



# Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



## INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

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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, assisted by Ms. Divya Rai, based on open source reports and publications. Your comments and feedback may be addressed to the author at [lalit@dpg.org.in](mailto:lalit@dpg.org.in). To subscribe, please [click here](#).

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### Cover Images:

1. Prime Minister Narendra Modi meets South Korean President Lee Jae Myung at Hyderabad House, New Delhi on April 20, 2026. Source: PIB
2. Union Minister of Defence Shri Rajnath Singh at the Commissioning Ceremony of INS Taragiri in Visakhapatnam on April 03, 2026. Source: PIB
3. USS George HW Bush in the Northern Arabian Sea enforcing the USS blockade, April 23, 2026. Source: @CENTCOM

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# INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

April 2026

## Abstract

The US announced a two-week ceasefire ending kinetic conflict in its war on Iran on April 8; this was extended indefinitely on April 22. However, US-Iran talks held in Islamabad on April 11-12 were inconclusive, and the conflict moved into a phase of dual blockades of the Strait of Hormuz. At month end, the ceasefire was continuing, peace talks were stalled, and the Strait of Hormuz remained closed.

South Korean President Lee Jae Myung paid a state visit to India from April 19-21, setting out a roadmap for the bilateral relationship for the next five years. Austrian Chancellor Dr. Christian Stocker made an official visit to India from April 14-17.

The UK shelved ratification of its May 2025 treaty to transfer sovereignty over Diego Garcia to Mauritius, following strong opposition from US President Trump.

Australia signed a contract with Japan on April 18 for the purchase of three Mogami-class frigates. The deal, the largest defence export in Japan's post-war history, will be followed by joint production of eight more frigates in Australia.

Japan's Cabinet on April 21 announced relaxation of rules for arms exports. All restrictions on export of non-lethal equipment were removed, while lethal equipment can be exported to countries with which Japan has entered into defence equipment and technology transfer agreements.

The UK House of Commons Defence Committee's comprehensive AUKUS Inquiry Report, published on April 28, found significant shortcomings and failings that could derail the programme unless the government takes remedial action.

Australia published the second of its biennial National Defence Strategies on April 16.

Indonesia and the US agreed to elevate their defence relations to a Major Defence Cooperation Partnership on April 13. The partnership has three foundational pillars: military modernisation and capacity building, training and professional military education, and exercises and operational cooperation.

India and Germany signed a Defence Cooperation Roadmap on April 22, encompassing industrial cooperation and technology transfers, joint exercises and staff-level dialogues, and expedited export clearances for the sale of defence equipment.

India's third SSBN and fourth Nilgiri-class frigate were commissioned by Shri Rajnath Singh at Visakhapatnam on April 03. Earlier, the fifth Nilgiri-class frigate was delivered to the Indian Navy on March 31.

India continued to build cooperation with Indian Ocean countries through the 9<sup>th</sup> Indian Ocean Conference held in Mauritius from April 10-12. In parallel, IOS Sagar, with a multinational crew from 16 Indian Ocean countries, visited Male, Phuket, Jakarta and Singapore during the month.

Vietnam's National Assembly elected Communist Party General Secretary To Lam as State President, and former central bank governor Le Minh Hung as Prime Minister for the 2026-2031 term. President To Lam made his first international visit to China from April 14-17, emphasising China's importance in Vietnam's strategic calculations.

Indonesia's President Prabowo Subianto visited South Korea on April 1 and upgraded bilateral relations to a special comprehensive strategic partnership. French President Emmanuel Macron visited Japan from March 31-April 2, and South Korea on April 3, elevating relations with South Korea to a Global Strategic Partnership. Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese visited Singapore on April 09-11, and Malaysia and Brunei from April 14-17.

## The US Iran War

The US Iran confrontation moved during the month from an air and missile power based kinetic conflict to a no war, no peace situation amidst dual blockades and stalled diplomatic negotiations.

On April 07, President Trump threatened to demolish all Iran's electricity infrastructure and bridges, saying, "a whole civilisation will die tonight if Iran doesn't reach a deal with negotiators"<sup>1</sup>. Hours later, 38 days after operations began and after having struck more than 13,000 Iranian targets, the US announced a ceasefire on April 07<sup>2</sup>. US Secretary of War Pete Hegseth was quick to claim a decisive military victory<sup>3</sup>. He said Iran's military had been decimated and rendered combat ineffective for years to come and the US military had achieved every single objective on plan, on schedule. Iran's Navy was at the bottom of the Sea, Iran's Air Force had been wiped out, the country no longer had a functional air defence system, and the missile programme had been functionally destroyed, with launchers, production facilities and existing stockpiles decimated and almost completely ineffective. This had forced Iran to "beg" for negotiations. President Trump had graciously agreed and announced a two-week suspension of attacks on Iran's infrastructure subject to opening of Strait of Hormuz<sup>4</sup>.

The US made five demands: a total shutdown of nuclear enrichment by Iran for 20 years, removal of existing stockpiles of enriched Uranium and dismantling of nuclear sites; IAEA compliance and oversight; strict limits to Iran's missile development and production; ending support for regional proxies like Hamas, Hezbollah, Houthis; and guaranteed freedom of navigation in Hormuz. Iran, in turn, put forth ten demands: lifting of all primary and secondary US sanctions on Iran; recognition of Iran's right to nuclear enrichment; withdrawal of US combat forces from all bases and deployment points in the region; a permanent cessation of attacks on Iran and its regional allies/proxies, including Hezbollah in Lebanon; termination of all United Nations Security Council resolutions against Iran, termination of all IAEA resolutions and restrictions applicable to it; release of frozen Iranian assets; payment

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<sup>1</sup> Trump says ' a whole civilisation will die tonight' if Iran does not make a deal, April 07, 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/trump-says-a-whole-civilization-will-die-tonight-if-iran-does-not-make-deal-2026-04-07/>

<sup>2</sup> C. Todd Lopez, "Epic Fury Quelled for Now, Objectives Accomplished, US Forces Remain Ready", Pentagon News, April 08, 2026, <https://www.war.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/4454276/epic-fury-quelled-for-now-objectives-accomplished-us-forces-remain-ready/>

<sup>3</sup> Secretary of War Pete Hegseth and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Air Force Gen. Dan Caine Hold a Press Briefing, April 08, 2026, <https://www.war.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/4454648/secretary-of-war-pete-hegseth-and-chairman-of-the-joint-chiefs-air-force-gen-da/>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

of reparations (Iran reportedly assessed these damages as \$ 270 billion); a binding UN Security Council resolution to guarantee the agreement; and guaranteed security through the Strait of Hormuz, with Iran overseeing passage, potentially as a "toll" system to fund reconstruction.

Negotiations between Iran and the US to end the war took place in Islamabad on April 11-12. The US team was led by Vice President JD Vance, along with special envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner. The Iranian delegation was led by parliamentary speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf and foreign minister Abbas Araghchi. The US demanded that Iran stop all Uranium enrichment and allow inspections, which Iran did not agree to. The US demanded that the Strait of Hormuz remain open and free for navigation, while Iran sought to retain control and impose tolls. Iran demanded the lifting of sanctions and unfreezing of its assets, which the US linked to nuclear concessions. Iran also demanded a ceasefire in Lebanon and an end to Israeli attacks on the Hezbollah, which the US did not agree to. Consequently, the two sides were unable to come to an agreement and negotiations collapsed.

The US then imposed a blockade of all maritime traffic entering and exiting Iranian ports commencing 1400 GMT on April 13<sup>5</sup>, while excluding ships entering or leaving non-Iranian ports from the ambit of the blockade. The calculation was that Iran would be forced to scale back production as oil stocks piled up, resulting in strangling of its economy and possible damage to its wells. The IRGC responded by reasserting control over Hormuz again. On April 21, President Trump announced indefinite extension of the ceasefire, while continuing the blockade of Iran's ports. The US Navy seized a container carrier (M/V Tuska) and two VLCCs (M/V Tifani and Majestic X) to enforce the blockade. Meanwhile, USS George Bush arrived in the Northern Arabian Sea on April 23, joining USS Abraham Lincoln and USS Tripoli there, while USS Gerald Ford operated in the Red Sea.

