Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power

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Author

Lalit Kapur







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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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Abstract

The US confrontation with Iran entered its ninth month, with continuing disruption of energy and trade flows through the Strait of Hormuz. Yemen's Houthis repeatedly struck airport and energy infrastructure in Saudi Arabia, and renewed fighting between the Ethiopian government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front added to regional instability. As the month ended, the US reportedly reached out to Iran with a peace proposal, while simultaneously warning Gulf countries of resumption of kinetic conflict after the mid-term elections.

Maldives President Muizzu visited Pakistan from October 20-22, signing MoUs on defence and maritime security, among others. Bangladesh Prime Minister Tarique Rahman visited Tokyo from October 26-29, promoting the bilateral strategic partnership and its flagship initiative of the Bay of Bengal Industrial Growth Belt (BIG-B).

Defence Ministers from ASEAN and dialogue partners convened at Cebu in the Philippines on October 28-29 for the ADMM and ADMM Plus meetings. They reaffirmed commitments to security and stability in the South China Sea, freedom of navigation and strict adherence to international law, including UNCLOS. The ADMM Plus meeting agreed to expand collaborative defence frameworks to counter supply chain shocks. India reiterated its commitment to collective regional security and the eradication of terrorism in all its forms.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio visited Mumbai and Jamnagar from October 20-22. He laid stress on the imports of Venezuelan crude by Indian refiners.

Quad Foreign Ministers met in Atlanta for the third time this year, on October 31, discussing practical cooperation on regional security, maritime security and economic resilience in support of a peaceful, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific.

China opened its third overseas base at Ban Keun, Laos, adding to its South China Sea island bases in the Fiery Cross Reef, Mischief Reef and Subi Reef, and another being constructed at Antelope Reef.

The Indian Navy continued its maritime outreach across Western Europe, East Asia and Africa, participating in Exercises Varuna and Konkan in Toulon and Plymouth,

Indra in Vladivostok and Ibsamar in Simon's Town. India handed over command of CTF 154, the training element of CMF Bahrain.

Qatar, Turkey, Pakistan and Indonesia concluded a MoU on cooperation in defence manufacturing and training on October 21.

AUKUS Defence Ministers announced on October 26 that USS Colorado would be the first nuclear attack submarine to be assigned to SRF-West beginning late 2027. The submarine commenced a scheduled maintenance period at HMAS Stirling in Australia on October 27.

The Middle East Conundrum

35 weeks after US President Trump launched his anticipated 4-6 week campaign against Iran, confrontation between the two nations continued, with no end in sight. The US may have achieved its stated military objectives (destruction of Iran's Air Force and Navy, and severely degrading its missile launch and industrial capabilities)[1]. This did not translate into degradation of Iran's ability to project military power throughout the Middle East: in reality, Iran's geopolitical position is now both stronger and weaker than ever before. On the one hand, the Strait of Hormuz remains a threatened area: though the flow of oil from the Gulf has increased, this has not resulted in reduction of international prices. Iran's leaders have begun to discuss withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). On the other, Iran is experiencing unprecedented economic hardship. Its proxies (the Houthis) have expanded the war in Yemen and carried out several drone and missile attacks on Saudi Arabia, threatening the world's most-used east-west trade corridor and forcing the cancellation of major Saudi-hosted international events. Substantial US forces remain bogged down in implementing the blockade. The US has warned Gulf countries of a short, intense renewal of kinetic war in November, after the mid-term elections.

Reports indicate that at least 30 vessels were attacked in the Strait of Hormuz in October 2026, though only one was reported to have sunk[2]. Flow of traffic through the strait picked up, with the US reported to have facilitated the transit of around 30 vessels per day (as against the normal of over 100 vessels per day). Crude oil exports bypassing Hormuz increased. International crude oil prices, though, did not come down; they ranged from a low of about $ 100 per barrel at the beginning of the month to over $ 116 per barrel on October 23. The price of India's crude basket stood at over $ 118 per barrel as on October 28[3], as against an average of about $ 65 per barrel in February 2026, before the war commenced.

The US blockade on Iran continues, with reports indicating that Iran's oil exports have been almost completely shut down. Iran's president is reported to have said many Iranians were struggling to put food on the table[4]. He warned that unilateral US

[1] Secretary of State Marco Rubio with George Stephanopoulos of ABC Good Morning America, March 30, 2026, https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2026/03/secretary-of-state-marco-rubio-with-george-stephanopoulos-of-abc-good-morning-america
[2] Iran Shipping Update – October 27, 2026, https://www.unitedagainstnucleariran.com/analysis/iran-shipping-update-october-27-2026
[3] Crude Oil FOB Price (Indian Basket), accessed on October 28, 2026, https://ppac.gov.in/prices/international-prices-of-crude-oil
[4] Iran president says many struggling for food as war bites, October 24, 2026, https://www.arabnews.com/middle-east/iran-president-says-many-struggling-for-food-as-war-bites-3008077

sanctions, including restrictions impacting air and maritime access, could have broader consequences for global energy markets. Iran's resolve to continue resisting remains strong, and there is talk of the country withdrawing from the NPT. The value of the Iran's currency sank to a new low, trading at over 2.5 million Iranian Rials to one US Dollar. On the other hand, substantial US forces remained tied up in enforcing the blockade, including the USS George Bush and USS George Washington Strike Groups, as well as the USS Boxer Amphibious Ready Group. USS Theodore Roosevelt, in the Philippine Sea at the time of writing, was expected to arrive in the Northern Arabian Sea by mid-November.

Intense diplomatic activity to end the war continued, but a solution was not in sight. High level officials from Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Türkiye met Iranian President Pezeshkian and Foreign Minister Araghchi in Tehran on October 26 to de-escalate tensions[5]. Iran's Supreme Leader reiterated Iran's pre-conditions for talks on October 28, including lifting the US blockade, withdrawal of US military power from the Gulf, and lifting of sanctions[6]. Iran rejected a Qatari draft peace proposal on October 28, saying that it contained only unacceptable ideas[7]. Iran's leaders continued to believe they could outlast the US in will and capacity, while weaning away US partners. Meanwhile, US Vice President JD Vanc reached out to Mohsen Rezai[8], Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council seeking revival of negotiations, even as the US warned Gulf states of a short, intense renewal of the war after the mid-term elections[9].

The Pentagon reported that 21 US service members had been killed in the Iran War and 865 wounded[10]. The US Congressional Research Service reported that 12 F-15E Strike Eagles had been lost or damaged during the war[11]. Other casualties were one

[5] Iran, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Pakistan agree to continue talks for peace, October 26, 2026, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/10/26/officials-from-mecca-pact-states-to-hold-talks-in-iran-amid-regional-tensions

[6] Iran's Mojtaba Khamenei reiterates conditions for ending war with the US, October 28, 2026, https://www.straitstimes.com/world/middle-east/irans-mojtaba-khamenei-reiterates-conditions-for-ending-war-with-us

[7] Iran sees only unacceptable ideas in latest mediation to end war, official says, October 28, 2026, https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/qatari-mediators-present-iran-with-new-deal-end-war-official-says-2026-10-28/

[8] Vance sends letter to Iran hardliner in bid to revive peace talks as Trump threatens strikes: report, October 29, 2026, https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/us/vance-sends-letter-to-iran-hard-liner-in-bid-to-revive-peace-talks-as-trump-threatens-strikes-report/articleshow/135280661.cms

[9] U.S. Warns Gulf of Possible Short, Intense Renewal of Iran War After Midterms, October 27, 2026, https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/u-s-warns-gulf-of-possible-short-intense-renewal-of-iran-war-after-midterms-cd1a55e1

[10] Pentagon Again Increases Number of US Casualties in Iran War, October 10, 2026, https://www.nytimes.com/2026/10/10/us/politics/pentagon-casualties-iran-war.html?emc=edit_wor_20261011&nl=the-world&segment_id=227974

[11] US Aircraft Combat Losses in Operation Epic Fury: Considerations for Congress, CRS Report IN 12692, October 05, 2026, https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/IN12692?s=2&r=123

F-35A Lightning II damaged, one A-10 Thunderbolt destroyed and one damaged, one KC-135 Stratotanker destroyed and six damaged, one E-3 Sentry destroyed, two MC-130J Special Operations Aircraft destroyed, one MQ-4C Triton, three MQ-1 and 45 MQ-9 Reaper UAVs destroyed, and six helicopters lost. The cost of the war to the US had risen to $47.1 billion as of October 16, with bombs, missiles and other munitions accounting for more than 60 percent of the expenses[12]. However, no US warships have been lost or suffered damage due to the war.

