



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](#).

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Cover Images:

1. Prime Minister Narendra Modi meets Russia's President Vladimir Putin in Bishkek on August 31, 2026. Source: narendramodi.in
2. Family Photo of BRICS leaders at the Summit, September 12, 2026. Source: MEA Photo Gallery
3. President Xi Jinping and President Trump at the White House, September 24, 2026. Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China

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Abstract

Continental Asia's leaders, including Prime Minister Modi, met at Bishkek from August 31-September 01 for the 26th SCO Summit and adopted a Declaration advancing their vision for global and regional governance, security matters, connectivity and trade, and enhanced people-to-people cooperation.

India hosted the 18th BRICS Summit at New Delhi from September 12-13, seeking to build resilience, innovation, cooperation and sustainability. BRICS nations adopted the New Delhi Declaration, signalling a collective vision despite differences between some member states.

The high-level debate at the 81st session of the UN General Assembly from September 22-26 witnessed US President Donald Trump showcasing his achievements, rejecting global governance initiatives and issuing an ultimatum to Iran to negotiate a deal or face annihilation. French President Emmanuel Macron supported a revived multilateral order over a resurgent law of the jungle and the resolution of ongoing conflicts. China's Vice-President Han Zheng emphasized multilateralism and global development, while urging safeguarding of the post WW II order through dialogue rather than unilateral action. Japan's PM Sanae Takaichi called for urgent UNSC reform and the removal of the "enemy states" clause against Japan in the UN Charter. India's EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar urged global peace and resolution of ongoing international conflicts, reformed multilateralism, and zero-tolerance for cross-border terrorism.

US President Donald Trump hosted China's President Xi Jinping in Washington DC from September 23-25 for their second summit of the year. The event was marked for pomp and pageantry, but had relatively little to show by way of substance. It continued the fragile truce between the two super powers, providing time for both to build up their capabilities and refine their strategy.

PM Sanae Takaichi reshuffled her cabinet on September 17, largely retaining her previous team. Japan's Defense Ministry sought a budget of ¥8.9 trillion (about \$55.6 billion). Japan acquired Tomahawk missile capability following the return of JS Chokai from a refit in San Diego; however, actual delivery of missiles by the US is now expected only by 2030.

Quad Sherpas met at New Delhi on September 03 to take forward decisions at the last Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting. Quad partners carried out a tabletop exercise in



Tokyo from September 03-04 to advance the Indo-Pacific Logistics Network. CGS Shaunak sailed from Chennai for Perth on September 25, with sea riders embarked for the Quad-at-Sea Ship Observer Mission.

Exercise Veer Guardian 2026, the maiden JASDF deployment of fighter aircraft to the Indian Ocean, took place at Jodhpur from September 09-22. The US Armed Forces participated in the 22nd Exercise Yudh Abhyas at Auli and Mahajan from September 15-27, as well as Exercise Tarang Shakti at Jodhpur commencing September 26. Indian Special Forces personnel participated in Exercise Super Garuda Shield 2026 at multiple locations in Indonesia from August 31 – September 11. IN warships participated in the 4th Exercise Samudra Laksmana in Malaysia, the 13th Exercise SLINEX off Visakhapatnam from September 17-21, an ADMM Plus Maritime Security Joint Cooperation Activity at Subic Bay from September 23-25, and the 24th Exercise Varuna in France commencing September 22.

INS Kolkata and PNS Hunain collided in international waters in the Northern Arabian Sea on September 15. The former continued her mission, while the latter was forced to return to harbour for repairs. PNS Hangor, the first of the Chinese-built submarines acquired by the PN, carried out the maiden test firing of its SLCM on September 27.



India and the 26th SCO Summit

Established in 2001, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is the continental counterpart of the maritime trans-Atlantic and trans-Pacific multilateral structures in Eurasia. It provides continuing proof that the US model of order remains confined to the western and eastern coasts of the Eurasian landmass, failing to penetrate the heartland or the southern and northern oceanic faces.

The geographic footprint of the SCO stretches from Eastern Europe to the Pacific and from Russia to India. Energy rich Central Asia, possessing both hydrocarbons and Uranium, lies at its core. The only pockets in this vast expanse that are not part of the SCO are Georgia, Turkmenistan, the Koreas, Southeast Asia and parts of the Middle East. Afghanistan is an observer since 2012, but has been excluded from the organisation after the Taliban takeover in 2021. The SCO membership thus spans more than 60% of the land area of Eurasia, about 40% of world population and over 23% of its nominal GDP, encompassing two members of the P-5, three of the world's four largest economies in PPP terms and four nuclear powers.

India, occupying a dominant oceanic frontage in the southern rim of the supercontinent, has interests straddling security, connectivity, economic growth and technology that span the continental space to its north and west, as well as the maritime space to its south. These necessarily shape each other and must be carefully balanced to maintain strategic autonomy while continental and maritime great powers seek to propagate their divergent visions in Eurasia. In recognition of this reality, India became an observer in the SCO in 2005 and a full member in 2017. In parallel, India joined in revival of the Quad commencing 2017¹ and enunciated its Indo-Pacific outlook in 2018². These added to India's regional relationship with ASEAN-centric organisations in Southeast Asia.

The 26th SCO Summit at Bishkek on August 31 and September 01 provided opportunity for India to pursue its continental interests. Leaders of all the SCO member states³ attended. Others present included leaders from Azerbaijan, Armenia, Laos, Mongolia, Turkey and Togo, deputy leaders from Vietnam and Egypt, and the Secretaries-General of the UN, CIS, CSTO, CICA and the Chairman of the Eurasian

¹ India-Australia-Japan-US consultations on Indo-Pacific, November 12, 2017,

https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29110/IndiaAustraliaJapanUS_Consultations_on_IndoPacific_November_12_2017

² Prime Minister's Keynote Address at Shangri-La Dialogue, June 01, 2018,

http://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/29943/Prime_Ministers_Keynote_Address_at_Shangri_La_Dialogue_June_01_2018

³ Belarus, China, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Economic Commission Board. Outcomes of the Summit included the Bishkek Declaration⁴ and 27 MoUs⁵.

The content of the 2026 Bishkek Declaration spans five broad areas. Part I dwells on the SCO vision of regional and global governance as the world navigates an era of profound geopolitical, socio-economic and technological change, marked by ongoing conflict, energy and food security challenges, global market instability and climate change. Member states reaffirmed their unwavering commitment to the norms and principles of international law enshrined in the UN Charter and emphasised the construction of a representative, democratic and equitable multipolar world order. They advocated for the reform and improvement of the system for global governance and regulation to ensure equal participation by and benefit to all States. Significantly, member states condemned military strikes on Iran, reaffirmed their support for its sovereignty and territorial integrity, and advocated a resolution to the conflict solely through political and diplomatic means. They also said the only possible way to ensure peace and stability in the Middle East was through a comprehensive and just settlement of the Palestinian question. There was no mention of Ukraine in the declaration.

Part II of the Declaration focused on countering terrorism, trafficking in narcotics and international organised crime. Members emphasised the inadmissibility of attempts to exploit terrorist, separatist and extremist groups for selfish purposes. They strongly condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, calling out both double standards and cross-border movement of terrorists while noting the importance of consensus adoption of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism.

Part III covered the SCO's position on economic, trade, energy and connectivity cooperation. Member states opposed unilateral coercive measures that are contrary to the UN Charter and other norms of international law as well as the rules and principles of the World Trade Organisation (effectively opposing the unilateral use of sanctions by the US). All members except India reaffirmed their support for China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). They expressed their intent to promote cross-border e-commerce infrastructure, promote customs cooperation, expand cooperation in energy, enhance industrial cooperation and to strengthen cooperation in agriculture. They sought to increase the share of national currencies in mutual settlement, supported the reform of the international financial architecture by increasing representation of developing countries, declared they would continue dialogue to

⁴ Bishkek Declaration on the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, September 01, 2026, <https://rus.sectscsco.org/20260901/2495418.html>

⁵ The 26th Meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO Member States and the "SCO Plus" Meeting Held in Kyrgyzstan, September 01, 2026, <https://eng.sectscsco.org/20260901/2493609.html>



strengthen financial cooperation within the SCO Interbank consortium and noted progress towards establishing the SCO Development Bank.

Part IV of the Declaration set out measures to promote cooperation in the relatively easier areas of climate, culture, education, health, tourism and science. The final part served as a conclusion, appreciating the chairmanship of Kyrgyzstan and passing the baton to Pakistan.

In his statement at the Summit, Prime Minister Modi lauded the SCO's foundation for cooperation laid during the last 25 years, and said the goal should be to translate this into tangible outcomes in the next 25 years⁶. He reiterated India's vision of the three main pillars of the SCO as Security, Connectivity and Opportunity. Noting that the first requirement was peace and security, he said terrorism continued to pose a serious challenge to humanity as a whole and sought dismantling of the entire ecosystem of terrorist financing, recruitment, radicalisation and safe havens. On connectivity, he supported all efforts that connect markets, facilitate trade, and open up new avenues for development, with the caveat that connectivity efforts must respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries. On opportunity, he said that the true measure of SCO success should be how many new measures were created for young people, how many new markets were opened for entrepreneurs, how much farmers benefited from technology and how much better the lives of citizens became.

