



# Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



## INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

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## INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR Volume IV, Issue 2 February 2023

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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 is independently funded by a 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.

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### INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

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

### Cover Image:

*Maiden landing of LCA (Navy) on board INS Vikrant, February 6, 2023. Source: Indian Navy*

*Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and India's External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar in Sydney on February 18, 2023. Source: HCI Canberra Photo Gallery*

*Australian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence Richard Marles and Minister for Foreign Affairs Penny Wong with Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi and Defence Minister Prabowo Subianto at Canberra on February 9, 2023. Source: [Twitter@RichardMarlesMP](https://twitter.com/RichardMarlesMP)*

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# INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

February 2023

## Abstract

The visit by US Secretary of State Antony J Blinken to Beijing to follow up on discussions at the Biden-Xi Jinping Summit in Bali in November 2022 was called off a day before it was to begin, on account of the fracas over a Chinese high altitude balloon over the US. Blinken met Chinese State Councilor Wang Yi on the margins of the Munich Security Conference, with both sides reiterating well-established positions and no indications of a via media having been found. Wang Yi went to Moscow where he voiced unequivocal commitment to the Russia-China partnership.

India's National Security Adviser Ajit Doval visited the US from January 30 to February 1, 2023, meeting his counterpart and other high level officials to discuss bilateral, regional and global issues of mutual interest. Among the outcomes was the inaugural meeting of the initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET), following up on the commitment made by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Biden at their meeting in Tokyo in May 2022.

Air India announced the purchase of 470 aircraft from Boeing and Airbus in the largest such order in commercial aviation history, leading to euphoric statements on the partnership with India from leaders of the US, UK and France.

India, France and the UAE jointly announced the launch of their Trilateral Cooperation Initiative on February 4, 2023. The new trilateral envisages cooperation in energy, climate, defence and health issues, with a focus on the Indian Ocean. The Canada-India Strategic Dialogue saw Canada's Foreign Minister Ms Mélanie Joly visit New Delhi to explore enhanced cooperation in pursuit of Canada's new Indo-Pacific strategy. As the month approached an end, West Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholz visited New Delhi to discuss expanded cooperation with India.

Indonesia's Defence Minister Prabowo Subianto and Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi joined their Australian counterparts Richard Marles and Penny Wong in Canberra for the Eighth Australia Indonesia Foreign and Defence Ministers 2+2 Ministerial Meeting on February 9, 2023. Subianto then met Richard Marles for a Defence Ministers' Dialogue the next day. The ministers committed to

further deepening of their relationship, including enhancing the defence cooperation agreement of September 2021 to one that is binding under international law. They discussed reciprocal access to training ranges and streamlined entry and exit procedures for joint activities, directing their officials to undertake speedy negotiations for this purpose.

The visit of General Lloyd Austin to Manila on February 2, followed by the visit of Filipino President Bong Bong Marcos to Tokyo from February 8-12 resulted in steps that signal the return of the Philippines into the US security fold. The Philippines will open up four additional sites for US bases and enhance cooperation with Japan. The latter announced Official Developmental Assistance and private sector investment amounting to ¥600 billion (USD 4.6 billion) in the Philippines in FY 2023 and 2024 during the Marcos visit.

China published its concept paper for the Global Security Initiative on February 21, 2023. The Second China – Russia – South Africa Joint Exercise MOSI-II took place in the area between Durban and Richards Bay, in the Indian Ocean, from February 22 – 27, 2023.

## The India France UAE Trilateral

A meeting on the margins of the United National General Assembly Session in New York in September 2022 led to the Foreign Ministers of India, France and UAE agreeing to establish a trilateral cooperation initiative. Five months later, the new trilateral was revealed to the world when the ministers jointly announcing its launch on February 04, 2023<sup>1</sup>. A roadmap for implementation of the initiative was also stated to have been adopted.

The stated objective of the trilateral is to promote the design and execution of cooperation projects in the fields of energy (with a focus on solar and nuclear), the fight against climate change and the protection of biodiversity. Defence was stated as another area of close cooperation, in which efforts would be made to promote compatibility, joint development and joint production. A third area was emerging threats from infectious diseases and measures to fight against future pandemics. To further these objectives, the three countries will jointly seek to enhance cooperation between their developmental agencies; ensure greater alignment of their respective economic, technological and social

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<sup>1</sup> Statement of the Government of the Republic of India, Government of the French Republic and the Government of the United Arab Emirates on the Establishment of a Trilateral Cooperation Initiative, [https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateraldocuments.htm?dtl/36192/Statement\\_of\\_the\\_Government\\_of\\_the\\_Republic\\_of\\_India\\_Government\\_of\\_the\\_French\\_Republic\\_and\\_the\\_Government\\_of\\_the\\_United\\_Arab\\_Emirates\\_on\\_the\\_Establish](https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateraldocuments.htm?dtl/36192/Statement_of_the_Government_of_the_Republic_of_India_Government_of_the_French_Republic_and_the_Government_of_the_United_Arab_Emirates_on_the_Establish)

policies with the objectives of the Paris Agreement; organise a range of trilateral events in the framework of the Indian Presidency of the G-20 and UAE's hosting of COP-28 this year; foster cooperation between relevant academic and research institutions; and promote cultural cooperation.

This cooperation will manifest itself in the Indian Ocean Region. The Indian Ocean littoral remains among the most conflict prone regions in the world. Divisions on account of ethnicity, religion, ideology and levels of development abound. However, the geopolitical importance of this region cannot be understated. The India Ocean provides the shortest and most economically viable route to connect current and future economic giants like Japan, China, South Korea, Indonesia and India to markets in Europe and across the Atlantic. It also connects these economic behemoths to sources of energy and vital raw materials required for industrial production, in Africa, the Arabian Peninsula and potentially Central Asia.

As such, the region is fertile ground for great power competition, particularly between the US and China. China's gains in the region during the last couple of decades are undeniable. These have come at a time when the affluent West had largely retreated from its developmental responsibilities and become more inward-looking. The retreat of the US (and NATO) from Afghanistan has generated doubt about US commitment to regional security. On the other hand, the Abrahams Accords have opened up space for plurilateral arrangements to fill up developmental gaps. The I2U2 Summit of July 2022 is one example of such plurilateral arrangements<sup>2</sup>. The India France UAE (IFU) Trilateral is another. The former may be somewhat more ambitious in that it seeks to tackle challenges pertaining to water, energy, transportation, space, health and food security, but its initial focus is food security and clean energy. The IFU will complement I2U2, while ensuring that the platforms remain plurilateral.

India, France and UAE are all middle powers preparing for a future multipolar world. They are strategic partners: India's strategic partnership with France was formalised in 1998, that with UAE in 2015. France opened its Abu Dhabi military base in 2009 and began an institutionalised strategic dialogue with UAE in 2012<sup>3</sup>. The UAE hosts the largest Indian and French communities in the Gulf: the former exceeds 3.4 million, well ahead of the nearly 2.6 million in

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<sup>2</sup> Joint Statement of the Leaders of India, Israel, United Arab Emirates, and the United States (i2U2), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/07/14/joint-statement-of-the-leaders-of-india-israel-united-arab-emirates-and-the-united-states-i2u2/>

<sup>3</sup> France UAE Bilateral Relations, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/dossiers-pays/emirats-arabes-unis/relations-bilaterales/>

Saudi Arabia<sup>4</sup>, while the French community in UAE is estimated at 35,000, including over 500 military personnel<sup>5</sup>. All three are members of the Rafale Club: France has ordered over 280 aircraft, India has taken delivery of 36 and is considering acquiring 135 more (including for the Indian Navy) and the UAE ordered 80 aircraft in December 2021. All have substantial interest in security and stability in the Indian Ocean and can bring considerable strength to bear. UAE can provide capital, France the technology, while India can bring to bear its demographic advantages, innovation skills, trained and motivated human resource and considerable soft power and knowledge of the region.

The IFU trilateral is at a nascent stage. Its objectives are relatively limited at present, but have the potential to grow substantially as cooperation builds up. Notably, it treats the Indian Ocean as a single space, instead of dividing it between three Commands, as the US does. It also brings together nations with three different religious persuasions: France is predominantly Christian, India Hindu and the UAE Islamic. All three are, however, committed to promoting the values of inclusion and religious tolerance and do not believe religious differences will prove an obstruction to their cooperation.

The IFU trilateral will face competition, including impediments, from China, Iran and radical Islam. It cannot rely on an overstretched US to provide security or stability, particularly in the Western Indian Ocean, which will be its priority area. It will, therefore, have to expand cooperation into this space in due course. For the present, however, it marks a good beginning into stepping up developmental and security cooperation in the Indian Ocean, the Western portion of the Indo-Pacific.

