



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power

INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

AUGUST 2026

Author

Lalit Kapur

Volume VII, Issue 8



Delhi Policy Group

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

www.delhipolicygroup.org



INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

Vol. VII, Issue 8

August 2026

ABOUT US

Founded in 1994, the Delhi Policy Group (DPG) is among India's oldest think tanks with its primary focus on strategic and international issues of critical national interest. DPG is a non-partisan institution and an independently funded non-profit Trust. Over past decades, DPG has established itself in both domestic and international circles and is widely recognised today among the top security think tanks of India and of Asia's major powers.

Since 2016, in keeping with India's increasing global profile, DPG has expanded its focus areas to include India's regional and global role and its policies in the Indo-Pacific. In a realist environment, DPG remains mindful of the need to align India's ambitions with matching strategies and capabilities, from diplomatic initiatives to security policy and military modernisation.

At a time of disruptive change in the global order, DPG aims to deliver research based, relevant, reliable and realist policy perspectives to an actively engaged public, both at home and abroad. DPG is deeply committed to the growth of India's national power and purpose, the security and prosperity of the people of India and India's contributions to the global public good. We remain firmly anchored within these foundational principles which have defined DPG since its inception.

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](#).

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and should not be attributed to the Delhi Policy Group as an Institution.

Cover Images:

1. Defence Minister Shri Rajnath Singh meets Japan's Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi at the Manekshaw Centre in New Delhi, August 20, 2026. Source: @rajnathsingh
2. USS Abraham Lincoln operates in the Northern Arabian Sea on May 10, 2026. Source: USS Abraham Lincoln @CVN_72
3. Leaders from Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan at the Makkah Al-Mukarramah Summit for Joint Defence in Mecca on August 07, 2026. Source: Saudi Press Agency

© 2026 by the Delhi Policy Group

Delhi Policy Group

Core 5A, 1st Floor,
India Habitat Centre,
Lodhi Road, New Delhi- 110003.
www.delhipolicygroup.org

INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR
Vol. VII, Issue 8
August 2026

Contents

Abstract	1
The Iran Imbroglio	3
Koizumi Advances Defence Cooperation with India and Australia	6
The Mecca Agreement.....	11
Vietnam Australia Relations Advance.....	14
Other Indo-Pacific Developments	17



INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

August 2026

Abstract

Six months launching Operation Epic Fury in the Persian Gulf, the US confrontation with Iran continues, having traversed through kinetic conflict, a naval blockade, a short-lived cease-fire as precursor to a peace agreement, and now economic warfare to completely isolate Iran. However, China's financial dealings and purchases of Iranian oil have remained outside the ambit of US sanctions. The USS Abraham Lincoln Carrier Strike Group headed for home on August 20, and was replaced in the Northern Arabian Sea by the USS George Washington. Traffic through the Strait of Hormuz remained well below its peacetime levels.

Japan's Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi visited India and Australia in mid-August to enhance cooperation with both partners. The joint statement following his Delhi visit pointed to the prospect of increased defence industrial cooperation, including in building MCM capability and ship production. Australia and Japan have moved faster, with the production of Mogami-class frigates going ahead and successful field trials of a laser detection and tracking system.

Leaders from Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Pakistan met in Mecca on August 07 to announce the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement to strengthen collective deterrence against aggression. They did not, however, identify any adversary. Structures to operationalise the agreement have yet to be developed.

Political developments in the Indo-Pacific during the month included summits between Australia and Vietnam, Australia and Thailand, and 2+2 Foreign and Defence Ministers' meetings between Indonesia and Australia, and Indonesia and China. The first trilateral Australia-Indonesia-Japan Defence Ministers' Meeting took place virtually on August 26.

US-South Korea military relations were jolted when the Pentagon first curtailed the annual Exercise Ulchi Freedom Shield and then cancelled a joint amphibious exercise scheduled for September 2026, as President Trump wooed North Korean President Kim Jong-un. Opinion polls in South Korea indicated strong public support for the country to develop nuclear weapons.

China's assertive actions in the South China Sea increased following the Philippines depositing an official nautical chart notifying baselines in the Scarborough Shoal with



the UN. China rejected the chart and conducted a naval-air exercise at the shoal, following up by enforcing unilateral rules regarding fishing in its declared 'national nature reserve'. Reports indicated that China was building an airstrip at Antelope Reef in the Paracel Islands.

Pakistan and Somalia signed MoUs on defence cooperation on August 04, while Pakistan and Kuwait followed suit on August 27. Both indicate increased Pakistani action to play a part in West Asian security. India and Kuwait, meanwhile, held their inaugural Joint Defence Committee meeting in New Delhi on August 28.

Reports indicated that Japan would seek a record ¥8.9 trillion (about \$ 56 billion) for defence in its budget request for fiscal 2027. The amount represents 1.27% of its estimated GDP of \$4.45 trillion in 2026.

The Iran Imbroglio

Six months after President Donald Trump launched Operation Epic Fury aiming to subdue Iran in four to six weeks, the US continued to be bogged down in the Middle East. The ambiguous Pakistan-brokered Iran-US MoU of June 17¹, intended to stop fighting for 60 days while diplomats pursued peace negotiations officially expired on August 17 (it had effectively died in June itself when Iran targeted commercial ships not using the route it had specified to exit the Persian Gulf, and the US responded with resumption of strikes, reimposition of the blockade and resumption of sanctions). Even as Trump proclaimed the efficacy of his military action and blockade, claiming that Iran was at the end of its tether, traffic through the Strait of Hormuz remained far below peacetime levels, Iran retained its missile and drone capability, its proxies were active in Lebanon, and there was no progress on the nuclear issue. The Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb was also threatened by the Houthis in Yemen, forcing re-routing of Saudi tanker traffic through the Red Sea.

General Wesley Clark, a former NATO Supreme Commander, explained the stakes when he pointed out that letting Iran keep control of Hormuz would damage American deterrence, weaken influence in Asia and undermine the security of Europe in one stroke². The US Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff General Dan Caine was reported as seeking an off-ramp even as US military options remained limited to blockade enforcement³. Iran, on the other hand, sought major changes in US behaviour to open the Strait of Hormuz: stop threatening and end the war on Iran and allies in Lebanon, Palestine, Yemen and Iraq forever; lift the blockade and withdraw naval and air forces from around Iran; pay reparations for two wars of aggression; lift sanctions against Iran; unconditionally release Iran's frozen and stolen assets⁴. Iran also said it would not allow US warships into the Gulf, effectively cutting away one of the foundational elements of US military power in the region.

The USS George Washington CSG joined USS George Bush in the Northern Arabian Sea on August 20, allowing USS Abraham Lincoln to head back home after a record deployment. At the time of writing, USS Abraham Lincoln was in Thailand for its first port call in nearly nine months. Media reports, meanwhile, indicated that the US has

¹ A Look at the Text of the Agreement Between the United States and Iran, June 17, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/06/17/us/politics/us-iran-agreement-deal-text.html>

² @Mark4xx, "Former NATO Supreme Commander: This War is Now Existential for US Hegemony – No Exit Allowed", August 02, 2026, <https://x.com/Mark4XX/status/2083836851517898792>

³ Zachary Cohen, "Trump's top general is 'looking for an off-ramp' from Iran war as US military options remain limited, sources say", August 08, 2026, <https://edition.cnn.com/2026/08/07/politics/general-dan-caine-off-ramp-iran-war>

⁴ Yeganeh Torbati, Leily Nikounazar and Aasro Boxerman, "Iran Issues List of Demands, Complicating Efforts to Reopen Strait", August 08, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/08/08/world/middleeast/iran-us-oman-strait-of-hormuz.html>

lost about 25% of its MQ-9 Reaper RPVs in the Iran conflict⁵. Other reports indicate that the US has used up virtually all of its Precision Strike Missiles and ATACMS missiles⁶, as well as 80% of THAAD interceptors, 65% of its Patriot interceptors, and about half of its Tomahawk missiles.

On August 19, Trump threatened economic warfare and isolation of Iran on an unprecedented scale⁷. Iran dismissed the threat⁸, describing it as a diversion from America's own crisis of unprecedented debt and surging interest costs. Iran also warned Gulf states against joining Trump's economic war, threatening that it would prevent even a drop of oil leaving the region in response⁹. The UAE officially suspended all trade and financial transactions with Iran on August 19¹⁰, accusing Iran of firing two ballistic missiles at its territory. Iran denied the accusation, describing the reported attack as a false flag operation by Iran and the US. Iranian traders found ways to circumvent the UAE action by routing shipments via Oman and Turkey and using false documentation for movement of ships.