Unlike in Western Europe and ASEAN, member countries of the SCO have not been able to significantly advance its potential or moderate unilateral action by its great power members. The overall message of commitment to the UN Charter is clouded by China's disregard for international law and unilateral actions in the South and East China Seas, its repression in Xinjiang and Tibet, and Russia's continuing war in Ukraine. Security remains a chimera: intra-SCO conflicts within this decade include Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan, China-India and Pakistan-India. Terrorism from Pakistan and Afghanistan remains a concern, particularly for India. There has been progress in China-sponsored trans-regional connectivity, enabling energy and trade flows through areas outside the reach of US military power. The Eurasian Land Bridge is functional. The China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor is partly functional using pipelines and road-freight routes, while the railway infrastructure remains under construction. Transportation infrastructure for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor has largely been established, but Pakistan's economic concerns hinder further progress. India, however, opposes China's opaque model of propagating connectivity, as well as its disregard for Indian sovereignty over Pakistan Occupied Kashmir. Moreover, Pakistan continues to deny India connectivity with Central Asian

⁶ English Translation of Prime Minister's Statement at the 26th SCO Summit, September 01, 2026, [https://www.mea.gov.in/speeches-statements?dtl/41726/English Translation of Prime Ministers Statement at the 26th SCO Summit September 1 2026](https://www.mea.gov.in/speeches-statements?dtl/41726/English%20Translation%20of%20Prime%20Ministers%20Statement%20at%20the%2026th%20SCO%20Summit%20September%201%202026)

members of the SCO, while India's efforts to connect to the region through Chabahar have been stymied by the US revocation of exemptions for Iran-related sanctions. So, while India's trade with the SCO in 2025-26 totalled \$ 190.6 billion⁷, more than 98% of this was with China and Russia; Central Asia remained largely inaccessible. There is no move towards an SCO Free Trade Agreement, mainly due to concerns that such an agreement would increase China's dominance of the bloc.

Nevertheless, India's interests dictate that engagement with the SCO continues. The organisation provides India a voice in Central Asia, a means to engage China, Russia and Iran, a forum for counter-terrorism discussion, and an expression of its strategic autonomy. China's growing influence in the region and in the SCO must be balanced: India cannot countenance regional decisions that disregard its interests. It cannot ignore terrorism emanating from the Af-Pak region and must develop linkages to address it. Moreover, Central Asia is part of India's traditional hinterland and a rich source of energy. India must find a way to effectively address connectivity challenges: while China has been able to harness Central Asian resources, India remains cut off. These interests explain why Prime Minister Modi has attended all SCO summits (except the one in Astana in 2024 due to parliamentary compulsions).

The SCO is already relevant, as is shown by the paranoia in the West about it. It provides a platform for dialogue and balancing between two great powers, China and Russia, and an emerging power, India. Structural internal rivalries, connectivity constraints, under-developed security structures, fears of Chinese domination, and cultural differences limit its growth potential. While it will remain a useful geopolitical platform, it is unlikely to transition to a cohesive anti-West alliance or an integrated economic bloc able to significantly impact regional order.

Two Decades of BRICS

Conceptualised by Jim O'Neill⁸ in 2001 as a group of fast-growing economies that would surge ahead of Western economies in the coming decades, BRIC⁹ was formalised when Foreign Ministers of the four countries met in New York on the sidelines of the UNGA session in 2006. The grouping completed two decades of institutional cooperation in 2026. The inaugural BRIC Summit took place in Yekaterinburg, Russia, in June 2009¹⁰; the objective was cooperating to develop common positions on global political and economic matters and promoting a more

⁷ Compiled by author from India's trade statistics,
https://tradestat.commerce.gov.in/eidb/country_wise_trade

⁸ An economist with Goldman Sachs.

⁹ Brazil, Russia, India, China.

¹⁰ Joint Statement of the BRIC Countries' Leaders, Yekaterinburg, Russia, June 16, 2009,
<http://www.brics.utoronto.ca/docs/090616-leaders.html>

democratic, legitimate and balanced international order. South Africa joined at the third summit, in Sanya, in 2011 and the name of the grouping was changed to BRICS. Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia¹¹ and UAE became full members in 2024, and Indonesia followed suit in 2025, expanding the membership beyond the name. The agenda expanded over the years to encompass strategic global issues and areas of practical collaboration, including agriculture, climate change, energy and food security, terrorism and trade, as well as making global governance more inclusive, effective and responsive to contemporary challenges.

BRICS provides a framework for political, social, economic and financial cooperation that is independent of the West. Its membership spans a quarter of the world's land mass and 49.5% of its population, spread across Asia, South America and Africa but with no footprint in Europe, North America or Oceania. It includes two members of the P-5, one rising power, and six trillion dollar (nominal) economies, with a total GDP of \$35.18 trillion¹², or about 28% of the world's nominal GDP. In comparison, the combined nominal GDP of G7 nations which represent about 15% of the world's land area and less than 10% of its population is \$55.3 trillion, about 44% of the world GDP. More than 78% of BRICS GDP comes from China, India and Russia. There is a wide disparity in per capita income of members, ranging from Ethiopia's \$1080 and India's \$2810 at the low end to the UAE's \$54,201 at the high end¹³.

India hosted the 18th BRICS Summit at New Delhi from September 12-13, with a four-pillar theme of "Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability". The Summit marked the culmination of eight months of work including over 350 meetings spread across more than 30 Indian cities. It was attended by the Presidents of Burundi (representing the African Union), China, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Philippines, Russia, South Africa and the UAE; the Prime Ministers of Ethiopia, Malaysia and Vietnam; and other senior leaders from Brazil, Belarus, Bahrain, Cuba, Nigeria, Thailand, Saudi Arabia, Uganda, Uruguay and Uzbekistan. The Director-Generals/Presidents of the United Nations Organisation (UNO), World Health Organisation (WHO), World Trade Organisation (WTO), New Development Bank (NDB) and Asian Infrastructure Development Bank (AIDB) also attended. The presence of this galaxy of leaders provided opportunity for bilateral interaction which was fully availed by Prime Minister Modi. A notable bilateral meeting was between the Presidents of Iran and UAE, the highest level engagement between the countries after UAE's suspension of trade and financial dealings with Iran in August 2026.

The Summit programme spanned two sessions. The first, limited to members, focussed on "Inclusive Global Governance and Strengthening Multilateralism". PM

¹¹ Although Saudi Arabia is shown as a member in BRICS documents, the status remains ambiguous. It was represented at the Summit by its Foreign Minister, as an invitee.

¹² Based on IMF estimates of April 2026.

¹³ Ibid.

Modi proposed the establishment of a BRICS continuity and implementation mechanism through a Troika¹⁴; suggested the formulation of ten proposals for global governance reform that could be developed into a BRICS reform roadmap by the next Summit; sought the establishment of a Seafarers Emergency Support Network; and the transformation of the Global South from rule-takers to rule-shapers by providing young diplomats and policymakers with negotiation skills, practical training and legal expertise. The second session was titled “Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability: Shaping the Future for Inclusive Global Growth” and included partner countries and outreach invitees. In this, PM Modi spoke of India’s initiatives to strengthen resilience, innovation, cooperation and sustainability¹⁵. A Fact Sheet identifying over 50 outcomes under India’s chairship across various thematic tracks¹⁶ and the consensus New Delhi Declaration¹⁷ comprised the outcomes from the Summit.

What has BRICS done in two decades of cooperation? Perhaps its most remarkable achievement is of not just having remained united, but of having grown despite strong western opposition. Apart from its 11 members and 10 partner countries, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Türkiye have expressed interest in joining. This growth is no mean feat given the multiple contradictions between member states, spanning geographic dispersion, political systems, economic structures, strategic interests and foreign policy priorities. The continued unity and growth of BRICS amplifies the voice of the Global South. A second achievement is the growing number of areas of cooperation. A third is providing an alternative model to the Western domination of global political and financial institutions. Others include the establishment of the New Development Bank and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement. In the 18th summit, perhaps the biggest achievement is that of overcoming differences and arriving at a consensus declaration running into 140 paragraphs, covering numerous areas.

¹⁴ English Translation of Opening Remarks by the Prime Minister during the 18th BRICS Summit Session: Inclusive Global Governance and Strengthening Multilateralism, September 12, 2026, https://www.mea.gov.in/speeches-statements?dtl/41775/English_Translation_of_Opening_Remarks_by_the_Prime_Minister_during_the_18th_BRICS_Summit_Session_Inclusive_Global_Governance_and_Strengthening_Multilateralism_September_12_2026

¹⁵ English Translation of Prime Minister’s Opening Remarks during the 18th BRICS Summit Session: “Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability: Shaping the Future for Inclusive Global Growth”, September 13, 2026, https://www.mea.gov.in/speeches-statements?dtl/41781/English_Translation_of_Prime_Ministers_Opening_Remarks_during_the_18th_BRICS_Summit_Session_Resilience_Innovation_Cooperation_and_Sustainability_Shaping_the_Future_for_Inclusive_Global_Growth_September_13_2026

¹⁶ BRICS India 2026 Factsheet on Outcomes and Initiatives Under India’s Chairship https://d2jiw2zrmmyqt8.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2026/09/12212256/11th-Sept_BRICS-2026-Factsheet.pdf

¹⁷ New Delhi Declaration Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability, September 12, 2026, <https://d2jiw2zrmmyqt8.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2026/09/12185124/New-Delhi-Declaration-2026-1.pdf>

The declaration does not touch on some key issues. In the section on International and Regional Peace and Security, it does not mention the Russian attack on Ukraine, or China's grey zone coercion in the South and East China Seas. The Hamas terrorist attack on Israel of October 07, 2023 does not find mention, nor does Iran's weaponisation of the Strait of Hormuz, or China's weaponisation of its dominance in certain sectors of the global economy. There is a long section on conflict in the Middle East which, inter alia, expresses serious concern over deliberate attacks on civilian infrastructure and "peaceful nuclear facilities" under full safeguards of the IAEA. This is notwithstanding the IAEA having been blocked from access to Iran's nuclear facilities at least since June 2025¹⁸ and calling on Tehran to engage seriously and without preconditions in talks to build international confidence in the peaceful nature of its nuclear programme. These aberrations must be viewed as the costs of generating consensus, necessitating the dilution of principles, as happens in all politics.

BRICS leaders hype the fact that the organisation accounts for over 40% of the global GDP by Purchasing Power Parity (PPP). But PPP reflects only the internal purchasing power of citizens of a country. It does not reflect the ability of a nation to compete for essential resources in a globalised world. India, for example, depends on external sources for its requirements of energy, fertilisers, cooking oil, advanced technology and military equipment, all of which must be paid for in hard and not domestic currency. The better measures of economic heft are thus nominal and per capita GDP, in both of which BRICS states remain well behind the G-7 (though 28% of the world nominal GDP is still significant). Moreover, China accounts for over nearly 60% of BRICS GDP; this increases to over 71% when India is included. These two together countries account for 80% of BRICS GDP growth over the last five years, the contribution of other members remains small.