There was speculation that talks might resume in Islamabad on April 25, but this was dashed when Iran refused to negotiate so long as the blockade was on. On April 28, Iran was reported to have proposed via Pakistani intermediaries that the ceasefire be extended for a long time or both sides agree to permanently end hostilities. It further proposed that negotiations focus on ending the US blockade and reopening Hormuz first. Nuclear negotiations could be deferred and decided once the opening of

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<sup>5</sup> US to Blockade Ships Entering or Exiting Iranian Ports, April 12, 2026, <https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/PRESS-RELEASES/Press-Release-View/Article/4457255/us-to-blockade-ships-entering-or-exiting-iranian-ports/>

Hormuz had been achieved<sup>6</sup>. President Trump refused these conditions on April 29. A stalemate persists.

The claimed US military success has not in any meaningful way diminished Iran's nuclear ambitions. Iran is no closer to surrendering its stockpile of enriched Uranium, ceasing enrichment, or agreeing to intrusive IAEA inspections. Its missile programme may have received a setback, but estimates indicate that about 70% of its pre-war missile arsenal as well as 60% of its launchers remain intact, and Iran is restoring its ability to manufacture both. Its support for regional proxies remains undiminished, while the Strait of Hormuz remains closed, with consequential impact on the global economy. Meanwhile, reports indicate that the US has depleted a significant percentage of its inventory of precision-guided missile inventory including Tomahawks, the Joint Air to Surface Standoff missile, Precision Strike missiles, SM-3 and SM-6, THAAD and Patriot. In many cases over 50% of the inventory has been used up<sup>7</sup>, and delivery time for these munitions is anywhere from three to five years. The inventory cannot thus be replenished in the near future.

Decapitating Iran's leadership as well as aerial strikes on military and industrial targets as a path to Iran's capitulation have thus proved to be illusions. Two core challenges remain – the nuclear issue, and opening the Strait of Hormuz to international traffic. The US cannot break Iran's stranglehold on Hormuz without a politically unsustainable ground offensive, which Trump does not appear to have the appetite for. He has reportedly told his aides to prepare for an extended blockade of Iran to compel capitulation<sup>8</sup>. He has publicly stated his belief that Iran is near collapse. Till such time as Iran caves in (if it does), however, the world is likely to continue facing the consequences of the US misadventure for the foreseeable future.

## South Korean President Lee Jae Myung's Visit to India

Upgrading the bilateral relationship to a Special Strategic Partnership in May 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and ROK President Park Geun-hye shared the view that bilateral defence and security cooperation had a large potential to grow<sup>9</sup>. They agreed to annual summit meetings in either country or on the margins of plurilateral

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<sup>6</sup> Barak Ravid, "Iran offers US deal to reopen strait but postpone nuclear talks", April 28, 2026, <https://www.axios.com/2026/04/27/iran-us-hormuz-strait-nuclear-talks-proposal-pakistan>

<sup>7</sup> Mark F Cancian, Chris H Park, "Last Rounds: Status of Key Munitions at the Iran War Ceasefire", April 21, 2026, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/last-rounds-status-key-munitions-iran-war-ceasefire>

<sup>8</sup> Alexander Ward, Laurence Norman and Summer Said, "Trump Tells Aides to Prepare for Extended Blockade of Iran", April 28, 2026, <https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/trump-tells-aides-to-prepare-for-extended-blockade-of-iran-da3be7a4>

<sup>9</sup> India – Republic of Korea Joint Statement for Special Strategic Partnership, May 18, 2015, [https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/25261/India\\_Republic\\_of\\_Korea\\_Joint\\_Statement\\_for\\_Special\\_Strategic\\_Partnership\\_May\\_18\\_2015](https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/25261/India_Republic_of_Korea_Joint_Statement_for_Special_Strategic_Partnership_May_18_2015)

events; the establishment of a joint Vice-Ministerial level defence and foreign affairs dialogue in the 2+2 format; and the encouragement of greater cooperation between their shipyards for defence needs. It speaks of subsequent progress in bilateral relations that the April 2026 Joint Strategic Vision for the India-ROK Special Strategic Partnership following the visit of South Korean President Lee Jae Myung to India reiterates the agreement to have leader-level summits annually or on the margins of international events; speaks of holding the inaugural Vice-Ministerial Defence and Foreign Affairs 2+2 dialogue at a mutually convenient time; and adopts a comprehensive framework for partnership on shipbuilding, shipping and maritime logistics. Clearly, progress in building defence relations between the two special strategic partners has not been commensurate with expectations.

ROK President Lee Jae Myung made a State Visit to India from April 19-21, the first bilateral visit by an ROK president since Moon Jae-in in July 2018. A delegation comprising ministers, senior officials and nearly 200 business executives, including the chairs of Samsung, Hyundai, LG, POSCO, HD Hyundai, and Hyosung accompanied him. He met President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, received a courtesy call from the External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar, and participated in the India-ROK Business Forum. Both sides decided to strengthen bilateral cooperation in a wide range of areas, including economic cooperation, shipbuilding, artificial intelligence, semiconductors, critical minerals, supply chain resilience and people-to-people ties. Four Joint Statements were issued after the meeting with PM Modi: a Strategic Vision<sup>10</sup>, on Energy Resource Security<sup>11</sup>, on Cooperation in Sustainability<sup>12</sup>; and in Shipbuilding, Shipping and Maritime Logistics<sup>13</sup>. An India-ROK Industrial Cooperation Committee at ministerial level was launched. ROK agreed to join the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative. A target of \$50 billion of bilateral trade by 2030 was set, and the two countries adopted a joint declaration on the resumption of negotiations to upgrade their Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA). They also agreed to launch a digital bridge to focus on AI, semiconductors and other emerging technologies. ROK announced its decision to join the International Solar Alliance. Notably, security cooperation did not figure amongst the headline areas of the joint strategic vision.

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<sup>10</sup> Joint Strategic Vision for India-ROK Special Strategic Partnership, April 20, 2026, [https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/25261/India\\_Republic\\_of\\_Korea\\_Joint\\_Statement\\_for\\_Special\\_Strategic\\_Partnership\\_May\\_18\\_2015](https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/25261/India_Republic_of_Korea_Joint_Statement_for_Special_Strategic_Partnership_May_18_2015)

<sup>11</sup> India - Republic of Korea Joint Statement on Energy Resource Security, April 20, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2253979&reg=3&lang=1>

<sup>12</sup> India - Republic of Korea Joint Statement on Cooperation in the field of Sustainability, April 20, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2253978&reg=3&lang=1>

<sup>13</sup> India - ROK Comprehensive Framework for Partnership in Shipbuilding, Shipping and Maritime Logistics, April 20, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2253976&reg=3&lang=1>

The outlooks of India and ROK converge on their vision for a free, open and rules-based Indo-Pacific, defence industrial cooperation including “Make in India”, supply chain resilience (de-risking dependence on China) and on climate and energy security. The inaugural India South Korea bilateral naval exercise was held at Busan in October 2025<sup>14</sup>. Areas of concern include India’s significant trade deficit with South Korea (India’s imports from South Korea in 2024-25 were worth about \$ 21 billion, while exports were only \$5.8 billion); the ROK’s deep integration with China’s economy (China is South Korea’s top trading partners, with trade in 2024 over \$ 279 billion, comprising \$132.9 billion in exports and \$146.2 billion in imports), its primary security focus on North Korea, and limited societal linkages.

This commentary focuses on the strengthening defence industrial cooperation. South Korea has, over the years emerged as the world’s 8<sup>th</sup> largest weapons exporter, possessing not just technology, but also the political will to share it and a distinct cost advantage. It has developed a reputation for producing high-quality hardware with exceptionally fast delivery times. Products include the K9 Thunder self-propelled howitzer (made in India as the K-9 Vajra by L&T in Hazira), the KF-21 Boromae fighter (potential customers include Egypt, Indonesia, Malaysia, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Saudi Arabia and UAE) and the FA-50 light fighter; the K-2 Black Panther MBT, KDX destroyers, KSS submarines, and precision guided munitions and air defence systems.