Trump officially launched Operation Economic Outcast on August 24¹¹. His Treasury Department claimed to have mapped every node, every facilitator, and every network that Iran has used to smuggle oil and evade sanctions and acting to block every potential source of revenue that funds the IRGC and the Iranian regime¹². It gave every country that deals with Iran a defined timeline to shut down identified activities, threatening unilateral action to remove any entity that did not comply with Iran removal from the US dollar system. The US imposed sanctions targeting five of Iran's most vital lifelines with other countries: digital assets, technology, gold, aviation, and shipping. Those sanctioned included four India-based companies: Portease Partners LLP, Sadashiva Overseas Ltd, PP Softtech Pvt Ltd, and Prakrutees Infra Impex India

⁵ US military has lost roughly 25% of its Reaper drones as Iran War depletes arsenal, August 13, 2026, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2026/08/13/us-military-has-lost-roughly-25-its-reaper-drones-iran-war-depletes-arsenal/>

⁶ Erin Banco, Mike Stone and Jonathan Landay, "US has used virtually all of its long-range precision missiles during Iran war, sources say", August 04, 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us-has-used-virtually-all-its-long-range-precision-missiles-during-iran-war-2026-08-04/>

⁷ Trump announces 'most crushing economic operation ever' against Iran, August 19, 2026, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/8/19/trump-announces-most-crushing-economic-operation-ever-against-iran>

⁸ Tiago Ventura, "Iran Hits Back at Trump's Threat of a 'Crushing' Economic 'D-Day' Campaign", August 20, 2026, <https://time.com/article/2026/08/20/iran-hits-back-at-trump-s-threat-of-a-crushing-economic-d-day-campaign/>

⁹ Erika Solomon, "Iran Warns Gulf States Against Joining Trump's Economic War", August 23, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/08/23/world/europe/iran-economy-war-united-states.html>

¹⁰ UAE trade embargo could shut Iran's key economic escape route: Here's why. August 19, 2026, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/8/19/uae-trade-embargo-could-shut-irans-key-economic-escape-route-heres-why>

¹¹ Operation Economic Outcast: Total Isolation of the Iranian Regime, August 24, 2026, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/releases/2026/08/operation-economic-outcast-total-isolation-of-the-iranian-regime/>

¹² Remarks from Secretary of the Treasury Scott Bessent on Operation Economic Outcast against Iran, August 24, 2026, <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sb0614/>

Pvt Ltd. Three Indian nationals associated with these companies were also sanctioned¹³. Meanwhile, Iranian airlines continued flying to Dubai, local business councils remained functional and Iranian banks in Dubai continued operations. As the month came to an end, the US targeted the Dubai branches of Bank Melli and Banque Misr¹⁴. UAE's Central Bank ordered a special and urgent examination of Banque Misr's branches in the country in response.

Shortages in Iran on account of the US blockade centred on automotive fuel, medicines and agricultural produce. Iran has a refining capacity – consumption gap of about 15 million litres per day of automotive fuel, which was earlier bridged by imports. The food gap is about 15%, reports indicate acute shortages of automotive fuel in Iran, forcing the government to begin rationing. Iran also imports almost all its active pharmaceutical ingredients; these imports had come to a near halt. The country was experiencing runaway inflation, with the Iranian Rial trading at over two million to a dollar. It remained confident, however, of surviving the blockade beyond the US will to continue.

There is little indication that Trump's Operation Economic Outcast will succeed in changing Iran's behaviour where military action and the blockade have failed. For the Iranian regime, the US-Israeli action is an existential threat, and Iran has long demonstrated its enormous capacity to absorb pain. Moreover, China and Russia are not likely to break their economic relations with Iran despite Trump's call. Trump will be careful about pushing China too far at a time when he is placating Xi. The UAE has announced trade and economic sanctions on Iran, but implementation of that announcement is still awaited. Nor is there confidence that the UAE decision will stand if Iran forces a military price. With US mid-term elections on November 03 less than three months away, the world economy in a precarious state, and China stepping up its coercive activity in East Asia, Trump appears to be out of options.

Operation Epic Fury was supposed to take Iran out of the US strategic calculus, enabling it to focus on the Asia-Pacific. Trump's failure to accurately assess the associated risks, to weigh the costs against the risk of increased exposure in other theatres, and to reconcile ends and means, are a strategic failure of world-changing dimensions. The Iran action has left the US exposed, with stocks of long-range precision strike weapons and air defence interceptor missiles severely depleted, the US Navy exhausted and perceptions of the US ability to prevail in East Asia significantly impacted. In parallel, Trump has undermined alliances with NATO and

¹³ Sanstuti Nath, "US Sanctions 4 India-Based Firms, 3 Indians to Punish Tehran", August 26, 2026, <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/us-sanctions-4-india-based-firms-3-indians-to-punish-iran-11959307>

¹⁴ US Sanctions Sever Financial Lifelines of Iranian Regime, August 28, 2026, <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2026/08/u-s-sanctions-sever-financial-lifelines-of-iranian-regime/>

South Korea, and permanently changed the economic and security calculus for Gulf nations. How soon the impact will be felt in the Indo-Pacific remains to be seen.

Revolutionary Iran has proved the *bête noire* of more than one American president. Jimmy Carter tried to rescue American hostages in Tehran through Operation Eagle Claw. He failed and remained a one-term US president thereafter. Ronald Reagan successfully oversaw Operation Praying Mantis (the US retaliation following the near loss of USS Samuel B Roberts to an Iranian mine in April 1988), but was adversely impacted by the Iran-Contra scandal¹⁵. Barack Obama avoided the military operation and negotiated the 2015 Iran nuclear deal that Trump disowned on taking over. Trump's maximum pressure on Iran campaign of his first presidency also failed. Will history be repeat itself and leave Trump facing the political costs of a strategic failure in Iran?

Koizumi Advances Defence Cooperation with India and Australia

The visit of Japan's Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi to Australia (August 17-18) and India (August 19-20) comes at a time when Japan is changing its defence policy. The war in Iran has laid bare the US inability to wield decisive force in a regional conflict, adding impetus to Japan's security preparations. Depletion of critical strike and air defence missiles during the Iran War and the visible shortfall in the US defence industrial base combine with President Trump's strategic incoherence and outreach to China to exacerbate doubt about whether the US has the ability and intent to honour its alliance commitments.

Japan faces assertion from China, Russia and North Korea, as well as the rise of numerous non-traditional threats to sea lane security. Responding to the changing geopolitical environment, Japan has adopted a three-pronged strategy to address security concerns: strengthening its own military and industrial capability; doubling down on the alliance with the US; and enhancing security partnerships for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) with like-minded countries¹⁶. Koizumi's visits to Australia

¹⁵ Contravention of the US embargo on arms transfer to Iran by secretly trafficking arms to fund toppling of Nicaragua's Sandinista government by Contra militants after Congress had prohibited appropriations for this purpose.

¹⁶ For an overview, see Lalit Kapur, "Japan's 2026 Defense White Paper", DPG Policy Brief Volume XI, Issue 22, August 10, 2026, https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/storage/uploads/publications_file/publication_DPG%20Policy_Brief_XI_Issue_22.pdf

and India were part of the third prong. They followed in the wake of Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's visit to Australia¹⁷ in May and to India in July¹⁸.

Koizumi's interactions with his Australian counterpart have been frequent: he met Marles on the sidelines of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting in November 2025¹⁹, bilaterally in Tokyo in December 2025²⁰, on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference in February 2026²¹, in Tokyo on April 08 under the bilateral framework for strategic defence coordination²², on board JS Kumano in Melbourne on April 18 to conclude the contract for Mogami class frigates²³, in Singapore on the sidelines of the IISS Shangri-La Dialogue on May 30²⁴, and in Canberra on August 18²⁵. On the other hand, this was the first time Koizumi met his Indian counterpart face-to-face. The difference indicates the different strategic priority Japan accords to defence relationships. Australia has become a quasi-ally, while India remains a partner in sea lane security.

The Australia-Japan Ministerial Statement on enhancing bilateral defence cooperation spoke of their operationalising the partnership to meet the challenges of a deteriorating security environment²⁶. It recognised the countries as being vital to each other's strategic depth and the substantial progress across five vital areas of defence cooperation. First was expanded information and intelligence cooperation. Second came Australia's general purpose frigate programme, for which the two had signed the deal for building upgraded Mogami-class frigates: Japan looked forward to delivering the first in 2029, and to establish associated sustainment and shipbuilding facilities in Australia. Third was co-development of technology: Australia's Defence Science and Technology Group (DSTG), Mitsubishi Electric Australia and Mitsubishi

¹⁷ See Lalit Kapur, "The Takaichi Visits to Vietnam and Australia", DPG Indo-Pacific Monitor Vol. VII, Issue 5, May 2026, https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/storage/uploads/publications_file/publication_Indo-Pacific%20Monitor-%20Vol%20VII,%20Issue%205.pdf

¹⁸ See Lalit Kapur, "Japan in India's Defence and Maritime Security Calculus, DPG Indo-Pacific Monitor Vol. VII, Issue 7, July 2026, https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/storage/uploads/publications_file/publication_Indo-Pacific%20Monitor-%20Vol%20VII,%20Issue%207.pdf

¹⁹ Japan-Australia Defense Ministerial Meeting (Summary), November 3, 2025, <https://www.mod.go.jp/en/article/2025/11/31d47317cc02c407d09a19b02a6628b4fdc31d37.html>

²⁰ Japan-Australia Defense Ministers' Joint Statement – Establishment of the Framework for Strategic Defence Coordination, December 07, 2025, <https://www.mod.go.jp/en/article/2025/12/4a6843fe4d8bed039b91bf377acce507cfe64bc.html>