In the Red Sea, the Saudi-backed Yemeni government declared war on the Houthis, seeking to reclaim territory, particularly on the northern shore of the Bab-el-Mandeb[13]. Saudi Arabia compared the Houthis to the Islamic State[14]. Intense fighting to push them away from the coast continued through the month. The Houthis launched multiple drone and ballistic missile attacks on Saudi Arabian territory, including ARAMCO facilities in Riyadh and Ras Tanura, and Abha and King Khalid International Airports in Riyadh, leading to closure of the airports. Air India suspended flights to Riyadh and Dammam, as did Indigo and Akasa Air. Numerous other international airlines, including Lufthansa, Cathay Pacific, Delta Airlines, Air France and others, followed suit. Saudi Arabia postponed the Future Investment Initiative conference originally scheduled for Oct 26-29[15]. Organisers moved the Dakar Rally scheduled for January 2027 out of Saudi Arabia[16]. Other events postponed include a summit with the EU, the Riyadh Fashion Week and the PIF Saudi International Golf Tournament. The UK agreed to send fighters to Saudi Arabia for defensive purposes[17]. Meanwhile, the US restricted its support to intelligence and targeting information.

The War in Iran has resulted in freedom of navigation and US forward bases becoming casualties to the proliferation of cheap drones, cruise and ballistic missiles. All Indo-Pacific economies have been adversely impacted. US inventories of air defence missiles and precision guided munitions have been depleted; replacing them will take time. US Navy leaders have warned their personnel that deployments will be 10-11

[12] Iran War Cost Rises to $47.1 Billion, Pentagon Told Lawmakers, October 27, 2026, https://www.nytimes.com/2026/10/27/us/politics/iran-war-cost-rises.html
[13] Saudi-Backed Yemeni Government Declares War Against Houthis, October 04, 2026, https://www.nytimes.com/2026/10/04/world/middleeast/houthis-oil-attack-saudi-arabia-yemen.html
[14] Reema Bandar Al-Saud, "There is No Limit to What the Houthis Will Do", October 27, 2026, https://www.nytimes.com/2026/10/27/opinion/houthis-yemen-saudi-arabia.html
[15] Saudi Arabia Postpones Its Marquee Investment Event After Houthi Attacks, October 19, 2026, https://www.nytimes.com/2026/10/19/business/saudi-investment-fii-houthis.html
[16] Dakar Rally 2027 moved out of Saudi Arabia amid conflict in Middle East, October 26, 2026, https://www.aljazeera.com/sports/2026/10/26/dakar-rally-2027-moved-out-of-saudi-arabia-amid-conflict-in-middle-east
[17] Operational Update 20 October – UK Military Support to Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, October 20, 2026, https://www.gov.uk/government/news/operational-update-20-october-uk-military-support-to-the-kingdom-of-saudi-arabia

months long for the next two years at least, against the norm of seven months[18]; this will impact morale. US military power has been drawn away from the Pacific and its structural limits highlighted. These events raise doubt about whether deterrence against China in the Pacific exists, though US Secretary of War Pete Hegseth has reassured his counterparts in Southeast Asia that the US commitment to defend its interests and those of its allies and partners remains[19].

The elimination of a few adversary leaders, or destruction of infrastructure or air and naval capability do not constitute proof of operational success. What matters is whether these actions produce the desired change in adversary actions and outlook. The US strategic approach in Iran has so far not been able to produce this. Iran's leaders remain convinced that the US objective is regime change. There is no gain for them in negotiating; in fact, the incentive is to resist, inflict costs, drag out negotiations and ultimately to outlast the US. On the other hand, there is no credible path for US President Trump to convince the public that he has denied Iran the bomb or upheld freedom of navigation. His choices are increasing the pressure on Iran through kinetic action (though the likelihood of its succeeding is questionable), continuing the present financial blockade (and this impacting energy prices worldwide), or another negotiation that will appear capitulation. The outcome of US mid-term election early next month will provide an indication on the future direction of the war.

Maldives Engages Pakistan

by
Muskan Rai

Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu visited Pakistan from October 20–22, at the invitation of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.[20] It was the first visit by a Maldivian president in 11 years[21] and coincided with the 60th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations between the countries[22]. The two sides exchanged 20 Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) covering defence and maritime security, narcotics control,

[18] Long Deployments to Be Navy Standard For Next Couple Years, MCPON, CNO Say, October 29, 2026, https://news.usni.org/2026/10/29/long-deployments-to-be-navy-standard-for-next-couple-years-mcpon-cno-say

[19] Hegseth reassures Southeast Asia of US commitment, pledges stronger defence ties, October 28, 2026, https://www.reuters.com/world/china/hegseth-likely-face-questions-us-role-indo-pacific-asean-summit-2026-10-27/

[20] The President's Office, Republic of Maldives, "President and First Lady Arrive in Pakistan on a State Visit," press release 2026-616, October 20, 2026, https://presidency.gov.mv/Press/Article/37523.

[21] Press Information Department, Government of Pakistan, "Prime Minister Holds Delegation-Level Talks with President of Maldives; 20 MoUs Exchanged," PR No. 328, Islamabad, October 21, 2026, https://pid.gov.pk/site/press_detail/34445.

[22] Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Maldives, "Pakistan," bilateral relations page, https://foreign.gov.mv/index.php/en/bilateral/countries/pakistan.

police training, health, fisheries and civil-service cooperation.[23] They announced a target of raising bilateral trade from about USD 13–14 million at present to USD 200 million within two years.[24] At their joint press conference on October 21, Muizzu also reaffirmed the Maldives' commitment to reviving the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).[25] The visit's significance for India lies less in its immediate economic outcomes than in the potential institutionalisation of Pakistan's influence on a strategically important Indian Ocean neighbour.

The economic target is a statement of intent: a fifteen-fold increase in trade within two years, albeit from a small base, is ambitious. The accompanying offers of scholarships, olive cuttings for the Maldives' tree-planting initiative and food and pharmaceutical supplies are limited in scale, but could establish practical channels for continued cooperation.[26] The foundations lie in plans to improve connectivity. Muizzu said the national airline, Maldivian, aims to start Malé–Karachi flights soon, and urged shipping, port and logistics companies to explore direct and commercially viable links.[27] Sharif said the target could not be met without a reliable direct shipping schedule from Karachi or Gwadar.[28] Neither proposal has been announced as an operating service with a confirmed start date. If they materialise, flights would ease travel and sailings would carry trade, turning a political engagement into a recurring commercial one, in a market where India agreed in 2025 to negotiate a free trade agreement.[29] That would raise Pakistan's commercial visibility in Malé without, by itself, shifting the strategic balance.

