



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



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INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

This publication is a monthly analytical survey of developments and policy trends that impact India's interests and define its challenges across the extended Indo-Pacific maritime space, which has become the primary theatre of global geopolitical contestation. It is authored by Cmde. Lalit Kapur (Retd.), DPG Senior Fellow for Maritime Strategy based on open source reports and publications. Your comments and feedback may be addressed to the author at lalit@dpg.org.in. To subscribe, please [click here](#).

Cover Image:

Family Photo of the Fifth India-US 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue, New Delhi, November 10, 2023. Source: PIB

Family Photo of the APEC 2023 San Francisco summit, November 16, 2023. Source: Kantei.go.jp

Aircraft Carriers USS Ronald Reagan and USS Carl Vinson in formation with Japan's Helicopter Carrier JS Hyuga in the Philippine Sea, November 07, 2023. Source: US Pacific Command

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INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

November 2023

Abstract

US Armed Forces operational activity in the Indo-Pacific increased substantially during the month. To India's west, as conflict continued in the Middle East, the USS Dwight D Eisenhower Strike Group sailed through the Straits of Hormuz into the Arabian Gulf on November 27, to deter Iran while the USS Gerald R Ford Group operated in the Eastern Mediterranean. To the east, the USS Ronald Reagan and USS Carl Vinson Strike Groups operated with ships from Canada, Australia and Japan to deter any adventure by China. Taiwan Strait transits by USS Rafael Peralta and HMCS Ottawa on November 1, and by HMAS Toowoomba on November 24, along with Freedom of Navigation Operations by USS Dewey in the Spratly Islands on November 2 and by USS Hopper in the Paracel Islands on November 25 contributed to the continuing challenge by the US and its allies to China's excessive claims in these regions. Australia claimed unsafe conduct by a PLA (N) destroyer while HMAS Toowoomba was clearing its propellers of fishing nets in Japan's waters on November 18; China rejected the claim.

The successful placement in orbit of a spy satellite by North Korea on November 22 brought the DPRK closer to verifiable trans-continental ICBM capability and was condemned by the US and the G-7.

Three summits indicated a thaw in tensions between China and its opponents. In the first, Australian Prime Minister Albanese visited China from November 4-7. The two sides agreed to reinstitute political dialogue and expand bilateral trade. In the second, a year after their Bali Summit, Presidents Biden and Xi Jinping met at San Francisco on November 16. They agreed to resumption of military dialogue and to discuss cooperation on a range of transnational challenges. The third involved President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Kishida, who met on the sidelines of the APEC Summit in San Francisco on November 16. The summits marked relative easing of tensions and signalled steps to reinstate dialogue across political, military and trade issues.

The 17th ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting and the 10th ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus took place in Jakarta on November 15 & 16 respectively.

That the participating ministers found it difficult to generate consensus was evident from the paucity of content in joint statements following the meetings.

India further strengthened its diplomatic, security and defence ties with its key Indo-Pacific partners, the US and Australia, during the month. The 5th India-US 2+2 Ministerial Meeting and the 2nd India-Australia took place in New Delhi on November 10 and 20 respectively. Both bilateral relationships continue to advance rapidly.

The Foreign Ministers of China, Japan and South Korea held their tenth trilateral meeting and the first since 2019 in Busan on November 26, paving the way for a possible summit level meeting between the three countries at an unspecified date in the coming months. Japan's improving relations with South Korea, however, suffered a setback following the Seoul's High Court judgement on November 23 directing Japan to pay compensation to the 'Comfort Women' plaintiffs.

The Philippines announced the termination of three big-ticket infrastructure projects funded by China in favour of Japanese and Western partners. A number of other China-aided projects were reported as facing the axe. Meanwhile, cooperation between the Philippines and the US under the Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement continued to strengthen. In parallel, Australia and the Philippines began joint patrols in the South China Sea.

Indonesia upgraded its ties with the US to a Comprehensive Strategic during the summit meeting between Presidents Joe Biden and Joko Widodo on November 13. Japan and the Philippines decided to strengthen their strategic partnership on November 03 and began negotiations for a reciprocal access agreement. Japan became Vietnam's sixth comprehensive strategic partners during the visit of President Vo Van Thuong to Tokyo from November 27-30.

Australia announced a slew of initiatives to ensure timely execution of the nuclear submarine construction project under AUKUS, including conclusion of the land acquisition agreement for the construction yard, introduction of legislation regarding nuclear safety and trade, and funding for additional university places, with graduates being employed for submarine construction.

As part of India's growing maritime presence, its warships and Coast Guard vessels ranged from the Gulf of Guinea and Namibia in the Atlantic to off Okinawa in the Pacific during the month. Within the Indian Ocean, they showed the flag in Madagascar, Mozambique, Perth and Muscat.

The China Australia Thaw

The thaw in Australia-China relations, begun when Prime Minister Anthony Albanese met President Xi Jinping in Bali¹, continued with Albanese visiting China from November 4-7, 2023². This was his first visit to China as Prime Minister and the first visit by an Australian Prime Minister since Malcolm Turnbull in April 2016. The visit itinerary included attending a trade fair in Shanghai and meetings in Beijing with Prime Minister Li Qiang, President Xi Jinping and Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress Zhao Leji.

Australia and China agreed to expand political engagement through reinstating numerous dialogues including the annual leaders' meeting, the foreign and strategic dialogue, the strategic economic dialogue, the joint ministerial economic commission and other government-to-government mechanisms³. They also agreed to expand bilateral trade based on the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement, to facilitate trade and economic links, and to progress implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement. The leaders agreed to work together on Memorandums of Understanding on standards, measurement, intellectual property, competition, education and food safety. Other areas of cooperation included recommencing the bilateral climate change and energy dialogues, strengthening people-to-people links and exchanges in culture, sports, education, innovation, academia, aviation, health and tourism; as well as facilitation of exchanges including through providing three-to-five-year multi-access visas for visitors and business people on a reciprocal basis.

President Xi noted Prime Minister Albanese's efforts to stabilise and improve relations after assuming office and said, "The Australia-China relationship has embarked on the right path of improvement and development"⁴. On his part, Prime Minister Albanese said, "When China represents more than one in four of our export dollars and more than one in four of Australian jobs depends on exports, this is an important relationship", and "We'll cooperate where we can

¹ Meeting with China's President Xi Jinping, November 15, 2022, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/meeting-chinas-president-xi-jinping>

² Media Release, "Visit to People's Republic of China", October 22, 2023, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/visit-peoples-republic-china>

³ Media Statement, November 07, 2023, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/statement-joint-outcomes-china-australia-annual-leaders-meeting>

⁴ Meeting With President Xi Jinping, November 06, 2023, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/meeting-president-xi-jinping>

with China, disagree where we must, but we will engage in our national interest”⁵.

The change in China’s approach towards Australia under the Morrison government and now is apparent. Then, China had frozen the engagement and instituted curbs on import of Australian coal, barley, wine, rock lobster and other products, and set out a 14-point list of grievances⁶. China’s government-controlled media had written of Australia risking becoming ‘the poor white trash of Asia’⁷ and Australian citizens of Chinese origins had been arrested for spying. On its part, Australia changed its strategic outlook, re-invested heavily in its alliance with the US including entering into the AUKUS agreement, carried out a Defence Strategic Review clearly focused on the looming threat from China and committed to substantial increase in defence spending. Australian business found other markets for their products, while the government contemplated cancelling the 99-year lease of Darwin to Landbridge Industry Australia, a subsidiary of China’s Shandong Landbridge Group.

