regional balance of power.

The heightened profile and policy coordination within the Quad, mini-laterals and 2+2 Dialogues is a positive development – and so is the deterrent symbolism of naval exercises like the Malabar. The United States must frame the narrative around realizing the goal of a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” rather than the objective of “containing China.” The ability of the United States and its partners to offer an alternative to the BRI will be a key factor in influencing outcomes which will determine which country will be the preeminent power in Asia.

How can we develop a Regional Security Architecture for the Indian Ocean

Two thirds of the global shipments of oil, half the container traffic and one third of the bulk cargo pass through the SLOCs of the Indian Ocean. The Indian Ocean is rich in mineral resources and fossil fuels on the seabed. Navies of 40 countries, including those of the US, Russia, China, India, Australia, France and the UK are active in the region. There are a number of *traditional security* challenges including: (1) competition between great powers (2) Extraterritorial powers using territory in the India Ocean for staging purposes e.g. Diego Garcia by the US and Djibouti and Gwadar by China. (3) *Non-traditional security* challenges including terrorism, maritime piracy and robbery off the coast of Somalia, the Straits of Malacca and in the waters of Indonesia. The region is also rife with organized smuggling syndicates and money laundering networks.

India is a leading security provider for the safety of SLOCs in the Indian Ocean Region. India hosts the *MILAN* - biennial naval Exercises with the participation of littoral navies. The Indian Navy participates in *joint coordinated patrols* with navies of Myanmar, Thailand and Indonesia. India regards MDAs as a priority in its overall maritime strategy. India set up an *International Fusion Center* in Gurgaon in December 2018, in pursuance of a commitment made at the IORA Summit in 2017. India is presently developing the Andaman and Nicobar Islands as a strategic security hub. India is also enhancing its maritime surveillance capability through the acquisition and deployment of the P8i maritime surveillance aircraft. India is also shaping the Regional Architecture in the Bay of Bengal through the BIMSTEC initiative.

India has signed MDAs with littoral countries. India is a founder member of CGPCS and has participated in anti-piracy patrols in the Gulf of Aden since 2008. India was a first responder after the Tsunami of 2004. The India Navy conducted the evacuation of Indian nationals from Libya, Iraq, Syria and Yemen. India was a founder member of the IONS. India has provided hydrographic support and training to littoral navies. India's guiding paradigm has been SAGAR – "Security and Growth' for all.

IORA has contributed to the development of a regional architecture in the Indian Ocean region through the "Working Group on Maritime Safety and Security" and the annual "Indian Ocean Dialogue." In 2017 in order to tackle the problem of piracy, the Indian Ocean Dialogue adopted the "Shared Awareness and De-confliction program (SHADE)" (an international political platform based in Bahrain intended to develop a structured strategy aimed at coordinating international naval activities combating piracy and people smuggling) and the "Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia." There is a lack of a pan IOR network for surveillance, MDA and intelligence sharing amongst national security agencies. The main reason for this is a trust deficit, competing surveillance, claims, military competition among regional countries and the persistence of regional conflicts e.g. in Yemen.

What is the Evolving Asian Maritime Landscape in the Eastern Indian Ocean

Recent years have witnessed significant changes in Asia's Maritime landscape. There has been an escalation in great power rivalry, heightened geopolitical competition and conflict. The *Bay of Bengal* is now a critical theatre for economic and strategic competition. It has always been a connector between South and Southeast Asia, but now it is the focal point for competing connectivity initiatives.

India and Australia are well placed to cooperate in addressing the challenges in the eastern Indian Ocean Region. The two countries have cooperated closely in ASEAN centric regional security institutions. Both countries can seek to reinforce EAS's role as a forum for consultation amongst leaders in the wider Indo-Pacific region. India and Australia can also focus on targeted cooperation in multilateral forums they are both members of like the IORA and the IONS.

In the eastern Indian Ocean, India and Australia can cooperate in shaping a regional architecture in the Bay of Bengal which is emerging as a zone of economic and strategic competition in the region, and where China is developing connectivity corridors for its western provinces to the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean. These corridors have the potential for creating growing security challenges for India and Australia in the future. For reasons outlined here there is a growing urgency for the two countries to cooperate in ensuring the security of SLOCs and vital choke points for international shipping in the Eastern Indian Ocean.

How do we assess the development of India-Australia Defense and Security Ties?

The security relations between India and Australia have gained momentum. Both the countries expect each to play a greater role in their Indo-Pacific neighbourhood. In 2008 the two countries signed the *Joint Security Declaration* which established the framework for the security relationship. The Declaration identified eight potential areas for cooperation including the defense dialogue, information exchange, policy coordination in regional affairs, cooperation in multilateral forums, counterterrorism and combatting transnational organized crime. The security cooperation between the two countries must address a range of traditional security challenges including territorial issues and maritime security, and a growing number of non-traditional security challenges like piracy, cyber security, natural disasters and pandemics.

Two factors have played a major role in uplifting bilateral security ties. – **first**, the development of strong strategic ties between India and the US and **second**, the common threat posed by the rise of an aggressive and assertive China.

This new Asian Geopolitics is markedly different from that which existed during the Cold War. Then during the fight against communism the US extended its security umbrella and allowed Southeast Asian countries to focus on economic growth and domestic stability. Now China has displaced Japan as Asia's largest economy and China's GDP is 5 times that of Southeast Asia. The capacity of the US, Japan and Australia to offer a combined response to this new geopolitics is under challenge.

India and Australia have improved their strategic coordination, military interoperability and maritime cooperation. They engage in regular military exercises³- Pitch Black, Kakadu, Malabar, MILAN and the reciprocal deployment of P8s in Goa and Darwin- professional exchanges, training exchanges, operational coordination, cyber and nascent defense technology cooperation⁴. Future cooperation should involve deepening these activities. Exploring the potential of defense sales from Australia to India is another area that needs to be examined.⁵ India has in the past expressed an interest in Busmaster and Hawkei light mobility vehicles radar technologies and undersea applications.

How has Civil Nuclear Cooperation Consolidated the Strategic Ties between the two countries.

India and Australia signed a Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement in 2014 for the sale of Uranium to India, which came into effect in 2015. A bill on Civil Nuclear Transfers to India was passed by both Australian houses of Parliament in November 2016. Through the NCA Australia consolidated its strategic relationship with India. Australia has already commenced exports of Uranium to India. The potential and scale of future supplies will depend upon Australia's competitiveness in this market.

What are the prospects for India-Australia Economic and People to People Ties?

As the Indian economy grows, the global situation presents a mixed picture. On one hand, we are growing at a healthy pace, increasing our share in global trade and output. On the other hand, many obstacles have to be overcome if we are to sustain rapid growth in the years ahead.

³ In addition to Malabar, the two countries participate in the AUSINDEX naval exercises – 10 bilateral exercises and 17 multilateral exercises as of 2022. This year the Indian Air Force has participated in the Pitch Black and Kakadu Naval exercises in Australia, while the Australian Navy has participated in the MILAN exercises. The INS Sumeda made a goodwill visit to Australia on the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations. Facilitated by the mutual logistics support agreement India has deployed P8 aircraft to Darwin and Australia has deployed P8s in Goa.

⁴ A joint working group between the DRDO and Australia's Defense Science and technology group was set up in 2018.

⁵ India has in the past expressed an interest in Busmaster and Hawkei light mobility vehicles radar technologies and under sea applications.

Particularly important are the supply side constraints of the Indian economy's narrative of "catch up growth" including Energy, Water, Food, Infrastructure and not in the least Education and Skills Training. It is no surprise, therefore, that these supply side constraints are the driving force behind the rapid growth in ties between India and Australia. There is much that India can gain from interaction and exchanges with Australia in terms of best practices, improved capabilities and the additionality of resources.

Australia is a major and growing source for imports of resources - gold, copper, coal and diamonds for the Indian economy. Indian companies have invested in the resources and manufacturing sectors in Australia.

The Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement (2014) is a critical element in our strategic partnership. Nuclear power generation is an important element in India's efforts to achieve energy security and to reduce the carbon footprint of the economy.

Australian companies possess expertise, technology and products in a number of areas of interest to India. They are increasingly looking to opportunities in manufacturing, telecom, logistics, steel production technologies, mining technologies, energy exploration, infrastructure projects, healthcare and financial services. Australian investments in India are making significant contributions to the economic relationship between the two countries. The proposed revision of the Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement will help expand business ties between the two countries.

Australia is one of the major destinations for Indian students studying abroad. 72,600 Indian students were studying in Australia's tertiary and vocational education sectors in Q1 2022. A number of formal agreements have been concluded between Australian and Indian universities. They involve student and staff exchanges, joint programs in India as well as research collaboration. Some Universities in India are also seeking collaboration arrangements to guide the institutions in their efforts to increase focus on research in the future.

Skills training and vocational education presents a huge opportunity for Australia to leverage and benefit from Indian growth in the coming decades. In the past India's National Skills Development Council has tied up with Skills Australia to set skill's standards in collaboration with Industry Skills Councils

in India. In March 2022, Australia announced the establishment of the “The Australia India Future Skills Initiative” which will establish a digital platform, to connect Australian vocational education, training and skills providers with Indian businesses, government, students and employers.

In science and technology, we have been cooperating in a number of focus areas including tsunami early warning, clean energy and joint research projects. The Australia India Strategic Research Fund (AISF) is an outstanding example of how we have collaborated together in scientific research and how our institutions have successfully developed networks in either country⁶.

The India Australia **Critical Minerals Research Partnership** and the India Australia **Critical Minerals Investment Partnership** will strengthen supply chains and work on the commercialization of technology.

After a decade of intermittent negotiations India and Australia signed an interim free trade agreement. Under the agreement annual bilateral trade is expected to double from US dollars 27.5 billion to US dollars 45 to 50 billion over the next five years. The deal will eliminate tariffs on 85%⁷ of Australian exports to India – this will rise to 91% in a decade. 96% of Indian exports entering Australia will become duty free.

Apart from regular chapters like Trade in Goods and Services, Technical Barriers to Trade, Sanitary and Phytosanitary measures and temporary movement of natural persons and the mutual recognition of professional qualifications, the ECTA makes broad commitments on certain products and visas, addresses technical barriers faced by the pharmaceutical industry and introduces Tariff Rate Quotas (TRQs).

The conclusion of the first part of the ECTA represents a “watershed” moment for our bilateral relations. The agreement will increase the resilience of supply chains and also contribute to the stability of the Indo-Pacific region.”

⁶ The AISF supports science & technology collaboration in the areas of agricultural research, astronomy and astrophysics, environmental sciences, microelectronics, nanotechnology, renewable energy, marine sciences and earth systems sciences. Many of these projects touch the daily lives of people in India.

⁷ This will increase to 91% in a decade.

How Does India Look at Australia?

This is what our Prime Minister conveyed to the Australian Parliament in 2014.

“Today, the world sees Australia to be at the heart of the Asia Pacific and Indian Ocean region. This dynamic region holds the key to this world’s future; and Australia is at its cross-currents. And, as Australia has become more engaged in this part of the world, we welcome its growing role in driving this region’s prosperity and shaping its security. Because we, in India, seek the same future for this world. We also see Australia as a vital partner in India’s quest for progress and prosperity.”

★ ★ ★

Australia-India Relations in an Evolving Indo-Pacific

Iqbal Singh Sevea*

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese arrived in Delhi on 8th September 2023 to participate in the G20 Summit. The Summit also provided an opportunity for Australia-India bilateral discussions on the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA). CECA is a free trade pact being negotiated between Australia and India that is projected to bring mutual benefits for both countries, foster inclusive economic growth and spur strategic preferential partnerships.¹ Although the idea for CECA was first mooted in 2010, negotiations proved tough and were eventually suspended in 2016. Both countries have now identified a number of areas that could be included in the trade pact. These include the agricultural sector, mining, critical minerals and space cooperation. It is important to note that a number of sectors ringfenced for possible inclusion in the CECA are areas that have not been incorporated by India in any of its previous trade agreements. The renewed commitment towards concluding CECA swiftly reflects a broader commitment from Australia and India to strengthen their economic, bilateral, strategic and defense partnership. Indeed, at the inaugural India-Australia Annual Summit, which was hosted in New Delhi, India, in March 2023, prime ministers Narendra Modi and Albanese highlighted an extensive range of issues, including trade, education, mobility, defense, national security and renewable energy in which Australia and India's interests converged and were conducive for development.

* Associate Professor Iqbal Singh Sevea is Director of the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) at the National University of Singapore (NUS).

¹ Anita Medhekar, 'Unlocking Australia and India's Trade Potential', *East Asia Forum*, 31 May 2023. <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2023/05/31/unlocking-australia-and-indias-trade-potential/> (Accessed 01 September 2023).

Such a commitment to deepening Australia-India relations is occurring within, and reflective of, an evolving geopolitical and geoeconomic context. The intensifying competition between the United States and China, and China's maritime posturing in the Indo-Pacific have led Australia to undertake a major reassessment of its defense and strategic positioning in the Indo-Pacific. In the words of Prime Minister Albanese, Australia's Defence Strategic Review (DSR), which was released in April 2023, aimed to ensure that "Australia has the necessary capability to defend ourselves in the most complex strategic environment we have encountered as a nation in over 70 years."² Two aspects of the DSR are particularly relevant to Australia-India relations. Firstly, it is foregrounded on the idea that the US is no longer the unipolar leader of the Indo-Pacific. The Review recognizes that the Indo-Pacific is a region increasingly being shaped by regional actors and defined by "an emerging multipolar distribution of power."³ Within this context, Australia needs to complement its defense and strategic relations with the US with deeper and broader relations with various regional powers to ensure a balance of power. Minister for Foreign Affairs Penny Wong succinctly described Australia's approach as laid out in the DSR as one of ensuring "strategic equilibrium" by working with other powers that share a commitment to shaping a stable, predictable and rules-based Indo-Pacific region.⁴

Thus, countries like India and Japan are increasingly important to Australia. The DSR also advocates a wholistic approach towards national defense and stresses the need for a 'whole of government' approach that will enable the deployment of all "tools of statecraft – to help shape the region."⁵ Trade, economics, technology and even the private-sector are seen as integral parts

² 'Transcript Defence Strategic Review; Australian Defence Force; Taiwan; China; Voice to Parliament; Indigenous Australians; cost of living; interest rates, Press conference – Parliament House Canberra', 03 August 2022. <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/press-conference-parliament-house-canberra-0> (Accessed 25 August 2022).

³ See Australia's Defence Strategic Review. <https://www.defence.gov.au/about/reviews-inquiries/defence-strategic-review>.

⁴ 'National Press Club Address, Australian interests in a regional balance of power', Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 17 April 2023. <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/penny-wong/speech/national-press-club-address-australian-interests-regional-balance-power>. (Accessed 23 April 2023).

⁵ Penny Wong, 'Launch of Australia's International Development Policy', Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aJtNryxOjHk> (Accessed 9 August 2023).

of securing Australia's national interests. Economic statecraft and issues like securing supply chains, access to critical minerals, governance in the blue economy and collaboration in space are, thus, strategic issues like defense agreements. Furthermore, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is central to the shaping of relations with various regional powers.

India's geographical location coupled with its drive to expand the capacity of its navy and coast guards makes it an important partner for Australia in the evolving Indo-Pacific maritime landscape. In 2023, India increased the budget allocated for its navy by nearly 45 percent. This additional allocation will allow India's navy to purchase new ships, submarines and equipment.⁶ Importantly, it will also enable it to expand its maritime surveillance capabilities. These are, no doubt, in response to China's expansion of its navy and assertive posture in the Indian Ocean. From India's perspective, Australia is not only an important economic partner but also a key strategic partner in the Indian Ocean. This was highlighted by the fact that the Indian submarine INS Vagir called at Freemantle, Australia, to participate in joint exercises with the Royal Australian Navy off the western coast of Australia. This was the first time that an Indian submarine had called in Australia. The location of the joint exercises that it was involved in is also worth noting. Australia recently signaled a renewed interest in the Indian Ocean, an area that had thus far been of secondary importance when compared to its position viz-a-viz the Pacific Ocean. China's escalating presence in the Indian Ocean and the growing importance of Australia's northern and western coast for supply chains, critical minerals and renewable energy has now drawn more strategic attention in Australia to the eastern Indian Ocean. In addition to having extensive gas pipelines in the area, Australia's plans to develop infrastructure for renewable energy in the west coast raise concerns about the region's vulnerability.⁷ The potential for deep-sea mining has further accentuated such concerns.

Given the 'whole of government' approach to national security and the increasing focus on the Indian Ocean in Australia, this paper reviews three

⁶ Abhishek Bhalla, 'Increase in Indian Navy's budget aims at enhancing fleet to deter Chinese Navy expansion', *India Today*, 2 Feb 2022. <https://www.indiatoday.in/business/budget-2022/story/increase-indian-navy-budget-aims-enhancing-fleet-deter-chinese-navy-expansion-1907972-2022-02-02> (Accessed 04 February 2022).

⁷ Samuel Bashfield, 'Seabed Warfare, Australia, India and the Indian Ocean', *Raisina Debates*, 12 September 2023.

key areas that are significant to the future of Australia-India relations. These are bilateral strategic relations; expanding trade relations; and agreements over critical minerals. It is important to note in this regard that while China looms large in the calculations of both countries, the convergence between them goes beyond China.⁸ They have shared concerns over maritime security, supply chain disruptions, access to critical minerals, climate change and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.

