



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

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Author

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INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

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

Cover Image:

IN Ships Delhi and Satpura with ASEAN ships participating in the first ASEAN-India Maritime Exercise in the South China Sea on May 8, 2023. Source: Indian Navy

US President Joe Biden, Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and India's Prime Minister at Hiroshima during the Third Quad In-Person Summit, May 20, 2023. Source: Twitter@narendramodi

Prime Minister Kishida Welcomes Prime Minister Modi to the G7 Hiroshima Summit, May 20, 2023. Source: MEA Photo Gallery

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Contents

Abstract	1
The 42 nd ASEAN Summit	2
The Quad Hiroshima Summit of May 20, 2023	6
Prime Minister Modi's Visit to Sydney	11
The IORA Indo-Pacific Outlook	14
The Indo-Pacific Outlook of Bangladesh	18
The ASEAN India Maritime Exercise	19
Other Indo-Pacific Developments	22



INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

May 2023

Abstract

A series of summits marked the month as nations jockeyed collectively and individually to enhance their position in the Indo-Pacific. The 42nd ASEAN Summit at Labuan Bajo in Indonesia on May 10-11 began the plurilateral series. A Chairman's Statement and ten other outcome documents spoke of incremental progress in building the Southeast Asian community, but left the strategic community at large unhappy about ASEAN's inability to get to grips with major challenges facing the region.

The Hiroshima G7 Summit followed from May 19-21, resulting in a voluminous communiqué and nine vision documents / progress reports. The unity of the G7 on issues as diverse as the war in Ukraine, China's egregious behaviour, economic security, the clean energy transition and responding to global challenges was remarkable. This could result in increased unilateralism even as the G7 talks of greater cooperation with the G20 and Global South.

The Quad Sydney Summit scheduled on May 24 became a truncated Quad Hiroshima Summit of May 20 due to President Biden's domestic compulsions. It was marked by a vision statement, a joint statement that unlike the one by the G7 mentioned neither China nor Russia, and three statements of principles. The third FIPIC Summit at Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea followed on May 22, strengthening India's engagement with the Pacific Island countries.

At the bilateral level, Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos made his first visit to the US from April 30 – May 4. Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida visited Seoul from May 7-8, continuing the resurgence in Japan-South Korea relations following President Yoon's visit to Tokyo in March. India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a bilateral visit to Sydney on May 23-24, eliciting a bipartisan welcome from Australian polity and a rapturous one from the Indian community.

The Indian Ocean Rim Association published its Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, with ASEAN and Quad partners acknowledging India's role in leading its development. Bangladesh also posted its new Indo-Pacific outlook, becoming the second Indian Ocean country after India to do so.



At the ministerial level, India's Defence Minister Shri Rajnath Singh made a successful visit to the Maldives from May 1-3. The 13th Singapore-Australia Joint Ministerial Committee Meeting in the 3+3 format on May 1 advanced Singapore-Australia ties. Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong visited the Philippines from May 16-18 for a review of the bilateral Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, and US Secretary of State Antony J Blinken substituted for President Biden in Papua New Guinea on May 22, signing the US-PNG Defence Cooperation Agreement.

India demonstrated its capability through the evacuation of nearly 4000 of its nationals from strife-torn Sudan. The Indian Navy continued its outreach to the region, through the inaugural ASEAN-India Maritime Exercise in the South China Sea, bilateral exercises with Thailand, Indonesia and Saudi Arabia, and port visits to Cambodia and Vietnam. INS Vikrant carried out the first night trap of a Mig-29K fighter on board.

The US Congressional Research Service assessed that the PLA (Navy) will comprise of 400 ships in 2025, as compared to the USN fleet size of 286 ships at the same time. This will include six SSBNs, 10 SSNs, 55 conventional submarines, 55 capital ships and 120 escorts. The planned ultimate size of the PLA (N) remains unknown.

The 42nd ASEAN Summit

The Indo-Pacific is acknowledged as the world's primary growth area. IMF projections in March 2023 indicated the region would be responsible for 67.4% of global growth in 2023, as compared to just 13.7% for the Western Hemisphere and 7.1% for Europe. Southeast Asia is the heart of the Indo-Pacific, the connector between the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Thus, when Southeast Asian leaders come together, the Indo-Pacific watches.

Southeast Asian leaders assembled at the Bintang Flores Hotel, in Labuan Bajo, Indonesia, on May 10-11 for the 42nd ASEAN Summit. Indonesia identifies the city, along with Lake Toba in Northern Sumatra, Borobudur in Central Java, Mandalika in West Nusa Tenggara and Kikupang in North Sulawesi as one of its five super-priority destinations for tourism. The Summit was intended to showcase the facilities available. Indonesia's President Joko Widodo was the



Chair. A voluminous statement running into 127 paragraphs described the discussions and decisions during the Summit¹.