Now, interaction at the ministerial and official level has recommenced, trade barriers are being lifted, the grievances appear to have been set aside, Cheng Lie is back in Australia, and Australia has determined it is not necessary to cancel the lease of Darwin to ensure its security⁸. Business interests on both sides clearly favour re-engagement. The ongoing war in Ukraine as well as the conflagration in Gaza draw away US attention, dictating a strategic pause in confronting China.

These changes are, however, unlikely to lead to a significant long-term transformation of the overall Indo-Pacific geopolitical environment. China’s power, including military, continues to expand, nor is there significant change in its coercive outlook, as is evident from its continuing actions in the South China Sea. Australia too continues with AUKUS and strengthening its own defensive and deterrent capability. Its economic and security engagement

⁵ Press Conference Beijing, November 07, 2023, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/press-conference-beijing-peoples-republic-china-1>

⁶ “If you make China the enemy, China will be the enemy: Beijing’s fresh threat to Australia, Sydney Morning Herald, November 18, 2023, <https://www.smh.com.au/world/asia/if-you-make-china-the-enemy-china-will-be-the-enemy-beijing-s-fresh-threat-to-australia-20201118-p56fqs.html>

⁷ Australia risks backsliding into a poor country in Asia Pacific, Global Times, August 31, 2020, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1199471.shtml>

⁸ Review Port of Darwin Lease, October 20, 2023, <https://www.pmc.gov.au/news/review-port-darwin-lease>

with other like-minded partners, including India, is growing, as is evident the recent India-Australia 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue⁹.

That tensions between the two remain is evident from the incidents involving HMS Toowoomba in the East China Sea this month. The Royal Australian Navy has three ships deployed in the Western Pacific: HMAS Brisbane, Toowoomba and Stalwart. Australia expressed serious concern to the Chinese Government following "Unsafe and unprofessional interaction with the PLA (N) on November 14, 2023 when HMAS Toowoomba was in international waters within Japan's EEZ. The ship had sent divers into the water to clear propellers fouled by fishing nets when a PLA(N) destroyer approached close and, despite being warned that divers were down, turned on her hull-mounted sonar in a manner that posed a risk to the safety of divers, forcing them to exit the water¹⁰. China, on its part, rejected Australia's claim, describing it as "completely untrue", saying that CNS Ningbo was tracking the Australian frigate in accordance with international laws and regulations, maintained a safe distance from the Australian ship and did not engage in any action that could have interfered with the Australian diver's operations¹¹. China also observed that there is no demarcation between China's and Japan's waters in the area, and that China's activities did not take place within Japan's EEZ.

On November 24, HMAS Toowoomba sailed through the Taiwan Strait¹², albeit without publicising it. China's spokesperson urged "parties concerned not to make provocations or create trouble for peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait"¹³.

It suits both sides to pull back for the time being, but without giving the impression they are backing down from established positions. Whether this will lead to a long term thaw in China-Australia relations, without a similar thaw in China-US relations, is open to question.

⁹ See separate commentary on the Second India-Australia 2+2 Ministerial in this Monitor.

¹⁰ Media Release, "Unsafe and unprofessional interaction with PLA-N", November 18, 2023, <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/media-releases/2023-11-18/unsafe-and-unprofessional-interaction-pla-n>

¹¹ China rejects Australia's claims of 'unsafe and unprofessional' warship encounter, November 20, 2023, http://eng.mod.gov.cn/xb/News_213114/TopStories/16267999.html

¹² Royal Australian Navy's HMAS Toowoomba sails through Taiwan Strait following recent run-in with Chinese warship, November 24, 2023, <https://www.skynews.com.au/australia-news/defence-and-foreign-affairs/royal-australian-navys-hmas-toowoomba-sails-through-taiwan-strait-following-recent-run-in-with-chinese-warship/news-story/8cb6c97052d42b4977258ddd4698fd09>

¹³ Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Mao Ning's Regular Press Conference on November 24, 2023, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/202311/t20231124_11186670.html

The ADMM and ADMM Plus Meetings

The 17th ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting was convened in Jakarta on November 15, 2023. The ministers once again declared their intent to strengthen defence and security cooperation among the ASEAN Member States and Plus Countries in order to respond effectively towards regional security challenges¹⁴. They decided to deepen defence cooperation by building regional resilience post the COVID-19 pandemic and explore the possibility of cooperation with non-Plus countries in the areas of HADR, military medicine, as well as energy and food security. Underscoring the significance of maintaining regional peace, stability, safety and freedom of navigation and overflight above the South China Sea and pursuing peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with international law including UNCLOS, they emphasised the need for early conclusion of an effective and substantive Code of Conduct while seeking the full and effective implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea. Urging all parties in Myanmar to cease violence, they reiterated the need to develop concrete, practical and measurable indicators in support of implementation of the Five-Point Consensus.

The ministers adopted the Concept Paper on Implementation of the AOIP from a Defence Perspective, which sets out guidelines for ASEAN (collectively) to undertake defence cooperation with Plus and other external partners. They also adopted the Concept Paper on Harmonising ADMM and ADMM-Plus Initiatives, adopted the ADMM Work Programme 2023-2026, adopted the guidelines for implementation of observer status granted to Timor Leste and approved the revised Standard Operating Procedures for Strategic Information Exchange among ASEAN member states on violent extremism, radicalisation and terrorism. They welcomed the ADMM-Plus Joint Statement on Women, Peace and Security¹⁵. They also endorsed India's proposal to co-chair the Expert Working Group on Counter-Terrorism¹⁶.

At the ADMM-Plus Meeting on November 16, India's Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh reiterated India's commitment to Freedom of Navigation, overflight and unimpeded lawful commerce in international waters in

¹⁴ Jakarta Joint Declaration of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting for Peace, Prosperity and Security, <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/2023-Jakarta-Joint-Declaration-of-ADMM-for-Peace-Prosperity-and-Security.pdf>

¹⁵ Joint Statement by the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus on Women, Peace and Security, <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/2023-10th-ADMM-Plus-Jakarta-16-Nov-2023-Final-Joint-Statement-by-the-ADMM-Plus-on-Women-Peace-and-Security.pdf>

¹⁶ India's Proposal to Co-chair Expert Working Group on Counter-Terrorism endorsed by ADMM-Plus, November 16, 2023, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1977298>

accordance with international laws, including UNCLOS¹⁷. Calling for regional security initiatives that are consultative and development-oriented to reflect consensus among various stakeholders, he committed towards nurturing practical, forward-looking and result-oriented cooperation with ADMM-Plus to enhance maritime security in the region. He appreciated the enthusiastic participation of ASEAN Member States in India-ASEAN activities, including the Initiative for Women in UN Peacekeeping Operations, the Initiative for Marine Plastic Pollution Response, the maiden ASEAN-India Maritime Exercise in May 2023, and in the Expert Working Group on HADR activities, in which Indian and Indonesia are co-chairs for the 2020-2023 cycle.

US Secretary of Defense Lloyd J Austin emphasised the US commitment to ASEAN centrality and detailed how US security cooperation with ASEAN partners is contributing to a more stable and prosperous region¹⁸. He discussed US support for the shared regional vision and outlined challenges to it, including coercive PRC activities in the South China Sea, the crisis in Myanmar, DPRK proliferation activities and the ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East.

In the absence of a Defence Minister, China was represented by a delegation¹⁹.

A Chairman's Statement or a Joint Statement on the ADMM-Plus Meeting was not available till the end of the month. The ADMM-Plus appears to have been used more for bilateral interaction by the Plus partners with counterpart from other countries²⁰, rather than any substantive collective decisions. Reports, however, indicated that the ASEAN ministers had raised their growing concerns over the escalating situation in the Middle East, apart from endorsing a Joint Statement on Women, Peace and Security²¹.