The evolving geopolitical landscape has directly resulted in a deepening of defense and security cooperation between Australia and India. While both countries have long enjoyed friendly diplomatic relations, defense cooperation between the two had been restricted due to India's limited maritime ambitions and Australia's focus on the Pacific Ocean. Strategic reconfigurations in the wake of the geopolitical and geoeconomic clout of China as well as the desire to develop and secure supply chains has, however, pushed both to steadily enhance their defense ties. The upgrading of relations between Australia and India into the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) in 2020 had significant implications on defense relations and the shaping of a converging vision of the Indo-Pacific and importance of the maritime domain. Both sides agreed to deepen defense cooperation, increase military inter-operability through defense exercises and strengthen collaborations in the realm of defense science and technology.⁹ Both countries also issued a Joint Declaration on a Shared Vision for Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific that stressed the need to facilitate deeper and expanded engagement between themselves.¹⁰ Apart from expressing collective support for regional institutions and initiatives like India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), which seeks to shape cooperation in the maritime domain, Australia and India expressed their willingness to cooperate to ensure an 'Open and Inclusive Indo-Pacific.' The strategic

⁸ Shubhamitra Das, 'India-Australia Defence Cooperation and Collaboration in the Indo-Pacific', *Australian Outlook*, 31 January 2023 <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/india-australia-defence-cooperation-and-collaboration-in-the-indo-pacific/> (Accessed 07 September 2023).

⁹ 'Joint Statement on a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between Republic of India and Australia', Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/india/joint-statement-comprehensive-strategic-partnership-between-republic-india-and-australia> (Accessed 01 September 2023).

¹⁰ Ibid.

wording employed here indicated a convergence or alignment of strategic visions on the Indo-Pacific. Following the CSP, a '2+2' format ministerial dialogue involving foreign and defense ministers was established to discuss strategic issues.

Since 2020, burgeoning Australia-India defense and strategic cooperation has been manifested in four primary domains: bilateral exercises, information sharing, defense technology cooperation and the re-emergence of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. In terms of bilateral relations, Australia and India have participated in a number of joint military exercises including the Australia-India Exercise; Indo-Pacific Endeavour; and the Malabar military exercises. Australia had invited India to participate in the recently concluded Exercise Talisman Sabre, which brought together more than 34,000 military personnel from 13 countries. India, however, opted to join Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines as an observer to the Exercise rather than a participant and has reportedly signaled its intent to join the next round of the Exercise.¹¹ The China factor clearly plays an important role in the expansion of such military exercises. Such joint exercises have been supplemented by a range of technical arrangements such as the Mutual Logistics Support Arrangement and the Defence Science and Technology Implementing Arrangement, which have codified practices of increased transparency and synergy between the two militaries and laid the ground for greater technological defense collaboration. In addition to this, the General Rawat India-Australia Young Defence Officer Exchange Program, which was launched in 2023, allows officers from both countries to attend military educational institutions in the other country. Australia has already sent 15 officers to India as part of this program, and India is expected to do the same in 2024.

Growing defense ties between Australia and India are reflective of the broader geopolitical dynamics playing out in the Indo-Pacific. While India is building its maritime capacity and looking to deepen strategic engagements, Australia has been pivoting to paying closer attention to the

¹¹ See 'Official opening of Exercise Talisman Sabre: Media Release', Australian Ministry of Defence, 21 July 2023. <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/media-releases/2023-07-21/official-opening-exercise-talisman-sabre> and Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, 'Why Did India Merely Observe Exercise Talisman Sabre 2023?', *The Diplomat*, 12 August 2023. <https://thediplomat.com/2023/08/why-did-india-merely-observer-exercise-talisman-sabre-2023/>.

Indian Ocean region. It is important to note that the commitment to developing defense and strategic relations between Australia and India cut across party lines. In Australia, key steps to building this relationship were taken by the previous Liberal Party government led by Scott Morrison. The current Labour Party government led by Albanese has built upon these. While Prime Minister Albanese has toned down the rhetoric against China, his government is heavily invested in developing stronger ties with regional powers and engaging states in the Indian Ocean region. This is clear from the principles laid out in the DSR. The Albanese government is also firmly committed to AUKUS, which is a multidecade nuclear-powered submarine plan that has been met with opposition from China.¹² Meanwhile, in India despite domestic political battles, a cross-party consensus seems to have arisen on matters relating to foreign affairs and India's strategic positioning in the Indo-Pacific.¹³ Thus, the relationship between India and Australia is poised to deepen and it will no doubt have an impact on the security architecture of the Indo-Pacific.

The deepening defense and strategic relations are complemented by burgeoning economic ties. The Australia-India economic relationship has steadily grown in recent years. In 2022, India emerged as Australia's 9th largest trading partner and according to projections by the Global Trade Research Initiative, bilateral trade between India and Australia is likely to amount to US\$70 billion by 2028.¹⁴ Trade flows between the two countries are also increasingly diversified. India's major exports include petroleum products, textiles and apparel, engineering goods, leather, pearls, mechanical appliances, iron and steel, and gems and jewellery.¹⁵ Conversely, India's imports from Australia include coal, edibles, chemicals and minerals. It is worth noting here that coal generally accounted for approximately 74 percent of India's

¹² Daniel Hurst and Julian Borger, 'Aukus: nuclear submarines deal will cost Australia up to \$368bn', *Guardian*, 13 March 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/mar/14/aukus-nuclear-submarines-australia-commits-substantial-funds-into-expanding-us-shipbuilding-capacity> (Accessed 01 September 2023).

¹³ C. Raja Mohan, 'Rahul Gandhi and India's Foreign Policy Consensus', *ISAS Briefs*, 12 June 2023.

¹⁴ Quoted in 'India-Australia ECTA: Key Benefits', *India Briefing*, 12 January 2023.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

imports from Australia; a major proportion of this being coking coal.¹⁶ In the first quarter of 2023, the supply from Australia dipped due to India's move to acquire cheaper coal from Russia. Such a shift is, however, likely to be a mere short-term adjustment due to Russia's temporary price advantage. In the long term, Australia's importance as a source of coal is only likely to grow. It is anticipated that Australia's metallurgical coal exports will rise substantially by 2027 and that the bulk of this is going to go to India and China. India is envisaged as a more important market than China for two reasons. Firstly, India's expanding steelmaking industry coupled with its commitment to net zero emissions and decarbonization will push it to expand its import of metallurgical coal, which emits less carbon dioxide and is critical for the development of renewable energy infrastructure. Secondly, the fact that China imposed a ban on the import of coal from Australia in 2020 has incentivized Australian leaders to focus more on India as the market of the future to avoid geopolitically motivated disruptions to the market.

As the case of coal indicates, growing economic relations should not be divorced from the strengthening strategic relations and geopolitical context. It was noted above that there is a renewed commitment to swiftly conclude a CECA between Australia and India. This is linked to developments in the bilateral, strategic and defense partnership between the two countries. It is also spurred by the success of the Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA) that was finalized as an interim trade pact as both countries negotiated terms surrounding the CECA. The ECTA covers several crucial areas, including trade in goods, trade in services, rules of origin, technical barriers to trade, customs procedures and trade facilitation, trade remedies, legal, and institutional issues, and the movement of natural persons. In accordance with the ECTA, Australia provided India with zero-duty access to its market for nearly 96.4 percent of exports by value from the day the agreement took effect. In return, India grants Australia preferential access to over 70 percent of its tariff lines

¹⁶ See 'India Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement: A Win-Win for India and Australia', Ministry of Commerce & Industry, India, 08 January 2023 <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1889525> and '10 years in making, India and Australia seal landmark free-trade deal', *Economic Times*, 02 April 2022. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade/10-years-in-making-india-and-australia-seal-landmark-free-trade-deal/articleshow/90604225.cms?from=mdr>. (Accessed 13 August 2023).

including in sectors like raw materials, coal and mineral ores.¹⁷ The early effects of the ECTA have been promising for India. It has witnessed a 15 percent reduction in its trade deficit with Australia due largely to the increase in exports of pharmaceuticals, electrical machinery, and iron and steel products. Meanwhile, Australia's Trade Minister noted that ECTA would save Australian exporters around \$2 billion annually in tariffs while ensuring consumers and businesses \$500 million in tariff savings on imports of finished goods and manufacturing inputs.¹⁸

Looking ahead, agreements relating to the mining sector and critical minerals will be particularly important. The Australian government is pushing ahead to ensure that the country is a major global supplier of critical minerals and is looking to secure markets for its raw materials. India, on its part, requires a stable and uninterrupted supply of critical minerals. Critical minerals such as lithium, graphite, cobalt and titanium will be crucial to the future economy and to ensure the green transition. The fact that Australia can be an important source of cleaner coal for India has been noted above. However, critical mineral supply chains are susceptible to disruptions and not free from geopolitical powerplay. It is important to note here that the fact that these minerals are geographically concentrated in limited areas and that the process of extraction and refining is both extremely costly and requires specialized technology. This has resulted in limited and, at times, disrupted access. This is, in turn, spurring competition to secure supply chains. As it stands, China has emerged as the dominant player in the critical mineral supply chain. Almost 50 to 70 percent of global lithium and cobalt refining; 90 per cent of processing operations that are converting rare earths into metals and magnets; and 70 percent of global electric vehicle manufacturing capacity are dominated by China.¹⁹

This has led Australia and India to develop their respective strategies towards securing critical mineral supply chains through bilateral and multilateral

¹⁷ See, for instance, 'India-Australia ECTA: Key Benefits'.

¹⁸ 'Trade deal with India delivers from 29 December', Joint Media Release: Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and Minister of Trade and Tourism Don Farrell, 20 November 2022. <https://www.trademinister.gov.au/minister/don-farrell/media-release/trade-deal-india-delivers-29-december> (Assessed 29 August 2023).

¹⁹ I am grateful here for inputs from Devyani Chaturvedi.

ties. In 2019, Australia launched its Critical Minerals Strategy with the aim of developing Australia into a “world powerhouse” through financing and supporting extraction and processing projects.²⁰ Since then, it has invested extensively in research and development. While India is projected to have one-fifth of the world’s rare-earth reserves, it still lacks the production and processing capacity required to sufficiently exploit them for commercial purposes. India has, thus, focused on ensuring access to critical minerals through bilateral relations, particularly with Australia. Take for instance the agreement negotiated between Australia and India to enable the Indian public sector company Khanji Bidesh India Ltd (KABIL) to collaborate with Australia’s Critical Mineral Facilitation Office (CMFO) to acquire lithium, nickel, cobalt and rare earths. KABIL is a joint venture formed between three Indian government-run companies namely National Aluminium Company, Hindustan Copper Limited and Mineral Exploration Corporation to explore, acquire and mine assets overseas.

The centrality of critical minerals in Australia-India bilateral relations is further evident in the India-Australia Critical Minerals Partnership. This is an agreement that focuses on investment, extraction and processing of critical minerals. Under this partnership, the two countries have identified five target projects. Two of these projects are lithium-related and three focus on cobalt.²¹ As it stands, Australia is the second-largest producer of cobalt and one of the largest producers of lithium in the world. This partnership will enable Australia to secure a market and supply chains while providing India with lithium and cobalt which are essential to the batteries needed for the production of electric vehicles. Apart from this, agreements in the critical minerals sector are seen as an important aspect of economic diplomacy and engagement between both countries. In line with this, both countries have worked to facilitate private-sector collaboration. For instance, India has introduced legal reforms that allow Australian companies to have exploration rights in India and more

²⁰ Natasha Jha Bhaskar, ‘India-Australia Cooperation on Trade in Critical Minerals’, *ISAS Insights*. 18 March 2021 <https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/657.pdf> (Assessed 01 September 2023).

²¹ ‘Milestone in India and Australia critical minerals investment partnership’, Media Release: Minister for Resources, Madeline King, 10 March 2023, <https://www.minister.industry.gov.au/ministers/king/media-releases/milestone-india-and-australia-critical-minerals-investment-partnership> (Assessed 01 September 2023).

than 40 Australian mining companies have already developed collaborations in India.²²

Overall, Australia and India are actively deepening and broadening their relations. Geopolitical churning has resulted in both countries taking a holistic view of their strategic interests. Thus, supply chains, economic diplomacy, people-to-people connections and private sector engagements are not seen in total isolation from defense relations. The timely conclusion of a CECA between the two countries will further entrench their bilateral ties and unlock the economic potential of the relationship. Crucially, it will also go some way in ensuring energy security. More broadly, the expansion of India's naval and maritime surveillance capacity and Australia's turn towards the eastern Indian Ocean will also impact the security architecture of the Indo-Pacific.



²² See Neha Mishra, 'India-Australia rare earth supply chain collaboration', *Raisina Debates*, 01 July 2023. <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/india-australia-rare-earth-supply-chain-collaboration/> (Assessed 04 July 2023).

India-Australia Maritime Outlook in the Realm Indo-Pacific

GG Dwivedi*

Introduction

The Indo-Pacific as a geo-political construct has emerged as a substitute for the erstwhile Asia-Pacific, signifying the eastward shift in balance of power dynamics from Euro-Atlantic. An integrated entity, it is a fusion between Indian and Pacific Oceans, and surrounding land masses. From the Western perspective, Indo-Pacific geographic space stretches from the US West Coast to India's Western shores. However, for India and Japan, Indo-Pacific framework is far broader, its expanse stretching up to Africa's Eastern seaboard.

The architecture of Indo-Pacific is still evolving, both in the strategic and economic domains, prime focus being the major sea-lanes. The concept per se has its origin in Weimar German geo politics,¹ revived in 2006 through Japanese initiative duly complemented by US. It was formalized in 2016-17 by the Japanese PM Shinzo Abe, wherein he laid down the vision and report titled "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy".² There are number of

**Major General GG Dwivedi, SM, VSM & Bar retired as Assistant Chief Integrated Defence Staff, after 38 years of distinguished service. A Veteran of Bangladesh War, he later commanded Battalion in Siachen (Northern Glacier), Brigade in Kashmir Valley, Division in the North East; served as Defence Attaché in China, North Korea and Mongolia. An alumnus of National Defence College and Harvard Kennedy School, he has PhD from JNU in International Relations. Currently, is Adjunct Professor and Distinguished Fellow at USI, Senior Fellow at Alon Ben-Meir Centre, New York. An acclaimed writer and speaker, he regularly appears as a panellist on the national TV.*

¹ Hansong Li, (June 04, 2021), "The "Indo-Pacific": Intellectual Origins and International Visions in Global Contexts", *Cambridge University Press*. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/modern-intellectual-history/article/indopacific-intellectual-origins-and-international-visions-in-global-contexts/21B142B132F694349D46CAD22EA8C7CD>

² "Achieving the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) Vision", *Japan Ministry of Defense's Approach*, https://www.mod.go.jp/en/d_act/exc/india_pacific/india_pacific-en.html

major economies located in the Indo-Pacific, including US, India, Japan, Australia and ASEAN group. The region accounts for 65 percent of world population, 63 percent of global GDP and 46 percent of world merchandise trade.³

It was in 2013 that Australia in its White Paper identified Indo-Pacific as a new theatre in pursuit of a robust security strategy. In 2018, Indian PM Modi at the Shangri la Dialogue spelt out nation's vision of Indo-Pacific; embracing all in a common pursuit of progress and prosperity. Hence, the partnership between India and Australia in the realm of Indo-Pacific is driven by their shared vision, recognition of significance this region as a global geo political- economic center. Besides, there is high degree of convergence in their national interests, which encompass common values, maintaining regional stability, promoting free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific, adhering to rule-based international order while being resilient to coercion. Geographic proximity to crucial 'Sea Lanes of Communications' (SLOCs) and region's security dynamics have contributed towards strengthening Indo- Australian partnership.

Over the years, New Delhi and Canberra have deepened their economic connection. In 2020, the strategic partnership between the two countries was elevated to 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership'. An array of institutional mechanism has been put in place to promote bilateral cooperation. In 2022, two nations signed 'Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement.' The bilateral trade reached \$ 27.5 billion in 2022, and expected to realize target of \$ 45-50 billion by 2035.⁴

Both countries have pledged to conclude a comprehensive trade deal by the end of 2023, seeking to expand engagement in the fields such as agriculture, critical minerals, mobility, education, sports, space and defence & technology.

In the security domain, critical areas of focus include alignment of geo strategic goals, marine and cyber security, counter terrorism, defence

³ Ambar Kumar Ghosh, Debosmita Sarkar, Anasua Basu Ray Chaudhury, (February 25, 2022,) "Security, Economy, and Ecology: Setting Priorities for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific", *Observer Research Foundation (ORF)*. https://www.orfonline.org/research/security-economy-and-ecology/#_edn5

⁴ "India Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement: A Win-Win for India and Australia", (January 08, 2023) *Ministry of Commerce & Industry*. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1889525>

cooperation including joint military exercises and exchange of strategic information. India and Australia have also been exploring opportunities for cooperation in regional connectivity and supporting transparent and sustainable infrastructure projects especially in the Indo-Pacific. Some of the specific areas of maritime outlook between the two strategic partners are enumerated in the succeeding paras.