²¹ Japan-Australia Defense Ministerial Meeting (Summary), February 14, 2026, <https://www.mod.go.jp/en/article/2026/02/b0bf28b047416fef0cee38ce08a002cbb40a1898.html>

²² Japan-Australia Defense Ministerial Meeting (Summary), April 08, 2026, <https://www.mod.go.jp/en/article/2026/04/cc71509252765c06a6f2b11d925f9b6afefcbcfdf.html>

²³ Japan-Australia Defense Ministerial Meeting (Summary), April 18, 2026, <https://www.mod.go.jp/en/article/2026/04/2ed377d44fe90c5d148a170e6b44b064be03f611.html>

²⁴ Japan-Australia-New Zealand Trilateral Defence Ministers' Meeting, May 30, 2026, <https://www.mod.go.jp/en/article/2026/05/2e70eb25f46a97ed06aaa258fc55eed062a309a1.html>

²⁵ Minister of Defence Koizumi's Visit to Australia (Summary), <https://www.mod.go.jp/en/article/2026/08/07a8dd6e7db8e3f8418c494f919a4fdcf9142608.html>

²⁶ Ministerial statement on enhancing Australia-Japan defence cooperation, Canberra, Australia, August 18, 2026, <https://www.mod.go.jp/en/article/2026/08/3b59625cce400f2b292741059785a188d789bb07.html>

Electric Corporation came together in September 2023 to marry Australia's laser research and Japan's advanced commercial electronic and optics technology to create a hi-energy laser to detect and track fast-moving targets in the air or water (there are no reports that the laser is intended to destroy such targets). The statement recorded that field trials of the Boobook laser had successfully been conducted in Australia in August 2026. Fourth was using Australia's testing ranges for the development of Japan's next-generation, long-range precision strike assets and autonomous capabilities, including the hypersonic missile program. Fifth was increased participation in each other's exercises, leveraging their reciprocal access agreement. The statement also emphasised the importance of deepening practical cooperation with the US, as well as working with regional partners including India, Indonesia, New Zealand, the Philippines, South Korea and ASEAN to uphold FOIP.

The India-Japan Ministerial Statement reaffirmed the commitment of the two countries to deepen defence cooperation to realise FOIP²⁷. The ministers concurred on the importance of sharing assessments of the regional and international security environment. They also concurred on deepening maritime security cooperation and signed a bilateral memorandum of arrangement in this regard. The content of the memorandum was not shared with the public, though the media statement indicates that it encompasses information sharing in the field of Maritime Domain Awareness as well as enhanced cooperation in Search and Rescue and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief. The ministers affirmed that they would strengthen coordination for the protection of sea lanes of communication, including through port visits by warships, joint exercises, expert exchanges and logistical support including use of port, maintenance and repair facilities. They shared the view that both sides should maximise synergy to enhance mine countermeasure capability and explore the possibility of joint development in naval shipbuilding. They discussed Japan's use of India's production capabilities under the 'Make in India' framework, as well as reciprocal provision of ship repair facilities. They welcomed the steady expansion and deepening of bilateral exercises, including the forthcoming Exercise Veer Guardian 2026 which will see Japan Air Self Defence Force aircraft coming to India for the first time. They concurred on promoting exchanges between their Special Operations Forces. They committed to working together for early realisation of the NOMURA antenna project, and concurred on the establishment of a working group, headed at the Director-General / Joint Secretary level, to coordinate cooperation in an integrated manner across the operational, intelligence, equipment, technology and industrial domains.

²⁷ India-Japan Joint Press Statement, August 20, 2026, <https://www.mod.go.jp/en/article/2026/08/d53ab5504adee3c85a14df37a5b7e3108fa885e8.html>

Security cooperation between Japan and Australia began in 2007, focused then on countering transnational crime and terrorism, maritime and aviation security, and exchange of strategic assessments²⁸. Japan and Australia upgraded their relationship to a special strategic partnership and signed an agreement on transfer of defence equipment and technology in 2014²⁹. The exponential growth of China's military capabilities and assertion, particularly after 2012, changed the focus of defence cooperation to preservation of the existing rules-based order, maintenance of a favourable strategic balance to deter aggression and coercive behaviour, and an open, stable and secure maritime domain underpinned by adherence to international law³⁰. Cooperation has advanced significantly, encompassing information sharing, military exchanges including port visits, joint exercises in the Western Pacific and reciprocal access agreements. Of particular significance is cooperation in defence equipment and technology, through the Mogami frigate deal, the equipping of this frigate with a Japanese passive sonar system³¹, and co-development of the Boobook laser.

India-Japan defence cooperation formally began with the 2008 Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation³². The focal area was information exchange, combating transnational crime and terrorism, disaster management and cooperation between coastguards. India and Japan elevated bilateral relations to a special strategic and global partnership and concluded their agreement on the transfer of defence equipment and technology in 2015³³. Defence engagement was expanded to cooperation to advance FOIP and national security and economic dynamism in 2025³⁴. Bilateral defence cooperation has grown since then, across information sharing, military exchanges, bilateral and multilateral exercises³⁵. The one area that has lagged is defence equipment and technology cooperation, with past attempts to develop

²⁸ Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation, March 13, 2007, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/australia/joint0703.html>

²⁹ Joint Statement with Prime Minister Abi - Special Strategic Partnership for the 21st Century, July 08, 2014, <https://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-23633>

³⁰ Australia-Japan Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation, October 22, 2022, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/countries/japan/australia-japan-joint-declaration-security-cooperation>

³¹ Japan's OKI Electric Industry will supply the towed passive sonar for the first three Mogami-class frigates, "OKI signs Supply contract with Mitsubishi heavy Industries for Towed Passive Sonar for Australia's New General-Purpose Frigates, July 28, 2026, <https://www.oki.com/global/press/2026/z26026e.html>

³² Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation between India and Japan, October 22, 2008, <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/5408/>

³³ Joint Statement on India and Japan Vision 2025: Special Strategic and Global Partnership Working together for Peace and Prosperity of the Indo-Pacific Region and the World, December 12, 2015, [https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/26176/Joint Statement on India and Japan Vision 2025 Special Strategic and Global Partnership Working Together for Peace and Prosperity of the Indo-Pacific R](https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/26176/Joint%20Statement%20on%20India%20and%20Japan%20Vision%202025%20Special%20Strategic%20and%20Global%20Partnership%20Working%20Together%20for%20Peace%20and%20Prosperity%20of%20the%20Indo-Pacific%20Region%20and%20the%20World)

³⁴ Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation between India and Japan, August 29, 2025, [https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/40065/Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation between India and Japan August 29 2025](https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/40065/Joint%20Declaration%20on%20Security%20Cooperation%20between%20India%20and%20Japan%20August%2029%202025)

³⁵ For an overview, see Lalit Kapur, "Japan in India's Defence and Maritime Security Calculus", Indo-Pacific Monitor July 2026, Volume VII Issue 7, https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/storage/uploads/publications_file/publication_Indo-Pacific%20Monitor-%20Vol%20VII,%20Issue%207.pdf

unmanned ground vehicles and robotics, as well as export the Shinmaywa US2 amphibian to India no more heard of. The NOMURA antenna project involving Bharat Electronics Limited and a Japanese consortium led by NEC Corporation, intended to co-develop and fit the UNICORN stealth radome mast on future warships of the Indian Navy, is the first co-development and technology transfer project to receive formal approval.

Japan's defence industry has historically been high cost, producing low volumes exclusively for the JSDF, with self-imposed bans hindering export of even dual use items. Attempts to export the Shinmaywa US2 amphibian aircraft to India and the Soryu submarine to Australia failed due to a mix of high costs and fierce international competition. The Takaichi government has now reformed policy permitting export of even lethal weapons to countries that have defence equipment and technology transfer agreements with Japan³⁶. The intention is to enhance regional capability and deterrence, and to advance security ties with like-minded countries; revitalise defence industry, scale up manufacturing and lower unit costs, making the industry more competitive; and to enable exports of joint defence projects, such as the GCAP fighter programme and the Mogami-class frigate (potential customers include New Zealand and Indonesia). The changed policy provides an opportunity India can exploit, both for co-development and co-production of defence equipment.

The India-Japan ministerial statement provides indicators of the future areas of industrial cooperation³⁷. The mention of maximising synergies to enhance mine countermeasures (MCM) capabilities is significant, given that India has no MCM capability today and its urgent need has been shown up in the Strait of Hormuz. Similarly, the mention of joint development in naval shipbuilding and design: while media speculation has focused largely on the Mogami-class frigate, a better prospect for India would learning from Japan's experience in building the larger Maya-class destroyer or the Aegis System Equipped Vessel. The size of the latter is commensurate with the size of the Indian Navy's planned Project 18 next-generation destroyers. Cooperation could also stretch to improving the production efficiency of India's public-sector shipyards: it took over seven years to build the Visakhapatnam-class destroyers; Japanese shipyards produce comparable ships in less than half the time. Other areas where Japan and India could work together include domain awareness, underwater sensors and weapons, counter-UAV technology using directed energy weapons, precision strike weapons, propulsion technology, and Ballistic Missile Defence Systems.