As great power competition and indeed confrontation picks up, ASEAN's search for common ground and attempts at relevance appear increasingly anachronistic. Repeated underscoring of the necessity for compliance with

¹⁷ India committed to freedom of navigation, overflight & unimpeded lawful commerce in international waters: Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh at 10th ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus in Indonesia, November 16, 2023, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1977298>

¹⁸ Read

¹⁹ Chinese defence ministry delegation attends 10th ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus, November 16, 2023, http://eng.mod.gov.cn/xb/News_213114/NewsRelease/16267199.html

²⁰ Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh holds bilateral meetings with his Indonesian and Vietnamese counterparts on the sidelines of the 10th ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus in Jakarta

²¹ ASEAN defence ministers urge immediate attention to address Middle East concerns, November 17, 2023, <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2023/11/979401/asean-defence-ministers-urge-immediate-attention-address-middle-east>

international law including UNCLOS, reiteration of the need for a Code of Conduct that complies with international law, and the statements on the FPC on Myanmar speaks of the constancy of ASEAN's stand on these troublesome issues, but also underline ASEAN limitations and don't help in movement towards a solution. That the only subject on which the ADMM-Plus could generate consensus was on the role of women in peace and security speaks volumes of its utility in the current geopolitical environment. Meanwhile, notwithstanding their position of not being forced to choose, ASEAN leaders appear to be making a choice, with Vietnam, the Philippines and Indonesia strengthening their military capability as well as enhancing relations with the US and Allies. There is no pause in China's assertions, particularly against the Philippines. This assertion is accompanied by China charging the US and Allies, including Japan, of meddling.

Under the circumstances, the continued centrality of ASEAN and indeed its coherence would appear to be questionable. Partner nations will continue to keep the organisation alive, but without expecting anything substantive from it.

The Fifth India-US 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue

Welcoming Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the White House, President Biden had said, "I've long believed the relationship between the United States and India will be one of the defining relationships of the 21st century"²². On his part, Prime Minister Modi had replied, "the friendship between India and the US will be instrumental in enhancing the strength of the whole world"²³. That state visit put in place the vision for substantial expansion of the bilateral relationship²⁴, spanning technology, defence, the clean energy transition, strategic convergence, propelling global growth and health, among others. The Fifth Annual India-US 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue brought Secretaries Antony J Blinken and Lloyd J Austin to New Delhi to meet their counterparts, External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar and Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh on November 10, and provided opportunity to review progress across "strategic,

²² Remarks by President Biden and Prime Minister Modi of the Republic of India at Arrival Ceremony, June 22, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2023/06/22/remarks-by-president-biden-and-prime-minister-modi-of-the-republic-of-india-at-arrival-ceremony/>

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ For an overview, see Lalit Kapur, "The Modi State Visit to the US", Indo-Pacific Monitor, Volume IV Issue 6, https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads_dpg/publication_file/indo-pacific-monitor-4920.pdf

defence and security ties, technology and supply chain collaborations, and people-to-people exchanges”²⁵.

The Joint Statement following the dialogue spans defence, counter terrorism and law enforcement, the science and technology partnership, health and trade dialogues, people-to-people ties, Afghanistan, and multilateral diplomacy and connectivity²⁶. Noting the substantial progress in transforming the India-US relationship, the ministers reaffirmed the importance of the India-US Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership and underlined their strong commitment to safeguarding a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific through mechanisms like the Quad.

The ministers reaffirmed their resolve to promote a resilient, rules-based international order with respect for international law, including the UN Charter, sovereignty and territorial integrity, and to ensure peace and prosperity for all. They shared deep concern about the war in Ukraine and its tragic humanitarian consequences, as well as its adverse impact on the Global South. Noting the horrific terrorist attacks against Israel, they called for adherence to international humanitarian law, including the protection of civilians, as well as immediate release of all hostages.

On the defence cooperation front, they expressed satisfaction with the pace of cooperation on Maritime Domain Awareness and looked forward to identifying pathways to promote stronger service-to-service ties and sharing technologies to address an array of maritime challenges, including in the undersea domain. They appreciated the commencement of commercial negotiations between General Electric (GE) Aerospace and Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) to manufacture GE F-414 jet engines in India. They looked forward to additional proposals from Indian and US companies to develop and produce systems in the identified priority areas: these include ISR; Undersea Domain Awareness; air combat and support, including aero engines; munitions systems; and mobility²⁷. They recommitted to spurring investment in India’s growing MRO sector, pledged to continue efforts to address export control issues while

²⁵ Secretary Antony J Blinken, Secretary of Defense Lloyd J Austin III, Indian Minister of External Affairs Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, and Indian Minister of Defense Rajnath Singh Remarks Before the US-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue, November 10, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-secretary-of-defense-lloyd-j-austin-iii-indian-minister-of-external-affairs-subrahmanyam-jaishankar-and-indian-minister-of-defense-rajnath-singh-remarks-before-the-u-s/>

²⁶ Joint Statement: Fifth Annual India-US 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue, November 10, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-on-the-fifth-annual-india-u-s-22-ministerial-dialogue/>

²⁷ Roadmap for US-India Defence Industrial Cooperation, June 5, 2023, <https://media.defense.gov/2023/Jun/21/2003244834/-1/-1/0/ROADMAP-FOR-US-INDIA-DEFENSE-INDUSTRIAL-COOPERATION-FINAL.PDF>

expanding defence industrial cooperation and supporting India's goal of emerging as a global defence hub, and looked forward to finalisation of a Security of Supply Arrangement. They commended the breadth of partnerships under the India-US Defence Acceleration Ecosystem (INDUS-X) and welcomed the Investors Strategy Session convened in New Delhi on November 08²⁸.

Unequivocally condemning terrorism and the use of terrorist proxies as well as logistical, financial or military support to terrorist organisations, they expressed their determination to counter new and emerging forms of terrorism and the use of emerging and evolving technologies for terrorist purposes. They looked forward to convening connected dialogues next year. They also welcomed the upcoming meeting of the bilateral Cyber Dialogue, expressed their concern about ransomware and other cyber-related crimes and recognised the need to bolster protection of critical networks and information infrastructure.

Welcoming the rapid progress under the India-US Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology, the ministers looked forward to the second iteration of the iCET in New Delhi in early 2024. Applauding the establishment of a fifth sub-working group focused on 'Space Commerce' under the bilateral Civil Space working group, they welcomed adding 'Planetary Defence' as a topic. They also welcomed India joining the multilateral Space Mission Planning Advisory Group (SMPAG) and the International Asteroid Warning Network by the end of the year. The US side pledged to work towards International Energy Agency membership for India (India is presently an Association Country). They noted the growing partnership amongst education and research institutions on both sides, to advance collaborations in the fields of sustainable energy and agriculture, health and pandemic preparedness, semiconductor technology and manufacturing, advanced materials, telecommunications, artificial intelligence, quantum science and critical and emerging technologies.

Praising the recent fifth India-US Health Dialogue, they identified several areas for future cooperation, including multilateral cooperation, pandemic preparedness and response, health safety and security, universal health coverage, access, equity, and communicable and non-communicable diseases. They noted that bilateral trade had the potential to cross \$ 200 billion in 2023 despite a challenging global environment. They looked forward to convening

²⁸ INDUS-X Investor Strategy Session Harnesses Private Capital for Start-ups, November 08, 2023, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3583997/indus-x-investor-strategy-session-harnesses-private-capital-for-start-ups/>

the next India-US Ministerial Trade Policy Forum next year and welcomed progress of the IPEF.

The ministers emphasised the important role of the Quad as a force for global good and looked forward to India hosting the next in-person Quad leaders' Summit in 2024. They looked forward to the forthcoming India-US Global Issues Forum in New Delhi in early 2024. Appreciating the efforts of I2U2 countries to enhance food and energy security and improve movement of people and goods across hemispheres, the ministers were optimistic about the potential of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor. They also welcomed relaunch of consultations between the MEA and State Department to explore the potential for trilateral cooperation in Africa, and looked forward to convening of the next round of East Asia Consultations.