South Korea has long demonstrated interest in participating in India’s naval acquisition programmes. Commencing 1989, the Indian Navy inducted the Sukanya class offshore patrol vessels, with three built by Korea Tacoma, and four more under licence by Hindustan Shipyard. In 2011, Kangnam corporation won the bid to supply Mine Countermeasures Vessels to the Indian Navy, with two ships to be built in Korea and six at Goa Shipyard. The project was, however, stalled and then cancelled in 2014 due to allegations of employing middlemen, contrary to integrity pacts. It was revived in 2015 as a Make in India initiative, with GSL to build all 12 minesweepers under licence from Kangnam Corporation. Negotiations could not be successfully completed due to absence of agreement on the amount to be paid for design and technical know-how, disagreements about intellectual property rights and production support guarantees, as well as the targeted 60% indigenous content. The Indian Navy still remains without an active minesweeper fleet. South Korea’s Daewoo Shipbuilding and Marine Engineering (now Hanwha Ocean) bid for the Project 75I submarine contract in 2019 following a special invitation from India, offering the

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<sup>14</sup> Inaugural Edition of India – Republic of Korea Navy Bilateral Exercise, October 14, 2025, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2179047&reg=3&lang=2>

DSME-3000 submarine. It was short-listed as one of the five foreign finalists<sup>15</sup>. The bid was withdrawn in 2023 as Daewoo was unable to meet India's stringent specifications. Cochin shipyard signed an MoU with Hyundai Heavy Industries to jointly design and construct Landing Platform Docks for the Indian Navy in November 2025<sup>16</sup>.

It is in this context that the framework for partnership in shipbuilding signals continuation of South Korean interest in India. Shipbuilding is now amongst India's top priorities, said Prime Minister Modi at the India Maritime Week 2025<sup>17</sup>. The Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision 2047, aimed at transforming India into a global maritime powerhouse by 2047, is in place. As a global leader in shipbuilding, South Korea can help India to create large-scale, greenfield shipbuilding clusters with a skilled workforce and invest in manufacturing technologies. HD Korea Shipbuilding and Offshore Engineering is exploring the joint development, financing, implementation and operation of a large new shipyard in Southern India to meet India's target of adding over 400 vessels. The Korea International Cooperation Agency is partnering with India to develop a robust maritime workforce through mapping, training, and setting up a specialized 'Shipbuilding Workforce Development and Technology Cooperation Centre'. Korea Marine Equipment Association (KOMEA) has set up a branch in Mumbai. The Korea Marine Equipment Research Institute (KOMERI) has expressed interest in related cooperation. Bharat Earth Movers Limited (BEML), HD Korea Shipbuilding and Offshore Engineering Co., Ltd and HD Hyundai Samho Co., Ltd of the ROK have signed an MOU to jointly design, manufacture, and support next-generation conventional and autonomous maritime & port cranes in India.

In sum, announcements during the visit of President Lee impart fresh momentum to the India-South Korea relationship. It sets out a clear roadmap for the next five years, with targets and a wide area of cooperation. The transformation of an ambitious vision into a truly consequential partnership will now depend upon follow up and delivery.

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<sup>15</sup> For an overview, see Lalit Kapur, "India's Submarine Decision", DPG Policy Brief Volume VII, Issue 19, May 13, 2022, [https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/storage/uploads/publications\\_file/indias-submarine-decision-3830.pdf](https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/storage/uploads/publications_file/indias-submarine-decision-3830.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Brief on India-ROK Bilateral Relations, April 03, 2026, [https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/India-Republic\\_of\\_Korea26.pdf](https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/India-Republic_of_Korea26.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi addresses Maritime Leaders Conclave at India Maritime Week 2025 in Mumbai, October 29, 2025, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2183969&reg=3&lang=2>



## The British Flip-Flop Over the Chagos Archipelago

The news that UK Prime Minister Sir Kier Starmer had shelved his Chagos Islands deal with Mauritius amid worsening relations with US President Donald Trump broke on April 11<sup>18</sup>. UK officials indicated that they had not abandoned the agreement, but had run out of time to pass necessary legislation before parliament is prorogued in May 2026. A new Chagos bill is not expected to feature in the King's Speech marking the opening of the next session of parliament, and is thus not part of the Starmer Government's legislative agenda for 2026. In effect, it means that the transfer of sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago from UK to Mauritius will not take place in the foreseeable future.

In February 2019, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) concluded in an advisory opinion that the process of decolonisation of Mauritius was not lawfully completed when that country acceded to independence, and that the UK is under an obligation to bring to an end its administration of the Chagos Archipelago as rapidly as possible<sup>19</sup>. The UN General Assembly backed this opinion with an overwhelming but non-binding vote. In 2022, the then UK Foreign Secretary under the Conservative Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak Governments, began negotiations with Mauritius to resolve all outstanding issues over the archipelago. These negotiations were continued when the Starmer Government assumed power in July 2024.

In October 2024, UK and Mauritius reached an agreement on the transfer of sovereignty<sup>20</sup>, with the full support of the US and India. The agreement was subject to finalisation of a treaty and supporting legal instruments, which both sides committed to complete as quickly as possible<sup>21</sup>. The essential terms were that the UK would agree that Mauritius has sovereignty over the archipelago and could resettle all islands except Diego Garcia. In parallel, Mauritius would grant UK full authority to exercise its sovereign rights in Diego Garcia so as to ensure continued operation of the base for an initial period of 99 years, extendable thereafter. The UK would also provide a financial package to Mauritius for the duration of the agreement, encompassing an indexed payment and the funding of an infrastructure partnership

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<sup>18</sup> Joe Pike, "UK Shelves Chagos Deal After Trump Opposition", April 11, 2026, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c04x1lg1lygo>

<sup>19</sup> Legal Consequences of the Separation of the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius in 1965, <https://www.icj-cij.org/case/169>

<sup>20</sup> For an overview, see Lalit Kapur, "Mauritius to Regain Chagos Archipelago", Indo-Pacific Monitor Vol V Issue 10, October 2024, [https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/storage/uploads/publications\\_file/indo-pacific-monitor-5213.pdf](https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/storage/uploads/publications_file/indo-pacific-monitor-5213.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> UK-Mauritius deal to protect national security – safeguarding the operation of strategic military base, October 3, 2024, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-mauritius-deal-to-protect-national-security-safeguarding-the-operation-of-strategic-military-base>

to boost economic development in Mauritius. Then US President Joe Biden applauded the agreement<sup>22</sup>.

Both sides completed negotiations to convert their agreement into a treaty which their leaders signed on May 22, 2025. The treaty was then presented to British parliament<sup>23</sup>. It permitted UK to exercise all Mauritian rights and authorities with respect to Diego Garcia as required for the long-term, secure and effective operation of the Base, including full responsibility for defence and security of Diego Garcia as well as jurisdiction and control arrangements. The UK was further permitted to authorise the US to operate the base jointly with the UK. In consideration, the UK agreed to pay Mauritius a sum of £165 million annually for the first three years, followed by an annual payment of £120 million from the fourth to the 13<sup>th</sup> years. Payment for the 14<sup>th</sup> year onwards was to be GBP 120 million indexed for inflation using the GDP deflator published by the UK for the preceding year<sup>24</sup>. The UK also agreed to set up a trust fund for the benefit of Chagossians, paying an amount of £40 million for the fund, one year after the agreement enters into force. Further, the UK was to grant Mauritius a sum of £45 million annually for a period of 25 years as part of a development framework for projects to be undertaken by Mauritius. The agreement was to have a duration of 99 years from the date of its entry into force, extendable for a further period of 40 years in the first instance, and subsequent periods as both sides agreed to. It set out a 24-mile buffer around Diego Garcia, where nothing could be built without UK consent. Foreign military and civilian forces were barred from other islands in the archipelago, with the UK retaining the power to veto any access to the Chagos islands.

Effectively, the treaty found a way to safeguard the interests of both sides, enabling UK to claim compliance with the ICJ opinion and General Assembly resolution while safeguarding the continued operation of the Diego Garcia base well into the next century. The US formally supported this treaty, commending both UK and Mauritius<sup>25</sup>. President Trump too supported the agreement till January 2026. Reports indicate that it is only after the UK blocked the use of Diego Garcia for strikes on Iran

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<sup>22</sup> Statement from President Joe Biden on the Occasion of an Agreement Between the Republic of Mauritius and the United Kingdom on Status of the Chagos Archipelago, October 03, 2024, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/10/03/statement-from-president-joe-biden-on-the-occasion-of-an-agreement-between-the-republic-of-mauritius-and-the-united-kingdom-on-the-status-of-the-chagos-archipelago/>

<sup>23</sup> See Lalit Kapur, "Mauritius Sovereignty Over Diego Garcia", Indo-Pacific Monitor Volume VI Issue 5, May 2025, [https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/storage/uploads/publications\\_file/indo-pacific-monitor-5324.pdf](https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/storage/uploads/publications_file/indo-pacific-monitor-5324.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> Letter No. 1 regarding implementation and interpretation of Article 11 of the Agreement between the UK and Mauritius appended to the Agreement, Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> US Support for UK and Mauritius Agreement on Chagos Archipelago, May 22, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-support-for-uk-and-mauritius-agreement-on-chagos-archipelago/>

that he changed his mind<sup>26</sup>. With ratification of the treaty now suspended, the transfer of sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago is unlikely in the foreseeable future.