Maritime Outlook-Salient Facets

Cooperation and Challenges-Indo-Pacific

As two key stakeholders of Indo-Pacific Region (IPR), India and Australia have reiterated their commitment to promoting peace and prosperity in the region, crucial for the world at large. They have a common interest in ensuring freedom of navigation and overflights in the area, besides maintaining open, safe and conducive SLOCs. Both nations are committed to honour the 'United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea' (UNCLOS) as also other international laws and standards. India and Australia have overlapping concerns about strategic, security and environmental challenges in the Indo-Pacific maritime space. These include maritime-related activities that violate international laws- such as terrorism, piracy, drug and weapon smuggling, irregular migration, human trafficking, marine species robbing, and illegal fishing. Environmental issues include marine pollution, climate change, ocean acidification, shortage of potable water, loss of habitat due to storm surges and saline water intrusion. Key initiatives to address these challenges include high-level meetings between the two Governments, Australia-India Maritime Dialogue and 'Navy-to-Navy' staff meetings as part of the institutionalized mechanism.⁵

Given the mutual interest in improving maritime security and safety, India and Australia are keen to expand intelligence sharing between their respective navies in order to strengthen marine domain awareness, throughout the Indo-Pacific. Additionally, both nations are engaged to improve collaboration between their respective coast guards and law enforcement agencies in civil maritime

⁵ "Joint Declaration on a Shared Vision for Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific Between The Republic of India and the Government of Australia", (June 04, 2020), *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade*, Australian Government. <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/india/joint-declaration-shared-vision-maritime-cooperation-indo-pacific-between-republic-india-and-government-australia>

domain. Given the importance of crucial sea trade routes and resources, both India and Australia seek to assert their interests in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) in view of China's expanding influence in the area. China's maritime activities and infrastructure development in the Indian Ocean, especially the 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI), have raised concerns for both countries, leading to closer cooperation to manage and balance out China's influence. Piracy and marine security are issues that the region is dealing with, especially with respect to China.⁶

The IOR is home to significant marine resources, including fisheries and hydrocarbons. Managing these resources sustainably, avoiding degradation due to over exploitation is a common challenge for India and Australia. Rising sea levels, ocean warming and deterioration of environment pose threats to coastal areas of both countries. There are contentious maritime claims and legal disputes created by China, which could lead to tensions. Quad as a group can be a facilitator to address such challenges, details covered subsequently in the paper.

Addressing the Voids in Indo-Pacific

In order to strengthen regional architecture in the wake of Chinese growing arrogance in the region, India and Australia are seeking to cooperate bilaterally, regionally and multilaterally through mini lateral agreements. Realizing the centrality of ASEAN in the Indo-Pacific for maritime cooperation, India and Australia have committed to scale up their engagement in fora like the East Asia Summit, ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting-Plus, Indian Ocean Rim Association, Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, Indian Ocean Tuna Commission and International Maritime Organization.⁷

Addressing the capacity issues faced by 'Pacific Island Nations' (PINs) by way of marine security is indeed crucial. The strategic horizon of India,

⁶ "Quad to curb China's illegal fishing in Indo-Pacific", *ANI*, August 20, 2022. <https://www.aninews.in/news/world/asia/quad-to-curb-chinas-illegal-fishing-in-indo-pacific-20220820133144/>

⁷ "Joint Declaration on a Shared Vision for Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific Between The Republic of India and the Government of Australia", (June 04, 2020) *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade*, Australian Government. <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/india/joint-declaration-shared-vision-maritime-cooperation-indo-pacific-between-republic-india-and-government-australia>

however, does not extend to this region and Delhi has not been able to mobilize resources even towards the Western Pacific despite the “Act East” policy. To counteract Chinese predominance in the region, it is crucial to strengthen the capacity of the nations of Indian Ocean and Western Pacific. India has requisite expertise in dealing with marine security risks with the help of surveillance equipment; such as shore-based radars, automatic identification system transponders and satellite-based surveillance systems; all of which provided in aid to Indian Ocean countries and PINs who are highly vulnerable.

Australia too has maintained a long-term commitment in aiding PINs, particularly through security cooperation that covers the entire spectrum, from defence to human dimensions. While there are numerous programs running simultaneously, India and Australia can easily work together in specific areas to make meaningful contribution. One such area could be incorporation of naval personnel from Indo-Pacific Island nations as observers during bilateral and multilateral exercises like AUSINDEX and Malabar, which can potentially increase the operational exposure of the participants.

Leveraging Quad

Quad-the Quadrilateral- is a strategic forum comprising Australia, India, Japan and US. It aims to promote regional security, economic growth and cooperation in the IPR. The group also serves as a platform for all the four nations to coordinate various issues including maritime security. Both India and Australia play a crucial role in maintaining geo- political balance in the region. While India’s military capabilities and vast experience in dealing with security in the IOR enhance Quad’s collective security efforts, Australia, as a close ally of U.S. and member of AUKUS (Australia, UK and US alliance) strengthens Quad’s overall deterrence capacity.

In order to strengthen Indo-Australian cooperation in the IPR, the “Quad Security Dialogue” can play a crucial role. The “Indo-Pacific Partnership for marine Domain Awareness”, an initiative of the Quad aims to aid states in the region to prevent illicit marine activity.⁸ The Quad accomplishes this by offering satellite information on ship movements wherein cross-referencing of the

⁸ “Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness”, *Australian Government- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade*, <https://www.pmc.gov.au/resources/quad-leaders-summit-2023/indo-pacific-partnership-maritime-domain-awareness>

inputs with data from Automated Identification Systems (AIS) is possible. As many illicit fishing boats purposefully turn off their AIS, the given satellite data opens up new opportunities for locating and seizing these boats. Thus, it can safeguard the interest of small countries in the region.

Quad plays a crucial role in ensuring freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific international waters. Deeper engagement of Quad with regional multilateral forums such as the ASEAN Regional Forum and the East Asia Summit will effectively thwart Chinese hostile design and promote diplomatic cooperation as also 'confidence-building measures' among the regional actors. This will foster regional stability and prosperity by addressing various security and economic challenges in the Indo-Pacific.

First ever Malabar- joint naval exercise under Quad where Australia participated was in the year 2007 in Bay of Bengal. However, after China's protest over the exercise, Australia withdrew itself from future joint training of this nature. The underlying reason was China's emergence as a major trading partner and largest export destination for Australian goods. However, after one and half decades, Australia made a comeback and has hosted '27th iteration of Malabar series' in Sydney from August 11th-23th, 2023. It sends a clear message to China about its growing threat. Regular conducts of Malabar Exercises and naval patrols will go a long way to uphold international maritime laws and prevent attempts to control these waters.

Safeguarding Marine Ecology

In this framework, India and Australia are collaborating closely to create the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), which Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced at the 14th East Asia Summit on November 4, 2020 in Bangkok. This initiative will enhance management of shared oceanic domains in crucial areas of cooperation like protecting the maritime ecology and lessening the effects of marine pollution (especially plastics), ensuring maritime security, sustainable use of marine resources, capacity building and resource sharing, disaster risk reduction and management, cooperation in science & technology and academic fields as well as trade, connectivity and maritime transport.⁹

⁹ "Australia-India Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative Partnership: Grant Round 2", *Australian High Commission*, New Delhi, <https://india.highcommission.gov.au/ndli/AIIP1.html>

Both nations are mutually committed to safeguard the Indo-Pacific marine environment and minimize the effects of marine pollution, particularly plastics, and climate change as both value ensuring the sustainable use of living and non-living marine resources in the region in accordance with international law. Australia's expertise in environmental and climate-related issues can significantly contribute to Quad's efforts to address challenges such as climate change and environment protection in the Indo-Pacific.

Soft Diplomacy

The India -Australia relationship is built on People- to -people connect, identified in the "India Economic Strategy-2035" as the most significant asset of all. It also contributes significantly to the maritime cooperation. Both nations seek to project their power and influence through people, society and culture. Higher education has emerged as an important linkage between the two countries as Australia is keen to reduce dependence on the Chinese students. As of 2022, around 96,000 Indian students enrolled in the Australian universities.¹⁰ Deakin University has established its first overseas campus in India.

Besides education, tourism and cultural interactions play a vital role in enhancing better understanding between the societies as also augment the bilateral cooperation. Sports, particularly cricket being the shared passion between the two nations is major factor contributing to the strengthening cultural bond between the two people. In 2022, around 3.7 lakh Indians visited Australia¹¹ while over 33,864 Australian visited India by the end of 2021.¹² Around 675,658 strong Indian diaspora forms 2.8 percent of Australian population.¹³ The two communities play an important role in strengthening

¹⁰ Jagriti Chandra, "Indians set to become Australia's largest group of foreign students", (October 13, 2022). *The Hindu*, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/indians-set-to-become-its-largest-group-of-foreign-students-in-australia/article66001688.ece>

¹¹ "India Tourism Statistics at a Glance – 2023", (July 2023) *GOI Ministry of Tourism*, New Delhi. <https://tourism.gov.in/sites/default/files/2023-07/India%20Tourism%20Statistics%20at%20a%20glance%202023%20-%20English%20version.pdf>

¹² "India Tourism Statistics 2022", (September 2022.) *GOI Ministry of Tourism*, New Delhi <https://tourism.gov.in/sites/default/files/2023-01/India%20Tourism%20Statistics%20English%202022%20%28Revise%29%20%281%29.pdf>

¹³ "Australia's Indian Diaspora: A National Asset Mapping The Community's Reach Into The Australia-India Economic Relationship", (March 2022). *Australian Government-Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade*, https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/australias_indian_diaspora_220317_full_report.pdf

the bilateral ties and promote cultural diplomacy; an important component of soft power.

Conclusion

Indo-Pacific emergence as a new geographic space is a strategic reality of the 21st Century. As part of the rebalancing process, there is marked shift in global economic and military power towards this region. This has resulted in reshaping the geo- political contours of the new international order, hugely impacting socio- economic and maritime environment in tangible manner across the spectrum. As part of Quad, India and Australia are important stake holders in the Indo-Pacific and duly complement the unique strength of the other two partners -US and Japan- thus ensuring stability and strategic equilibrium in the region.

India-Australia strategic partnership in the Indo-Pacific is based on their commitment to the shared values and national interests. Their maritime outlook in the Indo-Pacific reflects collective vision and cooperation in various domains, besides serving as a bulwark in ensuring peace and security in the region. It also offers opportunities for fostering mutual growth and enhancing respective roles on the global stage. The strategic partnership between India and Australia in the Indo-Pacific is aimed at advancing the cause of secure, stable and prosperous region in the long-term perspective. The collaboration is all encompassing, beyond defence and security paradigm to include economic, diplomatic cultural and cultural dimensions; hugely contributing to the Indo-Australian maritime outlook.

★ ★ ★

The Engagement of India and Australia in the Indo-Pacific

Shubhamitra Das*

Indo-Pacific has emerged as a prominent geo-strategic concept that has engaged the superpowers, emerging powers and/or middle powers and the small powers in a transnational power game, which is made possible because of a multipolar world order. ‘Indo-Pacific’ emerged as a maritime concept to contain, check and balance Chinese power in the region due to its blatant militarization, heightened territorial disputes with a number of countries and the probable consequences of Belt and Road Initiative. The littoral countries felt an urgency to engage with each other and play a constructive role for a new regional order bereft of wars and conflicts while increasing connectivity for networking and human interaction.

Going a little further back in history, the 20th Century made the Indian and the Pacific oceans the most contested geopolitical space due to the colonial empire building and the extension of European rivalry to the east, the use of *mare liberum and mare clausum*¹ policy was initiated for freedom of navigation on the seas. ‘Sea Power’ was a major concern for ancient empires and the major weapon of the colonial empires in the world. Thus, the rise of maritime concepts like ‘sea denial, sea control and power projection’² became the core factors of maritime strategy of every country.

*Dr. Shubhamitra Das is Assistant Professor in the Centre for Indo-Pacific Studies, the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She is a regular writer on Indo-pacific region and has several books to her credit.

¹ Sujan S Chinoy, (October 2020), “India and the Changing Dynamics of Indo-Pacific” *Asia Policy*, Vol 15, No 4, pp. 21-36.

² Naval supremacy and capacity to ensure maritime commerce has always been a priority of big powers and an enduring source of state power says Rebecca Strating, (2020) “Strategy at Sea: A Plan B for Australian Maritime Security” *Security Challenges*, Vol 16, No 2, *Special Issue Plan B on Australia’s Maritime Security*, 2020, pp. 58-70.

The end of Second World War made US turn towards the Pacific and made the region more open for contestations and cooperation. The Cold War terminology of 'Asia-Pacific' was the administrative and military strategy of the United States, on the Asian mainland while the maritime region remained secondary. The eventual rise of Asian economies and their role in global politics; especially of Japan, China, India and the Southeast Asian countries brought the region to the limelight; especially due to their increased trade through the sea routes. The consequent contestation of China to become the regional hegemon raised anxiety of the international community. The aggravation of the South China Sea dispute, the issue of Taiwan, China's growing influence with the Pacific Island Countries taking a security turn were causes for concern; especially when US, Australia, New Zealand and France were the security providers of the Pacific and have carefully rallied the region away from power play and rivalries. At this juncture, cooperation and engagement of the like-minded countries became the norm.

India and Australia's engagement can be easily marked as one of the fastest growing relations within the Indo-Pacific construct. Being at the gateway and forefront of the oceans has the responsibility in building the region that is free, open, inclusive and peaceful. The paper will deal with India and Australia's maritime strategy, changed perception of their neighborhood, and an increased emphasis on international cooperation both bilaterally and multilaterally, for a resilient and sustained human life. The potential areas for their engagement will be highlighted for a robust and an enduring relationship that could involve the littoral countries in the institution-building of Indo-Pacific. The paper will attempt to answer if India and Australia can influence the global political platform by their role-playing in the Indo-Pacific region.

Indo-Pacific: A Maritime Concept

Indo-Pacific is a maritime construct that engulfs the issues on security; ranging from security of ports, containers, piracy, cyber security, marine resource management, freedom of navigation and securing the global commons, respect for international law and peaceful settlements of disputes, Climate Change, Energy and food sustainability.³ The United States' conception of Indo-Pacific

³ Shubhamitra Das, (January 1, 2019), "India-Australia Bilateral Relations: Players in the Indo-Pacific", *Diplomacy and Beyond*, <https://diplomacybeyond.com/india-australia-bilateral-relationship-players-in-the-indo-pacific/>

is that of 'Indo-Asia-Pacific', keeping both the continental and maritime strategies in mind, with a geographical specificity of 'western coast of India to the west of US.'⁴ While India chalks the region as the western Indian Ocean on the Arabian Sea to south Indian Ocean with African East Coast, Northern Africa and the Pacific Islands region, while Australia chalks the region from the 'eastern Indian Ocean to the Pacific Oceans including India, Southeast Asia, North Asia and the United States'⁵ that is continued in 2020 and 2023 strategic papers. Thomas Wilkins draws the similarity of US and Australia in understanding the region, as US National Security Strategy 2022 points out 'the defining element of Indo-Pacific as strategic competition' and Australia's Defence Strategic Review (DSR) 2023 mentions that this strategic competition 'operates from economic, military, strategic, diplomatic angles in contesting for different values and narratives.'⁶

Indian Ocean has forever been the region where India not only played a central role but has also become the cultural melting pot where history, religion, culture, language, geography and even climatic pattern profoundly impacted India. On the other hand, Australia which is at the western Indian Ocean has a long history of maritime culture ever since the British rule started in Australia in late 1780s. The Pacific Ocean has been the major hub for American activities since the Second World War followed by the Cold War with the formation of allies and military bases. In 1990s, 90 percent of transactions were carried out on sea due to the rise of major Asian economies. Sea-borne trade depends upon free movement near the choke points and the straits that are considered as global commons. Coastal borders, gulfs, territorial waters, cargo terminals, waterways, air and sea transportation, ports and container security entered the paradigm of security; i.e. maritime security. This is the region where illegal movement of arms, narcotics and humans happens; with piracy, crime and terrorism infesting the region like in no other times. Movement of people and resources led to focussing on not only maritime issues but also to know

⁴ Wada Haruko, (2020) "The 'Indo-Pacific' Concept: Geographical Adjustments and their Implications" *S Rajaratnam School of International Studies, RSIS Working Paper No 326*, pp. 1-28.

⁵ Wada Haruko, (2020) 'the 'Indo-Pacific' Concept:

⁶ Thomas Wilkins, Australia's 2023 Defence Strategic Review: Mobilizing all elements of national power to meet the challenges of the Indo-Pacific era, Accessed on 19-07-2023, https://www.spf.org/iina/en/articles/thomas_07.html

the internal strife of the states, especially in the Asian region that includes North Africa which is culturally and historically conjoined to Asia- mostly West Asia. The emergence of 'Indo-Pacific' and the confluence of two seas led to the scholarship on understanding the regional challenges of armed conflict, armed robbery, terrorist threats, container security, maritime territorial disputes, illegal fishing and serious socio-political disturbance in places like Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen, Syria that made the study on 'coastal security' a central topic for 'maritime security.' Apart from these transnational issues that require transnational solutions, the Chinese threat has become all-encompassing touching almost all aspects of maritime security.

China's dependence on energy for sustained economic growth made it aggressive in defending its containers and to thwart non-traditional security issues and hence is in need for ports from where surveillance becomes easier.⁷ Apart from this, its historical claims of islands in Sparty and Paracels to gain more leverage on the South China Sea, increasing its 'geographical presence in the Indian Ocean' led to a considerable increase in military expenditure by China thus aggravating militarization of the Ocean region. South China Sea has one third of World's shipping and carries nearly USD 3 trillion in trade⁸ and is the bridge between the Indian and the Pacific Ocean which is also the energy life-line for northeast Asia and China.⁹ Moreover, Chinese way of doing business through 'cheque-book diplomacy' and an eventual 'debt trap' for economically weaker countries like Cambodia, Laos, Sri Lanka, Pakistan has tilted the balance within the existing regional forums and in the Indo-Pacific region where China is overtly showing signs of becoming a regional hegemon by denying easy access to the sea-air space with its Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) by defying UNCLOS. The South China Sea dispute has led to severe anxiety where the Southeast Asian countries wanted US presence to be stronger, while China's bilateral disputes with the littoral countries

⁷ The vast maritime zone surrounded by islands and choke points not controlled by China, rather monitored and defended by opposing countries is a challenge for China writes Evan Braden Montgomery (2013) "Competitive Strategies Against Continental Powers: The Geopolitics of Sino-Indian-American Relations" *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol 36, No1, pp. 76-100.

⁸ Rajaram Panda, (18-07-2023) "Engaging with ASEAN" *The Statesman*, p. 6.