India's trade with BRICS countries in 2025-26 amounted to over \$ 465 billion (around 38.5% of India's total trade), comprising \$92 billion in exports and about \$ 373 billion in imports and leaving a deficit of \$281 billion¹⁹. China alone accounted for \$151 billion, or over 32% of this. In comparison, China's total trade with BRICS countries is about \$ 884 billion; about 85% of this is with Russia and India. Intra-BRICS trade reached a record \$ 1.17 trillion in 2024²⁰. This could grow when efforts for trade settlement in national currency bear fruit. Growing India's trade with BRICS will also require the overcoming of connectivity limitations. India has gained from lending by

¹⁸ IAEA Board of governors Briefed on Ukraine, Iran and Global Nuclear Cooperation, June 08, 2025, <https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/news/iaea-board-of-governors-briefed-on-ukraine-iran-and-global-nuclear-cooperation>

¹⁹ Compiled by author from Department of Commerce country-wise trade statistics, https://tradedat.commerce.gov.in/eidb/country_wise_ttrade

²⁰ Two decades of intra-BRICS trade: Trends, patterns and policies, <https://unctad.org/publication/two-decades-intra-brics-trade-trends-patterns-and-policies>

NDB, which has financed 32 projects valued at \$ 9.5 billion²¹. To put this in perspective, the Asian Development Bank has committed \$ 63.8 billion for 683 projects in India as of December 2025²², while the World Bank has lent India \$ 110 billion for over 1100 projects. There is, however, no move towards a BRICS currency. Moreover, there is no movement towards a BRICS Free Trade Agreement due to concerns about China's domination.

Security cooperation too remains work in progress. BRICS is not a military alliance; its security cooperation focuses on counter-terrorism (which remains selective, with China continuing to provide shelter to Pakistan), cybersecurity and digital security, and countering trafficking in drugs, as well as other transnational crime. There remains substantial scope for translation of agreements into effective measures to deliver security.

Multiple challenges remain for BRICS. The need for political cooperation is much greater as multilateralism declines and an insecure US questions its commitments to global governance, traditional alliances and collective defence, lowering of global trade barriers and fostering economic interdependence, and the promotion of democracy and human rights, promoting in their place a policy of flexible realism, defunding international organisations that do not hew to its writ, requires allies and partners to spend substantially more on security, and adopts aggressive economic nationalism. Given the immense weight of the US in all facets of international activity, there is an undeniable need for a collective balancing mechanism to moderate its unilateral tendencies. The challenge, especially for India, will lie in ensuring that a system where the US is dominant is not exchanged for one where China assumes dominance. BRICS provides that potential, so long as it remains consensus driven. Prime Minister Modi's proposals of a Troika to maintain continuity despite annual changes of chairship, a digital repository to track decisions, and putting in place a long-term agenda for BRICS could, if adopted, strengthen the organisation.

Jim O'Neil, who originally conceptualised BRIC, may have concluded that BRICS will amount to little unless China and India open up their capital accounts and financial markets, agree to cooperate on joint initiatives²³. But BRICS has emerged as the first truly trans-continental grouping outside US-led partnerships and alliances in the post-Cold War world. As sweeping geopolitical changes shift the balance of power and unilateral action and protectionism grows, rising India must continue to invest in organisations that promote multilateralism. BRICS, along with the G-20 and G-7,

²¹ For project details, see https://www.ndb.int/projects/all-projects/?country=india&key_area_focus=&project_status=&type_category=&pyearval=#paginated-list

²² ADB's Work in India, <https://www.adb.org/where-we-work/india/overview>

²³ Jim O'Neil, "The BRICS Still Don't Matter", October 17, 2024, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/moscow-brics-summit-expanded-bloc-still-rudderless-and-ineffective-by-jim-o-neill-2024-10>

continues to offer the opportunity to promote engagement with existing and emerging powers, strategic autonomy, South-South cooperation, global governance reform and development-oriented multilateralism.

The Xi Trump Spectacle

Trump's May 2026 State Visit to Beijing was long on optics and rhetoric, but short on substance²⁴. The return State Visit by Xi Jinping to Washington DC from September 23-25 followed the same pattern, with much pageantry to entertain, but little else to show for the year's second summit level engagement between the world's two most powerful leaders.

This was Xi's second state visit to the US; the first had been in September 2015. It reciprocated Trump's two state visits to Beijing, in November 2025 and May 2026. The visit programme featured an official arrival ceremony, formal talks, a high-profile state dinner, a private tea at the White House, and a tour of the National Archives. In a rare gesture, President Trump and First Lady Melania Trump accorded a planeside welcome to President Xi Jinping and Madame Peng Liyuan at Joint Base Andrews, the first time in over six decades that the US President received a foreign leader coming for a State Visit at the airport²⁵. Trump had been received at Beijing Airport in November 2017 by Chinese State Councillor Yang Jiechi, and in May 2026 by Chinese Vice President Han Zheng, while then Vice President Joe Biden had received Xi Jinping during his September 2015 visit. The gesture was widely seen as Trump having accepted Xi as an equal.

There was no joint statement. The White House Fact Sheet following the summit notes actions by China to curtail trafficking in narcotics to the US, welcomes the arrival of two giant pandas leased by China to the Atlanta Zoo, operationalisation of the US-China Board of Trade and the US-China Board of Investment and discussions to advance a constructive relationship of strategic stability based on respect, fairness and reciprocity²⁶. It mentions consensus on recommendations for more favourable tariff treatment for the flow of \$ 30 billion of non-sensitive goods in each direction, China importing at least 10 million tonnes of coal from the US in 2027 and again in 2028, and

²⁴ For an overview, see Lalit Kapur, "The Trump Visit to Beijing", Indo-Pacific Monitor, Volume VII Issue 5, May 2026,

https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/storage/uploads/publications_file/publication_Indo-Pacific%20Monitor-%20Vol%20VII,%20Issue%205.pdf

²⁵ The last US President to do so was John F Kennedy in 1962, who received British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan at Andrews Air Force Base. Trump did receive Russian President Putin at Anchorage Airport, Alaska, in August 2025, but that was not a State Visit.

²⁶ Fact Sheet: President Donald J Trump Advances a Fair and Reciprocal Relationship with China While Hosting Historic State Visit, September 25, 2026, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2026/09/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-advances-a-fair-and-reciprocal-relationship-with-china-while-hosting-historic-state-visit/>

continuing work on US concerns regarding supply chain shortages related to rare earths and other critical minerals. It records agreement by both sides to attend each other's Summit (China will host the APEC Summit at Shenzhen on November 18-19, while the US will host the G20 Summit at Miami on December 14-15). It further records that the two sides discussed Russia, North Korea and Iran, and agreed that Iran can never have a nuclear weapon and no country or institution can be allowed to impose tolls on international waterways. It claims that the two countries agreed to use the term "super intelligence" (SI) rather than "artificial intelligence" (AI) to describe applicable emerging technologies, and that they established the bilateral US-China SI Dialogue. There was no mention of China's coercive actions against Taiwan, Japan or the Philippines, the Australian F-35 parts (cockpit canopy and a weapons-bay door) that were inexplicably diverted to Hong Kong and are now in China's custody, China's industrial overcapacity and burgeoning trade surplus, or of human rights matters.

China's readout, on the other hand, covers different aspects²⁷. Another readout identifies eight deliverables and understandings²⁸. These include agreement on building a constructive China-US relationship of strategic stability on the basis of respect, fairness and reciprocity; attending the APEC and G20 summits; Iran should not be allowed to develop nuclear weapons and no country or institution should be allowed to impose tolls on international waterways; recalling that the US and China fought together in WW II; the arrangement on \$30 billion reciprocal tariff reduction; progress in counter-narcotics cooperation; agreement to establish an bilateral AI dialogue; the leasing of two giant pandas to Atlanta Zoo; and an agreement to conclude an MoU on crisis communication and prevention as soon as possible. China's position on Taiwan is stressed as being essential to the foundation of China-US strategic cooperation and the development of bilateral relations. There is agreement that the Middle East, Ukraine and the Korean Peninsula were discussed. There is no indication of common ground as an outcome of these discussions, or whether Trump will use the recent Lindsey Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act of 2026²⁹ to bring economic pressure and compel China to stop its support to both countries.

What are the takeaways from the summit? The highlighting of ceremony rather than substance indicates the need for both sides to play to the gallery, while pushing contentious issues down the road. Trump needs to distract the US public from the

²⁷ President Xi Jinping Holds Talks with US President Donald J Trump, September 25, 2026, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xw/zyxw/202609/t20260925_12031181.html

²⁸ China and the United States Reach Eight Deliverables and Understandings, September 26, 2026, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xw/zyxw/202609/t20260926_12031663.html

²⁹ Congressional Bill HR 5334 Signed into Law, September 18, 2026, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/2026/09/congressional-bill-h-r-5334-signed-into-law/>

consequences of his intervention in Iran, which by all accounts has turned into a disaster. He thus seeks to show stable political relations with the primary US adversary, along with some success in trade issues. Xi, on the other hand, seeks to showcase his acknowledgement as a peer to Trump and parlay this into a fourth term as China's undisputed leader. Xi will also be conscious of Trump's predilection for changing the terms of his agreements and hence chary about concluding new ones. Both, therefore, contented themselves with maintaining the appearance of bonhomie.

Both sides are also conscious of their limitations in influencing each other and are buying time. The US needs a truce to develop ways around China's stranglehold in rare earths and critical minerals, to strengthen its military capabilities and posture in the Western Pacific to counter China's Anti-Access and Area Denial capabilities, and to recover from the excessive expenditure of precision guided air defence and strike weapons in the war on Iran. Xi, on the other hand, needs time to continue developing ways to resist unilateral US coercion, address China's slowing economy, and shield it against growing protectionism in the US and the Western world. It is a measure of China's growing capability and influence that Trump, the quintessential bully, has chosen to downplay difficult issues and changed his first term approach of confronting Beijing.