Meanwhile, the Maldives, which had opposed the deal citing its own claims of sovereignty over the archipelago, has welcomed current developments and called on the UK to take into account its rights. Relations between Maldives and Mauritius were suspended in March 2026 due to this stand.

Mauritius has pledged to continue the fight to regain control over the Chagos Archipelago, using every avenue to complete the decolonisation process. It is likely to continue exerting diplomatic pressure, both with the US and UK, as well as through the United Nations.

## The Australian National Defence Strategy 2026

The Australian Strategic Defence Review of 2023 had recommended, “Defence should move away from white papers to produce a National Defence Strategy on a biennial basis”<sup>27</sup>. The first Australian National Defence Strategy (NDS) was released on April 17, 2024<sup>28</sup>. Two years later, on April 16, 2026, Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Richard Marles released the 2026 edition of Australia’s NDS and Integrated Investment Programme (IIP)<sup>29</sup>.

The 2026 NDS has much in common with its predecessor. The chapterisation is identical. The deteriorating trends in the strategic environment identified in 2024 are said to have broadened and intensified. China continues to undertake the world’s largest military buildup; without the transparency or strategic reassurance the region expects. Coercive statecraft and grey-zone operations increase the risk of military escalation and miscalculation. The global rules-based order, which has underpinned Australia’s security for decades, is defined as in transition, with the end-state difficult to predict. The coming decade is likely to be defined by fracture, rivalry and disorder. Consequently, NDS 2026 states that Australia will face elevated levels of geopolitical

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<sup>26</sup> Peter Walker and Dan Sabbagh, “Trump changed mind on Chagos deal after UK blocked use of Diego Garcia for Iran Strikes”, February 19, 2026, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026/feb/19/donald-trump-turns-against-uk-chagos-islands-plan-iran>

<sup>27</sup> Recommendation 14.3 in the Australian Defence Strategic Review, April 2023, <https://www.defence.gov.au/about/reviews-inquiries/defence-strategic-review>

<sup>28</sup> For an overview of the strategy, see Lalit Kapur, “Australian’s National Defence Strategy”, Indo-Pacific Monitor Volume V Issue 4, April 2024, [https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/storage/uploads/publications\\_file/indo-pacific-monitor-5128.pdf](https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/storage/uploads/publications_file/indo-pacific-monitor-5128.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> 2026 National Defence Strategy and Integrated Investment Program, April 16, 2026, <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/media-releases/2026-04-16/2026-national-defence-strategy-integrated-investment-program>

risk over the coming decade, and exposure to force projection and military coercion will reach levels not seen since World War II.

NDS 2026 continues to see China as the primary driver of change in Indo-Pacific security dynamics. Its regional strategic weight is increasing with the growth of its national power and quest for greater strategic depth. China will continue prosecuting its maritime and territorial claims in the South and East China Sea, including through increased employment of the PLA and the Coast Guard. PLA intercepts of military vessels and aircraft operating legally in international waters and airspace are becoming more frequent, and at times, unsafe and unprofessional. Flashpoints in the Taiwan Strait, the South and East China Seas, the Korean Peninsula and India's borders with Pakistan and China all present the risk of miscalculation that could lead to conflict. Moreover, extra-regional events like the wars in Ukraine and in the Middle East disrupt trade and investment flows, undermine economic growth and create supply chain shocks. Although geography still offers Australia certain strategic advantages, it cannot protect the country against long-range missiles, space and cyber capabilities, disinformation, supply chain disruptions and the erosion of global rules and norms. Under these circumstances, the NDS states that any effective balance of military power in the Indo-Pacific will require the continued presence and role of the US. Consequently, Australia - US security arrangements, interoperability, intelligence sharing and industrial collaboration remain critical to Australia's national security.

The 2026 NDS commits to coordinated actions across nine priority areas to deliver national defence: economic security, integrated statecraft, defence industrial base, supply chain resilience, national logistics and infrastructure, a workforce and skills pipeline, intelligence, innovation and science and technology, and national civil preparedness. As the only arm of Government that generates and employs military power, the defence forces play a unique and vital role in national defence. Australia seeks to transform the ADF from a balanced force designed to respond to a range of contingencies to an integrated, focused force designed to address the nation's most significant security risks.

The three fundamental defence objectives remain deterring actions against Australia's interests, shaping Australia's strategic environment, and responding with credible military force when required. The strategy of denial remains, intended to prevent an adversary from coercing Australia through force, support regional security and prosperity and uphold a favourable regional strategic balance across five domains: maritime, land, air, space and cyber. The primary area of military interest is defined as encompassing the Northeast Indian Ocean, through maritime Southeast Asia and into the Pacific, including Australia, its populated offshore territories and northern

approaches. The five tasks of the ADF are to defend Australia and the immediate region; deter through denial any potential adversary's attempt to project power against Australia through the northern approaches; protect Australia's economic connection to the region and the world; contribute to the collective security of the Indo-Pacific; and contribute to protecting and upholding global rules and norms.

Australia seeks to deliver six capability effects. The first is impactful projection to deter any attempt to project power against Australia. Second is holding at risk any potential adversary that could target Australia's interests during a conflict. Third is protecting ADF forces and supporting critical infrastructure in Australia. Fourth is sustaining protracted combat operations during a conflict, including through disruptions in command and control networks, infrastructure, logistics networks and communication systems. Fifth is maintaining persistent situational awareness in the primary area of interest. The sixth is achieving decision advantage, by effectively exercising command and control during the conflict while undermining the ability of an adversary to do so.

The NDS commits to maintaining a permanent ADF of 69,000 personnel (as against an authorised strength of 62,700 at present) by the early 2030s, growing to around 100,000 by 2040. It sets out 11 capability priorities: undersea warfare, targeting and long-range strike, space and cyber capabilities, an amphibious capable combined-arms land system, maritime capabilities for sea denial and localised sea control, expeditionary air operations, missile defence to protect critical infrastructure and facilities, theatre logistics, theatre command and control, a Guided Weapons and Explosive Ordnance enterprise, and northern bases.

Enhancements envisaged to the Navy strike capability encompass the SSN (AUKUS), uncrewed underwater and surface vessels, integration of the Tomahawk, Naval Strike Missile and Standard SM-6 long-range air defence missile, enhancements to the ASW capability through acquisition of six new Hunter-Class frigates, induction of 11 Mogami class frigates, new large optionally crewed surface vessels and upgrades to the Hobart-class destroyers.

Accretions to the Army include acquisition of a littoral manoeuvre capability, expanded acquisition of HIMARS, induction of Precision Strike Missiles, increasing stockpiles of land-based long-range munitions, investment in infantry fighting vehicles, combat reconnaissance vehicles, main battle tanks, uncrewed tactical systems and a new attack helicopter, the induction of a new medium-range ground-based active missile defence system, and command and control systems.

For the Air Force, the NDS calls for integration of Long-Range Anti-Ship missile, the Advanced Anti-Radiation Guided Missile, the Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile and the Joint Strike Missile with appropriate RAAF aircraft, development of hypersonic air-launched weapons for the F/A-18F, replacement of the E-7A Wedgetail AWACS with a next generation aircraft, investment in uncrewed capabilities like the MQ-28A Ghost Bat, and replacement of the C-27J Spartan aircraft with a commercial aircraft fleet.

Australia's alliance with the US is considered fundamental to national security and the ADF capacity to generate, sustain and project credible military capability. Australia will deepen cooperation with Japan, as well as trilateral cooperation with Japan and the US. The NDS considers the Quad as a vital diplomatic partnership, and will seek to expand cooperation among the Quad partners to advance regional peace, security and prosperity, including strengthening maritime domain awareness, operational interoperability and HADR cooperation. Australia will enhance interoperability with New Zealand, strengthen defence engagement with Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines and Timor-Leste, and with South Korea.