There can be no doubting that the India-US partnership has made enormous progress. It has not yet, however, reached a level where it can become the defining relationship of the 21st century. As a growing middle power, India's impact will necessarily be focused on South and South East Asia and the Indian Ocean. That is where its key strategic challenges lie. India must bridge the economic, technological and military power asymmetry with China if it is to achieve its aspiration of a multipolar Asia in a multipolar world, or even the US aspiration of making India a balancing power in Asia. This necessitates US help if it is to happen in a reasonable time-frame. And while there has been substantial progress in this direction, much more remains to be done.

The sheer range of areas being discussed speaks of the growth of the bilateral relationship. The game-changer, however, lies in the defence and security domain, rightly described as among the foremost pillars of the relationship. The Indo-Pacific can be free and open only if the Indian Ocean, the vital East-West connector, remains free and open. This necessitates strengthening India's maritime capabilities, particularly in the undersea domain, considerably. In tandem, India's defence industry must be modernised, enabling it to defend not only itself, but also provide military industrial supplies to the world, as it did for the British Empire till World War II. India's innovative potential must also be unleashed, to enable cost-effective development and manufacture of game-changing technologies. And finally, the ability to tackle cross-border terror mechanisms must be strengthened.

The five priority technologies identified under the road map for defence industrial cooperation are well-chosen. Progress has been made on the ISR and air combat elements (through the GE F-414 deal). There are indications of movement in mobility, through manufacture of the Stryker vehicles in India.

Underwater domain awareness systems and advanced munitions must be prioritised. In addition, there is need to focus on emerging technologies like hypersonic strike vehicles and defence against them, directed energy weapons and/or rail guns; artificial intelligence, quantum technologies and cyber defences and weapons.

The US-India relationship is evolving, but is it evolving fast enough? That is something only time will tell.

The Second India Australia 2+2 Ministerial

India's relationship with Australia has transformed in the last decade. The intent became visible with the upgrading of the bilateral relationship to a comprehensive strategic partnership (CSP) in June 2020²⁹. A vision for maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific to address shared strategic, security and environmental concerns was also enunciated at that time³⁰. Progress since then has been substantial, encompassing frequent high-level contacts and ministerial exchanges, bringing into force of the bilateral Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement, Australia's hosting of Exercise Malabar for the first time in August 2023, an uptick in bilateral exercises involving all three armed forces, and participation in each other's multilateral exercises. The Second India-Australia 2+2 Ministerial, held in New Delhi on November 20, 2023, continued the process of relationship building, provided an overview of what has been done and where the two countries are going³¹.

The partners found substantial common ground in their global outlook. They underscored their support for a comprehensive, just and honourable solution that upholds all the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, while sharing concern about the impact of the war on developing and least developed countries. In Gaza, they stood with Israel against terrorism and called for immediate release of all remaining hostages, while supporting humanitarian

²⁹ Joint Statement on a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between Republic of India and Australia, June 04, 2020, https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/32729/Joint_Statement_on_a_Comprehensive_Strategic_Partnership_between_Republic_of_India_and_Australia

³⁰ 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, https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/32730/Joint_Declaration_on_a_Shared_Vision_for_Maritime_Cooperation_in_the_IndoPacific_Between_the_Republic_of_India_and_the_Government_of_Australia

³¹ Joint Statement: Second India-Australia 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue, New Delhi, (20 November 2023), https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/37284/Joint_Statement_Second_IndiaAustralia_22_Ministerial_Dialogue_New_Delhi_20_November_2023

pauses and working towards a solution that brings about durable peace. They also expressed concern about the continuing conflict in Myanmar and called for immediate cessation of violence, while supporting ASEAN-led efforts to address the crisis.

There was agreement to work together on a variety of Indo-Pacific issues, from gender equality to support for sovereignty and territorial integrity, democratic values, the rule of law, freedom of navigation and overflight and the peaceful resolution of disputes through dialogue and diplomacy. Underscoring the importance of being able to exercise rights and freedoms in all seas and oceans consistent with international law, including in the East and South China Seas, the ministers expressed serious concern about the militarisation of disputed features, the dangerous use of Coast Guard and Maritime Militia vessels and efforts to disrupt other countries' offshore exploration activities. They called for any Code of Conduct in the South China Sea to be fully consistent with international law and without prejudice to the legitimate rights and interests of all states including those not party to the negotiations. They recommitted themselves to empowering the Quad as a partnership for regional and global good, reaffirmed their commitment to ASEAN centrality, supported the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, and committed to cooperation with the Pacific Islands Forum as well as the Indian Ocean Rim Association. They looked forward to holding the next Australia-India Maritime Dialogue in 2024, to continuing cooperation through the Australia-India-France and Australia-India-Indonesia trilaterals, as well as to advancing the objectives of the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative. Both sides looked forward to greater cooperation to take forward the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness. Australia announced the hosting in collaboration with India of the next edition of the Indian Ocean Conference in Perth in February 2024. Committing to coordinating closely on development activities in the Indian Ocean Region, they welcomed India's intention of opening a resident mission in Timor-Leste and the appointment of Australia's first resident High Commissioner in Male. They underscored the need to reform the multilateral system to better reflect contemporary realities, including reform of the UNSC and commitment to ensuring positive outcomes at the Thirteenth WTO Ministerial Conference, including WTO Reform.

Describing their defence relationship as a core pillar of the CSP, the ministers agreed to continue deepening the defence and security engagement by enhancing interoperability, cooperating on situational and domain awareness, intensifying maritime cooperation across the region, exploring opportunities for defence industrial cooperation and to continuing to work closely to combat Illegal Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing in the Indo-Pacific region.

They looked forward to Australia's participation in India's first multilateral air exercise, Tarang Shakti, in 2024, and to India's participation in Exercise Pitch Black. They also noted Australia's invitation for India to participate in Exercise Talisman Sabre 2025: India had participated as an observer in the 2023 edition of the exercise. They were pleased by progress in discussions on air-to-air refuelling cooperation, which would increase the operational endurance and reach of their respective aircraft. Acknowledging progress in maritime information sharing, they agreed to continue aircraft deployment from each other's territories. Welcoming discussions on hydrography cooperation, they were pleased by the progress towards the inaugural bilateral joint research project in underwater technologies. They noted the potential for defence industrial cooperation, condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and agreed to work together to take concerted action across a range of subjects. They also recognised the need to bolster protection of critical networks and information infrastructure, including from ransomware and other cyber-related crimes.

Highlighting technology and industry cooperation as an essential pillar of the bilateral relationship, the ministers committed to foster collaboration in critical minerals and their supply chains. They welcomed progress under the India-Australia Energy Dialogue, including collaboration on solar energy and green Hydrogen. They noted India's initiative to establish a Global Biofuels Alliance

To continue building institutional chemistry, the ministers decided to expand the Senior Officials Consultations beyond the existing talks. They announced a new 1.5 track India-Australia Strategic Dialogue to share perspectives and policy solutions on challenges facing the Indo-Pacific region, to include representatives from government, academia, think tanks, the strategic community, industry representatives and policy-makers. They reiterated the commitment of the Prime Ministers for early conclusion of an ambitious Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement to realise the full potential of the bilateral economic relationship. Welcoming signing of the Mechanism for Mutual Recognition of Qualifications between the two countries, they welcomed the interest of Australian universities to set up campuses in India and noted progress in the Migration and Mobility Partnership Arrangement. They looked forward to hosting the 3rd 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue in 2025.