Security cooperation is the more consequential element. Pakistan's contacts with the Maldivian defence establishment are not new; the Maldivian Defence Minister and

[23] The President's Office, Republic of Maldives, "President Witnesses Exchange of Key MoUs between the Maldives and Pakistan," press release 2026-621, October 21, 2026, https://presidency.gov.mv/Press/Article/37532.
[24] Press Information Department, Government of Pakistan, "Prime Minister Holds Delegation-Level Talks."
[25] Mohamed Muizzu, "Statement to the Press by His Excellency Dr Mohamed Muizzu, President of the Republic of Maldives, at the Joint Press Conference with His Excellency Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan," The President's Office, Republic of Maldives, ref. SA/RMM/2026/32, October 21, 2026, https://presidency.gov.mv/Press/Article/37529.
[26] Press Information Department, Government of Pakistan, "Prime Minister Holds Delegation-Level Talks."
[27] Mohamed Muizzu, "Keynote Address by His Excellency Dr. Mohamed Muizzu, President of the Republic of Maldives, at the Maldives–Pakistan Business Forum," The President's Office, Republic of Maldives, ref. SA/RMM/2026/34, October 22, 2026, https://presidency.gov.mv/Press/Article/37559.
[28] Radio Pakistan, "Maldives President Calls for Stronger Economic Ties with Pakistan," October 22, 2026, https://www.radio.gov.pk/22-10-2026/pm-calls-for-promoting-pak-maldives-trade-investment-ties.
[29] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "Transcript of Special Briefing by MEA on Prime Minister's State Visit to Maldives (July 25, 2025)," Malé, July 25, 2025, https://www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/39878/Transcript_of_Special_briefing_by_MEA_on_Prime_Ministers_State_Visit_to_Maldives_July_25_2025.

Speaker met General Munir in 2024.[30,31] The defence and maritime security MoUs give them a framework whose texts have not been made public. The two governments also described Muizzu's meeting with Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff and Chief of Defence Forces, with different emphasis. The Maldivian release records only that they reaffirmed longstanding fraternal ties.[32] Radio Pakistan reports that they discussed the regional security environment, and that both sides underscored the importance of strengthening defence cooperation, institutional linkages and professional exchanges.[33] The question is whether Pakistan's new MoUs add a sustained role in Maldivian maritime security alongside India's, or simply formalise exchanges that already exist.

Muizzu's statement about SAARC bears most directly on India's regional diplomacy. He said the Maldives stood ready to work with all member states to create the conditions for convening the next summit at the earliest possible opportunity.[34] He had made a similar appeal at the Maldives' Independence Day ceremony on July 26, asking member states to return to the negotiating table and offering to serve as a mediator.[35] India replied on July 28 that everyone in South Asia knows which country is responsible for stymieing SAARC.[36] India called off its participation in the 19th SAARC Summit, scheduled for Islamabad in 2016, following the Uri terror attack .[37] India has thereafter focussed on BIMSTEC, which does not include the Maldives.

The Pakistani account of the talks adds two further subjects. Pakistan's Press Information Department records that Sharif shared Pakistan's position on Jammu and Kashmir and the Indus Waters Treaty.[38] India placed the treaty in abeyance on April

[30] The President's Office, Republic of Maldives, "At @MoDmv: Maldives, Pakistan to Broaden Defence Ties," President's Office blog, November 2024, https://blogs.presidency.gov.mv/daily-blogs/at-modmv-maldives-pakistan-to-broaden-defence-ties.
[31] Radio Pakistan, "Field Marshal Asim Munir Vows to Further Strengthen Pak-Maldives Ties," September 24, 2026, https://radio.gov.pk/24-09-2026/pakistan-values-brotherly-ties-with-maldives-field-marshal-asim-munir.
[32] The President's Office, Republic of Maldives, "Chief of Army Staff and Chief of Defence Forces of Pakistan Pays Courtesy Call on the President," press release 2026-629, October 22, 2026, https://presidency.gov.mv/Press/Article/37551.
[33] Radio Pakistan, "COAS, Maldives President Discuss Defence Cooperation," October 21, 2026, https://radio.gov.pk/21-10-2026/coas-maldives-president-discuss-regional-security-environment.
[34] Muizzu, "Statement to the Press," October 21, 2026.
[35] The President's Office, Republic of Maldives, "President Underscores Need for Equal Rights to Freedom, Independence and Sovereignty for All Nations, Hails Success of Maldives First Foreign Policy," press release, July 26, 2026, https://presidency.gov.mv/Press/Article/37076.
[36] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "Transcript of Biweekly Media Briefing by the Official Spokesperson (July 28, 2026)," New Delhi, July 28, 2026, https://www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings?dtl/41567/Transcript_of_BiWeekly_Media_Briefing_by_the_Official_Spokesperson_July_28_2026.
[37] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "India's Participation in the SAARC Summit in Islamabad," press statement, New Delhi, September 27, 2016, reproduced by the High Commission of India, Islamabad, https://india.org.pk/event.php?id=66.
[38] Press Information Department, Government of Pakistan, "Prime Minister Holds Delegation-Level Talks."

23, 2025,[39] and rejected the Court of Arbitration ruling that the treaty remains in force on the grounds that the court was illegally constituted.[40] Neither the Maldivian account of the talks nor Muizzu's own statement mentions Kashmir or the treaty.

The visit widens Pakistan's engagement with a neighbour central to India's Indian Ocean security architecture, but does not show that the Maldives is switching partners. Muizzu, who campaigned for office in 2023 on an "India Out" platform,[41] made a state visit to India in October 2024,[42] and Prime Minister Modi was guest of honour at the Maldives' 60th Independence Day in July 2025.[43] India's ₹ 4,850 crore line of credit, extended through an MoU signed in July 2025, and the free trade negotiations the two sides agreed to open the same month[44] give New Delhi an economic base against which Pakistan's offers will be measured. The risk for India is less an immediate realignment than a gradual expansion of Pakistani access through defence cooperation, commercial connectivity and regional diplomacy. New Delhi should keep its partnership visible, responsive and effective, starting with delivery of the projects under its credit line and early progress on the free trade negotiations, and watch whether the defence MoUs lead to training, port calls or exercises, because those would give Pakistan a foothold inside the Maldives' security arrangements.

ADMM, ADMM Plus and Related Interactions

ASEAN Defence Ministers convened at Cebu, Philippines on October 28 for the 20th ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM). Defence Ministers of Dialogue Partners joined them at the same venue for the ADMM Plus meeting on October 29. The former adopted the Manila Declaration[45] and a joint statement commemorating

[39] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "Transcript of Special Briefing by MEA (April 23, 2025)," New Delhi, April 23, 2025, https://www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings?dtl/39443/Transcript_of_Special_briefing_by_MEA_April_23_2025.
[40] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "Matters Pertaining to the Illegally-Constituted So-Called Court of Arbitration," press release, New Delhi, August 31, 2026, https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases?dtl/41720/Matters_pertaining_to_the_illegallyconstituted_socalled_Court_of_Arbitration.
[41] Adam Taylor, "In Blow to India, Pro-China Candidate Wins Maldives Election," *Washington Post*, October 1, 2023, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/10/01/maldives-mohammed-muiz-india-china/.
[42] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "Transcript of Special Briefing by Foreign Secretary on the State Visit of President of Maldives to India (October 07, 2024)," New Delhi, October 7, 2024, https://www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings?dtl/38386/Transcript_of_Special_Briefing_by_Foreign_Secretary_on_the_State_visit_of_President_of_Maldives_to_India_October_07_2024.
[43] Ministry of External Affairs, "Special Briefing on Prime Minister's State Visit to Maldives"; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Maldives, "Prime Minister of India to Undertake a State Visit to the Maldives," ref. 2025/PR/212, July 2025, https://foreign.gov.mv/index.php/en/media-center/news/prime-minister-of-india-to-undertake-a-state-visit-to-the-maldives.
[44] Ministry of External Affairs, "Special Briefing on Prime Minister's State Visit to Maldives."
[45] Manila Joint Declaration on the 20th Anniversary of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting: Navigating Our Future, Together, October 28, 2026, https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/10/Manila-Joint-Declaration-on-the-20th-ADMM_Navigating-Our-Future-Together.pdf

the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia[46]. The latter adopted a joint statement on Youth, Peace and Security[47].