What does this mean for US allies and partners the Indo-Pacific? Trump did not mention Taiwan, projected by China as the core of its core interests. A free Taiwan is both economically and militarily vital for the US: it depends hugely on TSMC for its AI stack, and forms the lynchpin of US military containment of China through the First Island Chain. There was no indication that Trump succumbed to Xi's pressure to change the US stance from not supporting Taiwan independence to opposing Taiwan independence. On the other hand, Trump has not yet decided on approving the pending \$14 billion arms sale passage for Taipei, described by him as a 'negotiating chip'. Whether Trump will negotiate Taiwan's autonomy away or maintain US policy towards it should become clear after the G20 Summit in Miami.

Japan's ties with China have come under severe pressure after Takaichi's November 2025 remarks that an attack on Taiwan could trigger a military response by Japan. China has intensified pressure to coerce her into retracting her words³⁰. Japan's ties with Russia had also gone into deep freeze following its sanctions in response to the Russian attack on Ukraine. Sanae Takaichi, the leader of America's foremost ally in the Indo-Pacific, met Trump in New York on September 22, just before his summit with Xi Jinping, to align strategies on China and reinforce bilateral cooperation on economic security, technology and regional defence. She also called for removal of

³⁰ For an overview, see Lalit Kapur, "The Impact of Takaichi's Taiwan Remarks", The Indo-Pacific Monitor, Vol VI, Issue 11, November 2025, [https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/storage/uploads/publications_file/publication_Indo-Pacific%20Monitor-%20Vol%20VI,%20Issue%2011%20\(Final\)%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/storage/uploads/publications_file/publication_Indo-Pacific%20Monitor-%20Vol%20VI,%20Issue%2011%20(Final)%20(1).pdf)

the obsolete “enemy states” clause from the UN Charter³¹, which permits enforcement measures bypassing normal Security Council authorisation procedures. China’s spokesperson promptly opposed her and accused her administration of being a blatant challenge to the postwar international order and a major factor threatening peace and stability in the region³². Takaichi will not have failed to note Xi Jinping painting Japan as a common enemy state during World War II, and Trump’s going along with that formulation in his fact sheet on the summit. On the other hand, she was briefed by Trump telephonically immediately after the summit³³. Japan can be expected to continue strengthening its military and strengthening middle power partnerships in the Indo-Pacific, while striving to keep the US onside. The possibility of Japan going nuclear if doubt arises about US commitment is ever present.

The Philippines, another vital link in the First Island Chain, continues facing China’s coercion in the South China Sea. Even as Xi was in Washington DC, PLA (Navy) and Coast Guard ships blocked a Filipino resupply attempt for BRP Sierra Madre at the Second Thomas Shoal³⁴ - and the US remained silent. China has subsequently moved to extend its control over the entire triangular space between the Paracel Islands, Spratly Islands and the Scarborough Shoal, sharply impacting the Philippines EEZ. Although President Bong Bong Marcos remains committed to the alliance with the US, he can be expected to continue hedging his bets. There may be questions in some quarters about the reliability of US support, as under Duterte.

Australia, fearing abandonment and deeply invested in building the AUKUS alliance and enhancing its own maritime capability even as China remains its foremost trading partner (Australia’s exports to China in 2025 amounted to A\$ 195.6 billion - about \$ 137.6 billion, with a trade surplus of about \$ 46 billion)³⁵, will have noted the cooling of US-China tensions. Its concern will be about unpublished bargains impacting a security architecture built around US-China competition.

Finally, India. The US is India’s largest export market³⁶, and a major source of technology and investment. China, on the other hand, is India’s largest source of

³¹ Article 53 refers. For the UN Charter, see <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text>

³² Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Guo Jiakun’s Regular Press Conference on September 23, 2026, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/fyrbt/lxjzh/202609/t20260923_12029735.html

³³ Jesse Johnson, “Takaichi says Trump gave her ‘detailed’ briefing on US-China summit, September 27, 2026, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2026/09/27/japan/politics/us-japan-takaichi-trump-china/>

³⁴ New Standoff Between China and Philippines Near Second Thomas Shoal, September 25, 2026, <https://maritime-executive.com/article/new-standoff-between-china-and-philippines-near-second-thomas-shoal>

³⁵ Australian Fact Sheet on China, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/chin-cef.pdf>

³⁶ Published statistics from India’s Department of Commerce indicate that India’s exports to the US were \$87.3 billion in 2025-26, accounting for 19.78% of India’s total exports. The US Bureau of Economic Analysis says India exported goods and services worth \$151.1 billion in 2025-26, and had a trade surplus of \$ 62.9 billion. See https://tradedat.commerce.gov.in/eidb/country_wise_trade for

imports³⁷, particularly for precursors for its pharma industry, electronics and industrial machinery. The evident disinclination of India's largest export and import partners and the world's two most powerful states to enter into confrontation and the short-term tactical stabilisation indicated by the summit provides breathing space to India (and the Global South), already buffeted by the impact of the Iran war on energy and fertiliser supplies (among others) and facing the outcomes of the Super El Nino. India is also concerned by Trump's wooing of both Xi and Munir simultaneously, raising two-front concerns, as well as by Trump's potential usage of the Russia Sanctions Act to enhance tariffs on India. In the absence of Chinese territorial provocation, the China-India rapprochement can be expected to continue, more so as the cushion provided by the flowering of India-US relations over the last two decades has become decidedly lumpy. The need is to press ahead with accelerating economic measures to strengthen the leverage provided by its huge and growing market, while enhancing military capability, on land, at sea and in the air, as well as in the technological and defence industrial domain. India should not count on the great power truce continuing for long and must redouble its efforts to diversify supply chains, attract global investment into manufacturing industry, and build comprehensive national power.

Deep differences between US and China remain – over the trade imbalance, technology restrictions, US support for Taiwan, China's support for Iran and Russia, China's attempt to obtain hegemony over Asia, and its aspiration to replace US pre-eminence. The truce between them is likely to be temporary; both sides can be expected to continue their struggle for primacy. Nevertheless, it does provide time for middle powers in the Indo-Pacific to re-evaluate their strategies and approach. India must find a way to maximise the opportunities provided, while strengthening capability to respond to Chinese coercion, both in Ladakh and in the Indian Ocean.

The Continuing Stalemate in the Northern Arabian Sea

The confrontation between the US and Iran in the Northern Arabian Sea festered, with only sporadic kinetic action, particularly during the first half of the month. The US blockade of Iran continued, as did Trump's threats to annihilate Iran. Talks between the two sides on the margins of the UN General Assembly high-level debate proved fruitless. Iran opened a new front against Saudi Arabia in the Red Sea, where its proxies cut Saudi Arabia's east-west pipeline and seized control over the Yemen's

Indian Data. For data from the US, see

<https://apps.bea.gov/international/factsheet/factsheet.html#612>

³⁷ India imported goods worth \$131.62 billion from China in 2025-26, accounting for 16.02% of India's total imports. An additional \$24.3 billion, 3.14% of India's imports, came from Hong Kong. See

https://tradestat.commerce.gov.in/eidb/country_wise_trade

northern coast in Bab-el-Mandeb. Both sides were far from achieving the political objective of war: inducing change in the mind of the enemy and forcing him to yield to the will of the victor.

The month opened with US strikes on Iranian military targets, including air defence sites, radar systems, maritime assets and facilities, mine laying capabilities and communications sites³⁸. Iran in turn attacked US bases in Jordan. On September 02, Trump mooted changing the name of the Hormuz Strait to Trump Strait³⁹, while Secretary Hegseth extended the deployment of about 50,000 US personnel to West Asia till 2027⁴⁰. On September 05, Iran claimed it had damaged a US aircraft carrier and destroyer with missiles, while the US said the Iranian attacks were unsuccessful and retaliated by destroying of three IRGC oil tankers⁴¹. Five additional IRGC tankers were claimed sunk on September 08, following attempted ballistic missile strikes on another USN warship⁴². Iran again struck US military sites in Jordan.

Iran-backed Houthis expanded the conflict on September 08 by attacking Aramco facilities in Southern Saudi Arabia with missiles and drones⁴³. They also launched a drive that seized Yemen's coast on the northern shores of the Bab-el-Mandeb, including Mokha Port, Perim Island⁴⁴ and the Hanish Islands⁴⁵. Saudi Arabia's East-West pipeline was shut down on September 11 due to damage by drones launched from Iraq⁴⁶, forcing the country to run the gauntlet of IRGC missiles and drones to ship oil through the Strait of Hormuz⁴⁷. It was partially reopened on September 22,

³⁸ CENTCOM Completes Strikes on IRGC Targets in Iran, September 01, 2026, <https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/PUBLIC-RELEASES/Article/4588389/centcom-completes-strikes-on-irgc-targets-in-iran/>

³⁹ Donald J Trump, @realDonaldTrump, <https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/117202132375758936>

⁴⁰ Shelby Holliday and Alexander Ward, "Hegseth Extends Middle East Troop Deployments Into 2027, Extending Strain on Troops", September 02, 2026, <https://www.wsj.com/politics/national-security/hegseth-extends-mideast-deployments-into-2027-escalating-strain-on-troops-c10fc533>

⁴¹ CENTCOM Destroys 3 IRGC Oil Tankers After Iran Targets 2 US Navy Warships, September 05, 2026, <https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/PUBLIC-RELEASES/Article/4591744/centcom-destroys-3-irgc-oil-tankers-after-iran-targets-2-us-navy-warships/>

⁴² US Destroys 5 IRGC Tankers After Iran Targets Another Warships, September 08, 2026, <https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/PUBLIC-RELEASES/Article/4593050/us-destroys-5-irgc-tankers-after-iran-targets-another-american-warship/>

⁴³ Yemen fighting updates: Battles rage between Houthi and Saudi-Backed forces, September 08, 2026, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2026/9/8/yemen-fighting-live-battles-rage>

⁴⁴ Adam Rasgon, Shuaib Almosawa, Said Al-Batati and Pranav Bhaskar, "Houthis Seize a Key Red Sea Island, Threatening Another Global Oil Route, September 11, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/09/11/world/middleeast/yemen-houthis-bab-al-mandab.html>

⁴⁵ Houthis seize 2 strategic Red Sea islands, and other Mideast developments, September 15, 2026, <https://apnews.com/article/mideast-iran-yemen-houthis-israel-saudi-oil-b95a5a6c73a26bb1caddcbf365ca62>

⁴⁶ Tiffanie Turnbull, "Saudi Arabia shuts key oil pipeline after drone attack launched from Iraq", September 12, 2006, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c62m933465eo>

⁴⁷ Lisa Friedman, "Saudi Pipeline Attack Risks 'Disastrous' Loss of Oil as Fighting Escalates", September 16, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/09/16/business/saudi-pipeline-houthi-attacks.html>

and became fully operational on September 29⁴⁸. Trump declined a Saudi request to carry out airstrikes against the Houthis, limiting US participation to the provision of intelligence support⁴⁹. Saudi Arabia's Mecca Pact partners too declined support. As a consolation, the US State Department approved Saudi Arabia's long pending request for the sale of 48 F-35 Lightning-II aircraft worth \$ 24.3 billion⁵⁰. On September 19, the Houthis attacked Riyadh and Saudi oil facilities, although without success⁵¹. Media reports indicated that France's President Macron had agreed to send French soldiers to Saudi Arabia to help secure energy sites, but not for any fighting⁵².