## India, Canada and the Indo-Pacific

How does the India Canada Strategic Dialogue of February 6, 2023, co-chaired by External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar and Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs Ms Mélanie Joly, impact on the Indo-Pacific? Canada published its new Indo-Pac Strategy barely three months ago<sup>6</sup>. The question thus acquires salience. The ministers expressed interest in deepening collaboration across domains, looked forward to the Early Progress Trade Agreement (EPTA) and

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<sup>4</sup> Population of Overseas Indians, <https://www.mea.gov.in/population-of-overseas-indians.htm>, accessed on February 25, 2023.

<sup>5</sup> France UAE Bilateral Relations, Op Cit.

<sup>6</sup> For an overview, see "Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy", Indo-Pacific Monitor Volume III, Issue 11, [https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads\\_dpg/publication\\_file/indo-pacific-monitor-4610.pdf](https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads_dpg/publication_file/indo-pacific-monitor-4610.pdf)



agreed to work together to ensure the success of India's G20 Presidency<sup>7</sup>. They also discussed contemporary regional, global and multilateral issues including developments in India's neighbourhood, Ukraine and cooperation in the United Nations.

If the US and India were "Estranged Democracies"<sup>8</sup>, the history of India-Canada relations has been equally problematic. India was among the largest recipients of Canadian external assistance during the Cold War, including grants to start India's nuclear programme. However, irritants were ever present. As a nation whose security was in US hands and a founding member of NATO, Canada was never able to accept India's non-aligned outlook. It remained far more accommodating of Pakistan and its views, including on the Kashmir issue, and failed to condemn Pakistani atrocities in what became Bangladesh in 1971. Canada followed the US lead in engaging China while keeping India on the back burner, so to speak. Domestic electoral considerations led to Canada accommodating Khalistani secessionist elements, including inaction that resulted in the bomb explosion that downed Emperor Kanishka (AI 182) in 1985. India's nuclear tests in 1974 and 1998 resulted in virtual breakdown of relations between the two countries; these would be restored to a semblance of normalcy only after 2006, when the Harper Government conceived and implemented a new strategy for India, including the civil nuclear cooperation agreement of 2010.

The Justin Trudeau government, which has led Canada since 2015, has had substantially lesser consideration for India's sensitivities. China's actions, however, have prompted a changed of tack. Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy now acknowledges the strategic challenge posed by China, in sharp contrast to earlier reluctance to risk annoying its second largest trading partner. "China is an increasingly disruptive global power", it states, with "ambitions to become the leading power in the region"<sup>9</sup>. It specifies that Canada's approach towards China is aligned with that of partners in the region and around the world. It outlines five interconnected strategic objectives for the region, including promoting peace, resilience and security for which Canada "will invest in an

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<sup>7</sup> India-Canada Strategic Dialogue, [https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/36201/IndiaCanada\\_Strategic\\_Dialogue](https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/36201/IndiaCanada_Strategic_Dialogue)

Dennis Kux, "<sup>8</sup> India and the United States: Estranged Democracies, 1941-1991", [https://books.google.co.in/books/about/India\\_and\\_the\\_United\\_States.html?id=zcyIFXH9\\_z8C](https://books.google.co.in/books/about/India_and_the_United_States.html?id=zcyIFXH9_z8C)

<sup>9</sup> Canada's Strategy for the Indo-Pacific, <https://www.international.gc.ca/campaign-campagne/indo-pacific-pacifique/index.aspx?lang=eng>



enhanced military presence, along with intelligence and cyber security, to promote security in the region and ensure the safety of Canadians"<sup>10</sup>.

Consequently, strategic convergences between Canada and India outweigh the differences. From Canada's perspective, "India's growing strategic, economic and demographic importance in the Indo-Pacific makes it a critical partner in Canada's pursuit of its objectives under this strategy"<sup>11</sup>. The shared backgrounds of democracy, pluralism, commitment to a rules-based international system and multilateralism are being touted again. Canada seeks to grow economic ties with India, including through deeper trade and investment, expand market access by concluding an Early Progress Trade Agreement as a step towards a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, connect people through enhancing Canada's visa-processing facilities, support academic and cultural exchanges, and accelerate cooperation in the fight against climate change. "Canada will seek new opportunities to partner and engage in dialogue in areas of common interest and values, including security and the promotion of democracy, pluralism and human rights"<sup>12</sup>.

Canada's strategic stability focus, however, appears limited to the North Pacific, where Canada will open new opportunities for cooperation with Japan and work to support and strengthen stability on the Korean Peninsula. The strategic commitment recedes as one goes into other sections of the Indo-Pacific. Canada will seek membership of ASEAN's collective security organisations such as the Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus and the East Asia Summit, but the focus in Southeast Asia is economic. In the Indian Ocean, security actions that Canada will take do not find mention.

Canada does have attractions that transcend differences with its current government. Foremost among them must be India's nearly 1.7 million diaspora<sup>13</sup>, constituting about 4% of Canada's population. Only a small proportion of these are Khalistani secessionists, though it must be acknowledged that they have disproportionate influence in Canada's politics. Canada is a member of both G-7 and G-20, significant for India as it leverages its G-20 Presidency to bridge the growing North-South divide. As a wealthy developed country, Canada is a potential source of incoming FDI, while its wealth of mineral resources, including energy (Uranium, gas and oil), all of which are required for India's growth, make it an attractive destination for

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Population of Overseas Indians, <https://www.mea.gov.in/population-of-overseas-indians.htm>

India's outgoing FDI. It is also a destination for India's exports, both in view of the relatively affluent Canadian market as well as a gateway into the US. As an Arctic state, it can help in the execution of India's Arctic Policy and its objective of building partnerships for sustainable development<sup>14</sup>. The attractions do not, however, include military technology or more than token action in the provision of security and stability; Canada remains dependent on the US on this account, as the recent Chinese balloon episode proved<sup>15</sup>.

On balance, Canada's leadership appears to be driven more by the need to exploit Indo-Pacific developments for economic benefit than the desire to make a significant contribution to regional stability. This may not be a bad thing: Canada can at least contribute to regional prosperity, if not regional security. So long as the estrangement between the developed world and China continues, conditions appear right for growth of India Canada relations. Canada will, on its part, have to display much greater concern for India's sensitivities than it has done in the past. It will have to manage Khalistani separatists, resisting the urge to let domestic electoral conditions trump strategic convergences. Its impact on the Indo-Pacific may not be significant, but is still welcome.

## The Eighth Australia Indonesia Foreign and Defence Ministerial Dialogue

Indonesia's Defence Minister Prabowo Subianto and Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi joined their Australian counterparts Richard Marles and Penny Wong in Canberra for the Eighth Australia Indonesia Foreign and Defence Ministers 2+2 Meeting on February 9, 2023. Subianto then met Richard Marles for a Defence Ministers' Dialogue the next day. Joint statements issued following the two meetings signalled significant changes in regional geopolitics.

The first meeting saw the four ministers committing "to deepening our defence engagement even further, including by working together on military medicine, military technology, defence industry and exploring ways to make it easier for our militaries to work together"<sup>16</sup>. Indonesian concerns around AUKUS and the possibility of Australia going nuclear were assuaged by the ministers reiterating

<sup>14</sup> India's Arctic Policy, <https://www.moes.gov.in/sites/default/files/2022-03/compressed-SINGLE-PAGE-ENGLISH.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Lalit Kapur, "China's Balloon over America and Implications for India", DPG Policy Brief Volume VIII Issue 10, [https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads\\_dpg/publication\\_file/chinas-balloon-over-america-and-implications-for-india-4853.pdf](https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads_dpg/publication_file/chinas-balloon-over-america-and-implications-for-india-4853.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Joint Statement on the Eighth Australia-Indonesia Foreign and Defence Minister's 2+2 Meeting, <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/penny-wong/media-release/joint-statement-eighth-australia-indonesia-foreign-and-defence-ministers-22-meeting>

“their commitment to transparency around respective strategic and defence policy settings”, while highlighting their ambition for a world without nuclear weapons and their commitment to strengthening the global nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament regime<sup>17</sup>. Indonesia went along with Australia in deploring Russia’s aggression against Ukraine and calling for Russia’s complete withdrawal from Ukrainian territory, while Australia conceded to Indonesia’s call for all parties to work towards a peaceful resolution of the ongoing conflict through diplomacy.

Within the region, the ministers shared the vision of “the Indo-Pacific as a region of dialogue and cooperation, where countries can make their own sovereign choices and where international law is respected”. They expressed their shared commitment to a rules-based maritime order, underpinned by adherence to international law including UNCLOS and expressed serious concern about developments in the South China Sea, noting that the conclusion of a substantive, effective and actionable Code of Conduct for the region should not prejudice the rights of all states. They reiterated their strong support for the central role of ASEAN in addressing the crisis in Myanmar. They committed to deepening cooperation in trilateral engagements with Timor-Leste, India and the Pacific.