The ADMM emphasised the importance of maintaining and promoting peace, security, stability and safety in the South China Sea, pursuing the peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with international law, maintaining freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea, and exercising restraint in the conduct of activities that would escalate disputes or complicate the situation. It reiterated strict adherence to UNCLOS (this is relevant following Iran's weaponisation of the Strait of Hormuz and Indonesia's kite earlier this year about tolls in the Malacca Straits) and called for dialogue partners to protect commercial seafarers and migrant workers caught in crossfire of external conflict zones. The ADMM Plus, on the other hand, agreed to expand collaborative defence frameworks to counter supply-chain shocks, with specific focus on coordinating joint humanitarian and military resources to safeguard regional food, energy and water systems against anticipated effects of the super El Nino.

India's Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh led India's team at the ADMM and ADMM+ from October 28-29. He had earlier addressed the maiden India-ASEAN Think Tank Forum in New Delhi on October 14[48], highlighting India's pursuit of an Indo-Pacific where all countries - large and small - make their own choices, protect their interests and pursue development in peace, and called for building trust, respecting each other's sovereignty, following international law and keeping channels of dialogue open to tackle both emerging and conventional borderless challenges. Strengthening maritime domain awareness, interoperability and underwater cooperation in pursuit of a stable rule-based maritime order, and co-development, co-production, training and technical support were other components of his address.

At Cebu, his address to the ADMM Plus reaffirmed India's commitment to collective regional security and the eradication of terrorism in all its forms[49]. He said that India's counter-terrorism experience was the outcome of decades of directly confronting

[46] Joint Statement by the ASEAN Defence Ministers Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Signing of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, October 28, 2026, https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/10/Joint-Statement-by-the-ASEAN-Defence-Ministers-Commemorating-the-50th-Anniversary-of-the-Signing-of-the-TAC-1.pdf

[47] Joint Statement by the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus on Youth, Peace and Security, October 29, 2026, https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/10/Joint-Statement-by-the-ADMM-Plus-on-Youth-Peace-And-Security.pdf

[48] India seeks an Indo-Pacific where all countries make their own choices, protect their interests & pursue development in peace: Raksha Mantri at 1st ASEAN-India Defence Think Tank Forum, October 14, 2026, https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2323085&reg=48&lang=1

[49] India committed to collective regional security & eradication of terrorism, ready to share battle-tested expertise with ADMM-Plus partners to strengthen joint capabilities: Raksha Mantri, October 29, 2026, https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2329874&reg=48&lang=1

complex, cross-border security challenges, and that counter-terrorism remained an important area of cooperation under the ADMM Plus framework, with India and Malaysia co-chairing the Experts' Working Group on Counter-Terrorism for the 2024-2027 cycle. He emphasised that Operation Sindoor decisively demonstrated India's pro-active, battle-tested doctrine, when India dismantled terrorist infrastructure and enforced a non-negotiable red line against state-sponsored terror.
Shri Rajnath Singh reiterated the importance India attaches to ASEAN centrality and a secure, open, inclusive, resilient and rule-based Indo-Pacific, and to advancing the defence and security components of the ASEAN-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Underlining that maritime security is closely connected with the safety and prosperity of the wider region, he described maritime cooperation as crucial to India's engagement with ASEAN, emphasising that our commitment to freedom of navigation and safeguarding global SLOCs was backed by a continuous operational legacy.

Shri Rajnath Singh met his counterparts from Australia, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, the Philippines and the US on the sidelines of the ADMM. The US readout of the bilateral interaction focuses on progress at the one-year anniversary of the Framework for the US-India Major Defence Partnership renewed in October 2025, as well as discussion on further collaboration in advancing this partnership in pursuit of shared interests across the region[50]. India's readout adds joint resolve to eliminate the global menace of terrorism and Secretary Hegseth reaffirming full US support to India in its fight against cross-border terrorism, as well as the India-US partnership remaining a cornerstone for a free, open and secure Indo-Pacific.

A joint press statement was released following the India-Japan Defence Ministers' Meeting[51], in which the two sides reviewed the steady progress in cooperation since they met in August, including in enhancing Mine Countermeasure capabilities, exploring joint development in naval shipbuilding and design, progress in cooperation between the two Air Forces, and the successful holding of the Japan-India Defence Industry Forum in Tokyo. The two Defence Ministers will meet again at the 4th India-Japan Foreign and Defence Ministerial Meeting and the India-Japan Defence Ministers' Meeting in Tokyo later this year.

[50] Readout of Secretary of War Pete Hegseth's Meeting With Indian Minister of Defence Rajnath Singh, October 28, 2026, https://www.war.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/4635195/readout-of-secretary-of-war-pete-hegseths-meeting-with-indian-minister-of-defen/
[51] Japan-India Joint Press Statement, October 28, 2026, https://www.mod.go.jp/en/article/2026/10/55d4f5a029937159fbe5295787af044ec18e1353.html

Marco Rubio Visits Mumbai and Jamnagar

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio made his maiden visit to India, focusing on New Delhi, in May 2026[52]. His second visit came five months later, from October 20-22[53], this time to Mumbai and Jamnagar, India's financial capital and the site of India's (and the world's) largest refinery. If the focus of was first visit was political, the second was economic, albeit with a brief political element.

Rubio arrived in Mumbai on the afternoon of October 20. His schedule commenced with a visit to the Gateway of India, where he also met Maharashtra's Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis. This was followed by laying a wreath at the 26/11 memorial inside the iconic Taj Mahal Hotel in Colaba, where he received a detailed first-hand account of the infamous November 2008 terrorist attack from Sunil Kudyadi, the hotel's head of security and a survivor of the attack, who had played a key role in rescuing trapped guests and staff and guiding Indian security forces[54]. He then interacted bilaterally with External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar, as well as trilaterally including UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Nahyan. A Freedom 250 reception hosted by US Ambassador Sergio Gor followed. Rubio also found time for two press interactions.

On October 21, Rubio met business leaders from the Adani and Tata groups, the former being significant because of the indictment of the Adanis in US courts in 2024, and the subsequent dismissal of all criminal charges and settlement of anti-corruption and Iranian LPG shipments in August 2026. Rubio then proceeded to Jamnagar to visit the Reliance Refinery and interact with the Ambani family. He returned to Mumbai for the night and extended has visit[55] including another press interaction on the morning of October 22, before departing for Washington DC.

Ind and the US both issued a positive readout of interaction between the Foreign Ministers. India's readout highlights a review of the entire gamut of bilateral relations including trade, defence, technology, energy security, BTA negotiations

[52] For an overview, see Lalit Kapur, "Marco Rubio's First Visit to India", 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

[53] Secretary of State Marco Rubio Concludes Visit to India, Advancing US-India Strategic and Economic Partnership, October 22, 2026, https://in.usembassy.gov/secretary-of-state-marco-rubio-concludes-visit-to-india-advancing-u-s-india-strategic-and-economic-partnership/

[54] A comprehensive account of the attack can be found in "The Siege: The Attack on the Taj" by Adrian Levy and Cathy Scott-Clark

[55] The visit was initially scheduled to end on October 21. See "US Secretary of State Marco Rubio Visits India" October 20, 2026, https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases?dtl/41895/US_Secretary_of_State_Marco_Rubio_visits_India

and ways of further strengthening the Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership. It also mentions an exchange of views on regional and global developments, and the EAM's participation in the Freedom 250 Reception[56]. The US readout specifically mentions developments in the Middle East as part of the discussion on regional and global issues[57]. It also propagates increased energy trade with the US and progress in civil nuclear cooperation, advocating the purchase of US technologies and systems. The trilateral meeting with the UAE Foreign Minister witnessed discussions on ways to strengthen trilateral cooperation, including in the economy, trade, investment, technology and artificial intelligence[58].

The Freedom 250 reception was marked by positive sentiments about bilateral relations. Ambassador Sergio Gor highlighted that more than 500 American companies operate in Mumbai, and American institutional investors represent the single largest bloc of foreign capital invested in Indian equities. He said that trade had shattered records, reaching over $ 240 billion and that he was laser focused on attaining the goal of $ 500 billion trade in the next three years. Secretary Rubio reiterated that the 21st century would be defined by what happens in region and the US-India relationship would be defining in many ways. He spoke of alignment on the core issues, including in harnessing super-intelligence and in the free and unfettered ability to trade, necessitating open sea lanes. EAM Dr. Jaishankar was more measured in his words, highlighting the expansion of the bilateral partnership, but taking care to subtly bring out India's concerns on terrorism. He commended Secretary Rubio for laying a wreath at the 26/11 memorial and welcomed the US decision to extradite Tahawwur Rana, but took care to emphasise India's right to defend itself against terrorism, and the expectation that partners would show zero tolerance towards terrorism.