The Inspector General of the US Department of Defense submitted a report on Operation Epic Fury to US Congress on September 15⁵³, assessing the cost of the operation to be \$33.4 billion as of June 29, 2026, including \$22.3 billion for expended munitions and \$3.7 billion in equipment losses. It noted that munitions expenditure had resulted in strategic inventory shortfalls and revealed industrial base bottlenecks for munitions resupply, including the production of solid rocket motors, the availability of high-grade explosives and propellants, and the recruitment of skilled manufacturing labour. The report also provided a list of US aircraft (over 60) and facilities destroyed or damaged during the operation. The Congressional Budget Office estimated that the war had cost \$38 billion till August 1 while significantly depleting munitions⁵⁴. Media reports indicated that the Pentagon had informed Congress on September 18 that the cost of the war with Iran was \$ 45.1 billion till September 03⁵⁵.

In his speech at the high-level debate in the UN General Assembly on September 22, President Trump said he had a big decision to make: whether to make a deal with Iran

⁴⁸ Lisa Friedman, "Tankers Are Loading Oil Again From a Vital Saudi Pipeline", September 29, 2026, https://www.nytimes.com/2026/09/29/business/oil-saudi-east-west-pipeline.html?emc=edit_wor_20260929&nl=the-world&segment_id=227268

⁴⁹ Helene Cooper, Eric Schmitt, Jonathan Swan and Maggie Haberman, "Trump Gets Caught in a Dilemma Over Saudi Plea for Military Help", September 20, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/09/20/us/politics/trump-yemen-houthis-red-sea-iran.html>

⁵⁰ Kingdom of Saudi Arabia – F-35 Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter Aircraft, September 17, 2026, <https://www.state.gov/releases/bureau-of-political-military-affairs/2026/09/kingdom-of-saudi-arabia-f-35-lightning-ii-joint-strike-fighter-aircraft/>

⁵¹ Vivian Neriem, Ismaeel Naar and Pranav Bhaskar, "In significant Escalation, Houthis Attack Saudi Capital", September 19, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/09/19/world/middleeast/saudi-arabia-riyadh-houthis.html>

⁵² Ephrat Livni, "France to Send Soldiers to Saudi Arabia to Help Secure Energy Sites, September 24, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/09/24/world/middleeast/france-saudi-arabia-red-sea-yemen-houthis.html>

⁵³ Operation Epic Fury: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, https://media.defense.gov/2026/Sep/09/2003993626/-1/-1/1/OEF_Q3_JUN2026_FINAL_508%20SECURE.PDF

⁵⁴ Catie Edmondson, "Independent Budget Office Estimated Iran War Has Cost \$38 Billion", September 15, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/09/15/us/politics/iran-war-cost.html>

⁵⁵ Annle Grayer, Lauren Fox, "Iran war has cost \$45.1 billion, Pentagon tells Congress", September 19, 2026, <https://edition.cnn.com/2026/09/18/politics/us-iran-war-cost>

enabling rebuilding a far greater country than it ever was before, or to annihilate the Islamic Republic and drive it into hell with no chance of survival and no hope of future greatness⁵⁶. The speech was unusual in that a member of the UNO P-5, an organisation dedicated to promoting peace and dialogue, used the platform to threaten the annihilation of a UN member state. On the sidelines of the debate, Iran proposed a seven-day plan to end hostilities, reopen the Strait of Hormuz and then begin comprehensive talks on Iran's nuclear programme⁵⁷, provided there was an end to all hostilities including in Lebanon, Iran's frozen assets were released, sanctions on Iranian oil were waived and the naval blockade on Iran lifted. Trump rejected the proposal in public⁵⁸, but negotiations were reported as continuing, with Iran saying that there had been no formal response from the US side.

Analysts describe the Iran War as amongst the greatest of strategic blunders⁵⁹, and the equivalent of Britain's humiliating defeat in the 1956 Suez Crisis⁶⁰. It has provided authoritarian leaders across the world a powerful incentive to acquire nuclear weapons and probably dealt a fatal blow to efforts to de-nuclearise the Korean Peninsula. It has also severely impacted the global "four F's": fuel, food, fertiliser and finance, hitting global supply chains and particularly nations of the Global South. Trump has gone from predicting a short conflict, lasting 4-6 weeks, to acknowledging that the conflict will go beyond the November 2026 US elections. Trumpian ego, deep pockets, formidable military capability and the paucity of domestic checks permit US continuation of the war into the near-term future, to China's benefit. Nor does the IRGC, which controls Iran, give indication of wanting to compromise on its conditions. Whether one side blinks, or the conflict continues into the indeterminate future, remains to be seen.

Exercise Veer Guardian 2026

The Japan Air Self Defense Force (JASDF) is no stranger to long range deployment of its combat aircraft. It began with Mitsubishi-built F-15J Eagles going to Alaska for

⁵⁶ Remarks to the United Nations General Assembly in New York City, September 22, 2026, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-the-united-nations-general-assembly-new-york-city-21>

⁵⁷ Farnaz Fassihi and Pranav Bhaskar, "Iran Proposes 7-Day Plan to End War", September 24, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/09/24/world/middleeast/iran-proposal.html>

⁵⁸ Zolan Kanno-Youngs, "Trump Rejects Iranian Proposal for Cease-Fire and Opening of Strait", September 26, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/09/26/us/politics/trump-iran-hormuz-strait.html>

⁵⁹ JJ Mearsheimer, "The Mother of All Strategic Blunders", September 01, 2026, <https://mearsheimer.substack.com/p/the-mother-of-all-strategic-blunders>

⁶⁰ Walter Russel Meade, "A Realistic Look at the Iran War", August 31., 2026, <https://www.wsj.com/opinion/a-realistic-look-at-the-iran-war-d6af0908>

Exercise Red Flag in July 2007⁶¹. 17 years later, it expanded by deploying Mitsubishi F-2 Viper Zeros to participate in Australia's Exercise Pitch Black in 2024. F-15J Eagles were deployed for Operation Atlantic Eagles to the US, Canada, UK and Germany in 2025⁶².

Still, all such deployments have in the past been to countries that are US allies. Exercise Veer Guardian 2026, which brought three Mitsubishi F-2A Viper Zeros from Tsuiki Air Base to Jodhpur via Okinawa and Thailand, with refuelling support from USAF KC-135 tankers en route, marked the first time JASDF fighter aircraft deployed to a non-ally, and to an Indian Ocean state.

IAF-JASDF exercises have been in the making for a nearly a decade. India and Japan began discussing cooperation between their Air Forces following the inclusion of Japan in Exercise Malabar in 2015. JASDF helicopter crew visited India's Sarsawa Air Station in December 2017. Defence Ministers of the two countries affirmed JASDF participation as observers in IAF-USAF Exercise Cope India 2018⁶³. The first bilateral IAF-JASDF Exercise Shinyuu Maitri also took place at Agra in December 2018⁶⁴. The inaugural Indian Air Force – JASDF Exercise Veer Guardian was scheduled to take place at the Komatsu Air Base in Japan in June 2020, but was called off due to the outbreak of Covid. It was rescheduled at the Hyakuri Air Base in Japan in July 2021, but that too had to be called off due to the eruption of Covid Delta. The first edition of Exercise Veer Guardian thus took place in the air space around Japan's Hyakuri and Iruma air bases, near Tokyo, from January 12-26, 2023⁶⁵.

Exercise Veer Guardian 2026, conducted at Jodhpur from September 09-22, is the second iteration of this exercise⁶⁶. It involved F-2A Viper Zero fighters from the JASDF supported by C-2 transport aircraft, as well as Su-30 MKI, Rafale and Tejas fighters from India. The exercise focused on complex air defence and combat scenarios, including close-range aerial tactics and dogfighting simulations. It also provided opportunity for collaborative strategy sessions to fine-tune joint aerial operational concepts and tactical coordination, and enabled professional discussions on engineering practices, maintenance protocols and aerospace safety. General Takehiro Morita, the Chief of the JASDF, visited Air Force Station Jodhpur and flew with Chief

⁶¹ JASDF arrives for Red Flag-Alaska, July 12, 2007, <https://www.pacaf.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/597004/jasdf-arrives-for-red-flag-alaska/>

⁶² Operation Atlantic Eagles, <https://milavreachout.org/operation-atlantic-eagles/>

⁶³ Joint Press Statement on the India-Japan Annual Defence Ministerial Dialogue, August 20, 2018, <https://www.pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=181975®=48&lang=2>

⁶⁴ Exercise Shinyuu Maitri-2018 With JASDF Commences, December 03, 2018, <https://www.pib.gov.in/newsite/printrelease.aspx?relid=186087®=48&lang=2>

⁶⁵ IAF and Japan Air Self Defence Force set to Exercise Jointly in Japan, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1889366>

⁶⁶ Air Defence Exercise with JASDF: Ex Veer Guardian-2026, September 08, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2307890®=48&lang=1>

of Air Staff Air Chief Marshal AP Singh in the Tejas Trainer version⁶⁷, describing his flight “not only as a truly valuable experience, but also as a powerful symbol of trust, confidence, and friendship”⁶⁸.