³⁶ Japan's Security Policy: Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology, June 24, 2026, https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page1we_000083.html

³⁷ India-Japan Joint Press Statement, August 20, 2026, <https://www.mod.go.jp/en/article/2026/08/d53ab5504adee3c85a14df37a5b7e3108fa885e8.html>

Defence cooperation between India and Japan, as well as between Japan and Australia has advanced considerably over the last decade. It is, however, technology and equipment cooperation that offers the greatest potential for effective deliverance of the FOIP objective of enhanced security cooperation to ensure regional peace and stability. An encouraging start has been made towards this objective. Much will depend on completion of the projects that have been initiated, and the identification of others than can enhance mutual capability.

The Mecca Agreement

Leaders of Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Pakistan met in Mecca on August 07 for the Makkah Al-Mukarramah Summit for Joint Defence. They signed the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement, intended to strengthen their collective security and promote defence cooperation in pursuit of a secure and prosperous future. They declared that the agreement was to strengthen collective deterrence against aggression, and that any armed attack against one of the three states would be regarded as an attack against all³⁸. They did not, however, identify any potential adversary. The situation was clouded by media reports indicating that Iran had been invited to join³⁹, although there was no official confirmation. The text of the agreement was not released to the public.

Turkey's foreign minister said that efforts to finalise the agreement had been ongoing for the last two years and eight months⁴⁰. Briefing the press a week later, Turkey's defence ministry spokesperson said the agreement was defensive, but did not identify any common enemy or adversary⁴¹. He specified three areas of cooperation: strategic political and military dialogue involving defence and foreign ministers, chiefs of general staff and armed forces commanders to ensure coordination at the apex level; military cooperation through exercises eventually involving land, naval, air, air defence and unmanned systems; and defence industry cooperation encompassing joint development and production, technological cooperation and sustainable maintenance and logistics support. The General Secretariat of the alliance is to be

³⁸ Makkah Al-Mukarramah Summit for Joint Defence, August 07, 2026, <https://www.spa.gov.sa/en/N2649227>

³⁹ Iran invited to join Mecca pact by Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Pakistan: Report, August 24, 2026, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/middle-east/iran-invited-to-join-mecca-pact-by-saudi-arabia-turkey-pakistan-report/articleshow/133446770.cms>

⁴⁰ Turkey, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia defence pact technically same as NATO's Article 5, Turkish minister says, August 09, 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/turkey-pakistan-saudi-arabia-defence-pact-technically-same-natos-article-5-2026-08-08/>

⁴¹ Türkiye-Pakistan-Saudi Arabia defense pact aims to boost joint military capabilities: Defense Ministry, August 13, 2026, <https://aa.com.tr/en/turkiye/turkiye-pakistan-saudi-arabia-defense-pact-aims-to-boost-joint-military-capabilities-defense-ministry/4026201>

established in Saudi Arabia. Foreign and Defence Ministers and Chiefs of Staff of the three countries were scheduled to meet in Istanbul on August 31 for the first committee meeting after the pact was announced⁴².

The agreement comes in the backdrop of growing disillusionment with the security umbrella provided by the US to the Arabian Peninsula. Concern began when the US announced its pivot, subsequently rebranded as rebalance, to Asia under Obama. Biden's subsequent urge to punish Saudi Arabia for the murder of Jamal Khashoggi proved short-lived⁴³. US action in responding to Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia was limited to intelligence sharing and political condemnation. The failure of US-led Operation Prosperity Guardian to deter/defeat Houthi attacks in the Red Sea added to the disquiet. Concern came to a head following the strategic inability of the US-Israeli war to subdue Iran. The initial US focus on eliminating Iran's nuclear ambitions, its missile capabilities and its support for regional proxies has receded into the background; while US infrastructure supporting its military presence in the Gulf has been severely damaged and there is doubt about whether it will ever be rebuilt. Iran is determined not to allow the US military back into the Gulf. US attention is currently focused on reopening the Strait of Hormuz and finding a face-saving way to end a conflict that has become a politically unpopular quagmire, which may result in the US withdrawing from the Gulf.

The Mecca Agreement envisages what some have described as a Sunni Islamic hedge against US unreliability (although reports indicate that Iran is seen as a future member), bringing together a NATO member (Turkey), a US security dependency (Saudi Arabia) and a state having exceptionally close relations with China (Pakistan) to develop a regional security system. It provides member states the potential to develop a strategic response to regional events independent of the US. These states lack the highly developed intelligence capability the US has, or its advanced technology, or strike capability. But they do have Saudi Arabia's financial muscle, energy wealth and central geographic location astride the strategically vital Red Sea and Persian Gulf maritime corridors; Turkey's indigenous military capability, NATO-member experience and advanced defence industry; and Pakistan's large military manpower, its nuclear capability and its long experience of using cross-border terrorism to target adversaries. The Mecca Agreement follows the Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement signed by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia in September 2025, as well as the creation of the 14-nation Islamic multinational maritime defence alliance to

⁴² Top officials from Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan to meet in Istanbul, August 30, 2026, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/8/30/top-officials-from-turkiye-saudi-arabia-pakistan-to-meet-in-istanbul>

⁴³ See Lalit Kapur, "Biden's Middle East Visit", DPG Indo-Pacific Monitor, Volume III, Issue 7, July 2022, https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/storage/uploads/publications_file/indo-pacific-monitor-4099.pdf

protect the Red Sea in July 2026⁴⁴. The founding members are hopeful that other regional partners, particularly Egypt and Qatar, will join them. Bangladesh is reported to have evinced interest in joining⁴⁵. Notably, the UAE and Bahrain, both signatories to the Abraham Accords, have remained aloof. So have Kuwait and Oman.

The three allies make for difficult bedfellows. Although Saudi Arabia has long depended on Pakistani troops for security purposes, Pakistan refused to participate in the nine-member Saudi-led coalition that intervened in Yemen in 2015. It shares a 909 Km long border with Iran and has historically maintained a neutral diplomatic stance in the Riyadh-Tehran rivalry. It has not appreciated Saudi Arabia's growing economic and strategic ties with New Delhi, making India one of Riyadh's largest trading partners. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia's ties with Turkey have been fraught, given Ankara's support for political Islamist groups and the Muslim Brotherhood (which Saudi Arabia sees as an existential threat), Turkey's accusations in the 2018 murder of Jamal Khashoggi, competition for leadership of the Islamic world, and Turkey's backing of Qatar during the Saudi blockade of the country. Moreover, Turkey shares a 499 Km border with Iran and will not lightly go up against its ideologically extreme neighbour.

Islam has historically not proved sufficient binding force for regional alliances to succeed. The Baghdad Pact of 1955, involving the UK, Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Pakistan, collapsed when Iraq withdrew in 1959. Its successor, CENTO, ended when Iran withdrew in 1979. The Gulf Cooperation Council and its military arm the Peninsula Shield Force have been hamstrung by political differences, inadequate force levels and capability gaps. Given this experience, taking the three-nation structure beyond solidarity into effectiveness will require the overcoming of political rivalries, vast differences in developmental status as well as in technological as well as industrial capability. Moreover, unlike NATO, where a common adversary provides the foundation, allies under the Mecca Agreement have not been able to define who they intend to deter. This creates difficulties when it comes to developing institutional structures encompassing the political, military, intelligence, surveillance, presence, industry and interoperability domains.

US President Donald Trump has welcomed the Mecca Agreement as big, bold and important first step in the Middle East coming together and countries defending

⁴⁴ Founding States Issue Joint Declaration on Establishing Multinational Maritime Defense Alliance, July 30, 2026, <https://www.spa.gov.sa/en/N2644911>

⁴⁵ Ruma Paul, "Bangladesh could consider joining Mecca pact, in test for foreign ties", August 25, 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/bangladesh-could-consider-joining-mecca-pact-test-foreign-ties-2026-08-25/>

themselves in a more meaningful way⁴⁶. China has not officially commented on the Agreement; Chinese media analysts view it as a statement of intent in response to declining US hegemony and a pragmatic shift towards regional strategic autonomy. Israel too has not commented officially; its strategic community has expressed concern about Saudi Arabia seeking an independent regional security framework rather than pursuing normalisation of relations through the Abraham Accords⁴⁷. Iran's reaction has been mixed: while the Foreign Minister has welcomed the agreement and called for regional countries to rely on their own capabilities (it has long been an Iranian goal to get the US to pull out from the Gulf), hard-line Iranian elements have warned the alliance that any action against regional resistance groups would trigger a direct battlefield response rather than a diplomatic one⁴⁸. India's response has been that it is carefully evaluating the implications of the collective-security framework on its national security and regional stability.

The Agreement doesn't mean that Saudi Arabia has given up on the US for its hard security challenges. Far from it: the agreement is presently something between a vision and a mirage, with much to be done before it can become effective. It is essentially a statement of intent. It is easy to say that an armed attack against one of the three states will be regarded as an attack against all. Operationalising a defensive alliance to make this statement a reality is, however, another ball game, and will be a long and difficult process. Can a regional deterrence become effective? There is no denying the need for it, given US unreliability and the inadequate capacity of European forces. Nor is there any other potential partner who could provide the requisite deterrence on the horizon. Even though Islam by itself doesn't provide sufficient binding force, as has been proven by past experience, Saudi Arabia has little option but to explore new arrangements. How effective these will be remains to be seen.