⁹ Girish Gujar, P K Ghosh, Hong Yan, (2014) "The Strategy for Securing Maritime Commons" Report Title "Sea Change: Evolving Maritime Geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific Region" (Ed) by David Michel and Rikky Passarelli, Published by Stimson Centre.

aggravated making it imperative to draw a strategy which can check, contain and balance China. US' Pivot to Asia-Pacific during Barak Obama had given way to a more pronounced Indo-Pacific strategy during Donald Trump. Japan initiated the concept of 'Confluence of two Seas' while Australia used the term officially in 2012 Defence White Paper, prior to all other stakeholders of the region. India-China relations are at an all-time low with severe border disputes that has also seen some low-key military combats. Within this uncertain backdrop lies the engagement of India and Australia that leads to a pertinent question; Is India-Australia engagement limited to balance China and to carry out the agenda of the United States alone? What exactly is the plan of action of India and Australia to be able to build a free, open and peaceful Indo-Pacific?

India and Australia's Emerging Ties

The inevitability of India and Australia's engagement is firstly due to their physical positioning on the Indian and the Pacific Ocean region, second the maritime character of their foreign and defence policy, third their 'geographical proximity' in balancing threat¹⁰ and fourth the increased engagement and closeness between India and the United States. Australia's maritime history was pronounced by the Dibb Report in 1980s that emphasised the 'Defence of Australia' is possible only when its maritime region is completely secured. Furthermore, Australia's emphasis on self-reliance and regional security slowly took the centerstage in its policy-making. Australia's emphasis on self-reliance in its White Papers since 1987 and later in 2013 rejuvenated this policy. 2012 White Paper 'Australia in the Asian Century' officially used the term 'Indo-Pacific' for its engagement in the region.¹¹ The military capability along with its regional posture was assessed all along like the Australian Defence White Paper of 2016 emphasised for a stable Indo-Pacific and not letting the escalation of US-China rivalry end up in a military combat, expecting for a peaceful Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands region and work towards regional cooperation¹² and force posture development for a 'secure and resilient

¹⁰ David Scott, (2013) "India's Role in South China Sea: Geopolitics and Geoeconomics in Play" *India review*, Vol 12, No 2, pp. 51-69.

¹¹ Wada Haruko, (2020) "The 'Indo-Pacific' Concept...".

¹² Shubhamitra Das, (January 2015) "India's Maritime Strategy and the Emerging Relation with Australia", *International Studies*, 52 (1-4), pp. 86-98.

Australia.’ Hence, India and Australian engagement has to be studied from both the angles, i.e., Australia’s role as an American ally and as an independent regional player. Just as Reid Hutchins pointed out that ‘Australia’s contemporary defence policy is a mixture of self-reliance and alliance dependency’,¹³ which gives enough scope to play different roles as a regional and also as a global player. The Defence White Paper of 2020 and 2023 states the area of ‘direct military interest’ to be “the immediate region surrounding the North-eastern Indian Ocean, through maritime Southeast Asia both in the Indian and the Pacific Ocean, including the Northern part of its region i.e., the Pacific Island region.”¹⁴ The signing of the AUKUS between US, UK and Australia has further strengthened Australia’s military capabilities and improvised on its strategy of ‘defence by denial.’

India broadened its vision due to increasing demand for energy to sustain a steady economic growth under Look-to-Act-East Policy, Extended Neighborhood Policy and to become ‘the voice of the Global South’ by engaging bilaterally and multilaterally. India’s strategic interests and, also its strategic behavior¹⁵ in the Indo-Pacific, is chalked not only due to Chinese aggression and geographic proximity¹⁶ but also due to its age-old dream of playing a pivotal role in the Indian Ocean. India’s conception of the Indo-Pacific engulfs a region beyond the perception of the United States and Australia, suggests that India would like to play it differently by involving the African and the west Asian states within the Indo-Pacific fold and has expanded to the Pacific Islands region where India-Australia collaboration can be very helpful to each other.

India and Australia’s Engagement in the Indo-Pacific

India and Australia had engaged bilaterally through security cooperation, defence arrangements, enhancing economic and trade relation and also joined hands

¹³ Reid Hutchins, “What was the ‘Defence of Australia’ Strategic Policy? How did the Policy evolve over time? And is it relevant today and in the future” *The Regionalist*, No 1 Working Paper, Institute for Regional Security.

¹⁴ Australia’s 2023 Defence Strategic Review”, Accessed on 17-07-2023, <https://www.iiss.org/en/publications/strategic-comments/2023/australias-2023-defence-strategic-review/>

¹⁵ David Scott (2013), “India’s Role in South China Sea...”.

¹⁶ India is assumed by US and the other Quad members to be one country that can counter China due to their traditional rivalry, land border disputes, physical proximity and economic growth says Montgomery, (2013) “Competitive Strategies Against Continental Powers...”.

in playing a crucial role in the next generation critical and emerging technologies; Artificial Intelligence (AI), in 5G/6G telecommunications, internet of things (IoT), Quantum computing, synthetic biology, blockchain and big data.¹⁷ Interestingly this new found trust and confidence in their relation is also felt within the minilateral and plurilateral arrangements, and in furthering multilateralism.

Defence and Security Cooperation

India and Australia signed a series of agreements since 2003 Memorandum of Understanding in combating terrorism, 2006 Memorandum of Understanding on defence cooperation and bilateral Strategic partnership in 2009, revitalised in 2020 as India-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA) is yet another milestone in defence cooperation; to transfer and share technology and information, improve interoperability and cooperation in Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA), an indispensable component for maritime security. MLSA thus allows each other to access their bases for logistics support which showcases mutual trust and respect. India and Australia had participated in a number of naval exercises AUSINDEX, Kakadu and many more. Interestingly, Australia declared to host the Malabar military exercise on its seas in 2023; especially when it was reluctant to join it earlier. Australia made a pertinent point after the Pandemic that it is not going to leave things on chance which is seconded by the DSR 2023 that the major challenge in the Indo-Pacific region is “a large scale conventional and non-conventional military build-up without strategic reassurance and the risk of military escalation and miscalculations.”¹⁸

India and Australia also agreed to work on the Indian initiative of 2019 Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)¹⁹ on ‘marine ecology; security of maritime borders; pollutants, like marine plastics; Illegal, Unreported, and

¹⁷ Australia-India Cyber and Critical Technology Partnership-Ground 2" Accessed on 23-07-2023, <https://india.highcommission.gov.au/ndli/AICCTP.html>

¹⁸ Australia's 2023 Defence Strategic Review.

¹⁹ IPOI emphasises on Maritime Ecology, Maritime Security, Marine Resources, Capacity Building, Disaster Management, Science and Technology, Trade, Connectivity and Transport in the maritime region, which is a comprehensive approach for maritime cooperation. Shubhamitra Das, (November 2021) “Middle Power Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific Region: India and Australia at the Forefront” *International Studies*, Vol 58, Issue 4, pp. 513-529.

Unregulated fishing (IUU); and deep-sea research for marine conservation.”²⁰ Apart from these, both the countries have signed India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement and signed the FTA in 2022. The increased trade diversification and connectivity has further integrated the countries towards stability in the region. India and Australia are equally inclined in working together in disaster management and Climate Change.

The depth of their relationship could be judged from the frequency of the visits by state officials and leaders, the increase in naval exercises, increase in trade and investments, people-to-people exchanges in fields like education, officer exchange programs and tourism. India’s relation with Australia vis-à-vis AUKUS requires mentioning as Indo-Pacific is becoming a region of high-tech military contestations, the US-China rivalry escalating with every Chinese aggression in the South China Sea and in Taiwan while the littoral countries are watching with hope and anxiety that Indo-Pacific does not become a war zone.

The formation of AUKUS has not undermined their bilateral partnership rather enhanced it further since a) It was a sigh of relief for India that Quad will not be a military alliance, where India is playing an active role, b) India will be a close partner to one of its members and still follow its policy of ‘strategic autonomy,’ c) having a close partner in an overt military alliance like AUKUS will enhance the stability of the Indo-Pacific region,²¹ d) India, unlike earlier times, welcomed AUKUS since China’s continuous intrusion in the Indian territory/s and the inability to understand Chinese methods of diplomacy and arms build-up which is both impulsive and non-transparent, requires desperate methods like alliance partners. AUKUS also portrays ‘high-tech supremacy by the member countries in Artificial Intelligence, quantum computing and cyber operations to have an edge.’²² On the other hand it is

²⁰ Shubhamitra Das, (January 31, 2023), “India-Australia Defence Cooperation and Collaboration in the Indo-Pacific” *Australia Outlook*, Australian Institute of International Affairs, <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/india-australia-defence-cooperation-and-collaboration-in-the-indo-pacific/>

²¹ John Dobson, (March 18, 2023) “AUKUS gathers some muscle, so how will this affect India?” *The Sunday Guardian*, Accessed on 19-07-2023, <https://sundayguardianlive.com/world/aukus-gathers-some-muscle-so-how-will-this-affect-india>.

²² Abijit Singh, 22, December 2021), “India remains divided about AUKUS” Accessed on 19-07-2023, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/india-remains-divided-about-aukus>.

leading to nuclear proliferation by undermining the various nuclear regimes. Blatant nuclearization of the Indo-Pacific region, which is averse to India's traditional foreign policy stand and its promise of being a 'voice of the Global South' becomes contradictory and questionable. Moreover, nuclear proliferation has serious implications on Climate Change which has already become an existential threat for the Pacific Island Countries, some African states and for many islands and archipelagic countries in the Indo-Pacific region. India was presumed to be 'friendly and an independent country'²³ in the Asian security architecture with a benign maritime prowess for maintaining equilibrium and regional peace. It remains to be seen how and when India will choose to play its role in the Indian Ocean and projecting its 'status and power' with the ideology of plurality, inclusiveness, peace and prosperity. As of now India is equally militarizing itself and welcomes AUKUS for maintaining equilibrium.

India-Australia Engagement in Multilateral Forum

The most important multilateral forums where India and Australia are engaged in that could lead to institutionalising the region were 1) the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and 2) Pacific Island Forum (PIF) and Forum for India-Pacific Island Cooperation (FIPIC). While India and Australia are closely connected within IORA and were able to form a trilateral along with Indonesia in strengthening the Rim members for understanding the depth of cooperation for a 'free, open and peaceful Indo-Pacific,' Australia and US were able to bring the Pacific Islands within its security fold during the Cold War days. But China's influence in the region with its 'cheque-book diplomacy,' helping in infrastructure building, extending diplomatic ties with countries like Fiji, Vanuatu and signing a security pact with Solomon Islands has brought the region within the preview of traditional security when the PICs only concern had always been human security, Climate Change and IUU fishing. The changed security perspective of Oceania led Australia's Step-up, and New Zealand's Pacific Re-set programs with the Pacific Island countries, recently US signed a security agreement with Papua New Guinea, India's enhanced visits to PNG and Fiji were all on the same lines. What India and Australia can do bilaterally is to unite the littoral countries as an Indo-Pacific unit that will not take sides or bandwagon with US or China and will shape the future of Indo-

²³ Montgomery, (2013) "Competitive Strategies Against Continental Powers...".

Pacific. After all India and Australia have been the forerunners in their initiative on Free, Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) and, being middle powers, could try and build bridges of cooperation and negotiations between the big powers so that the region remains peaceful. Multipolarity is to see that no one power supersedes and disrupts the equilibrium. The success of ‘multipolarity’ depends upon how the new age of ‘middle power cooperation’²⁴ can better institutionalise the region with ‘inclusivity and pluralism’ in mind. Sujan Chinoy aptly pointed out that ‘dialogue structures beyond Quad have to be developed for a stable Indo-Pacific security architecture.’²⁵ In fact, the participation and representation of the littoral countries is crucial if the traditional and non-traditional security aspects of the region is to be dealt successfully. India and Australia’s partnership can chalk a new world order with their use of agency in making the Indo-Pacific region ‘free, open, inclusive, secure, peaceful and prosperous’ in its true spirit.



²⁴Shubhamitra Das (November, 2021) “Middle Power Cooperation...”.

²⁵Sujan S Chinoy, (October 2020), “India and the Changing Dynamics of Indo-Pacific...”.

Unfolding the Changing Arc of Indo-pacific Strategic Architecture and India's Tangled Interests beyond Indian Ocean Region (IOR)

Akshay K. Singh* and Sanjay Kumar Mishra**

Introduction

Asia has been undergoing deep power transitions and shifting regional 'offense-defense balance.' The Indo-Pacific region has emerged as a key theater of engagement with the return of great power competition. China's growing capability and influence across the Indo-Pacific provoke pressing questions for the U.S. strategy in the region, as does the ambiguity over the robustness and resilience of the growing U.S. and space partnerships in the region. The evolution of China as a global power and its rise as a potential competitor of the US in a world order traditionally dominated by the West have triggered a struggle to establish hegemony in the region. Paul Godwin asserts that "China's economic development and military modernization programs may in the future grant it the status of a potential hegemon, the decision to become the region's hegemon does not directly derive from the capacity to dominate."¹ Today, the existing and emerging superpowers are trying to establish their presence in the maritime arena to claim the title of global hegemon. Nonetheless, the geographical significance and commercial suitability of the Indo-Pacific construct have turned the region into the theater of opportunities.

* Dr. Akshay K. Singh is the Head, Department of Political Science and International Relations, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Gautam Buddha University, Gautam Budh Nagar, U.P.

** Sanjay Kumar Mishra is a Research Scholar, Department of Political Science and International Relation, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Gautam Buddha University, Gautam Budh Nagar, U.P.

¹ Paul Godwin, "China as Regional Hegemon", in Jim Rolfe, *The Asia Pacific: A region in Transition* (Honolulu: Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, 2004).

Extra-regional powers are keen to increase their influence in this region in one way or the other and, therefore, they are turning out as catalysts in the emerging power game. One of the key strategic considerations in the Indo-Pacific region is the balance of power between China and the US. China has been rapidly expanding its military and economic influence throughout the region in recent decades. China's growing military capabilities, territorial ambitions and assertive foreign policy have led to concerns among other countries in the region, who worry about China's intentions and the potential for any possible conflict. This has prompted the US to beef up its military presence in the Indo-Pacific, strengthen its alliances and develop partnerships in a crucial strategic arena. One of the most important of these partnerships is the US-Japan security alliance, which has been in place since the end of World War II. The alliance is based on a mutual defense treaty and it serves as a cornerstone of US security policy in the Indo-Pacific region. In recent years, the US has also deepened its security alliances with other nations. Drawing greater emphasis on regional security and stability, the US has rejigged its Indo-Pacific Strategy and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue—a forum for strategic cooperation between the US, Japan, Australia, and India—has attained huge space in its geostrategic matrix. These initiatives have focused on strengthening regional security cooperation, promoting economic growth and development, and upholding international norms, values, and freedom of navigation. The US interest in the region stems from its clear strategic vision. Firstly, in the wake of the ignominious withdrawal from Afghanistan, a strategic void arose in the Asian region that could be filled in by a high-decibel presence in the Indo-Pacific region to meet the Chinese juggernaut at its very base and garner support from the compatible states, constituting democratic axis yet afflicted by the common cause. Brendon J. Cannon and Ash Rossiter aptly describe this as:

It is under this general “threat” that the positions of state actors have arguably begun to visibly shift from casual adherence or outright disinterest in upholding of the post-War global governance structure to one of increasing support. This shift is apparent in normative statements made by leaders about the “rule of law” or “sea lane safety,” and has led increasingly to a constellation of hard and soft power and thereby the beginnings of a strategy that includes one great power (the United States),

one economic power (Japan), one rising power (India) and one lynchpin power (Australia). These four states, spread across the globe with very different sources of, and outlooks on, power, now form the nucleus of what Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe had nominated a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” (FOIP) strategy.²

Secondly, the US candidly acknowledges that it is an Indo-Pacific power and that this region will witness the most intense future economic and military bustle. The Indo-Pacific Strategy of the U.S. as released by the White House states that the region not only hosts every second person of the world but also holds nearly “two-thirds of the world’s economy”, and “seven of the world’s largest militaries” and engages the “largest US military personnel outside the country”; the region sustains “more than three million American jobs and is the source of nearly \$900 billion in foreign direct investment in the United States.”³ In this context, the paper will investigate the changing arc of the Indo-Pacific strategic architecture and how India is prepared to cope up with the ever-growing challenges while keeping its core interest preserved.

India’s Tangled Interest Beyond Indian Ocean Region (IOR)

Moreover, given the massive changes in the balance of power amidst the reality that China’s caustic amalgamation of the traditional policy of subverting India’s interest in aligning with its arch-rival in South Asia and notoriously designing to instigate through newer initiatives like One Belt One Road (OBOR) engraving China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) within it has alarmed India.

Being a major power in the Indo-Pacific region, India needs to adopt a sane approach in the present circumstances. India’s effort on the one hand is to rheostat the ambitious West’s proposition to maintain sway in the region and on the other hand, to counteract entanglement with the overambitious China. In these situations, India has been able to best respond

² Brendon J. Cannon and Ash Rossiter, “The “Indo-Pacific”: Regional Dynamics in the 21st Century’s New Geopolitical Center of Gravity”, *Rising Powers Quarterly*, Volume 3, Issue 2, 2018, 7-17.