It was, however, the joint statement issued by the two defence ministers the next day that caught attention<sup>18</sup>. The current defence cooperation agreement between the two countries, signed in 2018, had only recently been renewed, in September 2021. At that time, Subianto had envisaged that the agreement could lead to Australia opening up its training areas for use by Indonesian units<sup>19</sup>. This time, the ministers confirmed their intent to elevate the existing defence cooperation agreement to one “that is binding in international law”. They also expressed their intent for the revised agreement to support increased dialogue, strengthen interoperability, and enhance practical arrangements. Negotiations would include issues such as reciprocal access to training ranges and streamlined entry and exit processes for joint activities. Officials were directed to undertake negotiations expeditiously and report back to the ministers regularly on their progress<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Joint ministerial statement of intent on upgrading our Defence Cooperation Arrangement, <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/statements/2023-02-10/joint-ministerial-statement-intent-upgrading-our-defence-cooperation-arrangement>

<sup>19</sup> Joint Press Conference: Indonesia-Australia Foreign and Defence Ministers 2+2 meeting, Jakarta, <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/marise-payne/transcript/joint-press-conference-indonesia-australia-foreign-and-defence-ministers-22-meeting-jakarta>

<sup>20</sup> Joint ministerial statement of intent on upgrading our Defence Cooperation Arrangement, Op Cit.

ASEAN centrality and a non-aligned outlook have long been the cornerstones of Indonesia's foreign policy. However, with the regional security environment worsening on account of China's assertions and great power competition, Indonesia has in effect accepted that ASEAN cannot provide solutions. This is an expression of political reality: even within Indonesia, 86.8% of the respondents of a recent survey felt that ASEAN is slow and ineffective and thus cannot cope with fluid political and economic developments, becoming irrelevant in the new world order<sup>21</sup>. 73.6% believe that ASEAN is becoming an arena of major power competition and worry that its member states may become major power proxies. 61.1% of the Indonesians surveyed are concerned about China's growing regional political and strategic influence (67.4% are similarly concerned about the growing political and strategic influence of the US).

Southeast Asian nations lack the capacity or capability to secure themselves, individually or collectively. Their strategic approach has been creating structures to counter trans-national governance challenges while relying on globalisation and the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation to keep great power rivalry in check. Both are incapable of addressing the challenge posed by an assertive China. Confrontation between China and Indonesia will grow, with Indonesia deciding to go ahead with exploitation of offshore hydrocarbon resources in the part of the Natuna Sea also claimed by China<sup>22</sup>. Indonesia is conscious of its deficiencies, and it is but natural for it to hedge and strengthen its deterrent capability.

The envisaged enhancement of defence and security cooperation between Australia and Indonesia should be seen in this light. A binding mutual defence treaty may be in the offing, as also assessed by a veteran American columnist<sup>23</sup>. Australia can help Indonesia strengthen maritime domain awareness and internal balancing capability without Indonesia paying the political price that would be incurred through a similar arrangement with the US. At the same time, the arrangement serves Australian interests by providing possibilities for forward defence.

<sup>21</sup> ISEAS The State of Southeast Asia 2023 Survey Report, <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/The-State-of-SEA-2023-Final-Digital-V4-09-Feb-2023.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> For an overview, see "Indonesia Approves Development of Tuna Gas Field in the Natuna Sea, Indo-Pacific Monitor, Vol IV Issue 1 (January 2023), <https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/publication/indo-pacific-monitor/indo-pacific-monitor-4836.html>

<sup>23</sup> Walter Russel Mead, "Down Under, Jitters About National Security", <https://www.wsj.com/articles/australia-america-china-pacific-national-security-defense-aokus-japan-indonesia-taiwan-f8e6dbe3>

The current month has, therefore, witnessed both Indonesia and the Philippines altering their security tack in response to China's actions. While their insistence on ASEAN centrality remains, Philippines has returned to its dependence on the US for security, while Indonesia is exploring a binding treaty with a US ally. Together, the two comprise 57% of ASEAN's population, 49.2% of its territory, 83.5% of its EEZ and 46.7% of its GDP<sup>24</sup>. Their actions are unlikely to suffice to deter a growing China, but they could give it pause. How these actions will impact ASEAN's future cohesion will be of interest.

The stated intent of the Indonesia-Australia 2+2 Ministerial to deepen cooperation with India holds out promise. The combined capacities of Australia, India and Indonesia will be a greater deterrent to Chinese action than the countries acting alone. Moreover, they can create effective barriers across all gates from the Pacific to the Indian Ocean, holding hostage PLA (Navy) access and deployments in the Indian Ocean in the event of conflict. The three will, however, have to work out how they can use their capacities and geographic advantage to counter China's well-established grey zone strategy while remaining below the level of conflict. Much can be done together in this regard, without compromising ASEAN's centrality or jeopardising regional security.

## The US Comeback in the Philippines

The visit of Secretary of Defense General Lloyd J Austin III to Manila in the beginning of February confirmed the trend of the Philippines returning into the US fold, while not completely turning its back to China. This trend has significant consequences for rebuilding of the First Island Chain and providing the US alternate forward deployment sites, thus adding to deterrence.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991 ended the strategic rationale for the US Pacific alliance system. Differences over lease costs led to withdrawal of the US from 22 existing facilities in the Philippines, including Clark Air Base in November 1991 and of Subic Bay Naval Base a year later. The subsequent occupation by China of Mischief Reef, well within its EEZ, convinced the Philippines that it had prematurely given up on US military backing and led to the conclusion of a Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA), which became effective in 1999. The US, however, remained equivocal about whether its Mutual Defense Treaty with the Philippines covered the China-claimed reefs and islands in the South China Sea. China's occupation of the Scarborough

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<sup>24</sup> Data on population and territory sourced from CIA World Fact Book. GDP data based on IMF World Economic Outlook October 2022. Military expenditures extracted from SIPRI Military Expenditure Data Base. EEZ data compiled by author.

Shoal in April 2012, the Obama Administration's reluctance to call out China and subsequent negotiations between China and the Philippines with US mediation led to the Philippine government pulling out of the ongoing confrontation. China, however, did not fulfil its part of the bargain and the US dithered, leading the then Filipino ambassador in the US to say, "We were short-changed"<sup>25</sup>.

The Philippines launched arbitration proceedings against China at the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague under Annex VII of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in January 2013. The award by the Court, announced on July 12, 2016, clearly ruled that any historic rights that China may have had in the South China Sea were extinguished to the extent they were incompatible with UNCLOS. It also found that China had violated the Philippines sovereign rights in its EEZ by interfering with Philippine fishing and petroleum exploration, constructing artificial islands and failing to prevent Chinese fishermen from fishing in that zone<sup>26</sup>. China, however, refused to abide by the Court's ruling.

Disappointed by the continued failure of the US to ensure the security of its ally, the newly elected Filipino President Rodrigo Duterte turned to finding accommodation with China and building an economic relationship in the hope this would temper China's expansionist intent. His turn away from the US extended to threatening suspension of the VFA, under which the US had been engaged in extensive counter-terrorism action in the Philippines. He also held back approval for the US to build facilities under the Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) of April 2014. However, China failed to exploit Duterte's approach and continued its assertion within the Philippines EEZ<sup>27</sup>.

In 2019, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo unequivocally stated that US mutual defense obligations covered Filipino forces in the South China Sea, enhancing domestic pressure on Duterte not to terminate the VFA. The Biden Administration reiterated that stand. The first visit by General Austin to Manila in July 2021 resulted in Duterte finally withdrawing his threat to end the VFA. A joint vision statement between the two countries followed in November 2021, in which they agreed on five specific measures to strengthen bilateral defense

<sup>25</sup> Jim Gomes, "Philippine Diplomat to China: Don't turn shoal into island", April 12, 2016, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2016/04/12/1572446/philippine-diplomat-china-dont-turn-shoal-island>

<sup>26</sup> Press Release: The South China Sea Arbitration, 12 July 2016, <https://docs.pca-cpa.org/2016/07/PH-CN-20160712-Press-Release-No-11-English.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> See Lalit Kapur, Déjà vu in the South China Sea, DPG Policy Brief Volume VI Issue 12, [https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads\\_dpg/publication\\_file/dj-vu-in-the-south-china-sea-2290.pdf](https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads_dpg/publication_file/dj-vu-in-the-south-china-sea-2290.pdf)



and security cooperation: launch of a new maritime security dialogue to coordinate responses to China's grey zone coercion; increased US support for Philippine military modernisation; formulation of new defense guidelines; conclusion of a long-delayed General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA); and implementation of infrastructure projects at five specified EDCA locations<sup>28</sup>. In April 2022, the Philippines' Secretary of National Defense visited Washington DC and agreed on an initial list of steps to modernise and deepen the US-Philippines alliance<sup>29</sup>.

The visit of General Lloyd Austin to Manila on February 2, 2023 must be seen in this context<sup>30</sup>. All five initiatives identified by the joint vision are well underway. Four new EDCA sites have been agreed upon, bringing the number of new US base sites in the Philippines to nine. That Subic Bay and Clark Air Force Base are reported as not among the approved sites is of no consequence. A ministerial level 2+2 will take place in Spring 2023<sup>31</sup>. Both sides have also agreed to look at opportunities to include other likeminded partners in cooperative defense activities.