Vietnam Australia Relations Advance

Since he came to power, Vietnam's General Secretary of the Communist Party and President To Lam has invested considerably in advancing his country's external relations. In the last two years, Viet Nam has more than doubled its comprehensive strategic partners, from China, Russia, India, South Korea, Japan and Australia before he took charge, to include France, Malaysia, New Zealand, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, UK and the EU. Vietnam has emerged as the country with the largest trade

⁴⁶ Truth Details, @realDonaldTrump Trump, August 17, 2026, <https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/117107211893196124>

⁴⁷ Yoni Ben Menachem, "Israel Fears Saudi-Turkish-Pakistani Pact Could Reshape the Middle East", August 18, 2026, <https://jcfa.org/israel-fears-saudi-turkish-pakistani-pact-could-reshape-the-middle-east/>

⁴⁸ Iran lawmaker warns of response to attacks from Mecca Pact members, August 11, 2026, <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202608117041>

surplus with the US, exceeding \$114 billion⁴⁹, under his leadership. To Lam's visit to Australia from August 09-12 continued his focus on Vietnam's external relations. Australia became a strategic partner in September 2009 and Vietnam's seventh comprehensive strategic partner in March 2024⁵⁰.

The Joint Statement of the visit⁵¹ stands on the same six pillars as the upgraded comprehensive strategic partnership agreement in 2024 - Political, Defence, Security and Justice Cooperation; Economic Engagement; People and Knowledge; Climate, Environment and Energy; Science, Technology, Innovation and Digital Transformation; Regional and International Cooperation. It signals continued intent to strengthen relations, but with limited delivery on ground.

The leaders concurred on reinforcing the political foundation of the relationship by increasing dialogue at all levels and further deepening defence and security ties. An updated joint vision statement was issued to guide further defence cooperation⁵², setting out 10 principles but limiting engagement to increased dialogue, capacity building, information sharing, participation in multilateral exercises, military education and training and peacekeeping cooperation. Vietnam has begun participating in Australia's multinational exercises, including KAKADU and TALISMAN SABRE. Law enforcement cooperation has begun, with joint counter-transnational crime initiatives and successful extradition of fugitives. Capacity building is limited to areas like English language and other specialised courses, military medicine etc.; it does not extend to the supply of military equipment, defence industry or research cooperation. Structural constraints, including Vietnam's "Four Nos" defence policy (no military alliances, no foreign military bases, no taking one country's side against another, and no use of force in international relations) prevent defence cooperation from going beyond the limited areas set out above.

On the economic front, two way trade between the partners has doubled since 2020, standing now at \$ 16 billion (A\$ 30 billion). Australia's ODA to Vietnam has averaged around A\$ 100 million over the last three years, making Australia one of the top five

⁴⁹ Stu Woo, "The Country That has the Biggest Trade Surplus With the US Is Now ... Vietnam", August 26, 2026, <https://www.wsj.com/world/the-country-that-has-the-biggest-trade-surplus-with-the-u-s-is-now-vietnam-0169b5cd>

⁵⁰ Joint Statement on the elevation to a comprehensive strategic partnership between Vietnam and Australia, March 07, 2024, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/joint-statement-elevation-comprehensive-strategic-partnership-between-vietnam-and-australia>

⁵¹ Joint statement on deepening the comprehensive strategic partnership between Vietnam and Australia, August 11, 2026, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/joint-statement-deepening-comprehensive-strategic-partnership-between-vietnam-and-australia>

⁵² 2026 Updated Joint Vision Statement on Further Defence Cooperation Between the Department of Defence of Australia and the Ministry of National Defence of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, August 12, 2026, <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/statements/2026-08-12/2026-updated-joint-vision-statement-further-defence-cooperation-between-department-defence-australia-ministry-national-defence-socialist-republic-vietnam>

aid donors to Vietnam and constituting 1.9% of Australia's ODA budget⁵³. The two countries do not have a bilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA), but are part of three multilateral FTAs: the ASEAN Australia New Zealand Free Trade Area, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Australia's main exports to Vietnam are raw material (coal, iron ore, wheat, cotton) and education-related travel, while its main imports are recreational travel, telecom equipment, crude petroleum footwear and computers and accessories. The leaders set a modest target of increasing bilateral trade to \$ 20 billion⁵⁴. They agreed to strengthen economic resilience cooperation and issued a joint statement in this regard⁵⁵. Both countries committed to working together to support transparent, diversified, secure, sustainable, trustworthy, reliable, economically efficient and resilient supply chains in areas such as critical minerals, semiconductors and clean energy, and agreed that cooperation would include the flow of essential goods, including grid infrastructure, agricultural and agri-food essentials, and key agricultural inputs such as urea.

The leaders welcomed deepening cooperation in science, technology and innovation. A joint statement was issued on this subject⁵⁶. In regional and international cooperation, both countries reaffirmed their commitment to a peaceful, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific that is inclusive, resilient and free from coercion, where sovereignty is respected and competition is responsibly managed. Both sides reiterated their concern about the situation in the South China Sea and re-emphasised the importance of upholding peace, security, stability, freedom of navigation and overflight, unimpeded lawful commerce, respect for legal and diplomatic processes and peaceful resolution of disputes, without resorting to the threat or use of force, in accordance with international law, particularly the 1982 UNCLOS. They noted that any Code of Conduct on the South China Sea must be effective, substantive, in accordance with international law, particularly the UNCLOS, and not affect the enjoyment of the rights of any state under international law. A notable addition to the joint statement was the critical role that straits used for international navigation and sea lanes of communication play to global trade and economic security. This becomes particularly relevant not just because of the ongoing blockage of the Strait of Hormuz,

⁵³ Development Cooperation Factsheet: Vietnam, May 2026, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/development-cooperation-fact-sheet-vietnam.pdf>

⁵⁴ Top Vietnamese leader holds talks with Australian PM, August 11, 2026, <https://mofa.gov.vn/en/web/ministry-of-foreign-affairs/detail/chi-tiet/top-vietnamese-leader-holds-talks-with-australian-pm-61466-177.html>

⁵⁵ Joint statement on economic resilience cooperation between Viet Nam and Australia, August 11, 2026, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/joint-statement-economic-resilience-cooperation-between-viet-nam-and-australia>

⁵⁶ Joint statement on the enhancement of science, technology and innovation connectivity between Australia and Viet Nam, August 11, 2026, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/joint-statement-enhancement-science-technology-and-innovation-connectivity-between-australia>

but also due to the June 2026 article by the Indonesian Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs describing sea denial as leverage waiting to be seized⁵⁷, and the response to it⁵⁸.

Vietnam is China's immediate neighbour and while its land border dispute has been resolved, both countries claim overlapping territories in the Spratly and Paracel Islands – in fact, China is presently building an airstrip in the disputed Antelope Reef⁵⁹. However, Vietnam remains wary of taking any action that could antagonise China, including developing external relationships that could be perceived as anti-China. This limits what it will do with Australia, and indeed other strategic partners. Irritants in the Australia-Vietnam relationship include concern about human rights and political freedoms in Vietnam, recently introduced Australian constraints on visas, and Vietnam's strong focus on ASEAN for regional diplomacy. In sum, while Australia's bilateral relationship with Vietnam can be expected to continue to grow, its ability to influence regional geo-strategic or geo-economic dynamics will remain limited.

Other Indo-Pacific Developments

Saudi Arabia Launches Multinational Maritime Defence Alliance. Saudi Arabia had announced the creation of a 14-nation maritime coalition led by it to safeguard freedom of navigation through the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb, Red Sea and Gulf of Aden at the end of July 2026⁶⁰. The coalition comprises seven countries bordering the Red Sea (Somalia, Djibouti, Sudan, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Yemen), three other GCC countries (Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar, the UAE and Oman did not join), and four extra-regional Islamic countries (Türkiye, Pakistan, Bangladesh and the Comoros). R Adm Abdullah bin Salem Al-Shehri of Saudi Arabia was appointed Commander of the coalition⁶¹; an officer from Pakistan was to be announced as Deputy Commander. The stated mission is to protect commercial shipping, international trade and energy supply pipelines through intelligence sharing and coordinated patrols. The first planners meeting was held on August 12⁶². It may be noted that EU Operation Aspides has been operating in the same area with a similar mission since February 2024⁶³. How successful this coalition of states with limited maritime capacity will be,

⁵⁷ Arif Haval Oegroseno, "The Sea Denial Trap: Why the Age of Unrestricted Sea Power is Ending", June 22, 2026, <https://rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/the-sea-denial-trap-why-the-age-of-unrestricted-sea-power-is-ending/>

⁵⁸ Robert C Beckman and Tommy Koh, "A Response to Arif Haval Oegroseno", June 26, 2026, <https://rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/a-response-to-arif-havas-oegroseno/>

⁵⁹ Is a New Chinese Runway Taking Flight at Antelope Reef, August 14, 2026, <https://amti.csis.org/is-a-new-chinese-runway-taking-flight-at-antelope-reef/>

⁶⁰ Founding States Issue Joint Declaration on Establishing Multinational Maritime Defense Alliance, July 30, 2026, <https://www.spa.gov.sa/en/N2644911>

⁶¹ Saudi Arabia names commander for maritime defence coalition, August 06, 2026, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/8/6/saudi-arabia-names-commander-for-maritime-defence-coalition>

⁶² Analysis: Saudi Arabia's new maritime coalition put to test, August 12, 2026, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2654449/middle-east>

⁶³ EUNAVFOR Operation Aspides, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eunavfor-operation-aspides_en?s=410381

given the failures of both US Operation Prosperity Guardian and EU Operation Aspides to make a difference remains to be seen.