³ Executive Office of the President (National Security Council), “Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States”, The White House, Washington, February 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf>.

by engaging in various global and regional groups to gain global cooperation. India's association with the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) signifies this. As described by analysts, India's interest *vis-à-vis* Indo-Pacific QUAD structure emanates from three drivers:

First, violent border clashes with China have accelerated the reorientation of Indian foreign policy toward deeper engagement with the West, particularly toward the Quad. **Secondly**, the Quad also contributes to India's broader foreign policy objectives in the Indo-Pacific. "From an Indian perspective, it is also a statement of [India's] growing interests beyond the Indian Ocean...". The Quad links neatly with the country's aim to be a net security provider in the Indian Ocean and its focus on delivering public goods contributes to Indian policies like Act East by increasing engagement with Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands. And **finally**, being a part of the Quad also helps India build its capacities.⁴

No doubt, despite the scientific and technological progress, even today, most of the global trade is done through sea routes. The geographical importance of the Indo-Pacific region and the relevance of commerce have transformed the region into a theater of opportunities. Thus, this makes the struggle for supremacy in this region between the current and emerging global powers inevitable. In a situation of such domination and conflict, it is extremely important to ensure a comprehensive maritime strategy and safeguard the business interests of various countries, including India. Geographically, India is in the center of the Indian Ocean and it has been acknowledged as a "net security provider" and capable regional power in the region. India conducts several maritime exercises, humanitarian aid and disaster relief with various countries in the region from time to time. Such efforts indicate India's capability of fulfilling its growing role both at the regional level as well as global levels. The U.S. participates in the Malabar Exercise with India and Japan in the Indian Ocean region. The collectiveness of India, the USA, Japan, and Australia as QUAD nations has created a credible platform that is committed to peace

⁴ Garima Mohan and Kristi Govella, "The Future of the Quad and the Emerging Architecture in the Indo-Pacific", *German Marshall Fund of the United States Policy Paper*, June 2022. <https://www.gmfus.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/The%20Future%20of%20the%20Quad%20and%20the%20Emerging%20Architecture%20in%20the%20Indo-Pacific.pdf>.

and security in the Indo-Pacific region. The US-led Blue Dot Network (BDN) is being seen as a major initiative to counter China's "String of Pearls" project in the region. India has openly opposed Chinese aggression and its growing hegemony.⁵

Emerging Arcs of Geopolitical and Geostrategic Architectures of the Indo-Pacific Region

Until the early 21st century, the Indo-Pacific region was defined as two distinct regions called Asia Pacific and South Asia. In the first decade of the 21st century, Japan was the first to recognize the growing relevance of India in this region. Japan is the far eastern country of the Asian continent located on the west coast of the Pacific Ocean, while India is considered a major strategic country in the Indian Ocean region. Japan's involvement in the Indo-Pacific region can be traced back to its "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy," which was first introduced in 2016 by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. This strategy aims to promote a rule-based order, respect for international law, freedom of navigation and connectivity in the region. In India, the term "Indo-Pacific" was first coined by the ex-naval officer, maritime analyst and an expert in Indo-Japanese relations, Gurpreet Khurana in 2006. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his keynote address to the Shangri-La Dialogue in 2018, outlined the framework and priorities of India's Indo-Pacific strategy. In the speech, he provided India's definition of the Indo-Pacific as being "from the shores of Africa to that of the Americas," providing a broad physical boundary for its initiatives.⁶ Thus, the Indo-Pacific region was named by combining the countries at the confluence of the two seas—the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. From colonial rule to the spread of Buddhist civilization, there are many points on which the common identity of these countries can be established. Due to its high population and high levels of consumption, the Indo-Pacific region has emerged as a major

⁵ US Department of Defense (2019), "Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships and Promoting a Networked Region", <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jul/01/2002152311/-1/-1/1/DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE-INDO-PACIFIC-STRATEGY-REPORT-2019.PDF>

⁶ Darshana M. Baruah, "Partnerships as a Central Pillar of India's Indo-Pacific Strategy", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (2020), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep24919.7>

market for global economies. The opportunities and benefits of the growing relevance of this region should be distributed equitably to all countries while protecting the geographical boundaries of different countries.⁷

Prime Minister Modi's June 2016 address to U.S. Congress is another important statement towards India's Indo-Pacific approach. In his address, he maintained that a "strong India-U.S. partnership can anchor peace, prosperity and stability from Asia to Africa and from Indian Ocean to the Pacific." However, despite shared values and common interests with other nations, India is more cautious about its immediate neighborhood and its own security concerns. In his address to the Shangri-La Dialogue, PM Modi said "India does not see the Indo-Pacific region as a strategy or as a club of limited members. Nor does it regard this as a grouping that seeks to dominate. And by no means do we consider it as directed against any country."⁸

This makes it quite clear that while it does not wish to antagonize China, India is aware of the Indo-Pacific's growing importance and strategic reality. India has been associated with almost all the countries of this region since ancient times, from the promotion of Buddhist civilization to the exchange of ideas and trade interests. The Indo-Pacific region generally includes large areas of the continents of South Asia, East Asia, South-East Asia, and Australia.

The population of the Indo-Pacific region is more than 3.5 billion and the combined gross domestic product (GDP) of the countries here is more than US \$ 30 trillion. As a result of globalization, the development of this region has gained tremendous momentum, due to which this region has become the fastest-growing region in the world in almost the last half-century. The rapid development journey of the Indo-Pacific region has created a force of gravity that has attracted global economic and political powers. All these circumstances have led to massive foreign investment and transfer of technology in the

⁷ Office of the Secretary of Defense (2020), Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020: Annual Report to Congress, <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Sep/01/2002488689/-1/-1/1/2020-DOD-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORTFINAL.PDF>

⁸ MoE, GoI, Prime Minister's Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue (June 01, 2018) <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speechesstatements.htm?dtl/29943/Prime+Ministers+Keynote+Address+at+Shangri+La+Dialogue+June+01+2018prosperous+and+rules-based>

region. The trade competition has created many challenging situations and various countries are trying to establish their hegemony over the sea routes of this region to protect their economic interests. Capital gains and retaining access to the majority of the market are the main causes of all the arising conflicts. In the course of its development journey, China has invested capital in developing and developed countries. These countries have gained short-term benefits but, by establishing its military capability and strategic reach, China has posed grave threats to the sovereignty of these countries. In many countries, China has tried to use international rules and laws to its advantage by changing the status quo. China's uncontrolled expansion in the South China Sea and the creation of artificial islands are the prime examples in this context. After the Second World War, the U.S. and its western allies maintained their access to the present-day Indo-Pacific region for a long time. Its economic and political benefits have been received by some countries but, in different parts of Asia, many types of crises also arose, which seemed to be inspired by the interests of these western countries. India followed the policy of non-alignment during such crises and avoided becoming a puppet of global powers.

In the 21st century, along with the expansion of science and technology, the process of economic development has been decentralized rapidly. Under such circumstances, many centers of power have emerged on the global level. The long-standing global geopolitical order is constantly being challenged by such emerging powers. As a result of all these processes, there is a demand for changes in global rules and regulations. Because of the increase in Asian dominance, it has become necessary to change the institutions and rules made according to the wishes of western countries. The effects of the challenges faced by the Western hegemony are visible in the Indo-Pacific region. The QUAD and Blue Dot Network (BDN) have occupied significant space in the geostrategic architecture of the region directed towards keeping the West's interest intact by putting a check on China's belligerence; while on the other hand, by expanding zone of cooperation among the strategically compatible countries of the region. Evidently, the 20th century Soviet Union's space is being occupied by the 21st century's China, directly or indirectly rivaling the US. India is an advocate of international peace and seeks to create a rules-based order that promotes global interests and, therefore, adheres to what best suits its local, regional, and global interests. India, Japan, and Australia

perceive compatible threat perception which became instrumental to embolden the QUAD keeping the US at the centre. As stated, China has transformed the region's strategic landscape in just five years. If other powers do not step in to counter further challenges to the territorial and maritime *status quo*, the next five years could entrench China's strategic advantages. The result could be the ascendancy of a China-led illiberal hegemonic regional order at the expense of the liberal rules-based order that most countries in the region support from Japan, South Korea in the North to Australia in the South. Given the region's economic weight, this would create significant risks for global markets and international security.

Indo-Pacific Ocean Initiative (IPOI): Whither India-Australia Relationships?

India is situated in the middle of the Indian Ocean and it is a major partner with many other countries in this region. India has been acknowledged as a major security provider in the region. It continuously makes such efforts so that its strategic interests in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean region are smoothly followed. In the year 2019, India presented the Indo-Pacific Ocean Initiative (IPOI) at the East Asia Summit. The main objective of this initiative is to establish "open, non-treaty-based global cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.."⁹ Countries like Australia, Japan, and Indonesia are openly supporting the Indian approach. The IPOI initiative constructs the mechanism to engage India and regional partners to team up for safeguarding the oceans in terms of "maritime security"; doing utmost for the preservation of "marine resources"; building capacity for fairly "sharing the resources"; cutting the "disaster risk"; boosting "science, technology and academic cooperation" and promoting "free, fair and mutually beneficial trade and maritime transport."¹⁰ In this cooperative structure, India's proximity to Australia is the key factor. Therefore, as the Australian High Commission in India wrote: "the Australia-

⁹ Premesha Saha and Abhishek Mishra, "The Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative: Towards a Coherent Indo-Pacific Policy for India", *ORF Occasional Paper-298*, December 2020.

¹⁰ Indian Council of World Affairs, "IPOI Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative: Towards a Sustainable and Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region", <https://www.icwa.in/pdfs/IndoPacificOceansInitiative.pdf>.

¹¹ Australian High Commission, New Delhi, Australia-India Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative Partnership <https://india.highcommission.gov.au/ndli/AIIPPOIP.htm>

India Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative Partnership (AIPOIP) helps shape maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific to support an open, inclusive, resilient, prosperous and rules-based maritime order.”¹¹ Certainly, the IPOI’s importance hinges on the fact that the Central Indo-Pacific and the Western Indian Ocean Region (WIOR) are increasingly touching the new strategic importance by sitting at the juncture of Asia, Africa, and Europe. No doubt, Australia is a lead partner in India’s Indo-Pacific strategic partnership and this initiative was reinforced when the two countries announced the “Australia-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership” in 2020 and “agreed to work together bilaterally, regionally and multilaterally and in mini-lateral arrangements, to support regional architecture in line with their shared values and interests.”¹² This links with “existing regional mechanisms and arrangements including ASEAN, the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF).” Besides, the growing conflict between democratic countries and expansionist forces is one of the new emerging features of the IPOI. India has always supported democratic countries and has been advocating the establishment of democratic processes in the world. With the help of its available resources, India is trying to reach out to neighboring countries through infrastructure diplomacy.

Japan, Australia, and the USA have great respect for democratic values and support the Indian approach to establishing a cooperative mechanism at the global level. India believes that its political, economic, and social interests lie in the establishment of a peaceful Indo-Pacific region, that’s why India has been emphasizing maritime security and better connectivity in the region.

Furthermore, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese visited India in March 2023 and that was reciprocated by the Indian PM’s visit to Australia in May 2023. This signified a paradigmatically new approach as the two nations led them to get engaged by their top leaders in terms of the annual summit. Australia has renewed its commitment towards a “free and open Indo-Pacific”

¹² DFAT, Govt. of Australia, Joint Declaration on a Shared Vision for Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific Between The Republic of India and the Government of Australia, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/india/joint-declaration-shared-vision-maritime-cooperation-indopacific-between-republic-india-and-government-australia>.

by hosting, for the first time, the Malabar exercise off the coast of Sydney, starting from 11th August 2023, and acknowledged “cooperation, shared understanding and knowledge coupled with training contributes to shared security and prosperity for our region.”¹³ No doubt, the Malabar exercise garners prospect for the partnering nations to augment interoperability and train their taskforces in the best practices in maritime security operations. India-Australia cooperative structure goes through the lane of the QUAD. Following India, Australia has also started pushing for bilateral and multilateral collaboration including “the latest 2023 Australia-United States Ministerial Consultations (AUSMIN), Joint Australia-US Military Exercise, and the 2023 Talisman Sabre exercise involving 13 nations’ navies.”¹⁴ However, India And Australia’s emerging horizon of relationship seems to be dictated by the fact that the two are “uniquely placed to link international networks and coordinate their efforts. Both can be the synapses between various groupings and act as a conduit between the South Pacific and the Indian Ocean.”¹⁵

The Way Forward

The lack of international cooperation due to the COVID-19 pandemic and other global challenges have added to the security challenges in the Indo-Pacific region. After a long time since the end of the Cold War, it is observed that the global order is moving from cooperation to conflict. International efforts to establish peace may fail as a result of the increasing arms race in the region and the promotion of militarization. Most of the conflicts arising in this region are the result of the expansionist policies of China and the dominant policies of America. The major adverse impacts of the rivalry of these countries will be felt by the backward countries of East Africa, South Asia, and South-East Asia. The withdrawal of the US troops from Afghanistan is an

¹³ Govt. of Australia, “Australia to Host Exercise Malabar for the First Time”, <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/media-releases/2023-08-11/australia-host-exercise-malabarfirst-time>.

¹⁴ Ashok Sharma, “Malabar Exercise off the coast of Australia is a step further in Strengthening the Quad”, *The Times of India*, 16 August 2023, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/ashoks-statecraft/no-stopping-for-the-quad-the-malabar-exercise-off-the-coast-of-australia-is-a-step-further-in-strengthening-the-quad-for-a-stable-and-secure-indo-pacific/>

¹⁵ Lisa Singh and Lewis Baker, “Australia’s shared security in the Indian Ocean”, The Lowy Institute, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpretor/australia-s-shared-security-indian-ocean>.

unprecedented event that was considered essential for the establishment of international peace. However, in the event of any escalation of conflicts in the Indo-Pacific region, the entire Asian region may be in disarray. Along with its economic importance, the major population of the world resides in this Indo-Pacific region. As such, the unstable regional dynamics and uncontrolled militarization will have widespread global consequences. During the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, India has promoted a positive partnership in this region and played a collaborative role in exporting vaccines to the Indian Ocean region. To maintain long-term peace and order in the region, bringing like-minded countries on a single platform is essential. America's involvement in groups like QUAD worries many Asian countries. India, Japan and Australia have increased their confidence through long-term efforts in this area. Therefore, the need is that countries like India, Japan, and Australia will have to come forward on a single platform to contain the expansionist policies of countries like China and America in the Indo-Pacific region. By doing so, the concerns of Asian countries can be addressed and economic and business interests in the region can be protected for a long time. Conflicts seem to be escalating despite the efforts so far to ensure stability in the Indo-Pacific. The escalation in various types of tensions is reflecting the lack of institutional leadership in this region.¹² The peace and security of the region require the creation of multi-institutional structures rather than relying on any single institution or group. Multilateral institutions like QUAD, APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation), ARF (ASEAN Regional Forum), and IORA (Indian Ocean Rim Association) can prove to be effective tools to establish peace and security for a long time.

★ ★ ★

Strategic Shifts in the Indo-Pacific and India-Australia Partnership

Tshering Chonzom Bhutia*

ABSTRACT

The Indo-Pacific region is believed to be of immense strategic significance given the dynamism of the region in propelling economic growth and cooperation between nations. However, the region has attracted significant attention from major powers and is being reimagined as a contested geo-political space. The emergence of the term has led to a restructuring of the popular perception in which the world has traditionally and strategically perceived this geographical area. This paper delves into the manner in which the India and Australia as important actors in the region conceptualize the 'Indo-Pacific' and how it has shaped India-Australia relations.

Keywords: *Free and Open Indo-Pacific, FOIP, India-Australia partnership, Indo-Pacific Strategy, Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, Quad.*

Introduction

India-Australia relations which had been characterized by “strained people-to-people ties” and influenced by “Cold War-era geopolitics... shallow economic and trade links” as well as “differences over India’s nuclear status” (Jaishankar, 2020) gradually gave way to greater synergy as the new century dawned in. Subsequently, the relations received a major boost as the heads of government of both countries undertook visits to each other’s countries in 2014. These developments in bilateral relations coincided with China advancing its maritime influence in the region to secure its energy requirements, expand trading ties and gain strategic depth. China firstly launched its mega project,

*Tshering Chonzom Bhutia, PhD is Advisor, Unit for International Cooperation National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA) (Deemed to be University) and Associate Editor, *India Quarterly*.

the ‘One Belt One Road’ (OBOR) in 2013¹. It attempts to connect Asia with the African and European continents through a grid of land and maritime routes. Recent estimations place China’s global spending to approximately \$1 trillion, of which the highest proportion (\$62 billion) has been spent in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) (Mardell, 2020).

As the OBOR gained traction and as China gradually expanded its reach,² it added to the already growing concerns about Chinese ambitions. A US government website articulates, “As the PRC’s overseas economic and security interests expand under ... (OBOR), it seeks to expand its overseas military footprint to protect those interests” (US Government, Undated). This influenced American recalibration of its strategic interest vis a vis Asia, and compelled the relevant Asian stakeholders, including Australia and India to respond and recalibrate at their end as well.

It was in this backdrop that the idea of the Indo-Pacific was born as an “interconnected space” (Das, 2019). In 2007, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe while addressing the Parliament of India spoke of the formation of “broader Asia” coming together as a result of the “dynamic coupling” of the “Confluence of Two Seas”. From 2009 onwards, the US in recognition of the ‘Asian Century’, started recalibrating its Asia-Pacific policy and subsequently, delineated its ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy’ (FOIP) in November 2019.³ The ASEAN demarcated its own ‘Indo-Pacific Outlook’ in June 2019. France which has taken the lead in formulating the European Union’s agenda on the Indo-Pacific, brought out an “Indo-Pacific defense strategy in 2016, which was followed by a comprehensive Indo-Pacific strategy in 2018” (Vashisht, 2023).

Joined together by the straits of Malacca, which is so far the fastest shipping sea lane in the region, the Indo-Pacific region is a dynamic space propelling economic growth and cooperation between nations. At the same

¹ Chinese President Xi Jinping launched the first half of the OBOR project known as the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) at Nazarbayev University in Kazakhstan in September 2013. The second half of the project known as the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR) was launched in another speech by Xi to the Indonesian Parliament in October 2013.