Rubio's visit to Jamnagar came at a time when his country and the world are feeling the impacts of the Iran war as well as the disruption of Russian refineries on global energy availability. The US seeks to enhance its own energy dominance by bringing Venezuelan crude to the market, while simultaneously denying China the benefits of its investment in Venezuelan oil. This necessitates its refining and marketing. Very few refineries in the world, apart from those in the US Gulf coast (which are utilised to capacity in refining shale oil) and in China have the requisite Nelson Complexity

[56] US Secretary of State Marco Rubio Visits India, October 20, 2026, https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases?dtl/41895/US_Secretary_of_State_Marco_Rubio_visits_India
[57] Secretary Rubio's Meeting with Indian External Affairs Minister Jaishankar, October 20, 2026, https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesman/2026/10/secretary-rubios-meeting-with-indian-external-affairs-minister-jaishankar-5/
[58] Abdullah bin Zayed joins trilateral meeting with FMs of US, India, October 20, 2026, https://www.mofa.gov.ae/MediaHub/News/2026/10/20/bin-Zayed-usa

Index[59]. Reliance is by far the biggest among them. Rubio's visit was intended to entice the Ambanis to buy more Venezuelan crude, while cutting down purchases from Russia. It also followed up on President Trump's March 2026 announcement that Reliance would be setting up a large refinery in Brownsville, Texas (Reliance is yet to confirm this, though US sources indicate the refinery would become operational in 2029).

Rubio's media interactions in India projected an optimistic view of bilateral relations. He said the bilateral trade agreement was very near conclusion. This is in contrast to the Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's statement earlier this month that negotiations had reached a plateau and further concessions will be very difficult. The future US approach towards tariffs, the fate of pending Section 301 investigations and the outcomes of legal challenges to President Trump's tariffs would have to be resolved before an agreement is formalised[60]. He maintained that bilateral relations remained as strong as they had ever been before, but the reality is that they have been set back, as brought out by this author separately[61]. Similarly with defence cooperation: he maintained that it was at an all-time high, citing the visit of Admiral Paparo and US participation in Exercises Yudh Abhyas and Tarang Shakti (with F-35 aircraft), but the strategic convergence that underpinned defence cooperation has come into question. On questions regarding rising anti-India sentiment in the US and the crackdown on Indian immigrants, he observed that there were individuals in every country, including the US, who were stupid, dumb, ignorant or just hateful, but they did not represent or define American society. He also observed that immigration restrictions were not India-specific; they were part of a broad attempt to revise a broken immigration system. He added that India was among the first places the US was looking to deploy is Small Modular Reactors in. A salient announcement that came during interaction was that a Quad Summit would be held at Manila next month, on the sidelines of the ASEAN Summit and associated events.

In sum, the US seeks to downplay the impact of its actions against India's core interests that have vitiated the bilateral relationship during the last 18 months, and to project business as usual. India remains diplomatically polite, but will carefully evaluate the impact of US actions on interests before investing further in the relationship. Trust has taken a hit and will not be easily restored. The stage is now

[59] The Nelson Complexity Index is a scoring system that measures the technical sophistication, conversion capacity and relative construction cost of a refinery.
[60] VS Seshadri, "A trade deal mired in uncertainty", October 22, 2026, https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/a-trade-deal-mired-in-uncertainty/article71608032.ece
[61] Lalit Kapur, "Marco Rubio's First Visit to India", 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

set for further leader-level interactions, including during the Quad Summit at Manila next month and the G-20 Summit at Doral, Miami in December, which will shape the future direction of the relationship.

Other Indo-Pacific Developments

US Ends Operation Inherent Resolve in Iraq. The 12-year long US Operation Inherent Resolve in Iraq came to an end with the US withdrawal of its personnel from Erbil Air Base on September 30[62]. Erbil was the main operational hub for the Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR), which has now moved to Jordan. The operation commenced to combat the ISIS in Iraq on June 15, 2014, and expanded to cover Syria, Jordan and Libya. US forces will continue operations in Syria from Jordan.

China Opens Military Base in Laos. China opened its third overseas military base in Ban Keun, Laos on September 29[63]. The base in landlocked Laos is air power focused, is located about 30 miles north of Vientiane and has a runway of over 6,500 ft length. China already has island air bases in the Fiery Cross Reef, Mischief Reef and Subi Reef, and is constructing another, expected to complete in mid-2027, at Antelope Reef[64]. The Lao base is ostensibly intended to train Lao Air Force pilots, but provides the PLAAF alternate routes to access disputed areas in the South China Sea, as well as Vietnam and Thailand.

Instability in Ethiopia's Tigray Region. Renewed fighting between Ethiopia's federal government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front threatened to re-ignite the civil war and bring an end to the November 2022 Pretoria Peace Agreement between the two sides[65]. Ethiopian forces seized the Tigrayan capital of Mekele from the TPLF in early October, while the TPLF said it would continue to seek overthrow of Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed from elsewhere. Ethiopia accused Eritrea of backing the TPLF, and the two countries severed diplomatic relations[66]. The conflict threatened to destabilise the southern shores of the Red Sea, whose northern shores are already rocked by the war between Yemen's government and the Houthis.

[62] US Forces End Operation Inherent Resolve Mission in Iraq, September 30, 2026, https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/PUBLIC-RELEASES/Article/4614532/us-forces-end-operation-inherent-resolve-mission-in-iraq/

[63] China and Taiwan Update, October 2, 2026, https://understandingwar.org/research/china-taiwan/china-taiwan-update-october-2-2026/

[64] Greg Torode, "Chinese work gathering pace on Antelope Reef in south China Sea, latest satellite images show", October 02, 2026, https://www.reuters.com/world/china/chinese-work-gathering-pace-antelope-reef-south-china-sea-latest-satellite-2026-10-02/

[65] Agreement for a Lasting Peace Though a Permanent Cessation of Hostilities Between the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), November 2, 2022, https://igad.int/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Download-the-signed-agreement-here.pdf

[66] Matthew Mpoke Bigg, "What to Know About Fighting Between Ethiopia and Rebels in Tigray", October 02, 2026, https://www.nytimes.com/2026/10/02/world/africa/ethiopia-tigray-conflict.html

Joint Statement on Iran Sanctions. One year after UN sanctions on Iran for non-compliance with its obligations under UNSC resolutions snapped back into force, 56 countries came together with a joint statement affirming their commitment to continued implementation of all relevant obligations enumerated in the reinstated UNSC resolutions[67]. Russia and China were not among these countries, nor was India.

Badr Memorandum of Understanding. Qatar, Türkiye, Pakistan and Indonesia signed the Badr MoU in Doha on October 21. The MoU aims to foster cooperation in defence manufacturing, enhance defence capabilities among the four countries, and promote collaboration in technical defence training, as well as in research and development. Türkiye contributes technological expertise, systems integration and a mature defence industry; Pakistan and Indonesia offer manufacturing capacity, skilled workforces and sizeable domestic markets; and Qatar provides investment potential and demand[68].

Makkah Alliance. Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Pakistan convened an emergency meeting of the Strategic-Political and Defence Committee of the Makkah Alliance in Riyadh on October 05[69]. The Committee appointed Pakistan's Lt Gen Nauman Mahmood (Retd) as the first Secretary General for a three-year term. It condemned the targeting of Makkah and Madinah, and agreed to take the necessary measures to provide the agreed military forces and capabilities and ensure their rapid deployment in Saudi Arabia, albeit for purely defensive purposes. Pakistan already maintains an 8000 man presence in Saudi Arabia under a bilateral arrangement.