Marcos hasn't completely closed doors with China. He undertook a state visit to Beijing in early January 2023. His joint statement with Xi Jinping speaks of cooperation in four priority areas: agriculture, infrastructure, energy and people-to-people exchanges. There is also mention of cooperation in the areas of defence and security, science and technology, trade, and investments<sup>32</sup>. 12 cooperation documents were signed; in effect they keep the doors for mutually beneficial cooperation open. There was commitment by China to undertake additional infrastructure projects in the Philippines, the ritual affirmation of the one-China policy and agreement to manage differences in perceptions of the two countries in the South China Sea through peaceful means. However, that Marcos will not be as accommodating of China as his predecessor appeared evident.

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<sup>28</sup> Joint Vision for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century United States-Philippines Partnership, <https://www.state.gov/joint-vision-for-a-21st-century-united-states-philippines-partnership/>

<sup>29</sup> Readout of Secretary of Defense Lloyd J Austin III Meeting With Philippines Secretary of National Defense Delfin Lorenzana, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3002650/readout-of-secretary-of-defense-lloyd-j-austin-iii-meeting-with-philippines-sec/>

<sup>30</sup> Readout of Secretary of Defense Lloyd J Austin III Meeting with the Philippine Senior Undersecretary and Officer in Charge of the Department of National Defense Carlito Galvez, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3286507/readout-of-secretary-of-defense-lloyd-j-austin-iii-meeting-with-philippine-seni/>

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Joint Statement Between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of the Philippines, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/202301/t20230105\\_11001064.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/202301/t20230105_11001064.html)

The official visit by Marcos to Japan from February 08-12, 2023, confirms this trend. Japan will contribute ¥600 billion (USD 4.6 billion) through Official Development Assistance and private sector investment in the Philippines during Japanese Fiscal Years 2022 and 2023<sup>33</sup>. The Japan-funded Metro Manila Subway Project will be inaugurated during the Marcos Presidency. Loans for a number of significant infrastructure projects have been agreed upon. The countries will discuss Japan's assistance to introduce LNG to the Philippines for the country's energy transition. Memoranda of cooperation on Agriculture, ICT and healthcare cooperation have been agreed upon. Defence and security cooperation will see the introduction of Foreign and Defence Ministerial Meetings in the 2+2 format, a Vice-Ministerial Strategic Dialogue and a Political-Military Dialogue. President Marcos has de facto endorsed Japan's new security policies, including its re-armament and acquisition of strike technology. Both countries have agreed increase their own defence capability and strengthen bilateral cooperation through reciprocal port calls and aircraft visits, transfer of more defence equipment and capacity building. People-to-people exchanges are being strengthened. The two countries have expressed a common position on all key regional and international issues, including "unlawful maritime claims, militarisation, coercive activities and threat or use of force in the south China Sea". Marcos has over five years of his term as President left, which will go a long way towards building up regional capability to deter China.

Sporadic domestic opposition remains in the Philippines. One Filipino novelist believes that the US-Philippine alliance has been a curse for her country<sup>34</sup>. Unless such opposition comes to a head, however, it seems likely that the Philippine tilt towards the US will gather momentum.

## China's Global Security Initiative Concept Paper

Delivering the keynote speech at the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference on April 21, 2022<sup>35</sup>, China's President Xi Jinping proposed a Global Security Initiative to unite the world in a vision providing common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security for all. Following the recently concluded Munich Security Conference and with the continuing deterioration in the

<sup>33</sup> Japan-Philippines Joint Statement, <https://japan.kantei.go.jp/content/000122825.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> Gina Apostol, "Dancing With America Has Been a Curse for the Philippines", <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/07/opinion/us-philippines-china-military-curse.html>

<sup>35</sup> Chinese President Xi Jinping's keynote speech at the opening ceremony of BFA annual conference 2022, Xinhua, <https://english.news.cn/20220421/f5f48ba605ed427dab911188af175ebf/c.html>

global security situation, China published a Global Security Initiative Concept Paper on February 21, 2023.

“This is an era rife with challenges. It is also one brimming with hope”, says the paper in its introductory paragraphs<sup>36</sup>. It declares the aim of the GSI is “to eliminate the root causes of international conflict, improve global security governance, encourage joint international efforts to bring more stability and certainty to a volatile and changing era, and promote durable peace and development in the world”.

The concept paper adduces three pillars towards its aim: Core concepts and principles, priorities of cooperation, and platforms and means of cooperation. The first pillar seeks that all nations make six commitments. The first is to President Xi’s vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security. Second is to respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries. Third is to abide by the purposes and principles of the UN Charter. Fourth is to taking the legitimate security concerns of all countries seriously. The fifth seeks peaceful resolution of differences and disputes between countries through dialogue and consultation. The final commitment is to maintaining security in both the traditional and non-traditional domains.

The issue with the first commitment is that Xi’s vision is China-centric, seeking to establish China as the regional and eventually global power-broker. As such, it will inevitably be resisted by existing and aspiring Asian powers. The second, commitment of respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, is at odds with China’s absorption of Tibet and Xinjiang, its invasion of Vietnam, the seizure by force of the Paracel Islands and continuing efforts to seize territory in Ladakh and in the South and East China Seas.

With respect to the third commitment, the opening sentences of the UN Charter enjoin nations to practice tolerance and live together, to unite to maintain international peace and security, to ensure that the armed forces are not used and to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all people<sup>37</sup>. China’s is visibly unwilling to comply with these principles even within its own territory, as the subjugation of the Tibetan and Uyghur people and the drive to subjugate Taiwan demonstrates. UN principles include sovereign equality and refraining from the use or threat of use of force. The then Chinese Foreign Minister famously demonstrated China’s double standards in this regard in 2012, while

<sup>36</sup> The Global Security Initiative Concept Paper, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjdt\\_665385/2649\\_665393/202302/t20230221\\_1102834\\_8.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/2649_665393/202302/t20230221_1102834_8.html)

<sup>37</sup> United Nations Charter (full text), <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text>

its continuing use of Coast Guard and Maritime Militia assets to achieve objectives in the South and East China seas, with an expanding military force in the background speaks for itself.

The fourth commitment, of taking legitimate concerns of all countries seriously has been visibly sidelined by China in its relations with smaller neighbours since 2012. Similarly, the fifth commitment of peacefully resolving disputes through dialogue has visibly not been practiced by China in the last decade. Finally, China's example of seeking to maximise its own security at the expense of others belies the sixth commitment. China may intend these commitments to govern relations between great powers, but it doesn't seem to want them to apply to lesser neighbours.

China's stated priorities bear out this assessment. They include platitudes such as enhancing UN capacity for implementing its peacekeeping mandate; building a major country relationship featuring peaceful coexistence, overall stability and balanced development; upholding the consensus that a nuclear war is unwinnable and should never be fought; supporting the process of global arms control; supporting ASEAN-centred regional security cooperation mechanisms and architecture, etc. Apart from the UN, platforms proposed for cooperation are China-led. They include the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, BRICS, a new multilateral dialogue platform in the Gulf Region, the China-Africa Peace and Security Cooperation Forum, the Middle East Security Forum, the Beijing Xiangshan Forum, the Global Public Security Cooperation Forum etc. Though China claims that it "stands ready to work with all countries and peoples who love peace and aspire to happiness to address all kind of traditional and non-traditional security challenges", the underlying drive to ensure that all processes and mechanisms are China dominated comes out strongly.

A separate communique dated February 20, 2023 had addressed "US Hegemony and its Perils", accusing the US of throwing its weight around, wanton use of force, looting and exploitation, monopoly and suppression, and spreading false narratives<sup>38</sup>. The communique made clear the animosity and ideological gulf between the US and China, as well as the latter's aspirations to chart its own path, without US interference.

The chances of China finding significant buyers for its concept paper, particularly in the Indo-Pacific which faces the brunt of its expansionism, are

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<sup>38</sup> US Hegemony and Its Perils, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjdt\\_665385/2649\\_665393/202302/t20230220\\_11027664.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/2649_665393/202302/t20230220_11027664.html)

dim. The gap between what it says and does is too wide to be easily bridged. That will not stop China from posturing, or claiming that the entire international community stands by its side. It is not likely, however, to make a meaningful contribution to global or regional security in these admittedly difficult times.

## Other Indo-Pacific Developments

### Hot Spot Issues

The Blinken Wang Yi Meeting. The long-awaited meeting between US Secretary of State Antony J Blinken and PRC State Councilor and Director of the CCP Central Foreign Affairs Office Wang Yi took place on the margins of the Munich Security Conference on February 18, 2023. It had earlier been summarily postponed on account of the Balloon Crisis<sup>39</sup>. According to the US readout of the meeting<sup>40</sup>, Secretary Blinken made clear that irresponsible acts such as the violation of US air space for surveillance must never occur again; warned that China's provision of material support to Russia in Ukraine will have consequences; condemned the ICBM test by North Korea on February 18; underscored the importance of maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait; and reiterated the importance of maintaining diplomatic dialogue and keeping open lines of communication. Wang Yi on his part set forth China's strong position on the so-called "balloon incident" and urged the US side to change course and resolve the damage its abuse of force had done to China-US relations<sup>41</sup>. Whether the meeting will deter China's grey zone activities or result in meaningful dialogue between the two powers remains to be seen.