Shared values, including liberal democracy, have never been sufficient to build strong relationships between nations. India and the US were 'estranged

democracies' for long, while Pakistan and the US were 'disenchanted allies'³². The fact that China was anything but a democracy did not prevent China from becoming Australia's largest trading partner by far. It is the convergence of interests created by China's rise and its coercive and assertive outlook that has triggered resurgence in the India-Australia relationship. It is this convergence that both countries must maximise if the relationship is to grow.

India must draw benefit from Australia's abundant energy supplies, mineral resources, access to technology and the support it can provide to keep the waters connecting the Pacific and Indian Oceans under surveillance. Australia, on the other hand, can benefit from India's market potential, its abundant pool of skilled manpower that can be trained to the required standard, and its standing with the Global South. The outcomes of the ministerial indicate that the two countries are heading in the right direction.

The Biden Jokowi Summit

Two years after Indonesia upgraded its relations with China to a comprehensive strategic partnership, Indonesia's President Joko Widodo visited the US in October 2015 to establish the US-Indonesia Strategic Partnership. Joe Biden was then the US Vice-President. A further eight years later, on November 13, 2023, Jokowi returned, with Biden approaching the end of his first term as US President, to upgrade US-Indonesia ties to the comprehensive strategic partnership (CSP) level. Indonesia's other comprehensive strategic partners, with the year of establishment of the partnership in brackets, include China (October 2013), Australia (August 2018), India (November 2018), Japan (September 2023) and now the US (November 2023). It also has a special strategic partnership with South Korea (November 2017), and strategic partnerships with the UK and France.

The US-Indonesia CSP rests on five pillars: inclusive economic growth, clean energy transition, people-to-people ties, fostering regional peace and stability, and defence cooperation³³. These bear considerable similarity to the pillars of

³² The description was used by Ambassador Dennis Kux as titles for his books "India and the United States: Estranged Democracies 1941-1991" and "The United States and Pakistan 1947-2000: Disenchanted Allies",

³³ Joint Statement from the Leaders of the United States and the Republic of Indonesia: Elevating Relations to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, November 13, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/11/13/joint-statement-from-the-leaders-of-the-united-states-and-the-republic-of-indonesia-elevating-relations-to-a-comprehensive-strategic-partnership/>

the 2015 strategic partnership agreement³⁴. The drive behind them, however, comes from high-level political exchanges. The seriousness of both sides in developing the relationship is evident from the fact that President Joko Widodo visited the US for only the second time in November 2023, and that too after a gap of eight years. In contrast, he has visited China seven times during the same period. The last US President to make a bilateral visit to Indonesia was Barack Obama, in November 2010. Donald Trump had neither the inclination nor the time. Joe Biden did visit Bali in November 2022, but that was for the multilateral G20 Summit. In contrast, Xi Jinping has made three bilateral visits to Indonesia since assuming office in November 2012.

Delivery by the US on the promise of the 2015 partnership has been lacklustre. Cumulative US Direct Investment in Indonesia dropped below \$ 12 billion as of 2022³⁵, a small fraction of the nearly \$ 1 trillion the US has invested in the Asia-Pacific. This meagre investment provides the US a return of around \$ 1.87 billion, or over 15%³⁶. In contrast, China's investment in Indonesia from 2015-2023 exceeds \$ 49 billion³⁷, with Chinese Premier Li Qiang having pledged another \$ 21.7 billion during his visit in September 2023, adding to the commitment of \$ 44.89 billion made when Jokowi met Xi in Beijing in July³⁸. China's investments span the Jakarta Bandung high speed rail, energy, infrastructure, telecommunications and mining, among others. Their impact is very visible in Indonesia.

The same story is replicated in other pillars. Total goods and services trade between Indonesia and the US in 2022 was just \$ 47.5 billion, with a surplus of \$ 23.3 billion in Indonesia's favour³⁹. China-Indonesia trade exceeded \$ 149 billion⁴⁰ and is projected to grow at a faster clip. There is little to show for the Memorandum of Understanding on Maritime Cooperation the US and Indonesia signed in 2015⁴¹, even though the bilateral defence cooperation

³⁴ Joint Statement by the United States of America and the Republic of Indonesia, October 26, 2015, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/10/26/joint-statement-united-states-america-and-republic-indonesia>

³⁵ US Direct Investment Abroad, 2020-2022, <https://www.bea.gov/international/di/usdbal>

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Chinese Investments & Contracts in Indonesia (2015-2023), <https://www.aei.org/china-global-investment-tracker/>

³⁸ Indonesia says China has pledged \$ 21B in new investment to strengthen ties, September 8, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/indonesia-china-new-investment-li-qiang-fade1b4c3e0aaf7ad8eca49a723807ff>

³⁹ Based on USTR statistics, <https://ustr.gov/countries-regions>

⁴⁰ General Administration of Customs of the People's Republic of China, <http://www.customs.gov.cn/customs/302249/zfxxqk/2799825/302274/302275/4794352/index.html>

⁴¹ Fact Sheet: US Indonesia Maritime Cooperation, October 26, 2015, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/10/26/fact-sheet-us-indonesia-maritime-cooperation>

agreement of 2015 focused on maritime cooperation; defence procurement and joint research and development; improving professionalism; cooperation on peacekeeping operations and training; HADR and countering transnational threats⁴². Joint exercises have grown, with the largest manifestation being Exercise Super Garuda Shield: the 2023 edition brought together over 4000 US and Indonesian troops; elements from Australia, Japan, Singapore, France and the UK also participated, while the observers included India⁴³. There has been limited progress in other areas, as brought out in a Fact Sheet⁴⁴.

But Indonesia possesses the advantages of location, size, demographics and regional influence. The world's largest archipelagic nation, it is also the world's 16th largest country, forming the southern boundary of the Malacca Straits and encompassing the Sunda, Lombok and Ombai-Wetar Straits. That makes it the maritime cross-roads connecting the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Indonesia is also the natural extension of the First Island Chain, the Southern neighbour of the Philippines and the natural barrier between China and Australia. It has the world's fourth largest population, behind India, China and the US. It has the world's largest Muslim population and is the world's third largest democracy. At \$ 1.42 billion, Indonesia has the world's 16th largest nominal GDP, projected to rise to the 13th largest by 2028⁴⁵ and the 4th largest by 2045. Moreover, it is extremely nationalist, stays aloof from great power competition, and is the driving force behind ASEAN, whose institutional centrality has given it substantial influence in Southeast Asia, with the G20 and the Global South.

China's revised ten-dash line covers parts of Indonesia Natuna Sea, including its piscine and mineral resources. Chinese fishermen continue encroaching into Indonesian waters and enjoy the protection of the Chinese Coast Guard and Maritime Militia. Indonesia is witness to China's continuing coercion in the Second Thomas Shoal, which threatens the coherence of ASEAN, a primary area of focus for Indonesia. It is, therefore, naturally concerned about China's revisionism, notwithstanding the economic benefit it derives from China. Indonesia knows it cannot match China's military and technological capacity,

⁴² Indonesia-US Bilateral Relations, https://kemlu.go.id/washington/en/pages/hubungan_bilateral_indonesia-amerika_serikat/554/etc-menu

⁴³ Super Garuda Shield: US, Partners Train in the Indo-Pacific, September 12, 2023, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3523152/super-garuda-shield-us-partners-train-in-indo-pacific/>

⁴⁴ Fact Sheet: US-Indonesia Maritime Cooperation, <https://id.usembassy.gov/our-relationship/policy-history/embassy-fact-sheets/fact-sheet-u-s-indonesia-maritime-cooperation/#:~:text=On%20October%202024%2C%202015%2C%20Indonesia,the%20United%20States%20and%20Indonesia>

⁴⁵ IMF World Economic Outlook Database, October 2023, <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/weo-database/2023/October>

nor can it resist as Australia did if China uses its economic influence for coercion. There is thus need to hedge. For its part, the US remains the world's premier economic, military and technological power, essential to Asia's strategic balances and the only nation that can check China's growing penchant for unilateral revision of laws and rules that don't suit it. Thus, both Indonesia and the US must find a way to get along, neither can afford to ignore the other.