The NDS defines the Northeast Indian Ocean as central to Australia's sea lines of communication. India, as before, is described as a top-tier security partner, the most important in the Northeast Indian Ocean. This is a sea change from the period following India's nuclear test, when Australia viewed India as a threat. The NDS says Australia will continue to support India's key role in the region and build interoperability by increasing the depth, complexity and frequency of defence cooperation across all domains, in the defence industry and in information sharing.

Building on the foundations of the 2024 NDS, Australia will invest around A\$ 425 billion over the next decade, including A\$94-130 billion in undersea warfare; A\$48-59 billion in an amphibious capable combined-arms land system; A\$14-19 billion in theatre command and control, A\$62-77 billion in Mogami class frigates, Hunter class frigates and upgrades to Hobart class destroyers; A\$34-41 billion in expeditionary air operations; A\$26-36 billion in guided weapons and explosive ordnance; A\$28-35 billion in targeting and long-range strike; A\$21-30 billion in missile defence; A\$13-16 billion in Northern bases; A\$27-38 billion in space and cyber capabilities; A\$14-21 billion in theatre logistics and health facilities; and A\$12-15 billion in autonomous and uncrewed systems.

The 2026 NDS is incremental, based on evolution of the 2024 NDS rather than a dispassionate assessment incorporating changes in global warfare as seen in the wars in Ukraine and Iran. It does acknowledge autonomous systems, but investment in them is limited, with major focus remaining traditional platforms like warships,

armoured vehicles and high performance aircraft. The continued dependence on Australia's alliance with the US does not take into account the demonstrated transactional nature of the Trump administration. Finally, there does not seem to be enough emphasis on developing national resilience, particularly with regard to vulnerabilities like fuel security and logistical sustainability.

## The Ninth Indian Ocean Conference

by Divya Rai

The Indian Ocean Conference was first convened in Singapore in 2016 and has since been held annually, positioning itself as a flagship consultative platform for Indian Ocean nations on issues of shared regional concern. The 9th Indian Ocean Conference (IOC 2026) was held in Port Louis, Mauritius from April 10 to 12, 2026, under the theme "Collective Stewardship for Indian Ocean Governance". The three-day gathering brought together over 200 delegates from 33 countries, including policymakers, diplomats and strategic affairs experts from across the Indian Ocean Region to deliberate on maritime governance, regional security, and economic cooperation. It was also historically notable as the first time the conference was held in Africa.

India's External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar delivered remarks at the inaugural session, laying out five broad observations for the Indian Ocean nations as they navigate a shifting and uncertain global order.<sup>30</sup> He opened by describing the Indian Ocean not merely as a geographic or strategic framework but as a living ecosystem – one that sustains economies, livelihoods, connectivity, and the cultural heritage of billions of people across Asia, Africa, and beyond. He observed that disruptions to this ecosystem, whether from conflict, climate stress, or supply chain fractures, do not remain contained and have consequences that ripple far beyond the immediate site of disturbance. His second priority revisited the long-standing post-colonial agenda, urging nations of the region to press ahead with dismantling the artificial barriers inherited from colonial rule – to deepen economic linkages, rebuild connectivity, and revive historical ties that centuries of colonial administration had systematically suppressed.

Jaishankar's third point addressed the changing character of the world order itself. He noted that the global environment has grown more competitive, fractured, and inward-looking, with the promise of open globalisation increasingly being eroded by

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<sup>30</sup> Ministry of External Affairs. "Remarks by EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar at the 09th Indian Ocean Conference, Mauritius". April 11, 2026. [https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/41038/Remarks\\_by\\_EAM\\_Dr\\_S\\_Jaishankar\\_at\\_the\\_09th\\_Indian\\_Ocean\\_Conference\\_Mauritius](https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/41038/Remarks_by_EAM_Dr_S_Jaishankar_at_the_09th_Indian_Ocean_Conference_Mauritius)

tendencies to weaponise economic and technological interdependence. Countries that once benefited from integrated supply chains and open financial systems are now compelled to seek more reliable partnerships and build greater self-reliance. His fourth point focused on the growing problem of chokepoints – not only the traditional maritime straits and canals that remain critical for energy flows and trade, but also newer, less visible chokepoints emerging in the domains of finance, technology, rare resources, and knowledge systems. He cautioned that these controlled bottlenecks, if left unaddressed, could undermine the very openness on which the Indian Ocean's prosperity depends. His fifth and final point reaffirmed India's MAHASAGAR outlook and our Neighbourhood First policy and called for deeper cooperation amongst nations of the Indian Ocean. Jaishankar's five priorities reflected India's broader strategic posture in the Indian Ocean – one that combines a rules-based multilateral vocabulary with a clear assertion of India's centrality to the region's stability and governance architecture.

The conference also hosted a range of thematic sessions covering freedom of navigation, maritime law, blue economy, and the governance of digital infrastructure. On the sidelines, Jaishankar held a series of bilateral meetings with counterparts from across the region, where discussions touched on the instability in the Middle East, energy supply disruptions, and the importance of building resilient regional partnerships. The absence of a Maldivian delegation was conspicuous – primarily due to the suspension of diplomatic ties between Mauritius and the Maldives over the Chagos Islands territorial dispute. This serves as a reminder that even within a cooperative multilateral setting, bilateral fault lines have a way of asserting themselves.

The Indian Ocean Conference has grown into a recognised annual fixture. Over nine editions, it has consistently attracted foreign ministers, senior officials, strategic thinkers, and institutional representatives from across a broad swathe of Indian Ocean nations. For India, the conference serves an obvious soft power purpose: it reinforces the SAGAR vision and provides a platform to project Indian leadership without the friction of a formal intergovernmental institution. However, apart from declarations, optics and building habits of cooperation, the conference has little to show. The themes shift with each edition – from maritime security to blue economy to collective stewardship. No cooperative framework has emerged from these deliberations. Looking ahead, the 10th edition of the Indian Ocean Conference is scheduled to be held in India, and unless the conference moves beyond speeches toward tangible, accountable outcomes, it risks becoming a gathering whose primary product is the conference itself.

## Other Indo-Pacific Developments

AUKUS Inquiry Report. The UK House of Commons Defence Committee published its AUKUS Inquiry Report on April 28<sup>31</sup>. The report warns that the trilateral partnership faces significant shortcomings and failings that could jeopardise its success unless corrective action is taken. These include the fading of political leadership (the Committee called upon the Prime Minister to take a more visible role in promoting and driving forward AUKUS); funding concerns and the need to regenerate a depleted submarine industrial base; critically low UK submarine availability that would make it difficult for UK to meet its AUKUS obligations, including increased visits to Australia; low public awareness and understanding of the programme; unaddressed barriers to workforce movement across the trilateral; low Virginia production rates in the US; and inadequate progress on AUKUS Pillar 2 which is rapidly losing credibility.

Austrian Federal Chancellor's Visit to India. Austria's Federal Chancellor Dr. Christian Stocker visited India from April 14-17. He held bilateral discussions with Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Hyderabad House, New Delhi on April 16, called on President Droupadi Murmu and received a call from the External Affairs Minister, Dr. S Jaishankar. The Joint Statement following official discussions focused on hi-technology cooperation, defence and security cooperation, and economic and trade ties<sup>32</sup>. Six agreements were signed, and nine announcements made<sup>33</sup>. Bilateral ties were upgraded to an "Enhanced India-Austria Partnership", focusing on defence technology, high-tech industrial collaboration, and counter-terrorism.

Australia Japan Defence Ministers' Meetings. Australia's Defence Minister Richard Marles and Japan's Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi met in Tokyo for the second time during the current year on April 08<sup>34</sup>. The meeting was intended to progress the Mogami frigate deal, align strategic security policies, and strengthen the special strategic partnership between their countries. They exchanged views on the current situation in the Middle East, the Indo-Pacific and North Korea, and discussed the status of their respective national defence strategies (Australia released its strategy on

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<sup>31</sup> AUKUS: Government must do more - and do it faster, April 28, 2026, <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/24/defence-committee/news/213346/aukus-government-must-do-more-and-do-it-faster/>

<sup>32</sup> Joint Statement on the Official Visit of the Federal Chancellor of Austria, April 16, 2026, <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/41049/joint-statement-on-the-official-visit160of-the160Federal-Chancellor-of-Austria>

<sup>33</sup> List of Outcomes: Visit of Federal Chancellor of Austria Cr. Christian Stocker to India, April 16, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2252562&reg=3&lang=1>

<sup>34</sup> Joint Remarks, Tokyo, April 08, 2026, <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/transcripts/2026-04-08/joint-remarks-tokyo>

April 16, Japan has committed to do so by the end of the year)<sup>35</sup>. The two leaders met again in Melbourne on April 18<sup>36</sup>, to finalise the contracts for the acquisition of Australia's first three general purpose frigates<sup>37</sup>, and to sign of the accompanying Memorandum of Implementation and an arrangement between respective defence authorities.