North Korean Missile Firing. North Korea continued its threatening missile testing, with the launch of a Hwasong-15 ICBM on February 18, 2023, followed by the launch of two SRBMs the next day<sup>42</sup>. The ICBM was launched on an elevated trajectory, reaching a height of more than 3,500 miles and a range of

<sup>39</sup> For an overview, see 'China's Balloon over America and Implications for India,' <https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/publication/policy-briefs/chinas-balloon-over-america-and-implications-for-india.html>

<sup>40</sup> Secretary Blinken's Meeting with People's Republic of China (PRC) Director of the CCP Central Foreign Affairs Office Wang Yi, <https://www.state.gov/secretary-blinkens-meeting-with-peoples-republic-of-china-prc-director-of-the-ccp-central-foreign-affairs-office-wang-yi/>

<sup>41</sup> Wang Yi Sets Forth Strong Position on the So-called "Balloon Incident" to the US Side, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjdt\\_665385/wshd\\_665389/202302/t20230220\\_11027359.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/wshd_665389/202302/t20230220_11027359.html)

<sup>42</sup> North Korea says surprise ICBM drill is 'proof' of 'nuclear counterattack' capabilities, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2023/02/19/asia-pacific/north-korea-icbm-surprise-launch/>

560 miles. The range was estimated at over 8700 miles on a normal trajectory, sufficient to put all of the US within North Korean missile range. Four days later, the US and ROK conducted the 8<sup>th</sup> US-ROK Deterrence Strategy Committee Table-Top Exercise at the Pentagon<sup>43</sup>, the first such exercise under President Yoon's administration. US and Japanese forces also conducted Exercise Resilient Shield 2023<sup>44</sup>, a one-week long Ballistic Missile Defence exercise involving naval forces. Both sides appear focused on brinkmanship, with prospects for dialogue having receded into the distance.

Seventh Fleet Aircraft Transits Taiwan Strait. The US continued asserting its right to sail, fly and operate anywhere in the world international law allows, including in the Taiwan Strait, when a US Navy P-8A Poseidon transited the Taiwan Strait while remaining inside international airspace on February 27, 2023<sup>45</sup>. Predictably, China denounced the action, portraying it as having disrupted the regional situation and jeopardised peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait<sup>46</sup>. China's assertions to sovereignty over the Taiwan Strait are in complete contravention of international law and practice and completely untenable. Nevertheless, China continues making such assertions in the hope that they will, over time, become reality as states fail to pay the cost of asserting their freedom to use the space as the law allows.

## Developments Associated With India

Modi State Visit to the US? The month began with an unconfirmed report regarding President Biden having invited Prime Minister Narendra Modi for a state visit to the US this summer<sup>47</sup>. The visit will include an address to the joint session of the US Congress and a state dinner at the White House. The invitation has reportedly been accepted in principle and officials on both sides are working out dates.

India-US Developments. A number of activities during the month indicated the sharp increase in engagement between India and the US. These included the visit of National Security Adviser Ajit Doval to Washington DC from January

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<sup>43</sup> 8<sup>th</sup> US-ROK Deterrence Strategy Committee Table-Top Exercise – Joint Press Release, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3308356/8th-us-rok-deterrence-strategy-committee-table-top-exercise-joint-press-release/>

<sup>44</sup> US and Japanese Forces Conduct Exercise Resilient Shield 2023, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/3308130/us-and-japanese-forces-conduct-exercise-resilient-shield-2023/>

<sup>45</sup> 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet Aircraft Transits Taiwan Strait, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/3312169/7th-fleet-aircraft-transits-taiwan-strait/>

<sup>46</sup> China denounces US P-8A anti-submarine patrol aircraft's transit of Taiwan Strait.

<sup>47</sup> Joe Biden invites PM Narendra Modi for state visit to US: report, <https://indianexpress.com/article/world/joe-biden-believed-to-have-invited-pm-modi-for-state-visit-to-us-8416535/>



30 – February 1, 2023<sup>48</sup>, during which he met his US counterpart Jake Sullivan, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Miley, Acting Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks and Secretary of State Antony J Blinken. The NSA also co-chaired the inaugural meeting of the bilateral initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET) on January 31, 2023<sup>49</sup>; established a Quantum Coordination Mechanism with participation from industry and academia; agreed to constitute a task force to identify near term opportunities and facilitate longer term development of semiconductor ecosystems; agreed to focus on joint production of items such as the GE-414 jet engine; agreed to cooperation between ISRO and NASA on human spaceflight opportunities and NASA's Commercial Lunar Payload Services project; and agreed to launch a public-private dialogue covering 5G/6G and ORAN. In parallel, the annual India-US Foreign Office Consultations took place at New Delhi on January 31, 2023, where Foreign Secretary Shri Vinay Mohan Kwatra and the US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Ms. Victoria Nuland discussed a number of issues of common interest<sup>50</sup>.

Air India Aircraft Deal. Air India's announcement on February 14, 2023 regarding its signing Letters of Intent with both Boeing and Airbus to purchase 470 aircraft drew euphoric reaction from leaders in France, UK and the US<sup>51</sup>. The order comprises 40 Airbus A350, 20 Boeing 787 and 10 Boeing 777-9 wide-body aircraft, as well as 210 Airbus A320/321 Neos and 190 Boeing 737-MAX single-aisle aircraft collectively valued at an estimated \$ 85 billion, making it numerically the largest aircraft order in aviation history. The A350 aircraft will be powered by Rolls-Royce engines, while the B777/787s will be with engines from GE Aerospace. The first aircraft will enter service in late 2023, while the bulk of them will arrive from mid-2025 onwards. Meanwhile, Air India has already begun taking delivery of 11 leased B777 and 25 A320 aircraft to accelerate its fleet and network expansion. Announcing the purchase, President Biden said it would support over one million American jobs and

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<sup>48</sup> Visit of National Security Advisor to Washington DC (January 30-February 01, 2023), [https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/36153/Visit\\_of\\_National\\_Security\\_Advisor\\_to\\_Washington\\_DC\\_January\\_30\\_February\\_01\\_2023](https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/36153/Visit_of_National_Security_Advisor_to_Washington_DC_January_30_February_01_2023)

<sup>49</sup> Fact Sheet: United States and India Elevate Strategic Partnership with the initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/01/31/fact-sheet-united-states-and-india-elevate-strategic-partnership-with-the-initiative-on-critical-and-emerging-technology-icet/>

<sup>50</sup> India-US Foreign Office Consultations, [https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/36152/IndiaUS\\_Foreign\\_Office\\_Consultations](https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/36152/IndiaUS_Foreign_Office_Consultations)

<sup>51</sup> Air India Signs Letters of Intent to Acquire Modern Fleet/Aircraft, [https://www.airindia.in/writereaddata/Portal/News/765\\_1\\_Press\\_Release\\_-\\_Air\\_India\\_Signs\\_Letters\\_of\\_Intent\\_to\\_Acquire\\_Modern\\_Fleet.pdf](https://www.airindia.in/writereaddata/Portal/News/765_1_Press_Release_-_Air_India_Signs_Letters_of_Intent_to_Acquire_Modern_Fleet.pdf)

reflected the strength of the US-India economic partnership<sup>52</sup>. President Macron of France described it as a testament to the relationship of trust that had been forged with partners in the Indo-Pacific, with Prime Minister Modi at the forefront<sup>53</sup>.

India Singapore Payment Connectivity. India and Singapore enabled instantaneous and low cost transfer of money by their citizens to each other on their mobile phones by linking India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) and Singapore's PayNow on February 21, 2023. Citizens will no longer have to visit banks to make such payments<sup>54</sup>. Singapore thus became the first country with which India launched such a person-to-person payment facility<sup>55</sup>.