For the present, the Indonesia-US CSP is useful to keep the two nations engaged and to send cautionary signals to China. Whether it becomes more will depend on whether the US can find a way to overcome limitations and make the IPEF effective, as well as find a way to open up market access for other countries. Indonesia and the US will both go in for elections in 2024. The foundations for greater cooperation have been laid, it will be for future leaders to make the most of them.

Indian Ocean Activity November 2023

Dates	Location	Participating Units	Event	Remarks
31 Oct-05 Nov	Mumbai	Portuguese ship BAP Union	Goodwill Visit ⁴⁶	
07-09 Nov	Bay of Bengal	INS Kuthar, Kiltan, Dornier; BNS Abu Bakr, Abu Ubaidah and MPA	4 th Ex BONGOSAGAR, 5 th CORPAT ⁴⁷	Included maiden SAR exercise
08 Nov	Dubai ⁴⁸	LCA Tejas, ALH Dhruv	Dubai Air Show 2023	13-17 Nov 2023
10-13 Nov	Walvis Bay ⁴⁹ , Namibia	INS Sumedha	Mission Deployment	
16 Nov	L&T Kattupalli ⁵⁰	Amini	Launch	Fourth ship of the ASW Shallow water craft project
Mid Oct – 16 Nov	Gulf of Guinea ⁵¹	INS Sumedha	2nd IN Gulf of Guinea Anti-piracy patrol	In Atlantic Ocean

⁴⁶ Visit of Peruvian Sail Training Ship BPA Union to Mumbai, <https://indiannavy.nic.in/content/visit-peruvian-sail-training-ship-bap-union-mumbai>

⁴⁷ India and Bangladesh Navies Undertake CORPAT and Ex Bongosagar, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1976149>

⁴⁸ IAF Contingent Inducted for Dubai Air Show 2023, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1975743>

⁴⁹ INS Sumedha Mission Deployed at Walvis Bay, Namibia, <https://indiannavy.nic.in/content/ins-sumedha-mission-deployed-walvis-bay-namibia>

⁵⁰ Launch of 'Amini', Fourth Ship of the ASW SWC (GRSE) Project on 16 Nov 23 at M/s L&T, Kattupalli, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1977458>

⁵¹ Indian Navy Completes Second Gulf of Guinea Patrol, INS Sumedha Furthers India's National Interests, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1977330>

Dates	Location	Participating Units	Event	Remarks
17 Nov	Antsiranana, Madagascar ⁵²	INS Sharda	Port Visit	Part of operational deployment
22 Nov – 06 Dec	Perth ⁵³ , Australia	81 member tri-service contingent	Ex AUSTRAHIND	
23-25 Nov	Maputo, Mozambique	INS Sumedha	Goodwill Visit	Part of operational deployment
28 Nov	Near Okinawa	INS Kadmatt	Bilateral Exercise	
29 Nov	Port Sultan Qaboos, Muscat ⁵⁴	CGS Sajag	To promote CG cooperation	Three day visit as part of overseas deployment to West Asia

Other Indo-Pacific Developments

The Biden Xi Summit. Presidents Joe Biden and Xi Jinping met in San Francisco on November 15 for a summit intended to discuss areas of potential cooperation and differences across the range of bilateral and global issues⁵⁵. Outcomes of the summit included resumption of high-level military-to-military communications, including between theatre commanders on both sides, talks on Artificial Intelligence and the setting up of a joint working group on counternarcotics cooperation. They also agreed to discuss enhancement of scheduled passenger flights between the two countries, as well as educational, youth, cultural, sports and business exchanges⁵⁶.

IPEF. Following meetings in San Francisco, the 14 partners of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework signed the IPEF Supply Chain Agreement and announced the substantial conclusion of negotiations for the IPEF Clean Economy Agreement, the IPEF Fair Economy Agreement, and the Agreement on the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity⁵⁷. They could not,

⁵² INS Sharda Enters Port Antsiranana, Madagascar, <https://indiannavy.nic.in/content/ins-sharda-enters-port-antsiranana-madagascar>

⁵³ Indian Armed Forces Contingent Departs for Exercise 'AUSTRAHIND-23', <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1978722>

⁵⁴ Indian Coast Guard Offshore Patrol Vessel Sajag arrives at Muscat, Oman as part of overseas deployment to West Asia, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1980914>

⁵⁵ Readout of President Joe Biden's Meeting with President Xi Jinping of the People's Republic of China, November 15, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/11/15/readout-of-president-joe-bidens-meeting-with-president-xi-jinping-of-the-peoples-republic-of-china-2/>

⁵⁶ President Xi Jinping Meets with US President Joe Biden, November 16, 2023, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/202311/t20231116_11181442.html

⁵⁷ Press Statement on Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity Meetings in San Francisco, November 16, 2023, <https://static.pib.gov.in/WriteReadData/specificdocs/documents/2023/nov/doc20231117271001.pdf>

however, come to an agreement on the fair and resilient trade pillar. Meanwhile, former President Donald Trump threatened to knock out IPEF if elected, calling into question the credibility of the framework.

North Korea Satellite Launch. North Korea claimed it had successfully placed its Malligyong-1 spy satellite in orbit on November 21⁵⁸. It said it would send up multiple such satellites in the future to ensure secure surveillance capabilities over South Korea and other regions of interest. The US condemned the launch for use of ballistic missile technology in violation of several UNSC resolutions⁵⁹. G-7 Foreign Ministers also condemned the launch⁶⁰.

Philippines to Exit Belt and Road Initiative Projects. The Philippines was reported to have dropped Chinese funding for three railway projects⁶¹: a 44-mile freight line and two intercity railway lines. It appeared confident of getting funding for these from another source, such as the World Bank, Japan Cooperation Agency or the ADB. India was among the countries reported to have offered financing for these lines⁶². A number of other China funded projects were reported to be facing the axe⁶³.

The Korean Comfort Women Court Case. The November judgement of the Seoul High Court in the lawsuit filed by former 'comfort women', inter alia ordering the Government of Japan to pay compensation to the plaintiffs and denying the application of State immunity under international law, sparked a strong protest from Japan and put to risk the recent bonhomie between the two countries⁶⁴. It may be recalled that President Yoon had prior to his summit with Prime Minister Kishida in March 2023, negotiated a solution whereby South Korean businesses benefiting from Japan's investment in South Korea from

⁵⁸ North Korea claims it launched first spy satellite, promises more, November 22, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/north-korea-flags-plan-launch-satellite-rocket-between-nov-22-dec-1-japan-says-2023-11-20/>

⁵⁹ Statement from NSC Spokesperson Adrienne Watson on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's Space Launch, November 21, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/11/21/statement-from-nsc-spokesperson-adrienne-watson-on-the-democratic-peoples-republic-of-koreas-space-launch-2/>

⁶⁰ G7 Foreign Ministers' Statement on the Launch Using Ballistic Missile Technology by North Korea, November 22, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/g7-foreign-ministers-statement-on-the-launch-using-ballistic-missile-technology-by-north-korea-2/>

⁶¹ Philippines Drops Chinese Funding for Three Railway Projects, The Diplomat, October 27, 2023, <https://thediplomat.com/2023/10/philippines-drops-chinese-funding-for-three-railway-projects/>

⁶² Why the Philippines Is Quitting China's Belt and Road Initiative, November 06, 2023, <https://www.newsweek.com/philippines-ends-bri-initiative-1841031>

⁶³ Why the Philippines is exiting the Belt and Road, Asia times, November 2, 2023, <https://asiatimes.com/2023/11/why-the-philippines-is-exiting-the-belt-and-road/>

⁶⁴ Statement by Foreign Minister KAMIKAWA Yoko Regarding the Judgement of the Seoul High Court of the Republic of Korea in the Lawsuit Filed by Former Comfort Women and Others, November 23, 2023, https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press1e_000489.html

1965 onwards would donate funds into a compensation account, which in turn would pay the victims⁶⁵.