Swiss President's Visit. Guy Parmelin, the President of the Swiss Confederation, made a State Visit to India from October 05-07. He was accompanied by a large business delegation. Mr Parmelin is one of the seven-member Swiss Federal Council, all of whom serve rotating one-year terms as the President, during which they double as Head of State. His was the first bilateral visit by a Swiss President since 2017. The visit produced no joint statement or communique. There were five outcome documents[70]. Mr Parmelin participated in the 2nd India-EFTA Prosperity Summit in New Delhi, commemorating the first anniversary of the India-European Free Trade Association Trade and Economic Partnership (TEPA), which envisages investment of over $ 100 billion from EFTA countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland) resulting in the creation of one million jobs. The visit enabled

[67] Joint Statement on the Anniversary of the Snapback of UN Restrictions on and Related to Iran, October 2, 2026, https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesman/2026/10/joint-statement-on-the-anniversary-of-the-snapback-of-un-restrictions-on-and-related-to-iran

[68] How Qatar, Türkiye, Pakistan and Indonesia are deepening defence ties, October 21, 2026, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/10/21/how-qatar-turkiye-pakistan-and-indonesia-are-deepening-defence-ties

[69] Joint Statement on the Emergency Meeting of the Strategic Political and Defense Committee of the Makkah Alliance for Defense, October 05, 2026, https://www.mfa.gov.tr/joint-statement-on-the-emergency-meeting-of-the-strategic-political-and-defense-committee-of-the-makkah-alliance-for-defense-5-october-2026.en.mfa

[70] List of Outcomes: State Visit of President of Swiss Confederation to India, October 05, 2026, https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2319109&reg=48&lang=1

identification of new areas of cooperation in military exchanges and defence production, as well as deepening of cooperation in nuclear energy[71].

Prime Minister of Poland Visits India. Mr Donald Tusk, Prime Minister of Poland, made an official visit to India from October 21-23. He was accompanied by the Polish Minister of Finance and Economy as well as a large business delegation. A joint statement was issued[72], spanning trade; economic cooperation and investment; defence and security cooperation; cooperation in space and new technologies; connectivity, maritime and shipping; science, education and academic cooperation; culture and people-to-people ties; and multilateral cooperation and global issues. Both sides expressed deep concern over the continuing war in Ukraine, unequivocally condemned terrorism and violent extremism, reaffirmed the importance of a free and open Indo-Pacific, and discussed actions to mitigate climate change. They targeted doubling of bilateral trade by 2030. Poland joined the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure. Both sides agreed to the establishment of a defence industry dialogue, as well as a dialogue on counter-terrorism[73].

Liechtenstein Visit to India. Hereditary Prince Alois, the Acting Head of State of the Principality of Liechtenstein, was hosted by India for a State Visit from October 25-28. The objective was advancing economic cooperation and commemorating the first anniversary of the India-EFTA Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA), with particular emphasis on trade, technology and talent. The joint statement on this occasion emphasised deepening bilateral relations, advancing economic cooperation under TEPA, moving towards a double taxation avoidance agreement, and multilateral cooperation[74].

Japan Bangladesh Summit. Bangladesh Prime Minister Tarique Rahman made and official visit to Japan from October 23-26[75]. He and Prime Minister Takaichi agreed to upgrade the Bay of Bengal Industrial Growth Belt (BIG-B) into a new strategic cooperation initiative, "BIG-B for Shared Prosperity"[76], under four pillars: strengthening connectivity, preparedness for natural disasters and geopolitical risk, public-private partnership for co-creation of economic growth opportunities and rule-making, and cooperation for peace and stability. They also agreed to work together to make the Bay of Bengal region, with Bangladesh as a hub, a region of shared

[71] English Translation of Press Statement by Prime Minister During the Joint Press Statement with the President of Switzerland, October 05, 2026, https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2319086&reg=48&lang=1
[72] India-Poland Joint Statement, October 22, 2026, https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2326568&reg=48&lang=1
[73] List Of Outcomes: Official Visit of the Prime Minister of Poland to India, October 22, 2026, https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2326570&reg=48&lang=1
[74] Joint Statement: State Visit of H.S.H. Hereditary Prince Alois, Acting Head of State of the Principality of Liechtenstein to India, October 27, 2026, https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/41915/Joint_Statement__State_Visit_of_HSH_Hereditary_Prince_Alois_Acting_Head_of_State_of_the_Principality_of_Liechtenstein_to_India
[75] Japan-Bangladesh Joint Statement, October 27, 2026, https://japan.kantei.go.jp/contents/topics/30670_ext_20_1.pdf
[76] BIG-B for Shared Prosperity, https://japan.kantei.go.jp/contents/topics/30670_ext_20_2.pdf

prosperity. Japan's private investment in Bangladesh is projected to reach ¥ one trillion in the next five years, creating 200,000 jobs. Prime Minister Takaichi announced Japan's decision to provide a patrol vessel under ODA to enhance Bangladesh's maritime security capability.

Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting. The third Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting of 2026 took place at Atlanta on October 31, with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio hosting his counterparts from Australia, India and Japan. The ministers released a Joint Statement[77], providing an overview of key initiatives on economic prosperity and security, maritime and transnational security, critical and emerging technology, and humanitarian assistance and emergency response. They recognised India's leading role as first responder to Nepal's flash floods of August 26, 2026 and reiterated the absolute necessity to protect and preserve navigational rights and freedoms in the Strait of Hormuz, the Red Sea and the Ban el-Mandeb. The meeting signals a renewed effort by the US to revive Quad cooperation, whose future direction will be shown by the forthcoming Quad Summit in Manila.

US Action Against the International Criminal Court. The US Department of State announced additional sanctions on the ICC to defend its sovereignty and neutralise the threat posed by the court[78]. The US action came shortly after the announcement that the Nobel Peace Prize for 2026 was awarded to Navanethem "Navi" Pillay, a judge of the ICC from March 2003 – August 2008[79]. In a statement, Secretary Rubio explicitly rejected the idea that the ICC could prosecute American citizens[80]. He nevertheless left a window of 180 days open for the ICC to address US concerns, committing to dismantling the ICC, brick by brick, till Americans were no longer threatened. In a rare gesture of opposition, Japan and US allies in Europe came together to strongly disapprove the sanctions to be imposed on the Court by the US[81].

Report on Implementation of the 2026 US National Defense Strategy. Under Secretary of War for Policy Elbridge Colby provided updates on the four key lines of effort laid out in the 2026 National Defense Strategy to the Senate Armed Services Committee in end September 2026[82]. Under defending the US homeland, he claimed having

[77] Quad Joint Press Release on Economic Prosperity and Security, October 31, 2026, https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases?dtl/41921/Quad_Joint_Press_Release_on_Economic_Prosperity_and_Security
[78] Imposing Sanctions on the International Criminal Court, October 09, 2026, https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesman/2026/10/imposing-sanctions-on-the-international-criminal-court-2/
[79] Announcement, Nobel Peace Prize 2026, October 09, 2026, https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2026/press-release/
[80] Imposing Sanctions on the International Criminal Court, October 09, 2026, https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesman/2026/10/imposing-sanctions-on-the-international-criminal-court/
[81] Joint Statement of the Foreign Ministers of Canada, Denmark, Germany, France, Italy, Japan, The Netherlands, United Kingdom, October 10, 2026, https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/101099747.pdf
[82] Statement of the Honourable Elbridge A Colby, Under Secretary of War for Policy on Implementation of the 2026 National Defense Strategy, September 22, 2026, https://media.defense.gov/2026/Sep/28/2004007869/-1/-1/1/UPDATE-ON-IMPLEMENTATION-OF-THE-2026-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-AS-SUBMITTED-TO-THE-SENATE-ARMED-SERVICES-COMMITTEE.PDF

achieved the most secure border in modern American history, dwelt on the revised approach to national missile defence and countering the threat from unmanned aerial systems, and covered initiative in countering terror and defending cyberspace. Under deterring China in the Indo-Pacific, he highlighted increased military dialogue with China, strengthening deterrence by denial along the First Island Chain, and working with partners throughout the region to strengthen US forces access, basing and overflight. Under increased burden sharing with US allies and partners, he covered developments in Europe, the Indo-Pacific and the Middle East. He specifically mentioned building a strong defence relationship with India including through the recent 10-year bilateral defence framework and anther to strengthen undersea cooperation. Under supercharging the defence industrial base, he covered efforts to increase production and magazine depth of munitions, efforts to expand shipbuilding and submarine construction, acquisition reform and efforts to reshore domestic production of critical minerals, rare earths and critical military components. He sought congressional support for the full $1.5 trillion defence budget request for FY27.