EAM Visit to Australia. External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar visited Sydney, Australia on February 18, 2023<sup>56</sup>, on his way back from Fiji. He met his counterpart Penny Wong, Australia's Defence Minister Richard Marles and the Prime Minister Anthony Albanese. He also delivered the Keynote Address at the inaugural Raisina@Sydney Conference and participated in a panel discussion with the Australian Minister for Climate Change and Energy, Chris Bowen. High-level interaction between India and Australia has increased substantially since the two entered into a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in June 2022. Australia, which joined Japan as a regular participant in Exercise Malabar in 2020, will host the current year's edition in August 2023, as was announced by Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese after meeting Dr. S. Jaishankar on February 18, 2023<sup>57</sup>. A marked improvement in the

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<sup>52</sup> Statement from President Joe Biden on Air India's Historic Purchase of Boeing Aircraft, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/02/14/statement-from-president-joe-biden-on-air-indias-historic-purchase-of-boeing-aircraft/>

<sup>53</sup> President Macron and Prime Minister Modi hold videoconference, witness contract signing between Airbus and Tata Sons, <https://in.ambafrance.org/Airbus-and-Tata-Sons-sign-contract>

<sup>54</sup> Prime Ministers of India and Singapore to witness the launch of Real-time Payment Systems Linkage between the two countries, [https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/36275/Prime\\_Ministers\\_of\\_India\\_and\\_Singapore\\_to\\_witness\\_the\\_launch\\_of\\_Realtime\\_Payment\\_Systems\\_Linkage\\_between\\_the\\_two\\_countries](https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/36275/Prime_Ministers_of_India_and_Singapore_to_witness_the_launch_of_Realtime_Payment_Systems_Linkage_between_the_two_countries)

<sup>55</sup> English Translation of Address by Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi at the Joint Virtual Launch of UPI-PayNow Linkage between India and Singapore, [https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/36276/English\\_Translation\\_of\\_Address\\_by\\_Prime\\_Minister\\_Shri\\_Narendra\\_Modi\\_at\\_the\\_Joint\\_Virtual\\_Launch\\_of\\_UPIPayNow\\_Linkage\\_between\\_India\\_and\\_Singapore](https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/36276/English_Translation_of_Address_by_Prime_Minister_Shri_Narendra_Modi_at_the_Joint_Virtual_Launch_of_UPIPayNow_Linkage_between_India_and_Singapore)

<sup>56</sup> Visit of External Affairs Minister to Sydney, Australia (18 February 2023), [https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/36279/Visit\\_of\\_External\\_Affairs\\_Minister\\_to\\_Sydney\\_Australia\\_18\\_February\\_2023](https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/36279/Visit_of_External_Affairs_Minister_to_Sydney_Australia_18_February_2023)

<sup>57</sup> Bilateral Meeting with Dr. S. Jaishankar, Australia's Relationship with India, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/bilateral-meeting-opening-remarks-sydney>

relationship is evident, even though the planned visit<sup>58</sup> by Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh to Australia appears to have been postponed for the time being<sup>59</sup>.

I2U2 Business Forum. The inaugural I2U2 Business Forum was convened in Abu Dhabi on February 22, 2023<sup>60</sup>. The event included presentations on two major initiatives currently being explored under I2U2: building a series of integrated agricultural facilities across India involving investment of \$ 2 billion, and development of a 300 MW wind and solar hybrid power plant in Gujarat. India also expressed its intention of joining the Agriculture Innovation Mission for Climate (AIM4C) launched by the US and UAE in November 2021<sup>61</sup>, joining 42 governments and more than 275 partners who are working to advance AIM4C's mission by supporting investment in climate-smart agriculture and food system innovation.

Fourth Exercise Dharma Guardian. The fourth edition of India – Japan Joint Military Exercise Dharma Guardian commenced at Camp Imazu, in Japan's Shiga Province, on February 17, 2023<sup>62</sup>. The exercise will end on March 2, 2023. The exercise is directed at platoon level joint training on operations in jungle and semi-urban/urban terrain. It will enable the two countries to share best practices in conducting tactical operations under a UN Mandate, apart from developing interoperability, bonhomie, camaraderie and friendship.

IAF Deployment to the UK. An IAF contingent with five Mirage 2000 fighters, two C-17 Globemaster III and an IL-78 mid-air refueller departed India on February 26 to take part in Exercise Cobra Warrior in the UK. The Air Forces of UK, Finland, Sweden, South Africa, Singapore and the US will also participate in the exercise, scheduled from March 06 – 24, 2023<sup>63</sup>.

<sup>58</sup> Rajnath Singh to visit Australia towards Feb end for increasing defence cooperation, <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/national/rajnath-singh-to-visit-australia-towards-feb-end-for-increasing-defence-cooperation/article66467843.ece>

<sup>59</sup> Indian Defence Minister's Visit to Australia Postponed, <https://www.theindiansun.com.au/2023/02/17/indian-defence-ministers-visit-to-australia-postponed/>

<sup>60</sup> Inaugural I2U2 Business Forum convened to accelerate joint investment in key sectors, February 22, 2023, [https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/36283/Inaugural\\_I2U2\\_Business\\_Forum\\_convened\\_to\\_accelerate\\_joint\\_investment\\_in\\_key\\_sectors](https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/36283/Inaugural_I2U2_Business_Forum_convened_to_accelerate_joint_investment_in_key_sectors)

<sup>61</sup> India Joins the Agriculture Innovation Mission for Climate, February 22, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/india-joins-the-agriculture-innovation-mission-for-climate/>

<sup>62</sup> Indo-Japan Joint Training Exercise "Dharma Guardian" to Commence at Camp Imazu in Shiga Province, Japan, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1899832#:~:text=INDO%20JAPAN%20JOINT%20TRAINING%20EXERCISE,IMAZU%20IN%20SHIGA%20PROVINCE%2C%20JAPAN&text=The%204th%20edition%20of%20joint,February%20to%202002%20March%202023.>

<sup>63</sup> Indian Air Force to Participate in Exercise Cobra Warrior at Waddington in UK, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1902576>

IAF Deployment to UAE. An IAF contingent with five LCA Tejas and two C-17 Globemaster III aircraft is participating in Exercise Desert Flag VIII from February 27 to March 17, 2023. This is the first time the LCA Tejas has been deployed to participate in any exercise abroad. Air Forces from the UAE, Australia, Bahrain, France, Kuwait, Morocco, South Korea, and the US are also participating in the exercise<sup>64</sup>. The performance of the Tejas, among the world's lightest supersonic single engine jet fighters, will be keenly watched.

India's Aircraft Carriers. INS Vikrant moved closer to full operational status when the maiden landing of Mig 29K fighter aircraft and the LCA Navy took place on February 6, 2023<sup>65</sup>. Meanwhile, the refit of INS Vikramaditya neared completion: the ship will begin sea trials in March and is expected to become operational by end March 2021<sup>66</sup>.

Maritime Domain Awareness in the Indian Ocean. A Memorandum of Understanding to link the Information Fusion Centre Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) at Gurugram with the Regional Coordination Operations Centre in the Seychelles was signed on February 22, 2023<sup>67</sup>. The MoU will link national centres of the Comoros, Djibouti, France, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius and the Seychelles, enhancing information sharing and cuing for actions in response to governance challenges in the Indian Ocean. IFC-IOR currently hosts Liaison Officers from 12 partner nations: Australia, France, Italy, Japan, Maldives, Mauritius, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Singapore, UK and USA.

## China – Russia Developments

China's Anti-Piracy Force in the Horn of Africa. China's 43<sup>rd</sup> naval escort task force officially took over the escort mission in the Gulf of Aden and the Horn of Africa on February 5, 2023<sup>68</sup>. Comprising the destroyer Nanning, the frigate Sanya and the supply ship Weishanhu, the flotilla will continue China's presence that has been a constant in the region since December 2008.

<sup>64</sup> Indian Air Force to Participate in Exercise Desert Flag VIII First International Exercise Outside India for LCA Tejas, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1902383>

<sup>65</sup> Maiden Landing of LCA Navy and Mig-29K Fighter Aircraft On Board INS Vikrant, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1896759>

<sup>66</sup> Aircraft Carrier INS Vikramaditya is Back on High Seas, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/aircraft-carrier-ins-vikramaditya-is-back-on-high-seas-101676775908275.html>

<sup>67</sup> Maritime Security: Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Between the Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) and Regional Coordination Operations Centre (RCOC), February 22, 2023, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1901371>

<sup>68</sup> 43<sup>rd</sup> Chinese naval escort taskforce officially starts escort mission, [http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/CHINA\\_209163/TopStories\\_209189/16200026.html](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/CHINA_209163/TopStories_209189/16200026.html)

China's Coercion in the South China Sea. The Philippines Coast Guard (PCG) accused Chinese Coast Guard vessel with bow number 5205 of directing a military-grade green laser light at the PCG vessel BRP Malapascua on February 6, 2022, causing temporary blindness to the crew on the bridge<sup>69</sup>. The PCG vessel was engaged in a rotation and resupply mission for personnel on BRP Sierra Madre, which the Philippines had deliberately run aground on the Second Thomas Shoal in 1999 to assert its claims in the Spratly Islands. A detachment of Filipino marines has been maintained on board since then. China has frequently obstructed PCG vessels engaged in resupply missions thereafter, particularly after the Philippines took its case to the Permanent Court of Arbitration in January 2013. The PCA had conclusively ruled, inter alia, that the Second Thomas Shoal was unambiguously within the Philippines EEZ, and China's claim to it was invalid. The US State Department reiterated its support for the Philippines and said an armed attack on the Philippine armed forces, public vessels or aircraft, including those of the PCG, would invoke US mutual defense commitments under the 1051 Treaty<sup>70</sup>. The commitment was reiterated by the US Defense Secretary when he spoke with the Philippine Senior Undersecretary and Officer in Charge of the Department of National Defense Carlito Galvez on February 21, 2023<sup>71</sup>.