² For example by setting up a base in Djibouti in 2017.

³ The US government released the document titled “A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision” on 4 November 2019, available here <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Free-and-Open-Indo-Pacific-4Nov2019.pdf>

time, the region has emerged as a crucial geopolitical theater due to its economic importance, maritime trade routes and strategic significance, and is being reimagined as a contested geo-political space. The two main reasons identified for the Indo-Pacific taking center stage are – “first, the growing footprint of China across the length and breadth of the region and second, the relative decline of the U.S. alliance system and its strive for resurgence” (Das 2019 and also, Medcalf and Mohan, 2014).

This paper attempts to understand the approach of both India and Australia towards the conception of Indo-Pacific as a region and how this may have shaped their bilateral relations.

Australia’s Indo-Pacific Policy

Australia was among the first countries to discuss the idea of an Indo-Pacific (Parry 2022, Das 2019) however it was in the context of how to leverage the opportunities arising from Asia’s rise in its foreign policy White Paper of 2012 titled “Australia in the Asian Century.” With respect to China, it called for supporting “China’s participation in the region’s strategic, political and economic development.” In hindsight however, the White Paper is considered a more “optimistic document” (Tyler 2023).

Australia-China relations began to show signs of tension “from as early as 2015” as Australia was embroiled in a series of overarching developments that all pointed at China as the key problem. For example, Chinese assertiveness in the South China Seas and Chinese overtures to Pacific Island nations⁴ were issues that concerns Australia greatly in the foreign and security policy domain. In the domestic sphere, growing Chinese investments in Australia and apparent Chinese attempts to influence Australian politicians (Parry 2022) had major fallouts, so much so that Australia passed a legislation against foreign interference. “Australia’s call for an investigation into the origins of the Covid-19 pandemic” (Parry 2022) further widened the chasm in relations. Hence, gradually Australia’s approach to the Asia/Indo-Pacific as a region of opportunity transformed into viewing it as an “epicentre of strategic competition” (Tyler, 2023).

The ascendance of Trump in the US in 2017 and his immediate withdrawal

⁴ Most recently, China signed a security agreement with the Solomon Islands in March 2022, the news of which emerged only about a month later. This has led to expansion of Australia’s diplomatic ties and defense budget.

from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) that year, including its overall “non-committal approach to partners and allies also affected Australia’s strategic calculation” (Parry 2022). Recognizing shifting power dynamics between a “dominant” US and a “challenging” China and importance of the region as a dynamic economic core, Australia supports a “secure, open and prosperous” and “inclusive” Indo-Pacific. Australia’s 2017 foreign policy White Paper discussed about how “powerful drivers of change are converging in a way that is re-shaping the international order and challenging Australian interests” (Government of Australia, 2017). Envisaging imminent political and economic gains, Australia called for “strong partnerships” and strengthening “rules-based international order” with respect for the “rights for all states.” Australia saw “a significant US role in the Indo-Pacific as a stabilising influence” especially given their historical treaty relations. Most recently, Australia joined the US and UK to form the AUKUS agreement in September 2021.

India’s Indo-Pacific Policy

India’s Indo-Pacific policy may be considered an extension of its Look/Act East Policy (LEP/AEP). Enunciated in 1992, the Policy reflects India’s “considerable economic, political and strategic focus to East Asia” (Brewster, 2015: 40) and South East Asia. Given India’s recognition of ASEAN as central to this policy, the Act East Policy was formally enunciated in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar, in November 2014 by the newly elected Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. According to the Ministry of External Affairs: “The Objective of the ‘Act East Policy’ is to promote economic cooperation, cultural ties and develop strategic relationship with countries in the Asia-Pacific region ... thereby providing enhanced connectivity to the States of North Eastern Region including Arunachal Pradesh with other countries in our neighbourhood” (MEA 2015a).

India’s external relations also began to widen. US recognized India as a defacto nuclear weapons state with the signing of the 123 Agreement between India and the U.S. in 2007. India and Japan came to “increasingly seeing each other as poles in an emerging axis focused on balancing against China” (Brewster 2015). Similarly, India and Australia declared each other as strategic partners in 2009. As more countries, as well as, regional and multilateral organizations began to acknowledge India’s significance in the changing geo-

economic and strategic contexts, India adopted a more responsive approach by delineating its maritime strategy through a series of policy initiatives such as Project Mausam, SAGAR, IPOI, etc.

Launched at the 38th World Heritage Session at Qatar in June, 2014, Project Mausam was implemented by the Ministry of Culture to showcase historical ‘Transnational Mixed Routes’ (natural as well as cultural) in the IOR. In 2015, the Indian Navy released the ‘Ensuring Secure Seas: India’s Maritime Security Strategy’ (Indian Navy 2015), outlines ‘freedom to use the seas’ for its national interests and provides a broader framework for “synergizing [cooperation and coordination]... with stakeholders” on maritime security. Introduced in 2016, ‘Security and Growth for All in the Region’ (SAGAR) was formally announced by Prime Minister Modi in his keynote address at Shangri La Dialogue on 1st June 2018. With it, for the first time, India formally “underlined India’s official acceptance of the Indo-Pacific concept” (Kaura, 2020: 2). “The destiny of the world [Prime Minister Modi] will be deeply influenced by the course of developments in the Indo-Pacific region” and outlined India’s vision for the Indo-Pacific as an “open and inclusive region...embracing a common pursuit of progress and prosperity.”

In April 2019, the Ministry of External Affairs established an Indo-Pacific division with an aim to “consolidate India’s vision of the Indo-Pacific across Government of India” (MEA, 2020). The ‘Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative’ (IPOI) is the most recent initiative launched by PM Modi on 4 November 2019 during the East Asia Summit held in Bangkok this year, Thailand. The IPOI is a “liberal theoretical paradigm built on SAGAR endorsing an open, inclusive, non-treaty-based global initiative for mitigating challenges in the maritime domain through regional cooperation architecture” (ICWA, 2022).

India-Australia Relations and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue

Maritime cooperation between the members of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or “Quad 1.0”, as it has come to be known, began a few years prior to the formation of the Quad. A ‘Tsunami Core group’ was formed in 2004 to coordinate emergency response and humanitarian assistance (Fraser, 2023). It continued in the form of Exercise Malabar which refers to the naval exercises between the Quad nations that began in the Malabar coast in 1992 as a bilateral exercise between Indian and US navies.

Year 2007 is considered significant as two important events took place (Jaishankar, 2020) that gave a push to India-Australia relations as well as the idea of Quad and the Indo-Pacific in general – Australia and Japan participated in the Malabar naval exercises in the Bay of Bengal and leaders of the Quad countries held their first meeting in Manila. Further, in 2007, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe while addressing the Parliament of India spoke of the formation of “broader Asia” coming together as a result of the “dynamic coupling” of the “Confluence of Two Seas” [the IOR and the Pacific Ocean] (Abe, 2007). Thus, was born the idea of the Quad, a quadrilateral informal strategic forum and a diplomatic alliance between maritime democracies comprising of USA, Australia, Japan and India. The momentum however slowed down following the defeat of Abe in Japan’s elections the subsequent year.

Later, Japan again joined the Malabar exercises since 2015,⁵ Australia however did not participate in the Malabar exercises for another 5 years or so. There were a number of reasons, primarily as it evoked vehement protests from China.⁶ Hence, India was “hesitant to involve Australia in the exercise, despite Canberra’s willingness and indirect pressure from Washington” (Kaura, 2020). As a consequence, the Quad “dissipated amid member leadership transitions, concerns about economic repercussions from China, and attention to other national interests” (CRS, 2023).

However, India-Australia interests, along with that of others began to converge in the light of China’s increasing assertiveness especially under the leadership of Chinese President Xi Jinping who assumed power since 2012. Chinese activism in the South and East China Seas, in areas around Australian waters, and closer home, two significant India-China border clashes – the Doklam standoff in June 2017 and again the Galwan valley clashes in June 2020 –gave a new lease of life to the Quad, with the first official talks of the Quad leaders being convened in Philippines in 2017. And in 2020, Australia resumed participation in the important Malabar exercises.

The Quad gained full traction with the inaugural virtual Leaders’ Summit held on 12th March 2021 followed by the second (first in-person) Quad Leaders

⁵ In 2015, the Prime Ministers of Japan and India, Shinzo Abe and Narendra Modi issued a statement of their Vision 2025 for a “peaceful, open, equitable, stable and rule-based order” in the Indo-Pacific region (MEA, 2015b).

⁶ China went as far to call it “an anti-China coalition” (Kaura, 2020) and an Asian NATO.

Summit on 24th September 2021. The latest and the fifth (third in-person) Quadrilateral Security Dialogue meeting was held in May 2023 in Hiroshima, Japan. Their joint vision statement was titled ‘Enduring Partners for the Indo-Pacific’, wherein they reaffirmed their commitment to support a “free and open Indo-Pacific that is inclusive and resilient.”

India-Australia Relations: Moving Towards Partnership

The visit of the Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbot to India on 4th-5th September 2014 and the visit of the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Australia (in 28 years) on 16th-18th November 2014 paved the way for deepening of relations between the two countries. Importantly, a Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement was signed in September 2014 during the visit of Prime Minister Abbot and a Framework for Security Cooperation was signed during the visit of Prime Minister Modi. Subsequently, the Australian Parliament passed the “Civil Nuclear Transfer to India Bill 2016” on 1st December 2016, which is significant for it ensures that Uranium mining companies in Australia may fulfill contracts to supply uranium to India for civil use. Since 2015, both countries have been actively engaging in maritime exercise AUSINDEX – Japan joined the Malabar exercises this same year.

In 2020, alongside the resumption of Australian participation in the Malabar naval exercises, India and Australia elevated their bilateral relationship to that of Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) during the “virtual summit” on 4th June 2020 between Prime Ministers Modi and Scott Morrison. The meeting resulted in conclusion of nine agreements and a joint declaration on a “Shared Vision for Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.”

Both leaders met again at the second Australia-India Virtual Leaders’ Summit on 21st March 2021. The Australian Prime Minister outlined a \$282 million package of new initiatives to bolster the CSP. Just a day after the second summit, on 22nd March 2022, the Australian government announced an updated India Economic Strategy (IES), which had been released in July 2018. Subsequently, the two countries formally relaunched negotiations for a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) at the 17th India-Australia Joint Ministerial Commission meeting on 30th September 2021 to deepen bilateral trade in goods and services, with the aim of concluding a full CECA by the end of 2022.⁷ Meanwhile, both countries on 2nd April 2022

signed the Australia-India Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA) as an interim agreement looking towards a full CECA (DFAT undated-a). The ECTA entered into force on 29th December 2022. For the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the ECTA “helps secure Australia’s foothold in the world’s fastest growing large economy and enables Australian businesses to unlock or expand their operations in a market of nearly one and a half billion people” (DFAT undated-b).

Following his election, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese’s first trip (along with Penny Wong, Australia’s new Foreign Minister) was to Tokyo to attend the Quad. Modi and Albanese met again during the latest Quad Leaders’ summit in May 2023.⁸ Both leaders finally visited each other’s countries, Modi to Australia in May 2023 and Albanese to India for the first Annual Leaders’ Summit in March 2023 (DFAT, 2023).

India-Australia bilateral relations today are characterized by a growing level of engagement in all spheres and sectors and is underpinned by shared values of pluralism, democratic governance and Commonwealth traditions. Australia is host to a huge Indian Diaspora population – 4,96,000 people of Indian origin and overseas Indians live in Australia as per MEA records. As per Australian Department of Home Affairs, 7,21,050 Indian-born people were living in Australia at the end of 30th June 2020, overtaking China from the previous year to become the second largest migrant community in Australia after the United Kingdom.

Australia is also an important partner in India’s vision of a “free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific” and a firm supporter of India’s strategic engagement with East Asia, South East Asia and the US. Both countries are part of the Quad and work together in other multilateral forums such as the G20 and EAS. Australia is one of only three countries with which India holds annual leader-level summits (DFAT, 2023). India is an important trade partner for Australia. It was Australia’s 6th largest trading partner and 4th largest export market in 2022, driven by coal and international education. According to the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), “education is

⁷ The negotiations are set to take place in 2023.

⁸ Both leaders also met on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Bali in November 2022 and funeral of the former Japanese Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe in Tokyo in September 2022.

Australia's largest service export to India, valued at \$4.4 billion in 2022. In this context, of significance is the signing of the first ever Mechanism for the Mutual Recognition of Qualifications between Australia and India by the Education Ministers of both countries in New Delhi on 2nd March 2023.

Conclusion

It is clear that the various powers have responded to the Indo-Pacific imperative from their own vantage points based on respective strategic compulsions and calculations and coalesced in forums such as the Quad. However, it is argued that the Quad's overriding purpose is undermined by its informality. At the same time, it may be this very nature of the alliance that makes it flexible to respond bilaterally, trilaterally and multilaterally to various challenges (Rossiter and Cannon 2023). In this light, the Quad has attempted to institutionalise its efforts and build "habits of cooperation" (The White House 2022) with the establishment of Leader-level working groups – Working Groups on Health Security (2021), Climate (2021), Critical and Emerging Technology (2021), Space (2021), Infrastructure and Cyber, Maritime Security (2023), Terrorism (2023).⁹ Ministerial meetings of Foreign Ministers have been held 2019 onwards and discussions are also held at the level of senior officials, Quad Sherpa, among others.

Notwithstanding, India and Australia as "middle powers" are seen as charting their own paths in the Indo-Pacific region that converge in forums like the Quad while also engaging separately in other forums¹⁰ and bilaterally, given the "uncertainties about the United States' ability and willingness to commit to underwriting regional security" (Jaishankar, 2020) and prosperity. Reflecting a more proactive approach, Australia is scheduled to host Exercise Malabar in 2023 for the first time and it will also be hosting the Quad Leaders' Summit in mid-2023. On its part, the US has released several documents outlining its Indo-Pacific Strategy, the Indo-Pacific Strategy Report in 2019, and Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States in 2022 and in the same year, US President Joe Biden launched the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF).

⁹ While three coordination groups were set up on Space, Infrastructure and Cyber, they later transformed into working groups. However, the details of when the latter two became working groups are not easily traceable in official statements/documents accessed.

¹⁰ India for e.g. engages with China in the BRICS, SCO, EAS, etc.

While India's decision to follow its policy of "strategic autonomy" vis a vis Ukraine-Russia crisis may have reaffirmed concerns about India's commitment to the Quad, however, the fact remains that India considers itself an Indo-Pacific nation. According to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (2023), approximately "95 percent of India's international trade by volume and 77 percent by value moves by sea transport". Nearly 55% of India's trade with the Indo-Pacific region passes through the South China Seas (Deshpande 2003). Hence, India would be invested in a stable and secure Indo-Pacific.¹¹

References

1. Abe, Shinzo (2007), Confluence of the Two Seas, Speech by H.E. Mr. Shinzo Abe Prime Minister of Japan at the Indian Parliament, Web Access 6 July 2023, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmv0708/speech-2.html>
2. Brewster, David (2015), "The Australia-India Framework for Security Cooperation: Another Step Towards an Indo-Pacific Security Partnership", *Security Challenges*, Vol. 11, No. 1, pp. 39-48.
3. Cherian, John (2007), "The Battle is On", 21 Sept, The Frontline, <https://frontline.thehindu.com/other/article30192939.ece>
4. CRS (2023), "The "Quad": Cooperation Among the United States, Japan, India, and Australia", *Congressional Research Service*, 30 January, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11678>
5. Das, Udayan (2019), "What Is the Indo-Pacific?", The Diplomat, 13 July, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/07/what-is-the-indo-pacific/>
6. Deshpande, Prashant Prabhakar (2003), "India's Indo-Pacific strategy to counter China", 14 August, Times of India, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/truth-lies-and-politics/indias-indo-pacific-strategy-to-counter-china/>
7. DFAT (2023), "India Country Brief", <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/india/india-country-brief>
8. DFAT (undated-a), "Australia-India ECTA official text", <https://www.dfat.gov.au/trade/agreements/in-force/australia-india-ecta/australia-india-ecta-official-text>
9. DFAT (undated-b), "Australia-India ECTA Outcomes", <https://www.dfat.gov.au/trade/agreements/in-force/australia-india-ecta/outcomes>
10. Fraser, Dominique (2023), "The Quad: A Backgrounder", Asia Society Policy Institute, May 16.
11. Government of Australia (2017), "Foreign Policy White Paper (2017)".

¹¹ Furthermore, India-China border still remains a problem as fresh skirmishes were reported in December 2022 and Chinese village construction activities have been taking place close to the border.