Admiral Paparo Visit to India. Admiral Sam Paparo, Commander of the US Pacific Command, visited India from October 03-08[83]. He participated in the session on maritime security and defence cooperation in the Indo-Pacific at the Munich Leaders' Meeting hosted by the Munich Security Conference in New Delhi[84]. He also attended roundtables on energy security and regional conflicts. His meetings included External Affairs Minister Dr. S Jaishankar, Chief of Defence Staff General NS Raja Subramani, Chief of Army Staff General Dhiraj Seth, Vice Chief of Air Staff Air Marshal Ashutosh Dixit, Chief of Integrated Defence Staff Air Marshal Tejinder Singh, and Defence Secretary Shri Rajesh Kumar Singh. On his way back, he visited stopped at Sri Vijaya Puram and met Vice Admiral Vineet McCarty, the Commander-in-Chief of the Andaman and Nicobar Command. The visit comes as the US continues to maintain its defence relationship with India, including through participation Exercise Yudh Abhyas in end September, and Exercise Tarang Shakti with F-35 aircraft.

INS Trishul in Europe. After participation in the India-France bilateral Exercise Varuna off Toulon last month, INS Trishul called at Valencia[85] and then went to Plymouth to represent India in India-UK bilateral Exercise Konkan, from October 08-15[86]. On completion of the exercise[87], the ship commenced her return journey to India,

[83] US Pacific Command Commander Admiral Samuel Paparo Arrives in India, October 03-08, 2026, https://in.usembassy.gov/u-s-pacific-command-commander-admiral-samuel-paparo-arrives-in-india/
[84] Commander of US Pacific Command Travels to India, Attends Munich Leaders Meeting, October 15, 2026, https://www.pacom.mil/Media/Press-Releases-and-Readouts/Press-Releases-and-Readout-view/Article/4627006/commander-of-us-pacific-command-travels-to-india-attends-munich-leaders-meeting/
[85] Indian Naval Ship Trishul Arrives at Valencia, Spain, October 02, 2026, https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2318300&reg=48&lang=1
[86] INS Trishul Arrives at Plymouth, UK for Exercise Konkan 2026, October 11, 2026, https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2321915&reg=48&lang=1
[87] Exercise Konkan-26 Concludes Off Plymouth, UK, October 17, 2026, https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2324800&reg=48&lang=1

calling at Lisbon[88], Portugal from October 18-21 and Civitacecchia[89], Italy from October 25-28[90].

INS Tarkash in Southern Indian Ocean. INS Tarkash visited Mombasa from September 29-October 02 as part of her deployment to the southwestern Indian Ocean[91]. She then proceeded to Simon's Town in South Africa to participate in the ninth edition of the India Brazil South Africa Exercise IBSAMAR 2026, commencing 08 October[92]. The exercise includes surface warfare, anti-air warfare, anti-submarine warfare, naval air operations, maritime interdiction, Visit Board Search and Seizure (VBSS), anti-piracy operations, Search and Rescue, Damage Control and Firefighting, as well as professional interaction. The exercise ended on October 20[93]. INS Trishul arrived at Port Louis, Mauritius, on October 30 and is scheduled to participate in the 192nd Aapravasi Diwas of Mauritius on November 02[94].

INS Sahyadri in Vladivostok. After participating in the ADMM Plus Maritime Cooperation Activity in Subic Bay last month, INS Sahyadri headed north, arriving at Vladivostok on October 10 to participate in the 15th edition of the India-Russia bilateral exercise INDRA-2026[95]. The ship departed Vladivostok on completion of the exercise on October 20[96]. She was in Busan, South Korea, for the India-Republic of Korea bilateral exercise commencing October 26[97], and is scheduled to participate in Exercise Malabar 2026 in Japan from November 05-12[98].

SIMBEX-2026. The 33rd edition of the Singapore India Maritime Bilateral Exercise was conducted off Visakhapatnam from October 21-26[99]. RSS Supreme represented

[88] INS Trishul Concludes Port Call at Lisbon, Portugal, October 23, 2026, https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2327413&reg=48&lang=1
[89] INS Trishul Arrives at Civitavecchia, Italy, October 26, 2026, https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2328468&reg=48&lang=1
[90] INS Trishul Concludes Port Call at Civitavecchia, Italy, October 29, 2026, https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2330070&reg=48&lang=1&_gl=1*x9fzbs*_up*MQ..*_ga*NTc2OTkxMzEzLjE3OTMzMTg4NDM.*_ga_Q414Y0X6EE*czE3OTMzMTg4NDMkbzEkZzEkdDE3OTMzMTg4NTEkajUyJGwwJGgw*_ga_QJJ6LZ8LHV*czE3OTMzMTg4NDQkbzEkZzEkdDE3OTMzMTg4NTEkajUzJGwwJGgw
[91] Indian Naval Ship Tarkash Arrives at Mombasa, Kenya for Goodwill Port Call, October 01, 2026, https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2317650&reg=48&lang=1
[92] Indian Naval Ship Tarkash to Participate in IBSAMAR IC 2026, Reaffirming India's Commitment to Maritime Cooperation, October 12, 2026, https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2322377&reg=48&lang=1
[93] Conclusion of the Ninth Edition of India-Brazil-South Africa Maritime Exercise (IBSAMAR IX 2026), October 21, 2026, https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2326117&reg=48&lang=1
[94] INS Tarkash Calls at Port Louis Mauritius, October 30, 2026, https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2330620&reg=48&lang=1
[95] Indian Naval Ship Sahyadri Arrives at Vladivostok, Russia, for Bilateral Exercise INDRA-2026, October 11, 2026, https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2321926&reg=48&lang=1
[96] Conclusion of India-Russia Bilateral Naval Exercise (INDRA 2026), October 23, 2026, https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2327353&reg=48&lang=1
[97] INS Sahyadri Arrives at Busan, Republic of Korea, for India-RoKN Bilateral Exercise, October 28, 2026, https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2329562&reg=48&lang=1
[98] Japan-US-India-Australia Multilateral Exercise (Malabar 2026), October 27, 2026, https://www.mod.go.jp/msdf/en/release/202610/20261027en.pdf
[99] 33rd Edition of Singapore-India Maritime Bilateral Exercise (SIMBEX-2026) Commences at Visakhapatnam, October 21, 2026, https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2326348&reg=48&lang=1

Singapore, while IN Ships Nilgiri and Kamorta and the submarine INS Sindhukirti represented India[100].

Training Squadron Deployment. Ships of India's First Training Squadron visited Port Victoria, Seychelles, from October 12-15[101]. They visited Male from October 21-24[102], and were in Colombo from October 26-29[103].

India Hands Over Command of CTF 154. India's Cmde Milind Mokashi formally relinquished command of CTF 154, the multinational training task force, to the Combined Maritime Force at Manama, Bahrain on October 14[104]. Cmde Mokashi had assumed command on February 11, 2026. During his innings, CTF 154 oversaw the training of more than 1100 personnel from 39 countries. It conducted 20 staff enhancement training engagements, two major multinational training exercises (Operation Compass Rose and Operation Southern Readiness 26-2) and the inaugural Subject Matter Expert Exchange on Piracy and Armed Robbery.