Japan's participation in air combat exercises beyond the US in recent years is indicative of its changing security thinking and desire to contribute more to global and regional security and conventional deterrence. These are evident from former Defence Minister General Nakatani's enunciation of the OCEAN (One Cooperative Effort Among Nations) concept at the Shangri-La Dialogue in May 2025⁶⁹ and Prime Minister Takaichi's updated FOIP concept of May 2026⁷⁰. To implement these visions, Japan has enhanced its defence budget, revised its principles for transfer of defence equipment, increased defence exports, developed logistics and reciprocal access agreements with regional countries, and undertaken joint capacity building and enhancement of interoperability with partner nations, both in conjunction with and independent of the US. Veer Guardian helps in building operational capacity and interoperability, elevates mutual trust and signals deepening strategic convergence in the Indo-Pacific.

Exercise Veer Guardian also reflects the increased reach of land-based air power, including for strike tasks. That does not, however, mean that it can replace carrier-based aviation: that would remain essential for air defence, anti-submarine warfare and persistent localised surveillance in the maritime domain, among other uses. It is also notable that land-based air power depends on static air bases which have proved extremely vulnerable to drone and missile strikes in the recent Iran War, whereas Iran has not been able to strike American aircraft carriers or warships. Both land and sea-based airpower must co-exist, performing different functions, even though there is some overlap.

Despite the commitment to reciprocal participation in each other's multilateral exercises hosted by each other⁷¹, it is notable that the JASDF's participation in Exercise Tarang Shakti 2026, also taking place at Air Force Station Jodhpur from September 26

⁶⁷ https://x.com/IAF_MCC/status/2101673834948739143

⁶⁸ Japan's Air Chief Takehiro Morita Flies Indian Tejas Fighter, Praising the Sortie as a Symbol of Mutual Trust, September 20, 2026, <https://defence.in/threads/japans-air-chief-takehiro-morita-flies-indian-tejas-fighter-praising-the-sortie-as-a-symbol-of-mutual-trust.18751/>

⁶⁹ General Nakatani, "Ensuring Stability in a Competitive World", at the 22nd Asia Security Summit, May 31, 2025, https://www.iiss.org/globalassets/media-library---content-migration/files/shangri-la-dialogue/2025/transcripts-final/p2/sld2025_second-plenary-session_nakatani-gen_as-delivered.pdf

⁷⁰ Foreign Policy Speech by Prime Minister TAKAICHI Sanae, May 02, 2026, <https://japan.kantei.go.jp/105/speech/202605/02fpspeech.html>

⁷¹ Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation between India and Japan, August 29, 2025, https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/40065/Joint_Declaration_on_Security_Cooperation_between_India_and_Japan_August_29_2025

to October 12, is only as an observer. Tarang Shakti brings together aircraft including fighters from India, the US, France, UAE, Australia, Germany, Greece, Singapore and Sri Lanka, among others. About 30 other countries have sent observers to the exercise. While there is need to expand participation in such exercises, consideration could also be given to air exercises involving the Quad partners even though the Quad does not appear to be a high priority for the US at present: Japan and Australia have participated in Exercise Cope India 2025 as observers.

What does the future hold? Occasional exercises go some way in building mutual confidence and interoperability, but there is need for more frequent interaction. The India-Japan bilateral exercise JIMEX also began as an occasional exercise, but has become an annual fixture over the years. Similarly, it can be expected that Exercise Veer Guardian will also become a regular affair.

Other Indo-Pacific Developments

Belgian Prime Minister Visits India. Mr. Bart De Wever, the Belgian Prime Minister, accompanied by Mr Theo Francken, the Belgian Minister for Defence and Foreign Trade, paid an official visit to India from September 2-4. The visit followed the inaugural India-Belgium Strategic Dialogue⁷² of July 15, 2026, and the visit of a high-powered Belgian economic delegation to India in March 2025⁷³. It was the first visit of a Belgian Prime Minister to India in two decades. A joint statement covering the India-EU strategic partnership and free trade agreement; bilateral trade, economic cooperation and investment; defence and security cooperation, the green transition, emerging technologies, healthcare and startups, connectivity, mobility, education, culture and people-to-people ties; and other international matters was issued⁷⁴. In defence cooperation, Belgium appointed a resident Defence Attache in New Delhi in November 2025; India committed to positioning a Defence Attache in Brussels in 2027. The Belgian frigate Leopold I will visit India in November 2026, and the Belgian Defence College will come to India in 2027. A letter of intent to setting out a framework for defence cooperation was signed by the Defence Ministers. Multiple MoUs were signed between Indian private sector companies and Belgian defence

⁷² India-Belgium Strategic Dialogue, July 15, 2026, https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases?dtl/41466/IndiaBelgium_Strategic_Dialogue_July_15_2026

⁷³ Visit of a high-powered Economic Delegation from Belgium led by Princess Astrid to India, March 09, 2025, https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases?dtl/39135/Visit_of_a_highpowered_Economic_Delegation_from_Belgium_led_by_HRH_Princess_Astrid_to_India_March_01_08_2025

⁷⁴ India-Belgium Joint Statement on the Visit of Prime Minister of Belgium to India, September 03, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2306302®=48&lang=1>

industry companies⁷⁵. Leaders set a target of doubling bilateral trade from the present level of \$ 13 billion in the next five years. The two sides also established an investment fast track mechanism to promote Belgian investments in India.

Maldives Invites UK PM to Discuss Chagos Archipelago. Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu invited UK Prime Minister Andrew Burnham for official talks on matters concerning the sovereignty of the Chagos Islands⁷⁶. Muizzu had in February 2026 reversed the Maldives official position supporting Mauritian sovereignty and refused to recognise the ITLOS demarcation of the EEZ between Mauritius and the Maldives, resulting in Mauritius officially suspending its diplomatic relations with the Maldives. He had also guaranteed continued operation of the US base at Diego Garcia. Muizzu seeks to exploit non-ratification of the UK-Mauritius agreement on transfer of sovereignty due to US President Donald Trump's objections and the change of leadership in the UK to further his claim. India continues to support Mauritius in the matter.

RM visit to Sri Lanka. Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh visited Sri Lanka from September 08-10⁷⁷, becoming the first Indian Defence Minister to visit the country after Shri KC Pant visited in 1988, during the deployment of the Indian Peacekeeping Force following Op Pawan. INS Udaygiri visited Colombo to coincide with the visit⁷⁸. The visit objectives were reviewing progress of the India-Sri Lanka MoU on Defence Cooperation signed in April 2025 during the visit to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and deepening cooperation to advance maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region. The RM met Sri Lanka's President Anura Kumara Dissanayake (who also holds the Defence portfolio) and discussed strengthening of existing defence, economic, maritime and regional cooperation⁷⁹. Other meetings included Sri Lanka's Prime Minister, Deputy Defence Minister and senior military leadership. President Dissanayake sought India's support to combat drug trafficking and said Sri Lanka would continue supporting maintenance of peace in the Indian Ocean Region. Three new agreements were signed: to upgrade L70 guns for the Sri Lankan Air Force, for cooperation between the National Defence Colleges of the two countries, and for cooperation between the Sri Lankan Cadet Corps and India's National Cadet Corps.

⁷⁵ India and Belgium call for deeper defence industrial collaboration to build stronger militaries through co-development and co-production, September 03, 2026,

<https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2306423®=48&lang=1>

⁷⁶ President extends invitation to UK Prime Minister for official talks on Chagos Islands, September 08, 2026, <https://presidency.gov.mv/Press/Article/37314>

⁷⁷ Raksha Mantri to undertake a three-day visit to Sri Lanka, September 06, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2307145®=48&lang=1>

⁷⁸ INS Udaygiri's visit is symbol of India's commitment to work with Sri Lanka: Rajnath Singh, September 20, 2026, <https://idrw.org/ins-udaygiris-visit-is-symbol-of-indias-commitment-to-work-with-sri-lanka-rajnath-singh/>

⁷⁹ President Meets Indian Defence Minister, September 09, 2026, <https://www.presidentsoffice.gov.lk/news/?slug=president-meets-indian-defence-minister>

Three Bailey Bridges constructed by the Indian Armed Forces were inaugurated. The visit is indicative of continued improvement in India-Sri Lanka relations and pursuit of India's neighbourhood first and Mahasagar policies.

India's National Statement at the UNGA. EAM Dr. S Jaishankar delivered India's National Statement at the 81st session of the UN General Assembly at New York on September 26⁸⁰. The EAM called for peace in the Gulf and in Ukraine, reformed multilateralism, and the adoption of a zero-tolerance policy against terrorism, including cross-border terrorism. He also sought action to prevent the targeting of seafarers on the high seas.

Lindsey Graham Russia and Iran Sanctions Act. The US House of Representatives passed the Lindsey Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran bill of 2026 on September 16 by 262-159 votes. The Senate had already passed the bill 86-11 on August 07. President Trump signed the bill into law on September 18⁸¹. The Act empowers President Trump to impose tariffs of up to 100% on the top five buyers of Russian oil and gas (India is one of them) and extends the sunset date for the Iran Sanctions Act to 2031. India said it remained firmly committed to ensuring energy security for its 1.4 billion people and would take all necessary measures to protect its trade and economic interests.