Australia Japan Foreign Ministers' Meeting. The Foreign Ministers of Australia and Japan, Penny Wong and Toshimitsu Motegi, met in Tokyo on April 28<sup>38</sup>. The purpose of the meeting was strengthening cooperation between both countries on regional security, discussing energy and resource security in light of disruptions caused by closure of the Strait of Hormuz, and final high-level coordination for the forthcoming visit of Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi to Australia from May 03-05 for the Annual Leaders' Summit. Ms Penny Wong went on to China and South Korea after completing her visit to Tokyo.

Australia Signs Contract for Purchase of Mogami Class Frigates. Australia confirmed its choice of the upgraded Mogami-class frigate for its Anzac frigate replacement programme and signed contracts for the first three ships on board JS Kumano in Melbourne on April 18<sup>39</sup>. To be built by Mitsubishi Heavy Industries (MHI) at Nagasaki, the first frigate will be handed over in December 2029<sup>40</sup>, and all three ships are expected to be operational by 2034. The deal marks the largest defence export contract in Japan's postwar history. The Australian and Japanese Defence Ministers also signed the Mogami Memorandum<sup>41</sup>, reaffirming the commitment of both governments to successful delivery of the frigates and deeper defence industrial cooperation. Eight additional ships of the class are to be built at the Henderson Shipyard in Perth. The Mogami procurement programme is expected to cost between

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<sup>35</sup> Japan Australia Defence Ministerial Meeting (Summary), April 08, 2026, <https://www.mod.go.jp/en/article/2026/04/cc71509252765c06a6f2b11d925f9b6afebcbfdf.html>

<sup>36</sup> Joint Statement Australia-Japan Defence Ministers' Meeting 18 April 2026, Melbourne, Australia, <https://www.mod.go.jp/en/article/2026/04/187fa1c0f20cfb548ec05329f428cf0a9257ad6b.html>

<sup>37</sup> Memorandum of Cooperation Concerning Australia's General Purpose Frigates Between the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Defence of Australia and the Minister of Defence of Japan ('Mogami Memorandum'), April 18, 2026, <https://www.mod.go.jp/en/article/2026/04/5a98e8fad9a141a88e0186322d65ee047f230c5b.html>

<sup>38</sup> Japan Australia Foreign Ministers' Meeting, April 28, 2026, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/pressite\\_000001\\_02304.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/pressite_000001_02304.html)

<sup>39</sup> Australia locks in delivery of our first three general purpose frigates, April 18, 2026, <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/media-releases/2026-04-18/australia-locks-delivery-our-first-three-general-purpose-frigates>

<sup>40</sup> Australian Government Concludes Contract with MHI for Joint Development and Production of Australia's New General Purpose Frigates, April 18, 2026, <https://www.mhi.com/news/260418.html>

<sup>41</sup> Memorandum of Cooperation Concerning Australia's General Purpose Frigates Between the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Defence of Australia and the Minister of Defense of Japan (Mogami Memorandum), April 18, 2026, <https://www.mod.go.jp/en/article/2026/04/5a98e8fad9a141a88e0186322d65ee047f230c5b.html>

15-20 billion Australian dollars (\$10.76 – 14.35 billion). The agreement helps overcome memories of Japan's failed bid to export Soryu-class submarines to Australia in 2016. New Zealand has also expressed interest in the ship to replace its Anzac-class frigates, as has Indonesia.

Japan Approves Changes in Rules on Arms Exports. 50 years after the then Prime Minister Takeo Miki announced a stringent policy virtually banning all arms exports and framing a pacifist identity, Japan's Cabinet on April 21 approved the export of arms once again, subject to government approval<sup>42</sup>. Current rules had limited exports to five categories of equipment: rescue, transport, warning, surveillance and minesweeping. The Cabinet reclassified all defence equipment into two categories: arms (which have the capacity to kill or wound people or destroy objects) and non-arms (which don't possess such capacity). All restrictions on non-arms exports have been removed; their export will only require approval of the National Security Council (NSC) Board. For arms, exports will now be permitted to countries that have concluded an international agreement obligating the transfer of defence equipment and technology in a manner consistent with the UN Charter (these include India, Bangladesh, the G-7, Australia and some Southeast Asian countries), subject to approval by the four NSC ministers. The Diet will be notified after the decision is taken by the NSC. The revised rules could encourage Japanese defence industry to make the major investments required to expand production capacities and develop economies of scale. It comes after the Australian agreement to buy Mogami-class frigates from Japan, as well as interest expressed by New Zealand and Indonesia in these frigates. Meanwhile, India has officially welcomed Japan's decision<sup>43</sup>. Media reports indicate that Japan has offered the frigate for co-production in India<sup>44</sup>.

India Germany Defence Cooperation Roadmap. India and Germany had, during the visit of Chancellor Merz to India in January 2026, signed a Joint Declaration of Intent to develop a Defence Industrial Cooperation Roadmap to promote long-term industry-level collaboration, including technology partnerships, co-development and co-production of defence platforms and equipment<sup>45</sup>. The roadmap was signed

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<sup>42</sup> Gabriel Dominguez and Jesse Johnson, "In a major policy shift, Japan scraps limits on lethal arms exports", April 21, 2026, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2026/04/21/japan/politics/japan-lethal-weapons-export-rules-eased/>

<sup>43</sup> Transcript of Weekly Media Briefing by the Official Spokesperson, April 23, 2026, [https://www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/41077/Transcript\\_of\\_Weekly\\_Media\\_Briefing\\_by\\_the\\_Official\\_Spokesperson\\_April\\_23\\_2026](https://www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/41077/Transcript_of_Weekly_Media_Briefing_by_the_Official_Spokesperson_April_23_2026)

<sup>44</sup> Japan Offers Mogami-Class Stealth Frigates to India with Co-Production Plan to Deepen Defence Ties, April 20, 2026, <https://idrw.org/japan-offers-mogami-class-stealth-frigates-to-india-with-co-production-plan-to-deepen-defence-ties/>

<sup>45</sup> India - Germany Joint Statement, January 12, 2026, [https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/40581/India\\_Germany\\_Joint\\_Statement\\_January\\_12\\_2026](https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/40581/India_Germany_Joint_Statement_January_12_2026)

during the visit of Defence Minister Shri Rajnath Singh to Berlin on April 22<sup>46</sup>. The roadmap promotes long-term industrial collaboration, aiming for technology transfers, co-development, and co-production of military equipment under the "Make in India" initiative. It further envisages increased joint exercises, staff-level dialogues, reciprocal port calls, Germany deploying a Liaison Officer to IFC (IOR) in Gurugram, and faster export clearance for the sale of defence equipment by Germany to India. The long-awaited finalisation of the P75I submarine deal is also expected to figure in the roadmap.

Indonesia US Major Defence Cooperation Partnership. Indonesian Minister of Defence Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin met US Secretary of War Pete Hegseth at the Pentagon on April 13, 2026<sup>47</sup>. The two leaders agreed to elevate the US-Indonesia defence relationship to a Major Defence Cooperation Partnership (MDCP)<sup>48</sup>, with three foundational pillars: military modernisation and capacity building, training and professional military education, and exercises and operational cooperation. Under the MDCP framework, the United States and Indonesia will explore mutually agreed cutting-edge initiatives, including co-developing sophisticated asymmetric capabilities pioneering next-generation defence technologies in the maritime, subsurface, and autonomous systems domains, and cooperating on maintenance, repair, and overhaul support to improve operational readiness. Both sides also committed to joint Special Forces training.

Commissioning of INS Aridhaman. India's third SSBN, INS Aridhaman, was commissioned by the defence minister Shri Rajnath Singh at Visakhapatnam on April 03<sup>49</sup>. The submarine displaces about 1000 tons more than its predecessors Arihant and Arighat, and can carry 24 K-15 SLBMs (range 750 Km) or eight K-4 SLBMs (range 3,500 Km).