12. ICWA (2022), “Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative: Towards a Sustainable and Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region”, Indian Council of World Affairs.
13. Indian Mission (2023), “Quad Leader’s Vision Statement: Enduring Partners in the Indo-Pacific”, Indian Mission in ASEAN, 20 May, Web Access 5 July 2023, <https://www.indmissionasean.gov.in/extra?id=b68ne>
14. Indian Navy (2015), “Ensuring Secure Seas: India’s Maritime Security Strategy (2015)”, Naval Strategic Publication (NSP) 1.2, Indian Navy, Ministry of Defense, Government of India, October.
15. Jaishankar, Dhruva (2020), “The Australia–India Strategic Partnership: Accelerating Security Cooperation in the Indo–Pacific”, Lowy Institute for International Policy.
16. Kanodia, Harshita (2020), India’s Sagar Policy in the Indian Ocean, *Diplomatist*, December 25, Web Access 1 July 2023, <https://diplomatist.com/2020/12/25/indias-sagar-policy-in-the-indian-ocean-region/>
17. Kaura, Vinay (2020), “Quad’s Malabar Moment”, *Indian Journal of Asian Affairs*, June-December, Vol. 33, No. 1/2, pp. 1-23,
18. MEA (2015a), “Act East Policy”, 23 December, Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, <https://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=133837>.
19. MEA (2015b), “Joint Statement on India and Japan Vision 2025: Special Strategic and Global Partnership Working Together for Peace and Prosperity of Indo-Pacific”, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, December 12, Web Access 29 June 2023, https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/26176/Joint_Statement_on_India_and_Japan_Vision_2025_Special_Strategic_and_Global_Partnership_Working_Together_for_Peace_and_Prosperty_of_the_IndoPacific_R
20. MEA (2018), “Prime Minister’s Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue”, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, Web Access 1 July 2023, <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/29943/Prime+Ministers+Keynote+Address+at+Shangri+La+Dialogue+June+01+2018>
21. MEA (2020), “Indo-Pacific Division Briefs”, Ministry of External Affairs, February 7, Web Access 1 July 2023, https://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Indo_Feb_07_2020.pdf
22. Medcalf, Rory and C. Raja Mohan (2014), “Responding to Indo-Pacific rivalry: Australia, India and middle power coalitions”, Lowy Institute for International Policy, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep10182>
23. Parry, Matthew (2022), Australia’s Strategic View of the Indo-Pacific, European Parliamentary Research Service, European Parliament, February.
24. Prime Minister’s Office (2021), “Fact Sheet: Quad Leaders’ Summit”, 25 September, PIB Delhi.
25. Project Mausam, Ministry of Culture, Government of India, Web Access 3 July 2023, <https://indiaculture.gov.in/project-mausam>
26. Rossiter, Ash and Brendon J. Cannon (2023), “Quad in the Indo-Pacific, Role of Informality in Countering China”, *Issue Brief*, Institute for Security and Development Policy, February 7.

27. Smith, Sheila A. (2021), *The Quad in the Indo-Pacific: What to Know*, Council on Foreign Relations, New York.
28. The White House (2022), "Fact Sheet: Quad Leaders' Tokyo Summit 2022", 23 May, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/05/23/fact-sheet-quad-leaders-tokyo-summit-2022/>
29. Tyler, Melissa Conley (2023), "Asian Century White Paper: a decade on", 9 January 2023, *The Interpreter*, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/asian-century-white-paper-decade>
30. US Dept of State (2023), "Joint Statement of the Quad Ministerial Meeting in New Delhi", Media note, Office of the spokesperson, 3 March, <https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-of-the-quad-ministerial-meeting-in-new-delhi/>
31. US Government (Undated), "China's Military Aggression in the Indo-Pacific Region", Official Website of the United States Government, 2017-2020 Archived content, Web Access 10 August 2023, [https://2017-2021.state.gov/chinas-military-aggression-in-the-indo-pacific-region/#:~:text=Across%20much%20of%20the%20Indo,Republic%20of%20China%20\(PRC\)](https://2017-2021.state.gov/chinas-military-aggression-in-the-indo-pacific-region/#:~:text=Across%20much%20of%20the%20Indo,Republic%20of%20China%20(PRC))
32. US Mission in China (2023), "Integrated Country Strategy People's Republic of China", Reviewed and Updated on 2 February 2023, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/ICS_EAP_China_02FEB2023_PUBLIC.pdf
33. Vashisht, Pankaj (2003), "Indo-Pacific Strategies: What Do They Entail for India?", *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs* 6, no. 3 (March–April): 109-128, <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/3371487/indo-pacific-strategies-what-do-they-entail-for-india/>



India-Australia Relations in the Era of Indo-pacific

Kalesh Mohanan*

“At the heart of this contest is genuine respect, reflecting the affection and friendship between our peoples...On the field, Australia and India are competing to be the best in the world. Off the field, we are co-operating to build a better world.”¹

Anthony Albanese, Australian Prime Minister

The Asian seas today are witnessing an intriguing historical anomaly, the simultaneous rises of two homegrown maritime powers against the backdrop of US dominion over the global commons. The drivers behind this apparent irregularity in the Asian regional order are, of course, China and India. Their aspirations for great-power status and, above all, their quests for energy security have compelled both Beijing and New Delhi to redirect their gazes from land to the seas. While Chinese and Indian maritime interests are a natural outgrowth of impressive economic growth and the appetite for dominance in the Indian Ocean Region, their simultaneous entries into the nautical realm also portend worrisome trends.

While the Sino–Indian relationship has improved in recent years, it continues to oscillate between periods of cordiality and competition. This is exacerbated by a fundamental mismatch of threat perceptions between both states, rooted in the shifting balance of power and conflicting signals in the bilateral relationship. Moreover, the rise of both countries as major powers has provided them with new tools and platforms to interact with each other, contributing to a spill over of the Sino–Indian relationship from the bilateral to regional levels. Analysts like Robert Kaplan has called the Indian Ocean a “cockpit of future maritime rivalries.”

* The author, Commander in the Indian Navy as well as a naval historian. He has a PhD and has done his Postdoctoral research in naval history from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India. He has several publications including ‘The Royal Indian Navy: Trajectories, Transformations and the Transfer of Power’.

¹ The Indian Express, 10 Mar. 2023.

In the quest for its own logic of strategic maritime engagement, India has stressed on a two-pronged rationale to justify maritime presence in the Pacific. The first is to secure its commercial interests in the region and uphold the principles of freedom of navigation and 'access to global commons.' The second is to retain the leverage to mount an effective response to a possible contingency in the Indian Ocean borne out of the China's land border aggression.

Balance of Power and Regional Security Complex

The presence of states with varying degrees of power makes it necessary to study the pattern of relationship among them. If one goes by the realist assumption, the international system is unrestrained and unprotected by any international government, where states have to look after their own national interests and, obviously, national security, thereby inducing insecurity in others. Sometime, nations see each other with suspicious view, 'each is against the other', and maintain an Equi-association. As per the theory of Balance of Power, if one state tried to increase its power, thereby posing a threat, all the others would unite to prevent it. Alliances and Counter-Alliances are the most commonly used devices for maintaining the balance of power. If one state increases its strength, its adversaries have no other option but to balance it by forming coalitions against it. In this case, China is showing hegemonic power projection in the Indian Ocean and India aims to unite the littoral states in IOR through maritime diplomacy against China. The ideas of regional security and security complexes are important as every state can put its security in relation to at least one complex. Many examples of this can be easily identified; in this case India and its neighbours. We can clearly see how India's security is tied up with its regional complex of the Indian Ocean and vice versa, and how it undoubtedly takes this into consideration when considering its national security.

India-Australia Bi-lateral Relations

Australia and India have a long-standing relationship, with diplomatic relations established in the pre-independence period in 1941 when the Consulate General of India was first opened as a Trade Office in Sydney. The end of the Cold War and India's simultaneous decision to launch major economic reforms in 1991 provided the first positive move towards development of closer ties between

the two nations. With the passage of time, the relationship gained momentum towards a strategic relationship, alongside the existing economic engagement.

In recent years, the India-Australia relationship has charted a whole new trajectory of transformational growth. Bilateral cooperation has seen exponential growth in existing frameworks of cooperation and further expanded across a wide spectrum of new areas opening up new possibilities, both at bilateral and global levels. With greater convergence of views on various international issues such as international terrorism and a shared approach to rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region, the two great democracies of the region have expanded their bilateral relationship into global partnerships in plurilateral formats, including the QUAD. The two countries are important partners in the Indo-Pacific and cooperate closely in a wide range of sectors. The Australian Defence White Paper of 2013 has mentioned the Indo-Pacific region as the zone of strategic importance.² Since 2000, the two countries began to forge an increasingly cooperative partnership, essentially driven by the changing regional landscape in Asia and by China's aggressive behaviour, as also improving India-US relations, as signified by the nuclear deal.³ Australia has pushed back on China's aggressive trade barriers and has called for independent investigation of COVID-19 origins.⁴ India, on its part, has given a strong response to China's unilateral attempts to alter status quo on the Ladakh border. Many Australian analysts consider the strategic interests of Australia and India as 'essentially congruent' and there is certainly considerable scope for cooperation in the political-security arena.⁵

India-Australia Joint Ministerial Commission (JMC) was established in 1989 to enable interaction at a government and business level on a range of trade and investment related issues. JMC meetings are held regularly. Australia and India upgraded their bilateral relationship from 'Strategic Partnership'

² Defence White Paper, Australia, 2013

³ Col R.P. Singh, *India-Australia Relations on the Upswing*, IDSA Online Article, <https://www.idsa.in/idsacomments/india-australia-relations-rp-singh-260422>, accessed on 20 Aug 23.

⁴ Ibid

⁵ David Brewster, *India's Ocean: The story of India's bid for regional leadership*, Routledge, London, 2014, p.156 and Rory Medcalf and Amandeep Gill, 'Unconventional partners: Australia-India cooperation in reducing nuclear dangers', *Lowy Institute Policy Brief*, October 2009.

(2009) to Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) in 2020. Over the years, an array of institutional mechanism has been put in place to promote bilateral co-operation. Various institutional dialogue mechanisms include Annual Meetings of Prime Ministers, Foreign Ministers' Framework Dialogue, Joint Trade & Commerce Ministerial Commission, India-Australia '2+2' Foreign Secretaries and Defence Secretaries Dialogue, Defence Policy Talks, Australia-India Education Council, Defence Services Staff Talks, Energy Dialogue, India-Australia-Japan Trilateral Dialogue, India-Australia-Indonesia Trilateral Dialogue, India-France-Australia Trilateral Dialogue, India-Australia Bilateral Dialogue on Global Cyber Issues, India-Australia Maritime Dialogue, India-Australia Economic Policy Dialogue, India-Australia Dialogue on Disarmament, Non-proliferation and Export Control as well as Joint Working Groups on Tourism, Counter-Terrorism, Water Resources, Agriculture, Skill Development etc.

The two-way Prime Ministerial visits in 2014 gave significant momentum to the bilateral relationship. Former Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, visited India in September 2014. During the visit, four Agreements/ MoUs were signed. Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi visited Australia for G20 Leaders' Summit at Brisbane in November 2014, followed by a bilateral visit from 16th-18th November 2014. During the visit, "Framework for Security cooperation between India and Australia" and five other Agreements/ MoUs on Social security, Tourism, Arts & Culture, Sentenced persons and combating Narcotics were signed on this occasion. During the then Prime Minister Hon. Malcolm Turnbull' State Visit to India in April 2017, six bilateral agreements/MoUs on Cooperation in combating international terrorism & transnational organized crime, Health and Medicine, Sports, Environment, Climate and Wildlife, Civil Aviation society and Space technology were signed. India's relations with Australia reached a new high with the first ever visit of the President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind to Australia in November 2018. Five MoUs were exchanged during the visit. The President's visit to Australia was preceded by the visit of then Governor General of Australia, Sir Peter Cosgrove, to India, in March 2018 to attend the founding conference of the International Solar Alliance.

On 04 June 2020, the Prime Ministers of both countries elevated the bilateral relationship from Strategic Partnership of 2009 to Comprehensive

Strategic Partnership (CSP) during India-Australia Leaders' Virtual Summit. In 2021, the prime ministers of both countries met during COP26 in Glasgow. Apart from a Joint Statement on CSP, the Summit also delivered eight landmark agreements/MoUs in various fields, including Maritime Cooperation in Indo-Pacific, Defence, Cyber Security, Education, Mining, Water Resource Management etc. To pursue the CSP, Foreign and Defence Ministers of both countries agreed to meet in a '2+2' format biennially.⁶

India and Australia also co-operate in various multilateral fora. Australia supports India's candidature in an expanded UN Security Council.⁷ Both India and Australia are members of the Commonwealth, IORA, ASEAN Regional Forum, Asia Pacific Partnership on Climate and Clean Development, International Solar Alliance, Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, Indo-Pacific Economic Framework and have participated in the East Asia Summits. Both countries have also been cooperating as members of the Five Interested Parties (FIP) in the WTO context. Australia supports India's membership in the APEC.⁸ In 2008, Australia became an Observer in SAARC.

India and Australia have a shared vision on the Indo-Pacific. India's approach to the region was introduced by the Indian Government in 2018 through the vision of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All).⁹ To implement the vision of SAGAR, the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) was launched in 2019.¹⁰ India has also strengthened its outreach with Pacific island countries, through FIPIC (Forum for India–Pacific Island Cooperation). Australia's strategic vision on Indo-Pacific is expressed in the 2020 Defence Strategic Update. Australia's strategic objectives as defined in this document include – the shaping of strategic environment in the region, deterring actions that are against Australian interests and responding with credible military force, if

⁶ <https://www.hcic Canberra.gov.in/page/india-australia-relations/>, accessed on 20 Aug 23.

⁷ 'Joint Statement on a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between Republic of India and Australia', Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian Government.

⁸ <https://www.hcic Canberra.gov.in/page/india-australia-relations/>, accessed on 20 Aug 23.

⁹ Indian Prime Minister's Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue (June 01, 2018)", Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 1 June 2018.

¹⁰ Indian Prime Minister's Speech at the East Asia Summit, 04 November 2019, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 4 November 2019.

¹¹ Col R.P. Singh, *India-Australia Relations on the Upswing*, IDSA Online Article.

required.¹¹ South Pacific region is Australia's primary area of influence and its deep engagement in the region is defined by the Pacific Step-up initiative, which was first announced at the Pacific Island Forum Leaders' Meeting in September 2016 as a 'step-change' in its engagement with the region.¹²

Bilateral Economic and Trade Relationship

The India-Australia economic relationship has grown significantly in recent years. India's growing economic profile and commercial relevance to the Australian economy is recognized, both at the Federal and State level in Australia. As part of its efforts to develop strong economic relationship with India, the Australian Government commissioned the India Economic Strategy to 2035 to define a pathway for Australia to unlock opportunities offered by Indian Economic growth. The paper was released in July 2018. An update to the India Economic Strategy was released in April 2022. The Government of India released the CII Australia Economic Strategy Report in December 2020.¹³ The report gives a macro-overview of Australia, reviews Australia's business environment, highlights market opportunities in Australia for Indian products and delineates investment and cooperation opportunities in 12 focus sectors and 8 emerging sectors. India was 9th largest trading partner of Australia. During 2021, Bilateral trade in goods and services with India was US\$ 31.1 billion, with exports of goods and services worth US\$ 12.5 billion and imports of goods and services worth US\$ 18.6 billion. India's merchandise exports to Australia grew by 135% between 2019 and 2021.¹⁴

In 2022, there had been a series of high-level engagements and exchanges of ministerial visits, including the India-Australia Virtual Summit and Foreign Ministers' meeting. Several key announcements were made during the 2nd India-Australia Virtual Summit, including a Letter of Intent on Migration and a Mobility Partnership Arrangement to foster the exchange of skills. The India-Australia Economic Cooperation Trade Agreement (Ind-Aus ECTA) is the first free trade agreement signed by India with a developed country in a decade, which entered into force in December 2022. It has resulted in an

¹² Stepping-up Australia's Engagement with our Pacific Family, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian Government.

¹³ <https://www.hcic Canberra.gov.in/page/india-australia-relations/>, accessed on 20 Aug 23.

¹⁴ Ibid

immediate reduction of duty to zero on 96% of Indian exports to Australia in value (that is 98% of the tariff lines) and zero duty on 85% of Australia's exports (in value) to India.

Defence Cooperation

India and Australia, along with the US, Japan, were the pivotal players in the multilateral naval response effort to the 2004 Tsunami. This displayed India as a first responder as an Humanitarian and Disaster Relief (HADR) provider to the IOR and was a major turning point in Indian thinking about the potential for cooperation with other key maritime democracies in both the Indian and Pacific Oceans.¹⁵ Australia and India have signed many defence and strategic agreements in the post 9/11 attack. MoU on 'Cooperation in Combating International Terrorism' (2003), MoU on 'Defence Cooperation and Track II Bilateral Security Dialogue every 18 months' (2006), 'Defence Information Sharing Arrangement' (2007) and Agreements on 'Intelligence Dialogue, Extradition and Terrorism' (2008) were signed by the two governments.¹⁶ Australia and India have been conducting bilateral and multilateral military exercises, like Malabar naval exercise (US-Indian), Australia's Kakadu and Pitch Black exercises. In 2007, India extended the invitation to Australia, Japan and Singapore to take part in the Malabar Naval Exercise, which almost seemed to nurture the idea of a quadrilateral relation between India, US, Japan and Australia as a concrete mechanism to contain the common threat.¹⁷

The Australian Defence White Paper of 2009 discussed the strategic alliance with India and mentioned "India is an important partner for Australia... as India extends its reach and influence into areas of shared strategic interests, we need to strengthen our defence cooperation and understand India's strategic thinking. In the near term, we are looking for opportunities to expand high level defence dialogue, building upon annual talks between the Chief of the Defence Force and his Indian Counterpart. We should also increase education

¹⁵ David Brewster, *India's Ocean: The story of India's bid for regional leadership*, Routledge, London, 2014, p.156

¹⁶ Manmohini Kaul & Anushree Chakraborty (Ed), *India's Look East to Act East Policy: Tracking the Opportunities and Challenges in the Indo-Pacific*, Pentagon Press, New Delhi, 2016, p.88

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Australian Defence White Paper titled 'Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030', May 2009

and training exchanges and practical cooperation in areas such as defence information sharing, counter terrorism and peacekeeping.”¹⁸ The White Paper further says, “Australia and India will have a strong mutual interest in enhancing maritime security cooperation in the Indian Ocean, where we both have key strategic interests to manage. Maritime trade through the eastern Indian Ocean is particularly important for both countries, and we will explore opportunities to work together with India to ensure that those waters are kept secure and open over the decades ahead. The Government has specifically directed Defence to examine opportunities for increased maritime cooperation.”¹⁹ In November 2014, Australia and India decided to extend defence cooperation to cover research, development and industry engagement and agreed to hold regular meetings at the level of the Defence Minister, conduct regular naval exercises and convene regular service-to-service talks. Kevin Andrews, the Australian Defence Minister, visited India on 1st-3rd September 2015 for bilateral talks.