Exercise Austrahind 2026. The 5th edition of India-Australia Joint Military Exercise Austrahind was conducted at the Foreign Training Node, Thiruvanthapuram, from October 19 – November 01[105]. The exercise theme was "Joint Sub-Conventional Operations in Island and Coastal Environment under Chapter VII of the UN Mandate". An observer delegation from New Zealand also participated in the exercise for the first time.

Exercise Mountain Guardian. The India-UAE Joint Military Exercise Mountain Guardian 2026 was conducted at Chaubatia, Uttarakhand, from October 05-18[106]. The exercise aims to enhance interoperability, mutual understanding and cooperation, with a focus on Mountain Warfare. The objective is to improve UAE capability to defend itself in the Hajar Mountain Range, on its eastern border.

Exercise Garuda Shakti. The 11th edition of India-Indonesia Exercise Garuda Shakti, a Special Forces exercise, is taking place at Banyuwangi, Indonesia, from October 27 –

[100] Singapore and Indian navies Conclude Annual Maritime Bilateral Exercise, October 26, 2026, https://www.mindef.gov.sg/news-and-events/latest-releases/26oct26-nr/
[101] First Training Squadron Departs Seychelles, Reinforcing Maritime Cooperation, October 17, 2026, https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2324739&reg=48&lang=1
[102] First Training Squadron Arrives in Maldives, October 22, 2026, https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2326662&reg=48&lang=1
[103] First Training Squadron of the Indian Navy Departs Colombo, Sri Lanka, October 30, 2026, https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2330320&reg=48&lang=1
[104] Combined Maritime Forces HQ Assumes Command of Combined Task Force 154, October 16, 2026, https://combinedmaritimeforces.com/2026/10/16/combined-maritime-forces-hq-assumes-command-of-combined-task-force-154/
[105] 5th Edition of India-Australia Joint Military Exercise Austrahind commences at Thiruvanthapuram October 19, 2026, https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2325246&reg=48&lang=1
[106] India-UAE Joint Military Exercise Mountain Guardian 2026 Commences in Uttarakhand, October 05, 2026, https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2319135&reg=48&lang=1

November 06[107]. The exercise aims to strengthen mutual understanding, cooperation and interoperability between the Special Forces of the two nations.

BIMSTEC Maritime Security Exercise. The inaugural BIMSTEC Maritime Security Exercise began at Sri Vijaya Puram on October 30[108], bringing together ships from India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand, as well as representatives from Bhutan and Nepal. The five-day exercise, organised by the Andaman and Nicobar Command, aims to enhance interoperability, strengthen maritime domain awareness, improve coordination mechanisms and promote the exchange of best practices among BIMSTEC member states. The exercise marks the first step in BIMSTEC partners taking on collective responsibility for security of their region.

Japan US dialogue on the Indo-Pacific. The second US-Japan Dialogue on the Indo-Pacific took place in Tokyo on October 12. The US readout highlights discussions on aligning discussions on foreign assistance for strategic infrastructure in priority countries, including the Luzon Economic Corridor and the Japan-US Mekong Power Partnership; welcomes Japan's growing cooperation with NATO and notes progress in Japan-US industrial cooperation[109]. Japan's readout, on the other hand, brings out concurrence on advancing cooperation with like-minded countries, the robbery-murder incident on October 03 in Okinawa[110], and Japan's position on US sanctions on the International Criminal Court[111].

China's Malacca Dilemma. Some analysts have concluded from the over six-month blockage of Gulf oil exports that China has resolved its Malacca Dilemma[112]. The cite its coming through the stoppage of supply from the Gulf largely unscathed due to its huge oil reserves, overland supply pipelines, new technology to convert coal to chemicals and shift to green technology, including for transportation. Others, however, are of the view that this applies only for a short-duration conflict, given that China consumes about 15 million barrels of oil per day and overland pipelines can provide less than four missile barrels per day. China's efforts to overcome its geographic limitations, however, can be expected to continue.

USS Colorado Announced at First SSN for SRF-West. Defence Ministers from the US, Australia and UK announced that USS Colorado (SSN 788) had been designated as the

[107] India-Indonesia Joint Special Forces Exercise, October 27, 2026, https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2328954&reg=48&lang=1
[108] Inaugural BIMSTEC Maritime Security Exercise, October 31, 2026, https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2330850&reg=48&lang=1
[109] Second US-Japan Free and Open Indo-Pacific Dialogue, October 12, 2026, https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesman/2026/10/second-u-s-japan-free-and-open-indo-pacific-foip-dialogue/
[110] A 39-year old Japanese woman was found strangled to death in a hotel room in Naha, Japan. The prime suspect is an off-duty US Marine. The incident led to massive outrage across Okinawa. Prime Minister Takaichi condemned the incident and lodged a strong protest with the US.
[111] Japan-US Dialogue on a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), October 12, 2026, https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/pressite_000001_02727.html
[112] Andy Browne, "China has resolved its Malacca Dilemma", October 06, 2026, https://www.semafor.com/article/10/06/2026/china-has-resolved-its-malacca-dilemma

first Virginia-Class fast-attack submarine to be assigned to Submarine Rotational Force-West (SRF-West) beginning late 2027[113]. SRF-West is projected to host up to four US SSNs and one from UK on a rotational basis at HMAS Stirling. The announcement indicates that AUKUS continues to move ahead, strengthening collective deterrence in the Pacific. USS Colorado arrived at HMAS Stirling for a monthlong scheduled maintenance period on October 27[114].

Quad Senior Officials Meeting. Quad cyber senior officials met in Singapore on October 13[115]. They reaffirmed their shared emphasis on enhancing regional resilience and capacity to determine their own paths under the updated "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP) and exchanged views on cooperation to strengthen cyber capabilities in the region and to defend against and deter cyber threats.

China Withdraws from Colombo Port Logistics Hub. China Merchant Port Holdings, its partners and the Sri Lanka Ports Authority (SLPA) agreed to terminate their $392 million deal for the South Asia Commercial and Logistics Hub Project at the Port of Colombo on October 15[116], citing changes in external circumstances, the implementation environment, project timelines and commercial considerations. The termination halts development of the planned 530,000 cubic-metre multi-story modern logistics and warehousing complex, delaying enhancements to bonded warehousing, free-zone processing and cold storage. SLPA has announced that it plans to seek a fresh international partner through a transparent, competitive public-private partnership model, opening up opportunities for Indian entities and others to participate in Colombo's maritime expansion.

Indonesia Cabinet Expansion. Indonesia's President Prabowo Subianto reshuffled his cabinet on October 01 to consolidate political authority, reinforce ruling coalition loyalty and reassign key portfolios[117]. Arrmanatha Nasir took over as the Minister for Foreign Affairs from Sugiono, who was promoted to become the Coordinating Minister for Human Development and Culture. Bahlian Lahadalia was appointed the Coordinating Minister for Downstream Industry and Energy Transition. Dudung Abdurachman was appointed the Coordinating Minister for Political and Security Affairs, while Muhammad Sarmuji was appointed the Minister of Industry.

[113] Joint Statement, USS Colorado (SSN 788) Announced as First Submarine for Submarine Rotational Force – West, October 26, 2026, https://www.war.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/4633244/joint-statement-uss-colorado-ssn-788-announced-as-first-submarine-for-submarine/

[114] Navy Submarine Arrives in Western Australia for a Scheduled Maintenance Period, October 28, 2026, https://www.war.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/4635507/navy-submarine-arrives-in-western-australia-for-scheduled-maintenance-period/

[115] Japan-Australia-India-US (Quad) Cyber Senior Officials Meeting, October 13, 2026, https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/pressite_000001_02735.html

[116] China pulls out of key investment in Sri Lanka port logistics venture, October 19, 2026,

[117] President Prabowo Inaugurates New Ministers, Vice Ministers at State Palace, October 01, 2026, https://setkab.go.id/en/president-prabowo-inaugurates-new-ministers-vice-ministers-at-state-palace/

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Delhi Policy Group
Core 5A, 1st Floor,
India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road
New Delhi - 110003
India

www.delhipolicygroup.org