Commissioning of INS Taragiri. INS Taragiri, the fourth ship of Project 17A, was commissioned into the Navy in the presence of Defence Minister Shri Rajnath Singh

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<sup>46</sup> Raksha Mantri & his German counterpart hold bilateral talks in Berlin to bolster strategic defence partnership, April 22, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2254600&reg=3&lang=1>

<sup>47</sup> Readout of Secretary of War Pete Hegseth's Meeting with Indonesian Minister of Defence Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin, April 13, 2026, <https://www.war.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/4457684/readout-of-secretary-of-war-pete-hegseths-meeting-with-indonesian-minister-of-d/>

<sup>48</sup> Joint Statement on Establishment of the US-Indonesia Major Defence Cooperation Partnership, April 13, 2026, <https://media.defense.gov/2026/Apr/13/2003911810/-1/-1/1/READOUT-OF-SECRETARY-OF-WAR-PETE-HEGSETH-MEETING-WITH-INDONESIA-MINISTER-OF-DEFENSE-SJAFRIE-SJAMSOEDDIN.PDF>

<sup>49</sup> Bigger, quieter and deadlier: Navy commissions INS Aridhaman – all about India's 3<sup>rd</sup> nuclear sub, April 03, 2026, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/defence/news/bigger-quieter-and-deadlier-navy-commissions-ins-aridhaman-all-about-indias-3rd-nuclear-sub/articleshow/130000699.cms>

at Visakhapatnam on April 03<sup>50</sup>. Speaking on the occasion, the defence minister described the ship as a symbol of India's growing technological prowess, self-reliance and formidable naval power and reiterated the Government's commitment to make the Indian Navy one of the world's strongest in the times to come.

IOS Sagar. The second edition of the IOS Sagar mission, with a multinational crew from 16 Indian Ocean nations embarked on INS Sunayna, commenced from Mumbai on April 02<sup>51</sup>. At the time of writing, IOS Sagar had visited Male<sup>52</sup>, Phuket<sup>53</sup>, Jakarta<sup>54</sup> and Singapore<sup>55</sup>, and was scheduled to visit Yangon, Chittagong and Colombo before returning to Mumbai.

Indian Navy Maritime Security Strategy 2026 (INMSS-2026). The Indian Navy released INMSS-2026 on April 16<sup>56</sup>. The strategy, up update on INMSS-2015, defines objectives, influences including threats, and the means the IN will employ to ensure secure seas.

INS Sudarshini Deployment. INS Sudarshini, currently on the 10-month long Lokayan-26 transoceanic expedition, visited Sete (France), Casablanca (Morocco), Las Palmas<sup>57</sup> (Spain's Canary Islands) and Mindelo (Cape Verde) during the month. The ship will undertake the trans-Atlantic crossing after the visit to Mindelo, and is expected to participate in the Sail 250 international flotilla in New York in July 2026.

India to Position Defence Attache in Mauritius. External Affairs Minister Dr. S Jaishankar announced that India would soon be positioning a Defence Attache in Mauritius<sup>58</sup>. The announcement was part of his address to the Media after meeting Mauritius Prime Minister Navin Ramgoolam.

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<sup>50</sup> Indian Navy's latest stealth frigate 'INS Taragiri' commissioned in Visakhapatnam, April 03, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2248799&reg=3&lang=1>

<sup>51</sup> Raksha Rajya Mantri Flags off IOS Sagar from Mumbai, April 02, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2248586&reg=3&lang=1>

<sup>52</sup> INS Sunayna (IOS Sagar) Arrives at Male, Strengthening Maritime Ties with Maldives, April 07, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2249747&reg=3&lang=1>

<sup>53</sup> IOS Sagar Ship Arrives at Phuket, Thailand, April 17, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2252298&reg=3&lang=1>

<sup>54</sup> INS Sunayna Arrives at Jakarta Under Indian Navy's IOS Sagar Initiative, Strengthening Maritime Ties with Indonesia, April 21, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2254169&reg=3&lang=1>

<sup>55</sup> Indian Ocean Ship Sagar Arrives at Changi Naval Base, Singapore, April 28, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2256124&reg=3&lang=1>

<sup>56</sup> 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](https://indiannavy.gov.in/sites/default/files/basic_page_document/Book_Indian%20Navy%20Maritime%20Security%20Strategy_Version6_ver3-3_web.pdf)

<sup>57</sup> In a Historic First, INS Sudarshini Arrives at Las Palmas, Spain, April 24, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2255252&reg=3&lang=1>

<sup>58</sup> Statement to the Media by EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar after meeting with Prime Minister Navin Ramgoolam of Mauritius, April 09, 2026, <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches->

GE F414 Engine Negotiations. GE and HAL completed technical negotiations for the co-production of F414 engines in India on April 13<sup>59</sup>. The agreement secures an 80% transfer of technology, marking a significant milestone for the Tejas Mk2 programme. The initial agreement is for 99 engines to be manufactured in India, as against a requirement to equip 130 aircraft. Commercial negotiations are expected to complete this year, leading to the signing of a contract.

Vietnam Leadership Changes. On April 7, Vietnam's National Assembly elected Communist Party General Secretary To Lam as State President and former central bank governor Le Minh Hung as Prime Minister for the 2026–2031 term<sup>60</sup>. Tran Thanh Man was re-elected Chairman of the National Assembly. The leadership shakeup consolidates power under To Lam, making him the country's most powerful leader.

Vietnam China Summit. Vietnamese President To Lam made his first international visit to China from April 14-17, emphasising China's importance in Vietnam's strategic calculations. He met President Xi Jinping, Premier Li Qiang, Chairman of the National People's Congress Standing Committee Zhao Leji and Chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference Wang Huning. The two sides issued a Joint Statement on further deepening the Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership and advancing the building of a Viet Nam-China community with a shared future<sup>61</sup>. China reaffirmed its consistent policy of friendship with Viet Nam and its priority status in China's neighbourhood diplomacy, while Viet Nam reiterated that relations with China remain an objective requirement, a strategic choice and a top priority in its foreign policy. Both sides agreed to raise political trust, enhance security and defence cooperation, and maintain "better control and settlement of differences".

Indonesia South Korea Summit. Indonesia's President Prabowo Subianto and South Korean President Lee Jae Myung upgraded their bilateral relationship to a special comprehensive strategic partnership when they met at Seoul on April 01<sup>62</sup>. Their

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[Statements.htm?dtl/41034/Statement\\_to\\_media\\_by\\_EAM\\_Dr\\_S\\_Jaishankar\\_after\\_meeting\\_with\\_Prime\\_Minister\\_Navin\\_Ramgoolam\\_of\\_Mauritius](#)

<sup>59</sup> GE, Hindustan Aeronautics sign tech deal to build fighter-jet engines in India, April 15, 2026, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/business/ge-aerospace-hindustan-aeronautics-sign-tech-deal-to-build-fighter-jet-engines-in-india-101776241398793.html>

<sup>60</sup> Khanh Vu, Phuong Nguyen and Francesco Guarascio, "Vietnam's to leader To Lam expands power, new PM elected", April 7, 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/vietnam-parliament-elects-party-leader-lam-new-state-president-2026-04-07/>

<sup>61</sup> Vietnam, China issue joint statement on deepening Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in new era, April 17, 2026, <https://en.baochinhphu.vn/viet-nam-china-issue-joint-statement-on-deepening-comprehensive-strategic-cooperative-partnership-in-new-era-111260417153206502.htm>

<sup>62</sup> Kang Gahui, "Ties with Indonesia Upgraded, 16 MOUs on arms, minerals signed", April 02, 2026, <https://www.korea.net/NewsFocus/policies/view?articleId=290077&pageIndex=3>

agreement encompasses strengthening military cooperation, including on the KF-21 fifth-generation Boramae fighter and technology transfer; enhancing supply chain resilience, particularly in critical minerals; joint initiatives in AI, nuclear energy, digital development and green infrastructure; developmental projects including smart city technology for Indonesia's new capital, Nusantara; and 16 MOUs, spanning finance, defence, environment, health and investment. President Lee awarded President Prabowo the Grand Order of Mugunghwa, Korea's highest honour, for his contributions to boosting bilateral friendship.

France Japan Summit. President Emmanuel Macron of France paid his fourth visit to Japan from March 31 – April 02<sup>63</sup>. In a summit meeting with Prime Minister Takaichi, he called for an immediate ceasefire and de-escalation of the conflict in the Middle East. The leaders emphasised the critical need for free passage through the Strait of Hormuz. They signed a Joint Leaders' Statement to deepen security ties and coordinate on a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific". They also agreed to a roadmap for supply chain resilience, focussing on critical minerals and rare earths to reduce dependency on single sources. They reaffirmed cooperation in civil nuclear power, AI and space.