In October 2013, Australian Navy conducted an International Fleet Review (IFR) in Sydney where Indian naval ship *Sahyadri* participated. Indian Coast Guard Ship *Sankalp* visited Port Darwin in the first week of December 2014 and two Indian naval ships, *Satpura* and *Kamorta* visited Fremantle Port, Perth, in the first week of June 2015 as a goodwill visit. Indian Naval Offshore Patrol vessel *Sumitra* visited Sydney on 4th-7th November 2016 and Darwin on 6th-9th December 2016. The first-ever Bilateral Naval Exercise, AUSINDEX 15, was conducted in Visakhapatnam and the Bay of Bengal in September 2015. Australian Naval ship HMAS *Darwin* participated in the International Fleet Review conducted off the coast of Vishakhapatnam on 4th-8th February 2016. Chief of Royal Australian Navy, Vice Admiral Tim Barrett and a thirty-men military band participated in IFR 2016.

The second bilateral maritime exercise, AUSINDEX 2017 was conducted off the coast of Freemantle, Australia during 17th-19th June 2017 in which three Indian naval ships, *Shivalik*, *Kamorta* and *Jyoti* participated. Vice-Admiral HCS Bisht, Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Eastern Naval Command also visited Australia during this period. AUSINDEX 2019 was held in April 2019

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ ‘Milan’ is a multilateral naval exercise hosted by the Indian Navy. The biennial event features professional exercises and seminars, social events and sporting fixtures between participating nations.

in Visakhapatnam. Indian Coast Guard Ship *Vaibhav* visited Darwin, Australia in February 2017 as part of its tri-nation tour to Singapore, Australia and Malaysia. An Australian naval ship HMAS *Larrakia* participated in 'MILAN'²⁰, naval exercise in Andaman & Nicobar Islands in March 2018. In 2018, Indian Air Force participated, for the first time, in the Exercise Pitch Black in Australia from 27th July - 17th August 2018. INS *Sahyadri* participated in Kakadu, the biennial Exercise of the Australian Navy held from 30th August to 15th September 2018, in which 27 nations participated. The third edition of AUSTRAHIND (Special Forces of Army Exercise) was held in September 2018. In October-November 2020, the Australian Navy participated in 'Malabar'²¹ Exercises. India participated in the French-led naval exercises La Perouse in April 2021 in Bay of Bengal along with Australia, USA and Japan Arrangement concerning Mutual Logistics Support (MLSA) and Implementing Arrangement concerning cooperation in Defence Science and Technology to the MoU on Defence Cooperation were concluded during the Virtual Summit held in June 2020. Navies of India, Australia, Japan and the USA also participated in Phase I of Exercise Malabar 2021 from 26th-29th August 2021 off Guam and in Phase II in the Bay of Bengal from 12th-15th October 2021. India participated as an Observer in Exercise Talisman Sabre 2021 in July 2021. Australia participated in Exercise 'MILAN' in March 2022 in Visakhapatnam.

Indian Air force participated in Exercise Pitch Black in Northern Territory from 18th August to 09th September 2022. INS *Satpura* participated at the multinational Exercise KAKADU in Darwin in September 2022. A Maritime Partnership Exercise involving Royal Australian Navy (RAN) ships HMAS *Adelaide* and HMAS *Anzac* and Indian Navy Ships *Jalashwa* and *Kavaratti* along with their embarked helicopters was held in the Bay of Bengal from 2nd to 3rd November 2022 as part of Australia's Indo-Pacific Endeavour 2022 (IPE 22). India-Australia Joint Military Exercise AUSTRAHIND 2022 was held in Rajasthan from 28th November to 11th December 2022 between Indian Army and the Australian Army, first exercise in the series of AUSTRAHIND with participation of all arms and services contingent from both armies.

The 11th IAF-RAAF Staff Talks was held in Australia in May 2022. The

²¹ 'Malabar' naval exercise started in 1992 along the Malabar Coast of India as a bilateral exercise between India and the US. It was expanded in 2007 with the participation of Japan, Singapore and Australia. Japan became a permanent partner in 2015. Since 2020, Australia has been participating in the exercise.

Army-to-Army Staff Talks was held in Dehradun in June 2022. The 14th Navy Staff Talks was held in New Delhi in April 2022. India participated at Sea Power Conference 2022, Air & Space Power Conference 2022, and Army Chief Symposium. Naval Talks were held on 1st-3rd May 2023 in Australia. Establishment of General Rawat India-Australia Young Defence Officers' Exchange Programme was announced during 2nd Virtual Summit in March 2022.

With respect to the South China Sea, Australia and India underlined the importance of freedom of navigation and over flight, consistent with international laws, particularly UN Convention on the Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS). It was announced that India will participate in the Indo-Pacific Endeavour Exercise 2022, which aimed to promote security and stability in Australia's near region through bilateral and multilateral engagement, training and capacity building.²²

Maritime Cooperation

The Australia-India Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative Partnership (AIPOIP) helps shape maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific to support an open, inclusive, resilient, prosperous and rules-based maritime order.²³ In 2020-21, the AIPOIP generated ideas and cooperation to begin implementation of the IPOI, which is feeding into actions taken by both governments and non-government actors. In 2021-22, the AIPOIP focused on building areas of practical cooperation between Australia, India, and the Indo-Pacific along specific areas which the Australian and Indian governments have identified as priorities, particularly in the field of combating marine plastic waste and marine ecology. The AIPOIP sits under the Australia-India Joint Declaration on a Shared Vision for Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific as part of the Australia-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership announced during Leaders' Virtual Summit on 4th June 2020. India and Australia are committed to work together bilaterally, regionally, multilaterally and in minilateral arrangements, to support regional architecture in line with their shared values and interests. The AIPOIP also aligns with

²² Indo-Pacific Endeavour 2021, Department of Defence, Australian Government.

²³ <https://india.embassy.gov.au/ndli/AIPOIP1.html> accessed on 21 Aug 23.

²⁴ Ibid

other bilateral arrangements, including Australia-India Maritime and 2+2 Dialogues, and with our cooperation with ASEAN under its Outlook on the Indo-Pacific.²⁴

Agriculture, Science & Technology

Australia-India Strategic Research Fund (AISRF), which was established in 2006, supports collaboration between scientists in India and Australia on cutting-edge research. Pursuant to the commitment made by India and Australia during the Leaders' Virtual Summit in June 2020, to have AISRF Special COVID-19 Round in 2020, the AISRF COVID-19 special round projects (on COVID-19 screening & diagnostic testing and cardiac marker) were announced in December 2020. Grants for round 14 of the AISRF were announced in March 2022, including in areas of quantum technologies, earth observation remote sensing, groundwater resources management and downstream processing, recycling and tailings reclamation of critical minerals, COVID-19 long-term health impacts, Infection prevention and control, Digital health and telemedicine, Biomaterials (including bioplastics).

Resources & Energy Security

The India-Australia Energy Security Dialogue was held on 8th-11th February 2016, The Fourth India-Australia Energy Dialogue was held virtually on 15th February 2022 and signed a Letter of Intent on New and Renewable Energy Technology wherein both sides committed to work together on reducing the cost of ultra-low-cost solar and clean hydrogen.

During Leaders' Summit in March 2022, matching funds of the amount of AUD 10 million for Pacific Island Countries under Infrastructure for Resilient Island States (IRIS) and of AUD 10 million for Pacific Island Countries under International Solar Alliance (ISA) were announced by India.²⁵ During the 1st India-Australia Annual Summit on 10th March 2023, the Terms of Reference for India-Australia Solar Taskforce were announced. A Renewable Energy Partnership was also announced. The Terms of Reference for India-Australia Green Hydrogen Task Force was signed on 23rd May 2023 during the visit of Hon. PM Modi to Sydney.

Conclusion

²⁵ <https://www.hcicanberra.gov.in/page/india-australia-relations/>, accessed on 21 Aug 23.

India and Australia, the largest maritime powers among the littoral states of the Indian Ocean, constitute the region's geopolitical poles. This position gives them particular responsibility for the security of the region, and it means that the future of the India-Australia strategic relationship could affect far more than just New Delhi and Canberra. The two countries' interests are increasingly converging, particularly New Delhi and Canberra are both wary of China's growing assertiveness in the Asia-Pacific region.

Trade between the two countries is growing-and, along with it, are the shared strategic interests. Given both countries' increasing power projection capacities and the increasing importance of the Indian Ocean region to their strategic calculations, their spheres of action and influence are beginning to overlap, making an enhanced dialogue necessary.

Moreover, the two countries' perceptions of their strategic landscapes, especially regarding the role of China-align more closely than ever before. India and Australia increasingly share a common apprehension about China's rise, although for different reasons.²⁶ India's border dispute with China remains unresolved, and China's growing military capabilities, as well as its increased presence in the Indian Ocean, are a source of anxiety for New Delhi. Being two major powers with shared interests, India and Australia could play a significant role in creating a strong and prosperous Indo-Pacific region.

Views expressed are of the author and do not reflect the views of the Indian Navy or of the Government of India.



²⁶ Frédéric Grare, *India-Australia Strategic Relationship Defining Realistic Expectations*, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2014/03/18/india-australia-strategic-relationship-defining-realistic-expectations-pub-55007>, accessed on 21 Aug 23.

Regional News and Views

Nepal

Nepal and China have reached an agreement to accelerate the completion of pending projects previously announced by the Chinese government in 2018 and 2019 under the controversial Belt and Road Initiative to boost infrastructure in the landlocked Himalayan nation, a media report said on Tuesday. The agreement was reached during a meeting between the Vice Chairman of Nepal's National Planning Commission (NPC), Dr Min Bahadur Shrestha, and Chong Liang, the Vice Chairman of the Chinese government's National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), which oversees the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Nepal Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' is expected to visit China in September.

(Outlook India, 23rd July, 2023)

Myanmar

Myanmar's military has officially postponed an election promised by August this year after extending a state of emergency it imposed in the aftermath of its 2021 coup.

In a statement on state television on Monday, the military cited ongoing violence as the reason for the election delay.

The announcement amounted to an admission that the military does not exercise enough control to stage the polls and has failed to subdue widespread opposition to its rule, which includes increasingly challenging armed resistance as well as nonviolent protests and civil disobedience.

Monday's report did not specify when the polls might be held, saying only that they would occur after the goals of the state of emergency are accomplished.

The emergency, which is being extended for a fourth time, allows the

military to assume all government functions, giving Min Aung Hlaing, who heads the governing council, legislative, judicial and executive powers.

In response to the military's announcement, the United States said extending the state of emergency would plunge Myanmar "deeper into violence and instability".

Diplomatic efforts to end the conflict led by the United Nations and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations regional bloc have, meanwhile, stalled, with the military refusing to engage with its opponents.

(Al Jazeera, 1st August, 2023)

Myanmar junta pardons ex-leader Suu Kyi for five offences

Myanmar's former leader Aung San Suu Kyi will be pardoned for five of the numerous offences for which she was jailed for a total of 33 years, state media reported on Tuesday.

She is appealing the convictions for the various offences ranging from incitement and election fraud to corruption. She denied all of the charges.

(Reuters, 1st August, 2023)

Pakistan

Former Pakistan PM Imran Khan gets 3-year sentence in Toshakhana corruption case

Former Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan was arrested on Saturday after a trial court in Islamabad found him guilty of the "offence of corrupt practices" in the state gifts case (commonly known as the Toshakhana case). Mr. Khan has been sentenced to three years in jail and fined 100,000 Pakistani rupees.

An order by Additional and Sessions Judge Humayun Dilawar said Mr. Khan "cheated while providing information about gifts he obtained from Toshakhana which later proved to be false and inaccurate. His dishonesty has been established beyond doubt". Mr. Khan has been shifted to Attock Jail in Punjab.

Mr. Khan is accused of misusing his tenure from 2018 to 2022 to buy and sell gifts in state possession that were received during visits abroad and were worth more than Rs. 140 million. However, he denies that he

misdeclared. One of the most precious gifts that he sold was a special Holy Kaaba edition Graff watch that was gifted by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia to him.

(The Hindu, 5th August, 2023)

China

India, Malaysia, Philippines, Vietnam step up opposition to China's new map

Vietnam joined India, Malaysia and the Philippines on Thursday to reject a new map released by China.

Hanoi reiterated its “unwavering position” regarding sovereignty over Paracel (Hoang Sa) and Spratly (Truong Sa) islands and said it “resolutely rejects any maritime claims made by China that are based on the ‘nine-dash line’ in the East Sea,” according to Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Pham Thu Hang.

“The issuance of the map as well as China’s ‘nine-dash line’ claim show a violation of Vietnam’s sovereignty,” Vietnam Plus News quoted Pham as saying.

Beijing released on Monday what it called “China Standard Map Edition 2023,” triggering reactions from its neighbors.

Malaysia said Thursday it will send a protest note to Beijing.

“This has been the practice (when dealing with issues like this) ... the next step includes sending – a protest note,” said Malaysian Foreign Minister Zambry Abdul Kadir.

Malaysia said on Wednesday it does not recognize Beijing’s claims in the disputed South China Sea as outlined in the new Chinese map.

It said the map encompasses Malaysia’s maritime areas and the map “has no binding effect on Malaysia,” said the Southeast Asian nation’s Foreign Ministry.

According to Kuala Lumpur, China’s new claims encroach upon Malaysia’s maritime areas in Sabah and Sarawak states, based on the 1979 Malaysia map.

“Malaysia views the South China Sea issue as a complex and sensitive issue,” it added.

Calling on China “to act responsibly,” the Philippines also rejected the new version of China’s map, as the Foreign Ministry cited “its inclusion of the nine-dashed line (now a 10-dashed line) that supposedly shows China’s boundaries in the South China Sea.”

It further said: “This latest attempt to legitimize China’s purported sovereignty and jurisdiction over Philippine features and maritime zones has no basis under international law, particularly the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.”

(Anadolu Ajansi, Kuala Lumpur, 30th August, 2023)

India

India says Beijing claiming ‘Indian territories is an old habit of China’

Earlier, India had lodged a protest with Beijing over the map which showed the whole of Arunachal Pradesh and the Aksai Chin region as part of China.

Arunachal Pradesh is a northeastern state of India, which China claims, while the Aksai Chin region is part of disputed Jammu and Kashmir and has remained under the control of Beijing for long.

New Delhi has said Beijing claiming “Indian territories is an old habit of China.”

In China, Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin called on these nations to “view this map in an objective and rational manner.”

Wang stressed that China’s position on the South China Sea is “consistent and clear.”

“Updating and releasing various types of standard maps each year is a routine job for competent authorities in China, which aims to provide standard map services for all sectors of society and raise the public’s awareness of the standardized use of maps,” Beijing-based daily Global Times quoted him as saying.

Taiwan, which China claims as its “breakaway province,” also protested the new map.

The island nation’s Foreign Ministry spokesperson Jeff Liu told Taipei-based Taiwan News: “Taiwan, the Republic of China, is a sovereign and independent country that is not subordinate to the People’s Republic of China. The People’s Republic of China has never ruled Taiwan. These are universally recognized facts and the status quo in the international community.”

Taipei has insisted on its independence since 1949.

(The Wire, 29th August, 2023)

The 11-day Malabar naval exercise featuring the navies of India, Australia, Japan and the US concluded on Monday. The 27th edition of the exercise, which took place on the East Coast of Australia, witnessed complex and high intensity drills in air, surface and undersea domains, officials said.

Warships, submarines and aircraft from the Indian Navy, Royal Australian Navy (RAN), Japan Maritime Self Defence Force and the US Navy participated in the exercise.

The Indian Navy was represented by indigenously built destroyer INS Kolkata, frigate INS Sahyadri and P8I maritime patrol aircraft.

“The sea phase of exercise Malabar witnessed complex and high intensity exercises in air, surface and undersea domains, weapon firings and cross deck helicopter operations,” the Indian Navy said in a statement.

It said the joint exercise at sea honed the war-fighting skills and enhanced interoperability between the four navies to undertake advanced maritime operations.

“The seamless integration of air assets also showcased the exceptional coordination and interoperability between the Indian, Australian and US maritime patrol aircraft units,” the statement said.

“The exercise not only reaffirmed the ability of the four navies to operate together as an integrated force but also highlighted their shared commitment to maritime security and regional stability through collaborative training and mutual understanding,” it added.

(The Economic Times, 12th August, 2023)

Bangladesh

The appellate division of the Supreme Court on Sunday ordered Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus to pay 12 crore Taka tax.

Dr. Yunus has donated money to three of his own trusts namely: Dr. Mohammad Yunus Trust, Yunus Family Trust, and Yunus Centre Trust. Income Tax Authorities in Bangladesh imposed a tax on money donated to these three trusts.

Dr. Yunus went to High Court against the action of Income Tax Authorities but a High Court verdict upheld the action of Income Tax Authorities.

The Nobel Laureate challenged a High Court verdict that justified the validity of the Income-tax authority's imposition of tax on money donated to three trusts. The Appellate Division bench, headed by Chief Justice Siddique, heard the appeal submitted by Dr Yunus against a High Court verdict and passed an order against Dr Yunus to pay 12 core Taka tax to the government.

(All India Radio News Service Division, 23rd July, 2023)

On 31st August, 2023, Times of India reported that more than 170 global leaders including the former US president Barak Obama former UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon and the former secretary of State Hillary Clinton have urged Sheikh Hasina to suspend all legal proceedings against Yunus.