Qin Gang Visit to Indonesia. China's Foreign Minister Qin Gang visited Jakarta on February 22, 2023. He met President Joko Widodo<sup>72</sup>, co-chaired the 4<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Joint Commission on Bilateral Cooperation between China and Indonesia with Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi<sup>73</sup>, met Luhut Pandjaitan, the Indonesian Coordinator for cooperation with China and also met Kao Kim Hourn, the ASEAN Secretary General<sup>74</sup>, among others. Though Indonesia

<sup>69</sup> PCG statement on Chinese vessel using laser at PCG ship in Ayungin, <https://coastguard.gov.ph/index.php/11-news/5001-pcg-statement-on-chinese-vessel-using-laser-at-pcg-ship-in-ayungin>

<sup>70</sup> US Support for the Philippines in the South China Sea, February 13, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-support-for-the-philippines-in-the-south-china-sea-3/>

<sup>71</sup> Readout of Secretary of Defense Lloyd J Austin III's Call With Philippines Senior Undersecretary and Officer in Charge of the Department of National Defense Carlito Galvez, February 21, 2023, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3304564/readout-of-secretary-of-defense-lloyd-j-austin-iiis-call-with-philippine-senior/>

<sup>72</sup> Indonesian President Joko Widodo Meets with Qin Gang, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/wjbz\\_663308/activities\\_663312/202302/t20230223\\_11030232.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/wjbz_663308/activities_663312/202302/t20230223_11030232.html)

<sup>73</sup> Qin Gang and Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi Speak out for ASEAN's Strategic Independence Together, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/wjbz\\_663308/activities\\_663312/202302/t20230224\\_11030982.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/wjbz_663308/activities_663312/202302/t20230224_11030982.html)

<sup>74</sup> Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbing's Regular Press Conference on February 23, 2023, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/2511\\_665403/202302/t20230223\\_11030365.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/202302/t20230223_11030365.html)



appears to be turning towards Australia, China can be expected to pull out all stops to retain its influence.

17<sup>th</sup> Japan – China Security Dialogue. The 17<sup>th</sup> Japan China Security Dialogue was held in Tokyo on February 22, 2023, bringing together officials from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence of both countries to exchange views on security and defence policies<sup>75</sup>. Japan reiterated its views on China's activity in the East China Sea and the Senkaku Islands, its joint exercises with Russia, Japan's position on balloon-type incidents and the importance of peace and stability in the Taiwan Straits.

China's Communique on Ukraine. A 12-point communique on February 24, 2023 elaborated China's proposals for political settlement of the Ukraine conflict<sup>76</sup>. The points include respecting the sovereignty of all countries, abandoning the Cold War mentality, ceasing hostilities, resuming peace talks, resolving the humanitarian crisis, protecting civilians and prisoners of war, keeping nuclear power plants safe, reducing strategic risks, facilitating grain exports, stopping unilateral sanctions, keeping industrial and supply chains stable and promoting post-conflict reconstruction. The proposals appeared designed to appeal to the unaligned Global South while keeping both the US alliance and Russia bogged down in Ukraine.

Exercise MOSI-II. The South Africa - China - Russia joint exercise MOSI-II took place off the coast of Kwazulu Natal, between Durban and Richards Bay, from February 22-27, 2023<sup>77</sup>. The sea phase of the exercise was from February 25-27. China fielded the Type 052D destroyer Huanain, the Type 054A frigate Rizhao and the supply ship Kekexilihu, all of which were part of the 42<sup>nd</sup> Naval Escort Force in the Gulf of Somalia and handed over their duties on February 5. Russia fielded the frigate Admiral Gorshkov and tanker Kama<sup>78</sup>. South Africa fielded one patrol vessel. That South Africa was not united in support became clear when South Africa's shadow defence minister Kobus Marais described the exercise as "cause for concern", adding "Most, if not all, SA Navy (SAN) vessels are unserviceable". He added, "To waste money on this fruitless exercise is irrational, irresponsible and unacceptable. There can be little if any real benefit for the SANDF given the enormous resource constraints it has to deal with on

<sup>75</sup> The 17<sup>th</sup> Japan-China Security Dialogue (Overview),

[https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press1e\\_000381.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press1e_000381.html)

<sup>76</sup> China's Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis,

[https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjdt\\_665385/2649\\_665393/202302/t20230224\\_1103071\\_3.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/2649_665393/202302/t20230224_1103071_3.html)

<sup>77</sup> Chinese navy vessels participate in China-Russia-South Africa joint maritime exercise,

[http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/CHINA\\_209163/TopStories\\_209189/16203348.html](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/CHINA_209163/TopStories_209189/16203348.html)

<sup>78</sup> Frigate 'Admiral Gorshkov' arrives in South African Port of Richards Bay,

[https://eng.mil.ru/en/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12455371@egNews](https://eng.mil.ru/en/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12455371@egNews)



a daily basis<sup>79</sup>. Reports also indicated that representatives of the Brazilian Navy participated in the exercise as observers<sup>80</sup>.

## Australia Related Developments

AUKUS Submarines. An unconfirmed media report indicated that the UK has agreed in-principle to provide the Australian Navy British-designed and at least partially built nuclear submarines at a cost of £2 billion per unit<sup>81</sup>. The agreement, to be unveiled when UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak visits Washington DC in March 2023, could result in the first nuclear submarine reaching Australia before 2040. UK's Barrow-in-Furness Shipyard currently builds all British nuclear submarines. The commissioning ceremony of the fifth Astute class SSN, HMS Anson was witnessed by Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles on August 31, 2022<sup>82</sup>. The submarine left the Shipyard bound for her new home at Naval Base Clyde on February 20, 2023<sup>83</sup>. Two more boats of the class are under construction and the yard is also building UK's Dreadnought-class, raising questions about its capacity to take on additional work. The report, however, states that the yard could set up a parallel production line.

The AUKUS Submarine. Adm Harry Harris, the former Commander of the US Pacific Command and US Ambassador to South Korea, told the House Armed Forces Committee on February 7, 2023 that Australia's first SSN could be a reality in less than 30 years if "we put our shoulders to the task" and commit to a tight time schedule<sup>84</sup>. The US Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Michael Gilday had earlier said that it would be well into the 2040s before Canberra can launch the first nuclear-powered attack submarine<sup>85</sup>. These statements do not

<sup>79</sup> Exercise MOSI II a cause for concern, <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/featured/exercise-mosi-ii-a-cause-for-concern/>

<sup>80</sup> Inaugural ceremony of Russian-Chinese-South African naval exercise in Port of Richards Bay, [https://eng.mil.ru/en/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12455496@egNews](https://eng.mil.ru/en/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12455496@egNews)

<sup>81</sup> Deep Down Under UK agrees historic £2 billion nuclear sub deal with Australia, <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/21356516/uk-billion-nuclear-sub-deal-australia/>

<sup>82</sup> See 'AUKUS Developments' in the Indo-Pacific Monitor, Vol III, Issue 9, [https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads\\_dpg/publication\\_file/indo-pacific-monitor-4396.pdf](https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads_dpg/publication_file/indo-pacific-monitor-4396.pdf)

<sup>83</sup> The latest of the Royal Navy's advanced attack submarines sails for the first time, <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/news/2023/february/20/230220-hms-anson-sails-for-the-first-time>

<sup>84</sup> Australia's First Nuclear Submarine Could Be a Reality in Less Than 30 Years, Former PACOM Commander Testifies, <https://news.usni.org/2023/02/07/australias-first-nuclear-submarine-could-be-a-reality-in-30-years-former-pacom-commander-testifies>

<sup>85</sup> CNO Gilday: Expanding Military Cooperation Between South Korea, Japan 'A Necessity', <https://news.usni.org/2023/01/13/cno-gilday-expanding-military-cooperation-between-south-korea-japan-a-necessity>

portend good news for Australia's submarine deterrent: the current Collin-class submarines in Australia's inventory will be from 40-50 years old at that time.

Australia's Defence Strategic Review. The Defence Strategic Review Report prepared by Professor Stephen Smith and Air Chief Marshal Sir Angus Houston, the former Defence Minister and Chief of the Defence Force, was handed over to Defence Minister Richard Marles on February 14, 2023<sup>86</sup>. The Report is an independent examination of Australia's defence force posture, force structure and capabilities, and is widely expected to form the basis of a sea change in Australia's outlook as it responds to evolving geopolitical circumstances. Its recommendations will now be examined by the government and are expected to be made public in March 2023.