Trump Curtails Exercises with South Korea. As the annual US Republic of Korea Exercise Ulchi Freedom Shield commenced, US President Donald Trump instructed Secretary of War Pete Hegseth to substantially reduce the Joint Military Exercise⁶⁴. His rationale was that these exercises are not only costly (with much of the cost paid by the US), but also send a signal that is totally inappropriate and hostile to a country that has, during his presidency, “been unthreatening and respectful”. Another reason was South Korea’s refusal to join the US in the denuclearisation of Iran. The 2026 edition of the exercise was scheduled to run from August 17-27, but ended on August 21⁶⁵. South Korea also announced that the US had cancelled a joint amphibious landing exercise scheduled for September 2026 due to resource constraints following the Iran war⁶⁶. Trump’s description of North Korea as respectful discounts Kim Jong Un’s describing him as a “mentally deranged dotard”⁶⁷, while the ‘unthreatening’ description forgets the more than 24 ballistic missile tests conducted by North Korea during Trump’s second term, its despatch of over 14,000 troops to fight in Ukraine as well as the assistance provided by North Korea to Iran’s missile programme. Trump’s directions are seen as an attempt to entice Kim Jong Un into another summit this year. They will add to the unease about the reliability of US extended deterrence and the pressure for Japan and South Korea to go nuclear; as it is South Korea has already started on construction of nuclear-propelled submarines and an opinion poll indicated over 80% support for the country to exercise a nuclear option⁶⁸.

Thailand Australia Summit. Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul met Australia Prime Minister Anthony Albanese in Canberra on August 19 for a Thailand-Australia summit, the first visit by a Thai leader to Australia in 14 years. The two countries are strategic partners since 2020 and have a bilateral free trade agreement, in addition to the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand FTA and the RCEP agreement. The leaders signed a joint statement on deepening economic engagement⁶⁹, as well as a joint

⁶⁴ Truth Details, @realDonaldTrump Trump, August 17, 2026, <https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/117107215379637520>

⁶⁵ Hyung-Jin Kim, “US, South Korean militaries wrap up drill early, a day after North Korea’s missile barrage”, August 21, 2026, <https://apnews.com/article/north-south-korea-us-drills-trump-kim-e0350e23feac60adfa60f2cbf5eff27f>

⁶⁶ Choe Sang-Hun, “US Marines Cancel Drill With South Korea, Citing Iran War Demands”, August 24, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/08/24/world/asia/us-south-korea-military-drills-iran.html>

⁶⁷ Mahita Gajanan, “Kim Jong Un Called President Trump a ‘Dotard’. What Does That Mean?”, September 22, 2017, <https://time.com/4952750/kim-jong-un-donald-trump-dotard-north-korea/>

⁶⁸ 2026 Asan Annual Poll: South Koreans and Their Neighbours 2”, 09 April 2026, https://www.asaninst.org/bbs/board.php?bo_table=s3_4_2_eng&wr_id=106

⁶⁹ Joint statement on deepening economic engagement between Australia and Thailand, August 19, 2026, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/joint-statement-economic-engagement-between-australia-and-thailand>

statement on transnational crime⁷⁰. They also formalised a new biennial defence ministers' meeting to ensure regular security dialogue and agreed to work more closely together on science, research and innovation to drive economic growth.

China Indonesia Foreign and Defence Ministerial 2+2 Dialogue. The second meeting of the China-Indonesia Foreign and Defence Ministerial Dialogue took place in Jakarta on August 21⁷¹. This is the first 2+2 mechanism China has established globally. The ministers exchanged views on international and regional security issues of common concern. They agreed to strengthen law enforcement and security cooperation, including cracking down on transnational crime and pursuing fugitives and recovering illicit assets, and to support participation in international efforts to combat telecommunications fraud. They also agreed to implement maritime security cooperation documents and safeguard the safety of and unimpeded access to key shipping lanes. Indonesia maintains a non-aligned position and cooperates with all stakeholders in the region.

Australia-Indonesia Foreign and Defence Ministers' Meeting. The 10th Australia Indonesia Foreign and Defence Ministers' 2+2 Meeting took place in Melbourne on August 26. It followed in the wake of the Australia-Indonesia defence cooperation agreement of August 2024⁷², setting out the framework for bilateral defence dialogue, training cooperation and exercises, and cooperation in defence technology and industry, as well as the Jakarta Treaty of February 2026⁷³, committing the two sides to regular consultations at leader and ministerial levels on security cooperation, as well as consultation in the event of adverse challenges to their common security interests. The 2+2 Meeting looked forward to both countries completing their domestic processes to bring the Jakarta Treaty into force and welcomed Australia's commitment of AUD 33.2 million to support its implementation and institutionalisation⁷⁴. Ministers reviewed several initiatives to build economic resilience and prosperity, actions to enhance common security, and efforts to build an open, transparent, resilient, inclusive, and rules-based regional architecture that upholds international law, with ASEAN at the centre. Australia-Indonesia cooperation has come a long way in the last decade, encompassing a comprehensive forward looking partnership

⁷⁰ Joint Statement on Transnational Crime Between Australia and Thailand, August 19, 2026, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/joint-statement-transnational-crime-between-australia-and-thailand>

⁷¹ China and Indonesia hold 2nd Ministerial Meeting of China-Indonesia Joint Foreign and Defence Dialogue, August 21, 2026, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/wjbzhd/202608/t20260823_12008661.html

⁷² Agreement between the Government of Australia and the Government of the Republic of Indonesia on Cooperation in the Field of Defence, August 29, 2024, https://www.apf.gov.au/-/media/02_Parliamentary_Business/24_Committees/244_Joint_Committees/JSCT/2024/Indonesian_Defence/Treaty_-_Australia_Indonesia_Defence_Cooperation.pdf

⁷³ Australia-Indonesia Treaty on Common Security, February 06, 2026, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/countries/indonesia/australia-indonesia-treaty-common-security>

⁷⁴ Joint Statement on the Tenth Australia-Indonesia Foreign and Defence Ministers' 2+2 Meeting, August 29, 2026, <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/statements/2026-08-29/joint-statement-tenth-australia-indonesia-foreign-defence-ministers-22-meeting>

underpinned by treaties and concrete plans, deepening defence and security cooperation, measures to enhance economic security, supply chains, critical minerals, EV ecosystems and sustainable development, as well as regional cooperation.

Japan-Australia-Indonesia Defence Ministers Meeting. Defence Ministers of Japan, Australia and Indonesia met virtually for the first time on August 26 and confirmed their commitment to working together to jointly contribute to regional peace and stability, as well as to advancing trilateral defence cooperation⁷⁵. Potential areas of cooperation encompass defence dialogue, joint training and exercises, and equipment and technology cooperation. The meeting is part of Japan's efforts to go beyond bilaterals and set up minilateral defence relationships in the region.

Notification of Ballistic Missile Launches. 41 countries came together for a Joint Statement seeking at least 24 hours prior notification of ballistic missile launches on August 11⁷⁶. The statement was a response to China's SLBM launch of July 06. The US also noted that China had provided at best two hours notice to only some of the nations affected⁷⁷, and did not issue a Notice to Mariners or a Notice to Airmen identifying hazard areas. China's spokesperson said the US statement was driven solely by political motives and revealed hypocrisy and double standards⁷⁸. Notably, North Korea routinely conducts ballistic missile tests without providing advance notification to neighbouring countries or international aviation or marine organisations.

Scarborough Shoal Conflict. The Philippines deposited with the United Nations its official nautical chart notifying the international community of the normal baselines of the Scarborough Shoal, as well as the other limits of the territorial sea and contiguous zone, on July 29⁷⁹, opening a legal front in its effort to regain control over the shoal, which has been occupied by China since 2012. China immediately rejected the Philippines' chart, describing it as a grave infringement of China's territorial sovereignty and the shoal as China's inherent territory⁸⁰. China followed up by

⁷⁵ Japan-Australia-Indonesia Trilateral Defence Ministers' Telephone Call, August 26, 2026, <https://www.mod.go.jp/en/article/2026/08/501918b5cf80aaca785f019dcd7aaaa3e21793d2.html>

⁷⁶ Joint Statement on Notifications of Ballistic Missile Launches, August 11, 2026, <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2026/08/joint-statement-on-notifications-of-ballistic-missile-launches/>

⁷⁷ US National Statement on Notifications on Ballistic Missile Launches, August 11, 2026, <https://geneva.usmission.gov/2026/08/11/u-s-national-statement-on-notifications-of-ballistic-missile-launches/>

⁷⁸ Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Guo Jiakun's Remarks on August, 12, 2026, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/fyrbt/lxjzh/202608/t20260812_12002972.html

⁷⁹ Philippines deposits Bajo de Masinloc chart with UN, August 01, 2026, <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/deposit-scarborough-shoal-bajo-de-masinloc-char-united-nations/>

⁸⁰ Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China on the Delimitation of the So-Called "Baselines of the Territorial Sea" of China's Territory of Huangyan Dao by the Republic of the Philippines, July 31, 2026, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xw/wjbxw/202607/t20260731_11996509.html

conducting a joint naval-air training exercise in the Scarborough Shoal on August 01⁸¹. It also began strict enforcement of rules banning fishing, among other activities, in the shoal. The US, in turn, rejected China's attempts to enforce its destabilising "national nature reserve" at the Scarborough Shoal and deny Filipino fishermen their traditional fishing grounds⁸².