China Claims Expelling Japanese Ships from Senkaku Islands. China's Coast Guard claimed it had expelled multiple Japanese vessels, including several patrol boats and one fishing boat, that illegally entered territorial waters around the Diaoyu Islands⁶⁶. Claiming that the islands were China's inherent territory, it urged Japan to immediately stop all illegal activities in the area and ensure that similar incidents were not repeated.

Multinational Exercises in the Philippine Sea. A day after PM Kishida visited Manila, JS Hyuga, Japan's Helicopter Carrier, carried out a four-day exercise with the USS Ronald Reagan and USS Carl Vinson Carrier Strike Groups in the Philippine Sea⁶⁷. The JMSDF described this as a routine exercise to strengthen the capability of the US-Japan alliance for effective deterrence and response⁶⁸. China, on the other hand, firmly opposed the Philippines' action of colluding with external forces to patrol and stir up trouble in the South China Sea⁶⁹. Days later, ships from the Australian, Canadian, Japanese and US Navies exercised together on the Philippine Sea, on November 11⁷⁰.

Australia-Philippines Joint Patrol in South China Sea. The Australia-Philippines Joint Statement elevating ties between the two nations to a strategic partnership stated, "We will plan bilateral joint patrols in the South China Sea and in areas of mutual interest to support regional peace and stability⁷¹. The first such patrol took place from November 25-27⁷². HMAS

⁶⁵ For an overview, see Lalit Kapur, "The Japan South Korea Summit", Indo-Pacific Monitor March 2023, https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads/dpg/publication_file/indo-pacific-monitor-4873.pdf

⁶⁶ Japanese vessels illegally territorial waters off Diaoyu Islands, November 29, 2023, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/CHINA_209163/TopStories_209189/16269729.html

⁶⁷ Two US Navy Carriers Joint Japan Destroyer on Multi-Large Deck Even in Philippine Sea, November 07, 2023, <https://www.cpf.navy.mil/Newsroom/News/Article/3583834/two-us-navy-carriers-join-japan-destroyer-on-multi-large-deck-event-in-philippi/>

⁶⁸ Japan-US Bilateral Exercise, November 06, 2023, <https://www.mod.go.jp/msdf/en/release/202311/20231106en.pdf>

⁶⁹ China slams US, Philippines warships joint patrol in South China Sea, November 23, 2023, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/CHINA_209163/TopStories_209189/16268718.html

⁷⁰ Australia, Canada, Japan, US Navies Partner in Multilateral Exercise in Philippine Sea, November 11, 2023, <https://www.c7f.navy.mil/Media/News/Display/Article/3586330/australia-canada-japan-us-navies-partner-in-multilateral-exercise-in-philippine/>

⁷¹ Joint declaration on a Strategic Partnership between the Republic of the Philippines and the Commonwealth of Australia, September 09, 2023, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/joint-declaration-strategic-partnership-between-republic-philippines-and-commonwealth>

⁷² Joint Statement – Philippines-Australia Maritime Cooperation Activity, November 25, 2023, <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/statements/2023-11-25/joint-statement-philippines-australia-maritime-cooperative-activity>

Toowoomba and an RAF P-8A participated with BRP Grigorio del Pilar, BRP Davo Del Sur and five Philippines Air Force surveillance aircraft. The joint activity, which was also announced by Philippines President Marcos⁷³, adds a complication for PLA Coast Guard and maritime militia vessels encroaching into the Philippines EEZ, including in the vicinity of the grounded BRP Sierra Madre, more so as the USN and Philippines had carried out a similar joint patrol off Palawan just days before.

Prime Minister Kishida Visits the Philippines. The official visit by Philippines President Marcos to Japan earlier this year had resulted in the two leaders agreeing to strengthen the bilateral strategic partnership⁷⁴, including enhancing defence and security cooperation and simplifying procedures for JSDF personnel visiting the Philippines for HADR cooperation. The reciprocal visit by Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida to Manila on November 3 resulted in the two leaders continuing the process, including building the capabilities of the Philippines' Defence Forces. The leaders decided to commence negotiations on a reciprocal access agreement between Japan and the Philippines and welcomed the transfer of the first air surveillance radar⁷⁵. An agreement for grant aid of JPY 600 million (about USD 4 million) for a coastal radar system was among the agreements signed. In response, China's military spokesperson criticized Japan's attempts to meddle in the South China Sea including the provision of radars to the Philippines and said it (Japan) was increasingly becoming a destabilizing factor in the Asia-Pacific⁷⁶.

Prime Minister Kishida Visits Malaysia. Following his visit to Manila, Prime Minister Kishida visited Kuala Lumpur on November 4th and 5th⁷⁷. He expressed his intention to jointly set out the direction of future ASEAN-Japan relations and a new vision for cooperation at the Commemorative Summit for the 50th year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation in December and expressed his deep concern over unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force in the East and South China Seas. Malaysia's Prime Minister Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim agreed to enhance coordination for implementation of Japan's offer of Official

⁷³ PH, Australia kick off 'Maritime Cooperation Activity', November 25, 2023, https://pco.gov.ph/news_releases/ph-australia-kick-off-maritime-cooperative-activity/

⁷⁴ Japan-Philippines Joint Statement, February 9, 2023, <https://japan.kantei.go.jp/content/000122825.pdf>

⁷⁵ Joint Press Statement on the Outcome of the Visit of Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio to the Philippines, November 3, 2023, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100575977.pdf>

⁷⁶ China criticizes Japan's meddling in South China Sea, November 16, 2023, http://eng.mod.gov.cn/xb/News_213114/NewsRelease/16268757.html

⁷⁷ Prime Minister Kishida's Visit to Malaysia (Summary), November 5, 2023, https://japan.kantei.go.jp/101_kishida/diplomatic/202311/05malaysia.html

Security Assistance and agreed to strengthen cooperation in the maritime field, including between the Armed Forces and the Coast Guards.

Vietnam Japan Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Japan became Vietnam's sixth Comprehensive Strategic Partner on November 27, following China, India, Russia, South Korea and the US, during the visit of Vietnamese President Vo Van Thuong to Japan⁷⁸. Both sides agreed to enhance exchanges, including an annual high-level dialogue, and to bolster substantive and effective defence cooperation, including cooperation in maritime security and safety. The leaders also agreed to strengthen economic linkages and ensure economic security.

India Singapore Defence Policy Dialogue. The 15th India-Singapore Defence Policy Dialogue between Defence Secretary Shri Giridhar Amame and Singapore's Permanent Secretary (Defence), Mr. Chan Heng Kee was held in New Delhi on November 01⁷⁹. Both sides agreed to enhance collaboration in Service-to-Service interactions and bilateral exercises. They also identified means to enhancing maritime security and multilateral exercises.

US-Philippines Defence Ministers Meeting. US Defense Secretary Lloyd J Austin III met his Filipino counterpart in Jakarta on the sidelines of the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus⁸⁰. The two "denounced the recent harassment by vessels from the People's Republic of China (PRC) towards Philippine Coast Guard and resupply vessels conducting lawful resupply operations around Second Thomas Shoal, as well as dangerous operational PRC manoeuvres against U.S. aircraft and ships lawfully operating in the South China Sea". They appreciated the completion of the upgrade to the runway at Basa Air Base, and committed to strengthening bilateral operations and planning.