### The Western Alliance in the Indo-Pacific

Mission Jeanne d'Arc 2023. The French helicopter carrier Dixmunde and frigate La Fayette, with an Army Tactical Group embarked, began a 155-day round the world odyssey on February 8, 2023<sup>87</sup>. The mission will see the two ships calling at Djibouti, Kochi, Singapore, Jakarta, Townsville (Australia), Fiji, Tonga, Papeete, Acapulco, Pointe-à-Pitre and Fort-de-France, before returning to Toulon in July 2023. The ships will carry out amphibious exercises en route, including at Kochi, and will participate in exercises with friendly navies, including Exercise La Perouse in the Indian Ocean next month with the Indian, US, Japanese and Australian navies. The deployment enables the French Navy to demonstrate capability to demonstrate intervention capability and thus safeguard French sovereignty across the globe, make autonomous assessments of the situation in areas of strategic interest, conduct joint and combined exercises with international partners, and train future officers to deal with challenges in a live environment.

US and NATO Involvement in the Indo-Pacific. The 3<sup>rd</sup> US-France Indo-Pacific Strategic Dialogue was held in the Pentagon on February 8, 2023<sup>88</sup>. Begun following the State Visit of President Macron to the US in October 2021<sup>89</sup>, the dialogue addresses how these two extra-regional powers can cooperate to ensure Indo-Pacific security. One of the first outcomes of previous editions of

<sup>86</sup> Defence Strategic Review Handed to Government, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/defence-strategic-review-handed-government>

<sup>87</sup> The Joan of Arc 2023 mission sets sail, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/terre/actualites/mission-jeanne-darc-2023-appareille>

<sup>88</sup> Readout of US-France Indo-Pacific Strategic Dialogue, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3294593/readout-of-us-france-indo-pacific-strategic-dialogue/>

<sup>89</sup> US-France Joint Statement, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/10/29/united-states-france-joint-statement/>

this dialogue could be the exercise to be conducted by ships from the French, US, Australian and Japanese navies in the Indian Ocean in March 2023. Separately, NATO also announced that it was strengthening its relations with Indo-Pacific partners, specifically Australia, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand, with a view to expanding both situational awareness and response to non-traditional challenges<sup>90</sup>.

US Indo-Pacific Strategy. A report released on February 10, 2023 by the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee chaired by Senator Robert Menendez called into question actions of the Biden Administration in adequately resourcing the US Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS)<sup>91</sup>. It recommended that the administration must significantly increase funding for diplomatic and development agencies across the US government; cultivate the Congress as an active partner to ensure sufficient allocation of resources to the Indo-Pacific; advance economic integration by pressing for concrete deliverables from the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework; make democracy and human rights core tenets of the IPD; bolster deterrence through security and non-security efforts including clarifying what integrated deterrence means; expand investment in public diplomacy; prioritise strategic investments and deepen engagement with allies and partners. Three days later, the US State Department released a fact sheet marking one year since release of the Administration's Indo-Pacific Strategy<sup>92</sup>, spelling out actions taken on each of the ten identified core lines of effort. Overall, while the Administration has moved rapidly on the military elements of its Indo-Pacific strategy, more could be done on the non-military elements.

South Korea Defence White Paper. South Korea released its 2022 Defense White Paper "with the aim of promoting public awareness of national defense policy and enhancing transparency in the military"<sup>93</sup>. The English language version is awaited. However, among the significant changes from 2022 are that North Korea is once again described as "our enemy". Japan becomes a close

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<sup>90</sup> Relations with partners in the Indo-Pacific Region, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_183254.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_183254.htm)

<sup>91</sup> Strategic Alignment: The Imperative of Resourcing the Indo-Pacific Strategy, [https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/resourcing\\_the\\_ips\\_-\\_sfrc\\_democratic\\_staff\\_report\\_2023.pdf](https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/resourcing_the_ips_-_sfrc_democratic_staff_report_2023.pdf)

<sup>92</sup> Marking One Years Since the Release of the Administration's Indo-Pacific Strategy: Fact Sheet, <https://www.state.gov/marking-one-year-since-the-release-of-the-administrations-indo-pacific-strategy/>

<sup>93</sup> The Release of the 2022 Defense White Paper, February 24, 2023, [https://www.mnd.go.kr/user/boardList.action?command=view&page=1&boardId=I\\_8576246&boardSeq=I\\_10435528&titleId=null&siteId=mndEN&id=mndEN\\_020600000000&column=null&search=null](https://www.mnd.go.kr/user/boardList.action?command=view&page=1&boardId=I_8576246&boardSeq=I_10435528&titleId=null&siteId=mndEN&id=mndEN_020600000000&column=null&search=null)

neighbour with shared values, and South Korea will strive to improve relations with Japan while deepening bilateral intelligence cooperation<sup>94</sup>.

Quad Cyber Cooperation. India, Australia, Japan and the US launched the Quad Cyber Challenge to improve cyber security across their nations<sup>95</sup>. The challenge invited internet users across the Indo-Pacific to pledge to practice safe and responsible cyber habits, including preventive measures such as installing security updates, enabling enhanced identity checks through multi-factor authentication, utilizing stronger and regularly changing passwords, and knowing how to identify common online scams. The challenge will culminate in a series of events during the week of April 10, 2023.

US CNO Visits Manila. The US Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Michael Gilday, visited Manila for the first time on February 21 & 22 to meet with military and government officials<sup>96</sup>. The Philippines has agreed to commence joint operations with the USN in the South China Sea, as also to provide the US with sites for four additional bases. The CNO's visit is likely to have included discussions on these aspects.

Japan's Tomahawk Purchase. Japan's Defence Minister Yasukazu Hamada announced that Japan will buy all the 500 Tomahawk missiles it is seeking from the US in one go during fiscal 2023<sup>97</sup>. Tokyo is evidently in a hurry to put the missiles in place at the earliest to deter growing military threats from China and North Korea. The missiles, with a range of about 1600 Km, will enable Japan to cover all approaches to Taiwan, all of North Korea and the entire Chinese coast till Guangzhou, depending on where they are placed.

US-Japan-ROK Cooperation. Taking forward the momentum imparted to trilateral relations following the NSA level meetings in September 2022, the Foreign Minister level meeting the same month and the November 2022 Joint Statement at the Leader level, the Deputy Secretary of State and equivalents of

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<sup>94</sup> South Korean Defense Paper Describes Japan as Close Neighbour, [https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2023/02/17/national/south-korea-japan-defense-papers-friends/?utm\\_source=pianoDNU&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=72&tpcc=dnu&pnespid=9.ONiIQO8KjE7.O4rhW8rfYW.A0TrSd6yhcmGEU6uxCVgNCQN\\_JWG\\_tnNPkr6D5m8.JP64Y](https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2023/02/17/national/south-korea-japan-defense-papers-friends/?utm_source=pianoDNU&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=72&tpcc=dnu&pnespid=9.ONiIQO8KjE7.O4rhW8rfYW.A0TrSd6yhcmGEU6uxCVgNCQN_JWG_tnNPkr6D5m8.JP64Y)

<sup>95</sup> Quad Joint Statement on Cooperation to Promote Responsible Cyber Habits, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/02/07/quad-joint-statement-on-cooperation-to-promote-responsible-cyber-habits/>

<sup>96</sup> CNO Visits Philippines to Discuss Regional Security, Importance of the Navy, 22 February 2023, <https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/Press-Releases/display-pressreleases/Article/3306332/cno-visits-philippines-to-discuss-regional-security-importance-of-the-navy/>

<sup>97</sup> Japan to buy Tomahawks in one go from US in fiscal year 2023, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2023/02/14/national/japan-tomohawk-missiles/>

the US, Japan and South Korea met in Washington DC on February 13, 2023<sup>98</sup>. Key aspects discussed included the commonality of their approach to ensure a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, the resolve to continue Ballistic Missile Defence and Anti-Submarine Warfare exercises and South Korea being the regional co-host of the Second Summit for Democracy (the US is to co-host this in a virtual format on March 29-30, 2023, followed by gatherings in the co-host countries with representatives from government, civil society and the private sector; co-hosts will be Costa Rica, the Netherlands, South Korea and Zambia<sup>99</sup>). Executing the stated intent of strengthening deterrence, the US, Japan and South Korea carried out a ballistic missile defence exercise in the Sea of Japan on February 22, 2023<sup>100</sup>.

Japan – ROK Relations. The high speed boat service linking South Korea's Busan Port with Japan's Hitakatsu Port on the island of Tsushima resumed on February 25, 2023<sup>101</sup>. The number of South Korean visitors to the island had plummeted in 2019 following the deterioration in bilateral ties. The service was suspended in April 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

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<sup>98</sup> Joint Statement on the US-Japan-Republic of Korea Trilateral Ministerial Meeting, <https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-on-the-u-s-japan-republic-of-korea-trilateral-ministerial-meeting-2/>

<sup>99</sup> Summit for Democracy 2023, <https://www.state.gov/summit-for-democracy-2023/>

<sup>100</sup> US, Japan, Republic of Korea conduct Trilateral Ballistic Missile Defense Exercise, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/3304628/us-japan-republic-of-korea-conduct-trilateral-ballistic-missile-defense-exercise/>

<sup>101</sup> Boat Service Linking South Korea's Busan Port with Japan's Tsushima Resumes, The Japan Times, February 25, 2023.



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