New Construction at Antelope Reef. China was reported to have begun the construction of a new runway on Antelope Reef⁸³, in the Crescent Group of the Paracel Islands. China had earlier reclaimed nearly 1500 acres of land there. Ownership of the reef is claimed by China, Taiwan and Vietnam, with China having evicted Vietnam to gain possession in 1974.

Nauru Changes Name to Naoero. Nauru, a small island country in the Southern Pacific with a population of about 11,000, officially changed its name to Naoero on August 03. The name reclaims the native spelling, which European colonisers had altered for easier pronunciation.

Colby Visit to Southeast Asia. US Under Secretary of War for Policy Elbridge Colby travelled to Southeast Asia visited the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand and Cambodia in mid-August to advance bilateral relationships in the region and confirm US commitment to build a durable peace through strength⁸⁴. Colby's message, repeated across the four countries, came out in his speech at Manila on August 10⁸⁵. The effort was to sell to the region that the US was more invested than ever in Indo-Pacific security, but with the expectation of a much greater contribution from allies and partners. He pitched this as a return to the clear-eyed Republican realism that put US concrete interests first, but in a way that aligns with the interests of partner countries. He highlighted the US return to the time-tested strategy of flexible realism, clarity about priorities, seriousness about deterrence and an understanding of the values of both forcefulness and diplomacy. He said that America was decidedly not in decline, was not disengaging from Asia, and had opened up new vistas for cooperation. It sought partnerships, not dependencies. He denigrated middle power alliances designed to exclude the US, as well as new multinational frameworks for maritime

⁸¹ PLA Southern Theatre Command conducts joint naval-air training exercise at Huangyan Dao and surrounding areas, August 01, 2026, <http://eng.mod.gov.cn/2025xb/N/T/16477210.html>

⁸² China's "Administrative Measures" at Scarborough Reef, August 08, 2026, <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2026/08/chinas-administrative-measures-at-scarborough-reef/>

⁸³ Is a New Chinese Runway Taking Flight at Antelope Reef? August 14, 2026, <https://amti.csis.org/is-a-new-chinese-runway-taking-flight-at-antelope-reef/>

⁸⁴ Under Secretary of War for Policy Elbridge Colby and Assistant Secretary of War John Noh Travel to the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand and Cambodia, August 07, 2026, <https://www.war.gov/News/Advisories/Advisory/Article/4566735/under-secretary-of-war-for-policy-elbridge-colby-and-assistant-secretary-of-war/>

⁸⁵ Remarks by Under Secretary of War for Policy Elbridge Colby at the Stratbase Institute in Manila, August 10, 2026, <https://www.war.gov/News/Speeches/Speech/Article/4566924/remarks-by-under-secretary-of-war-for-policy-elbridge-colby-at-the-stratbase-in/>

security cooperation. He identified the US priority as fielding an operational and resilient architecture of denial defence stretching across the First Island Chain. Coming at a time when the US has imposed unilateral tariffs across the region, sought a G2 with China and downgraded military exercises with South Korea, Colby's flexible realism highlighted US unpredictability.

Japan to Seek Record 8.9 trillion Yen Defence Budget for 2027. Media reports indicated that Japan's Ministry of Defence would seek a record ¥8.9 trillion (about \$ 56 billion) in its budget request for fiscal 2027, up from ¥8.85 trillion in 2026⁸⁶. In dollar terms, the amount represents 1.27% of Japan's estimated GDP of \$ 4.45 trillion in 2026⁸⁷, far short of political claims of Japan having enhanced defence spending to nearly 2% of GDP ahead of schedule. The request would be based on three pillars: preparing for new ways of warfare utilizing artificial intelligence and other technologies, ensuring sustained operational capabilities in a prolonged conflict and strengthening defence industrial bases.

China Indonesia Naval Exercise East of Taiwan. Indonesian frigate KRI I Gusti Ngurah Rai carried out a passage exercise with China's Type 054A frigate Honghe about 80 nautical miles east of Taiwan and within its EEZ on August 12⁸⁸. This was the first Chinese exercise with a foreign navy in the waters east of Taiwan; it happened just after US Under Secretary of War Elbridge Colby visited Jakarta and was projected as Indonesian endorsement of China's claim on Taiwan⁸⁹. The Indonesian ship was on the way back from Vladivostok after participating in the joint bilateral exercise Orruda 2026⁹⁰ for the first time. Taiwan condemned China's announcement of the exercise, while seeking clarification and further details from the Indonesian government⁹¹. The incident is seen as evidence of the disconnect between Indonesia's foreign and defence ministries.

India Approves National Offshore Exploration Scheme. The Union Cabinet approved 'Samudra Manthan', the National Offshore Exploration Scheme for implementation up to FY 2030-31 with an approved outlay of ₹84,084 crores (about USD 8.8 billion)⁹². The scheme seeks to enhance India's energy security by accelerating domestic

⁸⁶ Defense Ministry to seek record ¥8.9 trillion in fiscal 2027 budget, August 20, 2026, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2026/08/20/japan/japan-record-defense-budget-request/>

⁸⁷ Based on the IMF World Economic Outlook Database, April 2026

⁸⁸ China, Indonesia wrap up naval navigation exercise in waters east of Taiwan Island, August 12, 2026, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/2025xb/H_251454/L_251456/16479064.html

⁸⁹ China, Indonesia to hold exercise east of Taiwan island in mid-August, first such drill carries 'great significance', August 11, 2026, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202608/1367962.shtml>

⁹⁰ Russian, Indonesian naval ships hold joint drills in the Sea of Japan, July 30, 2026, <https://tass.com/defense/2167187>

⁹¹ MOFA response to China's unilateral announcement of joint exercises with Indonesian navy in waters off Taiwan's east coast, August 12, 2026, https://en.mofa.gov.tw/News_Content.aspx?n=1328&s=122899

⁹² Cabinet approves 'Samudra Manthan' (National Offshore Exploration Scheme) with an outlay of Rs 84,084 crore, July 31, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2292445®=48&lang=1>

exploration and production of hydrocarbons from the offshore region, and is expected to catalyse reserve accretion of over 600 Million Metric Tons of Oil Equivalent.

India's Jet Engine Partnerships. Even as the India-US GE F414 engine co-production deal stalled, impacting the Tejas Mk2, AMCA Mk1 and TEDBF projects, two choices emerged to power the AMCA Mk2. The joint venture proposal between Safran and GTRE to develop a high-thrust fighter jet engine was reported as awaiting CCS approval⁹³. Meanwhile, Rolls-Royce and Reliance Industries Limited announced their strategic intent to partner and offer capabilities for the design, development, manufacturing and delivery of a sovereign indigenous combat engine for India's Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA) programme⁹⁴. The partners will explore the formation of a dedicated Aerospace Gas Turbine Complex (AGTC) that will be a centre of excellence for power and propulsion technology in India⁹⁵. The Reliance – Rolls Royce proposal potentially brings one of India's largest private sector conglomerates into high-end military aero-engine manufacturing, challenging the traditional monopoly of DRDO laboratories and HAL. Much will depend on how quickly the partnership establishes its dedicated AGTC.

India Leases Two MQ-9B Sea Guardians from General Atomics. India's Ministry of Defence signed a contract with General Atomics Aeronautical Systems to lease two MQ-9B Sea Guardian High-Altitude Long-Endurance remotely piloted aircraft systems for the Indian Navy for 30 months on August 17⁹⁶. The contract is valued at ₹1943 crores (about \$ 204 million). The lease is expected to fill the gap in maritime surveillance till the 15 aircraft ordered for the Indian Navy begin arriving in early 2029.

Agni-4 Test Firing. India announced the successful test-firing of the Agni-4 MRBM on August 06⁹⁷. The road-mobile missile has an operational range of 4000 Km.