France South Korea Summit. Presidents Emmanuel Macron of France and Lee Jae Myung of South Korea elevated bilateral relations between their countries to a Global Strategic Partnership when they met at Seoul on April 03<sup>64</sup>. The two sides pledged to deepen political, defence and security cooperation; strengthen their economic partnership through development of trade and innovation exchanges; deepen multilateral cooperation on climate change, development, biodiversity and health; strengthen cultural cooperation and people-to-people exchanges; and strengthen strategic convergence in the face of international challenges. The leaders set a goal to increase bilateral trade to \$ 30 billion by 2030, up from \$ 25 billion in 2025. Both countries pledged to cooperate on ensuring safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz. President Macron invited President Lee to the June 2026 G-7 Summit in Evian-les-Baines.

Australia Singapore Summit. Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese visited Singapore for a summit meeting with Singapore Prime Minister Lawrence Wong on April 10<sup>65</sup>. The leaders strengthened ties to combat global supply chain disruptions,

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<sup>63</sup> Japan France Summit Meeting and Working Dinner (Summary), April 01, 2026, <https://japan.kantei.go.jp/105/diplomatic/202604/01france.html>

<sup>64</sup> Joint Statement between the President of the French Republic and the President of the Republic of Korea, April 3, 2026, <https://www.elysee.fr/en/emmanuel-macron/2026/04/03/joint-statement-between-the-president-of-the-french-republic-and-the-president-of-the-republic-of-korea>

<sup>65</sup> Joint Statement on Economic Resilience and Essential Supplies, April 10, 2026, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/joint-statement-economic-resilience-and-essential-supplies>

particularly in energy, in the wake of the Iran conflict. Australia pledged to maintain its role as a key supplier of LNG to Singapore, while Singapore pledged continued supply of refined petroleum products to Australia. The countries finalised negotiations on a legally binding protocol to the Singapore-Australia Free Trade Agreement. New bilateral dialogues on economic resilience and energy were established. The leaders furthered the 80 initiatives under the upgraded Comprehensive Strategic Partnership 2.0 (launched in October 2025).

Albanese Visit to Brunei and Malaysia. Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese visited Malaysia and Brunei from April 14-17, to shore up Australia's energy security and secure guarantees for continued fuel and fertilizer supplies amid global disruptions caused by conflict in the Middle East. Australia and Brunei released a joint statement on strengthening energy and food security<sup>66</sup>. Malaysia and Australia released a joint statement on energy security<sup>67</sup>.

Pentagon Submits \$1.5 Trillion Budget Request. The Trump Administration submitted a request for \$ 1.15 trillion in discretionary spending and \$ 350 billion in mandatory spending to add up to a \$ 1.5 trillion budget request for 2027<sup>68</sup>. This encompasses a pay raise for all troops, resupplying critical munitions, building the golden dome, and \$65.8 billion to procure 18 battle force and 16 non-battle force ships. The budget request includes the purchase of 785 additional Tomahawk Land Attack Missiles for \$ 3 billion, as well as 540 Standard SM-6 missiles for \$ 4.33 billion<sup>69</sup>. The request will be debated by Congress in the coming months. A report indicates USN ships and submarines had fired more than 850 Tomahawks during the first four weeks of Operation Epic Fury<sup>70</sup>.

USN Budget Request. The US Department of the Navy released its 2027 budget request on April 21<sup>71</sup>. The budget seeks an allocation of \$ 377.5 billion, \$ 70 billion more than in 2026. It includes the procurement of one Columbia class and two

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<sup>66</sup> Joint Statement on Energy and Food Security, April 15, 2026, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/joint-statement-energy-and-food-security>

<sup>67</sup> Joint Statement on Energy Security, April 16, 2026, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/joint-statement-energy-security-16-april-26>

<sup>68</sup> Rebuilding Our Military, April 3, 2026, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/rebuilding-our-military-fact-sheet.pdf>

<sup>69</sup> Mallory Shelbourne and Sam Lagrone, "New Navy Budget Wants \$ 3 Billion for New Tomahawks, \$ 4.3 Billion for SM-6s", April 6, 2026, <https://news.usni.org/2026/04/06/new-navy-budget-wants-3b-for-new-tomahawks-4-3b-for-sm-6s>

<sup>70</sup> The 850 Tomahawks Launched in Operation Epic Fury is the Most Fired in a Single Campaign, March 27, 2026, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/850-tomahawks-launched-operation-epic-fury-most-fired-single-campaign>

<sup>71</sup> Department of the Navy Released FY 27 Budget Request, April 21, 2026, <https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/Press-Releases/display-pressreleases/Article/4464720/departement-of-the-navy-releases-fy27-budget-request/>

Virginia class SSNs, one frigate, one Arleigh Burke class destroyer, one America class and one San Antonio Class amphibious vessels, apart from 11 other ships and 123 aircraft.

Australian Defence Force Leadership Changes. Australia announced on April 13 a number of changes to the senior leadership of the Australian Defence Force (ADF), to take effect from July 2026<sup>72</sup>. The current Chief of the Navy, V Adm Mark Hammond, will become the Chief of the Defence Force, taking over from Adm David Johnston who is retiring. The Chief of Joint Capabilities, Lieutenant General Susan Coyle, will become the new Chief of Army. R Adm Mathew Buckley will become the Chief of the Navy.

JMSDF Indo-Pacific Deployment 2026. A press release from the JMSDF spelt out plans for its Indo-Pacific deployment from April – September 2026<sup>73</sup>. Multiple surface and air units will visit Fiji, Indonesia, Kiribati, Marshall, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Philippines, Samoa, Singapore, Solomon, Tonga, Tuvalu, United States of America and Vanuatu during the period. There are no plans for deployment in the Indian Ocean.

RIMPAC. The US Pacific Fleet announced that the 30<sup>th</sup> RIMPAC exercise would take place from June 24 – July 31, 2026<sup>74</sup>. A multinational force of 40 surface ships, 5 submarines, 140 aircraft and more than 25,000 personnel is expected to participate.

USS George Bush Arrives CENTCOM AOR. The USS George Bush CSG arrived in the CENTCOM Area of Responsibility on April 23, after sailing around South Africa. It joins the USS Abraham Lincoln CSG, operating from the North Arabian Sea, and the USS Gerald Ford CSG, operating from the Red Sea. This is the first time since 2003 that the US has deployed three Carrier Strike Groups to CENTCOM. The deployment notwithstanding the ongoing strategic stalemate is intended to pressure Iran by cutting off sea trade and allow for sustained, round-the-clock air operations and 24/7 strike capabilities without exhausting crew.

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<sup>72</sup> Appointment of Leadership Positions in the Australian Defence Force, April 13, 2026, <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/media-releases/2026-04-13/appointment-leadership-positions-australian-defence-force>

<sup>73</sup> Indo-Pacific Deployment 2026, April 14, 2026, <https://www.mod.go.jp/msdf/en/release/202604/20260414en.pdf>

<sup>74</sup> US Pacific Fleet Announces 30<sup>th</sup> RIMPAC Exercise, April 17, 2026, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Articles/Article/4463903/us-pacific-fleet-announces-30th-rimpac-exercise/>

India New Zealand FTA. India and New Zealand signed the bilateral Free Trade Agreement on April 28<sup>75</sup>. The agreement provides 100% duty-free access for India's exports to New Zealand, covers 139 service sectors, and includes a New Zealand commitment to invest \$ 20 billion in India. It also includes enhanced mobility for professionals, protection of sensitive sectors like dairy products for India, and increased cooperation in agriculture, MSMEs and digital trade. It aims to increase bilateral trade from the current level of \$ 2.4 billion to \$ 5 billion in five years. 95% of New Zealand's exports to India will become tariff free or will have sharply reduced tariffs<sup>76</sup>.

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<sup>75</sup> Union Minister of Commerce and Industry Shri Piyush Goyal and New Zealand's Minister for Trade and Investment Hon. Todd McClay sign the landmark India-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement, April 27, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2255914&reg=3&lang=1>

<sup>76</sup> New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Key Outcomes, <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/en/trade/free-trade-agreements/free-trade-agreements-concluded-but-not-in-force/new-zealand-india-free-trade-agreement/key-outcomes>



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