China Japan Relations. In a pointed message, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi met Japan's former Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya in Beijing on September 28 and specified three conditions for normalisation of China-Japan relations. He said that Japan must correct the erroneous words and deeds of its leaders on Taiwan, take a correct attitude on history, and form an objective and rational view of China⁸². He also warned that Japan cannot build a future if it glorifies war criminals or challenges its postwar pacifist constitution. The message was reinforced by China's spokesperson on September 29, when he drew attention to the China-Japan joint statement of 1972⁸³, which explicitly noted that it is "keenly conscious of" and "deeply reproaches itself" over its responsibility for the war and "fully understands and respects" the position of the Chinese government that Taiwan is an inalienable part of the territory of the People's Republic of China, and said the root cause of the severe

⁸⁰ India's National Statement at the 81st session of the UN General Assembly, September 26, 2026, [https://www.mea.gov.in/speeches-statements?dtl/41829/Indias National Statement at the 81st session of the UN General Assembly](https://www.mea.gov.in/speeches-statements?dtl/41829/Indias+National+Statement+at+the+81st+session+of+the+UN+General+Assembly)

⁸¹ Congressional Bill HR 5334 Signed into Law, September 18, 2026, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/2026/09/congressional-bill-h-r-5334-signed-into-law/>

⁸² https://x.com/Unveiled_ChinaX/status/2104645980050296966, September 28, 2026.

⁸³ Joint Communique of the Government of Japan and the Government of the People's Republic of China, September 29, 1972, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/china/joint72.html>

situation in China-Japan relations was that the political foundation of bilateral relations has been gravely undermined: The incumbent leader of Japan not only refuses to reflect on the history of aggression, but also claims that a contingency in Taiwan will constitute a “survival threatening” situation for Japan, while peddling the external threat narrative to speed up remilitarisation⁸⁴. China has maintained intense pressure on Takaichi’s government since November 2025⁸⁵, and continues strongly opposing her actions to strengthen Japan’s military capability.

AUKUS Completes Five Years. The AUKUS Agreement turned five years old on September 16, 2026. It has come out unscathed despite nine changes of administration as well as national reviews or public enquiries in all three member countries. Pillar I of the agreement envisaged providing SSNs to Australia in three phases: building the domestic nuclear submarine workforce and infrastructure and the rotational deployment of US and UK SSNs to Australia. Phase II envisaged the procurement of three Virginia class submarines (two used and one new) from the US commencing 2032, this has been modified so that all three Virginia class submarines will be used⁸⁶. Phase III, to commence in the 1940s, visualised Australia and UK building the SSN-AUKUS in their countries. The overall cost of the programme was estimated at A\$368 billion. There has been visible progress in Phase I. Questions, however, remain about the US ability to boost its submarine production sufficiently to enable sale of the Virginia-class submarines to Australia, as well as about completion of the design of SSN-AUKUS in time.

Quad Sherpas Meeting. India’s Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri hosted a Quad Sherpas Meeting in New Delhi on September 03⁸⁷ to take forward outcomes from the last Quad Foreign Ministers’ Meeting and prepare for the next one. Discussion encompassed maritime and transnational security; economic prosperity and security; critical and emerging technologies; humanitarian assistance and emergency response; and developments in the Indo-Pacific and the wider world. The Quad Summit may have been discontinued for the time being, but engagement of the four countries for Quad objectives continues.

⁸⁴ Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Guo Jiakun’s Regular Press Conference on September 29, 2026, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/fyrbt/lxjzh/202609/t20260929_12033413.html

⁸⁵ See Lalit Kapur, “The Impact of Takaichi’s Taiwan Remarks”, Indo-Pacific Monitor Vol. VI, Issue 11, November 2025,

[https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/storage/uploads/publications_file/publication_Indo-Pacific%20Monitor-%20Vol%20VI,%20Issue%2011%20\(Final\)%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/storage/uploads/publications_file/publication_Indo-Pacific%20Monitor-%20Vol%20VI,%20Issue%2011%20(Final)%20(1).pdf)

⁸⁶ Joint Statement, AUKUS Defense Ministers’ Meeting, May 31, 2026,

<https://www.war.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/4504769/joint-statement-aukus-defense-ministers-meeting/>

⁸⁷ Quad Sherpas’ Meeting in New Delhi, September 03, 2026, <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2026/09/quad-sherpas-meeting-in-new-delhi/>

Quad Tabletop Exercise. The Quad partners conducted a tabletop exercise in Tokyo from September 3-4 to advance the Indo-Pacific Logistics Network⁸⁸. The exercise focused on natural disaster response scenarios, with Quad partners examining how best to leverage each other's logistics capabilities, while strengthening interoperability and streamlining coordination. The partners also expressed their deepest condolence to all those affected by the recent devastating floods (in Nepal) and underscored their commitment to supporting regional partners in times of need.

Quad At Sea Ship Observers Mission. CGS Shaunak, with six sea riders from Australia, Japan and the US embarked, sailed from Chennai for Perth on September 25⁸⁹. The event is the second activity of the Quad-at-Sea Ship Observer Mission, following the voyage of USCGC Stratton from Palau to Guam in June-July 2025.

Japan Cabinet Reshuffle. Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi reshuffled her cabinet on September 17⁹⁰. The new cabinet comprised 23 ministers, 27 state ministers, 28 parliamentary vice-ministers and five special advisors⁹¹. Two ministers from the previous cabinet, Yoshimasa Hayashi (Internal Affairs and Communications) and Norikazu Suzuki (Agriculture) were dropped, while the JIP's Hiroshi Nakatsuka was appointed Minister for Administrative Reform and Regulatory/Children Policies. Minoru Kihara remained Chief Cabinet Secretary, while Satsuki Katayama, Toshimitsu Motegi and Shinjiro Koizumi retained the Finance, Foreign and Defence portfolios respectively.

Japan's Defence Budget Ask. Japan's Ministry of Defence sought a budget of ¥8.9 trillion (about \$ 55.6 billion) for FY 2027⁹². This was about the same as the FY2026 budget of ¥8.845 trillion. Priorities were artificial intelligence, unmanned capabilities and long-range strike capability. The final allocation is likely to be higher. Although funded through different ministries, Japan includes expenditure on its Coast Guard, some public infrastructure works and advanced science and technology related research towards meeting its target of spending 2% of its GDP on defence.

⁸⁸ Quad Concludes Tabletop Exercise in Tokyo to Advance Indo-Pacific Logistics network, September 11, 2026, https://www.mod.go.jp/en/images/0903a_usa_aus_ind-j_01en.pdf

⁸⁹ ICG to strengthen maritime cooperation through QUAD-at-Sea Ship Observer Mission, September 25, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2315065®=48&lang=1>

⁹⁰ Inauguration of the Reshuffled Second Takaichi Cabinet, September 17, 2026, <https://japan.kantei.go.jp/105/actions/202609/17takaichinaikaku2.html>

⁹¹ List of Ministers Inaugurated on September 17, 2026, <https://japan.kantei.go.jp/105/meibo/daijin/index.html>

⁹² Dzirhan Mahadzir, "Japan Budget Requests Record ¥55.6 billion for Unmanned, Long-Range Capabilities", September 01, 2026, <https://news.usni.org/2026/09/01/japan-budget-requests-record-55-6b-for-unmanned-long-range-strike-capabilities>

Japan Not Ruling Out Nuclear Submarines. Following testimony of the US Navy Intelligence Director that China was moving towards an all-nuclear submarine fleet⁹³, Japan's Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi reiterated that Japan was considering their acquisition in the revision to its three national security documents, due to be published by the end of the year⁹⁴. Japan currently operates 23 conventional submarines. An expert panel had in September 2025 recommended that Tokyo develop vessels with next-generation power sources and vertical-launching systems for long range missiles, a recommendation that was codified in the Japan Innovation Party's October 2025 coalition agreement with the ruling LDP.

Japan Acquires Tomahawk Capability. JS Chokai, the JMSDF's Kongo-Class Aegis-equipped destroyer commissioned in 1998, returned to its home port of Sasebo on August 31 after its upgrade in San Diego making it the first Japanese warship with Tomahawk land attack cruise missiles⁹⁵. The JMSDF plans to equip all its Aegis destroyers with the Tomahawk LACM. However, delivery of the 400 missiles it had contracted for, earlier scheduled by March 2028, has been delayed by up to two years due to heavy expenditure of missiles by the US in the Iran War, disrupting Tokyo's timeline for acquisition of counter-strike capability.

China Extends Range of Enforcement Operations For Scarborough Shoal. China was reported to have extended the range of its enforcement operations against the Philippines at the Scarborough Shoal beyond 24 nautical miles⁹⁶. The action is significant, indicating an attempt to gain control over the entire triangular space between the Paracel Islands, Spratly Islands and the Scarborough Shoal.

INS Kolkata PNS Hunain Collision. INS Kolkata and PNS Hunain collided in international waters in the Northern Arabian Sea on September 15⁹⁷. Reports indicate that INS Kolkata continued its mission without major damage, while PNS Hunain was forced to return to harbour due to structural damage. India protested the unacceptable and unprofessional conduct of the Pakistani warship, terming it a

⁹³ Testimony of R Adm Mike Brookes, Intelligence Director – Navy to the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, March 02, 2026, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2026-03/RADM_Brookes_Testimony.pdf

⁹⁴ Jesse Johnson, "Koizumi says Japan not ruling out nuclear subs, days after US offers positive view", September 11, 2026, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2026/09/11/japan/koizumi-japan-us-nuclear-submarines/>

⁹⁵ Dzirhan Mahadzir, "Japan's First Tomahawk Cruise Missile Destroyer Back from US", August 31, 2026, <https://news.usni.org/2026/08/31/japans-first-tomahawk-cruise-missile-destroyer-back-from-u-s>

⁹⁶ Aaron-Mathew Lariosa, "China Claims Expanded Zone Around Scarborough Shoal, Deploys New Drone", September 28, 2026, <https://news.usni.org/2026/09/28/china-claims-expanded-zone-around-scarborough-shoal-deploys-new-drone>

⁹⁷ Charge d'Affaires of the High Commission for the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in New Delhi summoned to the Ministry of External Affairs, September 16, 2026, https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases?dtl/41801/Charge_dAffaires_of_the_High_Commission_for_the_Islamic_Republic_of_Pakistan_in_New_Delhi_summoned_to_the_Ministry_of_External_Affairs

violation of the April 1991 agreement between the two sides on advance notice on military exercises, manoeuvres and troop movements.

Exercise Super Garuda Shield. Exercise Super Garuda Shield 2026 was co-hosted by the US and Indonesia at multiple locations in the Indonesian Archipelago from August 31 – September 11⁹⁸. Apart from the host nations, participation included military personnel from Australia, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Canada, France and India. The Exercise featured joint staff planning, cyber defence exercises, airborne drop jumps, amphibious beach assaults, and jungle warfare training.