Taiwan Strait Transits. USS Rafael Peralta and HMCS Ottawa carried out a routine transit of the Taiwan Strait on November 01, remaining in the area that is beyond the territorial waters of both China and Taiwan⁸¹. China condemned

⁷⁸ Joint Statement on the Elevation of the Japan-Vietnam Relations to the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity in Asia and the World, November 27, 2023, <https://japan.kantei.go.jp/content/000139562.pdf>

⁷⁹ Defence Secretary and his Singaporean counterpart co-chair 15th India-Singapore Defence Policy Dialogue in New Delhi, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1973803>

⁸⁰ Joint Press Statement for Secretary of Defense Lloyd J Austin III Meeting With Philippine Secretary of National Defense Gilberto Teodoro Jr, November 15, 2023, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3589325/joint-press-statement-for-secretary-of-defense-lloyd-j-austin-iii-meeting-with/>

⁸¹ 7th Fleet Destroyer and Royal Canadian Navy Frigate Transit Taiwan Strait, November 01, 2023, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/3576733/7th-fleet-destroyer-and-royal-canadian-navy-frigate-transit-taiwan-strait/>

the transit including 'hyping it publicly'⁸². HMAS Toowoomba carried out a Taiwan Strait transit on November 24⁸³, on the way from Sasebo to the Philippine Sea. China responded by urging "parties concerned not to make provocations or create trouble for peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait"⁸⁴.

FONOPs. USS Dewey conducted a Freedom of Navigation Operation near the Spratly Islands on November 03⁸⁵. China, Taiwan and Vietnam, all of whom claim the islands, require either permission or advance notification before a military vessel engages in 'innocent passage' through their territorial sea, in violation of UNCLOS. USS Hopper conducted another FONOP on November 25 off the Paracel Islands, challenging similar restrictions on innocent passage⁸⁶. China claimed it had driven the warship away, "according to law"⁸⁷.

Exercise Sea Guardians-3. The China-Pakistan Exercise Sea Guardians-3 took place in Karachi and in the Arabian Sea from November 11-17⁸⁸. The two sides also carried out their first joint maritime patrol during this period⁸⁹.

Land Agreement for AUKUS Submarines. The project for construction of AUKUS submarines in Osborne, South Australia, moved forward with the conclusion of a land exchange agreement between the Australian and South Australian governments⁹⁰. The design and construction partner, Australian Naval Infrastructure, will progressively take ownership of land parcels for the submarine construction yard at Osborne commencing December 2023. Land

⁸² Chinese military slams US, Canadian warships' transit through Taiwan Strait, November 02, 2023, http://eng.mod.gov.cn/xb/News_213114/TopStories/16264048.html

⁸³ China reacts after Australian warship HMAS Toowoomba transits Taiwan Strait, November 24, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-11-24/hmas-toowoomba-confronted-by-chinese-navy-transits-taiwan-strait/103147982>

⁸⁴ Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Mao Ning's Regular Press Conference on November 24, 2023, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/202311/t20231124_11186670.html

⁸⁵ US Navy Destroyer conducts Freedom of Navigation Operation in the South China Sea, November 03, 2023, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/3579889/us-navy-destroyer-conducts-freedom-of-navigation-operation-in-the-south-china-s/>

⁸⁶ US Navy Destroyer Conducts Freedom of Navigation in the South China Sea, November 25, 2023, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/3597764/us-navy-destroyer-conducts-freedom-of-navigation-operation-in-the-south-china-s/>

⁸⁷ PLA warns off US warship near Xisha Islands, November 25, 2023, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/CHINA_209163/TopStories_209189/16269134.html

⁸⁸ China-Pakistan Sea Guardians-3 joint maritime exercise kicks off, November 13, 2023, http://eng.mod.gov.cn/xb/News_213114/TopStories/16266437.html

⁸⁹ China-Pakistan Sea Guardian 2023 joint maritime exercise concludes, November 19, 2023, http://eng.mod.gov.cn/xb/News_213114/TopStories/16267834.html

⁹⁰ Land Agreement to build Australia's nuclear-powered submarines, November 10, 2023, <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/media-releases/2023-11-10/land-agreement-build-australias-nuclear-powered-submarines>

will also be secured for training of the submarine and naval shipbuilding workforce. In return, the South Australian government will acquire two sites, one to be used to facilitate hydrogen and renewable energy projects, the other for urban renewal, including affordable housing for future shipyard workers.

AUKUS News. The US, UK and Australia participated in a joint exercise off the East Coast of Australia to test Australian Defence Vessel Guidance, a new uncrewed undersea vessel intended to support undersea and surveillance systems trials⁹¹. Separately, the Albanese government introduced the Australian Naval Nuclear Power Safety Bill 2023⁹², to establish a new independent regulator within the Australian DoD to ensure Australia applies the highest standards of nuclear safety across its nuclear-powered submarine enterprise. Australia also announced an investment of \$ 128 million to fund 4001 additional university places in STEM-related courses over four years commencing 2024⁹³. Over 1000 of these places will be allocated to South Australian universities to support the construction of Australia's SSNs at Adelaide. The Albanese government also introduced the Defence trade Controls Amendment Bill 2023, to expand Australia's existing trade controls and regulate the supply of military and dual-use goods and technologies to foreign persons and entities within Australia and between entities overseas⁹⁴.

US Coast Guard Base Guam. The US Coast Guard formally established US Coast Guard Base Guam on November 08⁹⁵. The new base is part of the US Coast Guard effort to enhance mission support in the Indo-Pacific, including Oceania.

Kurt Campbell Nominated for Deputy Secretary of State. President Biden nominated Kurt Campbell, currently the Deputy Assistant to the President and Coordinator for Indo-Pacific Affairs on the National Security Council, to be the Deputy Secretary of State, following the retirement of Wendy Sherman. Mr.

⁹¹ New Uncrewed Undersea Capabilities Strengthen AUKUS Partnership, November 13, 2023, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3586592/new-uncrewed-undersea-capabilities-strengthen-aukus-partnership/>

⁹² New legislation to ensure naval nuclear power safety, November 16, 2023, <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/media-releases/2023-11-16/new-legislation-ensure-naval-nuclear-power-safety>

⁹³ Additional university places to grow Australia's AUKUS workforce, November 29, 2023, <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/media-releases/2023-11-29/additional-university-places-grow-australias-aukus-workforce>

⁹⁴ New legislation to unlock billions of dollars for AUKUS industry partners, November 30, 2023, <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/media-releases/2023-11-30/new-legislation-unlock-billions-dollars-aukus-industry-partners>

⁹⁵ US Coast Guard formally establishes Base Guam, November 08, 2023, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/3584540/us-coast-guard-formally-establishes-base-guam/>

Campbell was Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs during the Scarborough Shoal Crisis of 2011-12⁹⁶. The appointment, done on November 01, is subject to confirmation by the Senate.

Admiral Lisa Franchetti Confirmed as the CNO. The senate confirmed Admiral Lisa Franchetti as the 33rd Chief of Naval Operations, United States Navy, on November 02⁹⁷. She was sworn in the same day. Admiral Franchetti becomes the first woman to hold the US Navy's highest appointment and the first to serve on the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

⁹⁶ President Biden Announces Kurt Campbell as Nominee for Deputy Secretary of State, Department of State, November 01, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/11/01/president-biden-announces-kurt-campbell-as-nominee-for-deputy-secretary-of-state-department-of-state/>

⁹⁷ Admiral Lisa Franchetti Sworn in as 33rd CNO, November 02, 2023, <https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/Press-Releases/display-pressreleases/Article/3578249/adm-lisa-franchetti-sworn-in-as-33rd-cno/>



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