⁹³ Safran-GTRE Engine Partnership for AMCA Mk2 Nears Final CCS approval, August 05, 2025, <https://defence.in/threads/safran-gtre-engine-partnership-for-amca-mk2-nears-final-ccs-approval-clearance-expected-ahead-of-august-15-2026.18414/>

⁹⁴ Reliance Industries and Rolls-Royce announce strategic intent to partner and develop India's indigenous combat engine for the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA) programme, August 14, 2026, <https://www.rolls-royce.com/media/press-releases/2026/14-08-2026-reliance-industries-and-rolls-royce-announce-strategic-intent-to-partner-and-develop-indias-indigenous-combat-engine-for-the-amca-programme.aspx>

⁹⁵ Reliance Industries Ltd, @RIL_Updates, August 14, 2026, https://x.com/RIL_Updates/status/2088242035576967674?s=48

⁹⁶ MoD inks contract with General Atomics Aeronautical Systems, Inc for leasing of two MQ-9B Sea Guardian High-Altitude Long-Endurance Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems for Indian Navy for 30 months, August 17, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2300388®=48&lang=1>

⁹⁷ Agni-4 ballistic missile successfully test fired, August 06, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2295678®=48&lang=1>

IN-USN EOD Exercise. The eighth edition of the IN-USN Explosive Ordnance Disposal Exercise took place at Kochi from August 10-14⁹⁸. The exercise indicates defence engagement between the two countries remains strong.

Maitree XV. The India-Thailand joint military exercise Maitree-XV was conducted in Thailand from August 18-31. Instituted in 2006, the exercise seeks to enhance combined capabilities in executing joint counter insurgency/ terrorist operations in jungle and semi-urban environment.

India Notifies 6th Positive Indigenisation List. The Department of Defence Production notified the 6th positive indigenisation list of 405 items on August 18⁹⁹. The list covers platforms and systems, including helicopters, aircraft, aero engines, armoured vehicles, warships, missile systems, defence electronics and ammunition.

GRSE Expansion. Defence Minister Shri Rajnath Singh laid the foundation stone for five expansion projects of Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers and Yantra India Limited in West Bengal¹⁰⁰. Three GRSE projects will augment the shipyard's capacity and infrastructure to meet growing maritime requirements, while two projects at YIL will strengthen indigenous metallurgical and defence manufacturing capabilities.

INS Nipun Commissioned. India's second indigenous Diving Support Vessel, INS Nipun, was commissioned at Mumbai on August 31¹⁰¹. The ship strengthens the IN capability to undertake specialised diving and underwater missions across India's areas of interest.

Trump-Class Battleship. The US Congressional Budget Office assessed that the cost of the Trump-Class nuclear-powered Battleship programme, to be funded over the 2027-2056 period, would be about \$ 275 billion in 2026 dollars¹⁰². The first ship would cost about \$ 23 billion, while the average cost per ship over the programme would be \$ 18 billion. The US Navy Shipbuilding Plan of May 2026 calls for the purchase of 15 battleships, displacing about 35,000 tons, between 2028 and 2056¹⁰³.

⁹⁸ Eighth Edition of IN-USN Explosive Ordnance Disposal Exercise 2026 Concludes at Southern Naval Command, Kochi, August 17, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2300435®=48&lang=1>

⁹⁹ Aatmanirbhar Bharat: DDP notifies 6th Positive Indigenisation List of 405 strategically important items, August 18, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2300723®=48&lang=1>

¹⁰⁰ Rajnath Singh Lays Foundation Stone for Five Expansion Projects of GRSE and Yantra India, August 23, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2302487®=48&lang=2>

¹⁰¹ Indian Navy Set to Commission Second Indigenous diving Support Vessel 'Nipun', August 25, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2303091®=48&lang=1>

¹⁰² Congressional Budget Office, "The Navy's New Battleship Program: Costs and Implications for the Shipbuilding Industrial Base", August 2026, <https://www.cbo.gov/system/files/2026-08/62550-battleships.pdf>

¹⁰³ US Navy Shipbuilding Plan May 2026, <https://media.defense.gov/2026/May/11/2003928909/-1/-1/1/NAVY%20SHIPBUILDING%20PLAN%20MAY%202026.PDF>

Rebuilding America's Shipbuilding Industrial Base. An Executive Order from President Trump directed major changes towards rebuilding the US Navy and the US shipbuilding industrial base¹⁰⁴. Trump directed the Secretary of War to submit a plan to replace the Electromagnetic Aircraft Launch System (EMALS) and advanced weapons elevators with steam and hydraulic systems for the construction of CVN-81, the fourth Gerald R Ford class of USN aircraft carriers estimated to commission in 2034 (media reports indicate that he is planning to rename the ship after himself). He further directed the building of up to three ship classes, including surface combatants, under the 'Finland Model', enabling foreign shipbuilders to build the first two ships in their yards provided they acquired a shipyard in the US, hired American workers, licensed proprietary shipbuilding techniques and technologies to the US shipyard, and sourced US supply chains for construction and maintenance of subsequent ships. Other directions included the establishment of a fifth public Navy Yard, a component repair centre and reforming the Naval Sea Systems Command. The direction to revert to steam catapults and hydraulic systems for CVN-81 has aroused considerable controversy, with veterans observing that electric power involves fewer moving parts, lower costs, greater reliability and greater speeds than steam power, thus lowering personnel requirements.

USS George Washington Replaces USS Abraham Lincoln in Northern Arabian Sea. The USS George Washington Carrier Strike Group (CSG) replaced the USS Abraham Lincoln CSG in the Northern Arabian Sea, with the latter making its way back to San Diego¹⁰⁵. Living conditions on board USS Abraham Lincoln, which passed through the Singapore Strait into the South China Sea on August 29¹⁰⁶, had deteriorated considerably due to a prolonged deployment, impacting morale on board. The USN has been left without an operational aircraft carrier in the Western Pacific. Media reports indicate that the USS Theodore Roosevelt CSG is preparing for deployment and will replace USS George Washington next month¹⁰⁷.

Pakistan Somalia MoU on Defence Cooperation. Pakistan and Somalia signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Defence Cooperation on August 04¹⁰⁸. The Memorandum provides a framework for cooperation in counter-terrorism, military

¹⁰⁴ Rebuilding the United States Navy and America's Shipbuilding Industrial Base, August 13, 2026, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2026/08/rebuilding-the-united-states-navy-and-americas-shipbuilding-industrial-base/>

¹⁰⁵ John Ismay, "Weary USS Abraham Lincoln Leaves Middle East", August 20, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/08/20/us/politics/uss-abraham-lincoln-iran.html>

¹⁰⁶ Sam Lagrone, "USS Abraham Lincoln Passes Through Singapore Strait En route to Thailand", August 30, 2026, <https://news.usni.org/2026/08/30/uss-abraham-lincoln-passes-through-singapore-strait-en-route-to-thailand>

¹⁰⁷ Sam Lagrone, "Navy Planning for Extended Carrier Deployments as Iran Conflict Continues, CNO, MCPON Say", August 26, 2026, <https://news.usni.org/2026/08/26/navy-planning-for-extended-carrier-deployments-as-iran-conflict-continues-cno-mcpon-say>

¹⁰⁸ Somalia and Pakistan Sign Defence Cooperation Memorandum of Understanding, August 04, 2026, <https://web.mod.gov.so/resources/NewsDetail/somalia-and-pakistan-sign-bilateral-defence-and-security-agreement-xq>

training, the exchange of military expertise and knowledge, defence capability development, and enhanced security cooperation in support of efforts to promote peace and stability. The memorandum forms part of Pakistan's increased military outreach westward, adding to its participation in Coalition Maritime Force operations (particularly the North Arabian Sea maritime security focused CTF 150 and the Horn of Africa anti-piracy focused CTF 151), the September 2025 strategic mutual defence agreement with Saudi Arabia, its mediation between US and Iran in the ongoing war, the 14-nation multinational maritime coalition in the Red Sea of July 2025, and the trilateral Mecca Agreement. These initiatives are likely to enhance Pakistan's intelligence capabilities as well as influence in the Red Sea and Strait of Hormuz chokepoints.

Kuwait Defence Cooperation Developments. The Defence Ministers of Kuwait and Pakistan signed a joint defence and military cooperation agreement in Islamabad on August 27¹⁰⁹. The agreement will help promote operational coordination and exchange of expertise. A day later, India and Kuwait took a step towards operationalising the MoU on Defence Cooperation signed between the two countries during PM Modi's visit to Kuwait in December 2024 by holding the inaugural meeting of the Joint Defence Committee¹¹⁰.

Pirate Attack off Somalia. Somali pirates were reported to have hijacked a suspected Iranian shadow fleet tanker flying the Eritrean flag, SIBU1, on August 20¹¹¹. They had earlier hijacked the Cameroon-flagged vessel Lutuf off the coast of Puntland. The resurgence of piracy comes as naval forces are focused on the Iranian blockade and Houthi attacks in the Red Sea.

¹⁰⁹ Kuwait, Pakistan sign joint defense, military cooperation agreement, August 27, 2026, <https://kuwaittimes.com/article/48802/kuwait/kuwait-pakistan-sign-joint-defense-military-cooperation-agreement/>

¹¹⁰ Inaugural India-Kuwait Joint Defence Committee Meeting Held in New Delhi, August 28, 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2304285®=48&lang=1>

¹¹¹ Pranav Bhaskar and Hussein Mohamed, "2 Hijackings in 4 Days: Somali Piracy Rises", August 20, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/08/20/world/africa/2-hijackings-in-4-days-somali-piracy-surges.html>





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

www.delhipolicygroup.org