INS Mysore at Lumut, Malaysia. One month after the Indian and Malaysian Air Forces came together for the third Exercise Udara Shakti in Malaysia⁹⁹, INS Mysore visited Lumut and participated in the fourth 4th India-Malaysia Exercise Samudra Laksamana, from September 09-12¹⁰⁰. Malaysian ships KD Lekir and KD Gagan Samudera joined INS Mysore for the exercise, which speaks of increasing defence cooperation between the Indian and Malaysia Armed Forces. Armies of the two countries also come together for Exercise Harimau Shakti, the 5th edition of which was held in Rajasthan in December 2025.

INS Kulish at Ream Naval Base, Cambodia. INS Kulish made the first ever port call by an Indian warship at Ream Naval Base, in Cambodia, from September 12-15. Previous IN warship visits to Cambodia have been to Sihanoukville. Ream is seen as China's second overseas base, after Djibouti, with a near continuous presence of its Type 056A corvettes. Allowing INS Kulish to visit is part of Cambodia's effort to signal that Ream is not exclusively Chinese.

INS Trishul Deployment for Exercise Varuna. INS Trishul arrived at Toulon, France, on September 21 to participate in the India-France Exercise Varuna on September 22¹⁰¹. The ship had earlier visited Alexandria from September 14-17¹⁰² and Djibouti on September 06¹⁰³. The deployment is indicative of expansion of India's areas of interest to cover the Mediterranean¹⁰⁴. The exercise provides opportunities for both

⁹⁸ Super Garuda Shield 2026 Concludes, Cementing US Indonesia Military Partnership, September 11, 2026, <https://id.usembassy.gov/super-garuda-shield-2026-concludes-cementing-u-s-indonesia-military-partnership/>

⁹⁹ <https://x.com/uniindianews/status/2088256370521059373>

¹⁰⁰ INS Mysore Concludes Participation in the 4th Edition of Exercise Samudra Laksmana at Lumut, Malaysia, September 14, 2026,

<https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2310000®=48&lang=1>

¹⁰¹ Adithya Krishna Menon, "INS Trishul Arrives in Toulon Sporting Recent Upgrades, September 23, 2026, <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2026/09/ins-trishul-arrives-in-toulon-sporting-recent-upgrades/>

¹⁰² INS Trishul Makes Port Call at Alexandria, Egypt, September 19, 2026,

<https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2312509®=48&lang=1>

¹⁰³ <https://x.com/indiannavy/status/2098019459818729751>

¹⁰⁴ Ensuring Secure Seas, Indian Navy Maritime Security Strategy (INMSS-2026),

https://indiannavy.gov.in/sites/default/files/basic_page_document/Book_Indian%20Navy%20Maritime%20Security%20Strategy_Version6_ver3-3_web.pdf

navies to share experiences and best practices, enhance interoperability and foster mutual understanding.

Exercise SLINEX 2026. The 13th India-Sri Lanka Exercise SLINEX was conducted off Visakhapatnam from September 17-21¹⁰⁵. IN Ships Kavaratti and Jyoti and SLNS Sindurala took part. The exercise provided opportunities for professional interactions, exchange of best practices and enhancement of interoperability between the two Navies.

Exercise Yudh Abhyas. The 22nd edition of the India-US Joint Military Exercise Yudh Abhyas took place at Auli and Mahajan from September 15-27¹⁰⁶. The exercise provided opportunity for both Armies to share tactics, techniques and procedures, and enhance their ability to undertake coordinated military operations across varied terrain and operational environment. It included a combined air assault at Auli.

Exercise Tarang Shakti. Exercise Tarang Shakti 2026, India's multinational air exercise, began at Jodhpur on September 26¹⁰⁷. The exercise involves the participation of Six F-35 Lightning-II fighters and two KC-135 Stratotankers from the US, seven Rafales, three A-400M transports and two MRTT aircraft from France, six F-16s and one Global 6000 EW aircraft from the UAE, two A-400M transports from Germany, one C-130 each from Australia and Bangladesh, one King Air aircraft from Sri Lanka, and multiple Rafale, Su-30MKI, Tejas, Mig-29, Mirage 2000, Jaguar and support aircraft from India.

ADMM Plus Maritime Cooperation Activity. IN Ships Sahyadri and Kulish participated in the ADMM Plus Joint Cooperation Activity at Subic Bay, in the Philippines, from September 21-25¹⁰⁸. The exercise involved participation from Australia, Brunei, India, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of the Philippines, the Republic of Singapore, and the United States.

INS Ranvijay Visits Salalah, Oman. INS Ranvijay, deployed in the Northern Arabian Sea, was reported to have visited Salalah on September 29¹⁰⁹.

DAC Accords Approval for Projects Worth ₹1.1 Lakh Crores. The Defence Acquisition Council accorded Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) for projects worth ₹1.1 lakh crores

¹⁰⁵ India-Sri Lanka Bilateral Maritime Exercise SLINEX-26 Concluded at Visakhapatnam, September 23, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2313929®=48&lang=1>

¹⁰⁶ India-US Joint Military Exercise Yudh Abhyas 2026 Commences at Auli and Mahajan, September 15, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2310476®=48&lang=1>

¹⁰⁷ Exercise Tarang Shakti 2026: "Power in Partnership", September 27, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2315563®=48&lang=1>

¹⁰⁸ Indian Naval Ships Sahyadri and Kulish Conclude Participation In ADMM-Plus Maritime Security Joint Cooperation Activity, September 27, 2026,

<https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2315585®=48&lang=1>

¹⁰⁹ INS Ranvijay Makes Port Call at Oman's Salalah, Strengthening India-Oman Maritime Ties, September 29, 2026, <https://newsonair.gov.in/ins-ranvijay-makes-port-call-at-omans-salalah-strengthening-india-oman-maritime-ties/>

on September 07¹¹⁰. These include Arudhra Air Route Surveillance Radars for Naval Air Stations and the design, development and subsequent procurement of Marine Gas Turbines.

RM Unveils RAKSHA Defence Diplomacy Document. Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh released the 'RAKSHA' document on defence diplomacy on September 03¹¹¹. Although the full text of the document was not available in the public domain at the time of writing, the document is reported to outline India's strategic roadmap and vision for global defence partnerships over the next 10 years. Its key pillars are deepening bilateral and multilateral security cooperation through strategic partnership; capacity building through enhancing joint military exercises, training programmes and sharing best practices with friendly nations; promoting Make-in-India defence platforms to establish the nation as a reliable global defence manufacturing hub; and strengthening India's role as a Net Security Provider and First Responder in the Indian Ocean Region.

India's Fourth SSBN, Range of K-5 SLBM. Media reports indicated that India's fourth nuclear-propelled ballistic missile submarine would be named INS Arisudan and would commission in the first half of 2027¹¹². It will be equipped with up to eight K-4 SLBMs, with a range of around 3,500 Km. Another report quoted the first commanding officer of INS Arihant as saying that the K-5 SLBM currently under development would have a range of 10-12,000 Km, substantially more than the earlier estimate of 6,000 Km¹¹³.

TASL Signs MoU With Lockheed Martin to Make Javelin in India. India-US defence cooperation continued to move ahead as Tata Advanced Systems Limited (TASL) signed an MoU with Lockheed Martin to co-produce the Javelin All Up Round (AUR) in India¹¹⁴. Sub-assembly kits and guidance modules will continue to be built in the US and shipped to India for final assembly. Reports indicate that India is buying in the hope of eventually engineering a superior indigenous system, and that Lockheed Martin has evinced interest in co-developing the 5th generation of Javelin STGMs with

¹¹⁰ DAC clears capital acquisition proposals worth about Rs 1.10 lakh crores for the defence forces, September 07, 2026,

<https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2307452®=48&lang=1>

¹¹¹ Raksha Mantri unveils 'RAKSHA' defence diplomacy document outlining India's strategic roadmap & vision for global partnerships over next 10 years, September 03, 2026,

<https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2306256®=48&lang=1>

¹¹² India's Fourth Arihant-Class SSBN S4* to Joint Navy in 2027, August 31, 2026,

<https://idrw.org/indias-fourth-arihant-class-ssbn-s4-likely-to-join-navy-in-2027/>

¹¹³ K-5SLBM will have 10,000 Km range, says former Arihant Commander, September 13, 2026,

<https://idrw.org/k-5-slbm-will-have-10000km-range-says-former-arihant-commander/>

¹¹⁴ Javelin Joint Venture and Tata Advanced Systems signs Agreement For Missile Co-Production in India, August 30, 2026, <https://news.lockheedmartin.com/2026-08-30-Javelin-Joint-Venture-and-Tata-Advanced-Systems-Signs-Agreement-for-Missile-Co-Production-in-India>



India. The MoU indicates that cooperation India-US defence cooperation continues despite the downturn in political relations.

PNS Hangor SLCM firing. PNS Hangor, the first of the Hangor-class submarines built by China and delivered to Pakistan earlier this year, carried out its maiden live weapon firing on September 27, striking a designated target with an anti-ship cruise missile in the Northern Arabian Sea. The event signals strengthening of Pakistan's sea denial capability, which had reduced to just five boats (two Agosta-70 that are already more than 45 years old, and three Agosta-90B boats commissioned commencing 1999). The missile was reported to be either the YJ-18, with a maximum range of 540 Km, or the YJ-82, with a range of 290 Km.

Subic Bay Expansion. The Subic Bay Drydock Corporation, an American owned firm, was reported to funded a \$1.4 million feasibility study to expand the shipyard's approach pier by 169 metres¹¹⁵, thus creating additional usable berthing area of more than 270 metres for maintenance, repair and overhaul operators. The initiative is part of a move by the USN to strengthen its forward presence in the Philippines.

¹¹⁵ Aaron-Mathew Lariosa, "US Funding Subic Bay Shipyard Repair Expansion", September 14, 2026, <https://news.usni.org/2026/09/14/u-s-funding-subic-bay-shipyard-repair-expansion>



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