The verbosity of the statement disguised the relative paucity of significant content. 115 of the paragraphs reiterate well-known ASEAN principles and priorities that form part of every statement, or commend ASEAN bodies for their steady progress; only 12 reflect decisions or agreements adopted by Southeast Asian Leaders. Among these 12 were the adoption of declarations on migrant fishers², protection of migrant workers and their families³, combating trafficking in persons caused by the abuse of technology⁴, developing the regional electric vehicle ecosystem⁵, a one health initiative⁶, advancing regional payment connectivity and promoting local currency transactions⁷; and statements on the establishment of an ASEAN villages network⁸, strengthening ASEAN's capacity and institutional effectiveness⁹, the recent attack on a convoy of the AHA Centre and the ASEAN Monitoring Team in Myanmar¹⁰, and the development of a post-2025 vision¹¹.

¹ Chairman's Statement of the 42nd ASEAN Summit Labuan Bajo, Indonesia, 110-11 May 2023, <https://asean.org/chairmans-statement-of-the-42nd-asean-summit/>

² ASEAN Declaration on the Placement and Protection of Migrant Fishers, <https://asean.org/asean-declaration-on-the-placement-and-protection-of-migrant-fishers/>

³ ASEAN Declaration on the Protection of Migrant Workers and Family Members in Crisis Situations, <https://asean.org/asean-declaration-on-the-protection-of-migrant-workers-and-family-members-in-crisis-situations/>

⁴ ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on Combating Trafficking in Persons Caused by the Abuse of Technology, <https://asean.org/asean-leaders-declaration-on-combating-trafficking-in-persons-caused-by-the-abuse-of-technology/>

⁵ ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on Developing Regional Electric Vehicles Ecosystem, <https://asean.org/asean-leaders-declaration-on-developing-regional-electric-vehicle-ecosystem/>

⁶ ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on One Health Initiative, <https://asean.org/asean-leaders-declaration-on-one-health-initiative/>

⁷ ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on Advancing Regional Payment Connectivity and Promoting Local Currency Transaction, <https://asean.org/asean-leaders-declaration-on-advancing-regional-payment-connectivity-and-promoting-local-currency-transaction/>

⁸ ASEAN Leaders' Joint Statement on the Establishment of an ASEAN Villages Network, <https://asean.org/asean-leaders-joint-statement-on-the-establishment-of-an-asean-villages-network/>

⁹ ASEAN Leaders' Statement on Strengthening ASEAN's Capacity and Institutional Effectiveness, <https://asean.org/asean-leaders-statement-on-strengthening-aseans-capacity-and-institutional-effectiveness/>

¹⁰ ASEAN Leaders' Statement on the Recent Attack on a Convoy of the AHA Centre and ASEAN Monitoring Team in Myanmar, <https://asean.org/asean-leaders-statement-on-the-recent-attack-on-a-convoy-of-the-aha-centre-and-asean-monitoring-team-in-myanmar/>

¹¹ ASEAN Leaders' Statement on the Development of the ASEAN Community's Post-2025 Vision, <https://asean.org/asean-leaders-statement-on-the-development-of-the-asean-communitys-post-2025-vision/>



Of interest to the Indo-Pacific are the expansion of ASEAN's interests to maintaining and promoting peace, stability and prosperity not only in Southeast Asia, but also in the wider Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions. Leaders looked forward to establishing secretariat-to-secretariat cooperation between ASEAN and IORA as well as the PIF. Towards this end, they expressed their intent to invite the chairs of these bodies to participate in the 18th East Asia Summit as Guests of the Chair.

As expected, the centrality of ASEAN figured repeatedly. Southeast Asia certainly enjoys geographical centrality and ASEAN has built up enviable institutional linkages, providing unparalleled convening power in the Indo-Pacific. No other body can bring such a wide range of actors together for dialogue. This has not, however, translated into geopolitical centrality or influence. ASEAN statements repeatedly reaffirm the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) as the key code of conduct governing inter-state relations in the region and take pride in the number of new countries desirous of acceding to the TAC¹². The current statement looks forward to the accession of Saudi Arabia, Spain, Panama and Mexico. However, the fact that China has blithely ignored the provisions of Articles 2, 10, 13 and 17 of the TAC without consequence is glossed over. ASEAN continues to seek the accession of its nuclear dialogue partners to the protocol of the Southeast Asian Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone committing them not to contribute to violation of the treaty or to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons in the zone, but without effect. It continues to harp on the 1982 UNCLOS being the basis for determining maritime entitlement, sovereign rights, jurisdiction and legitimate interest over maritime zones, but glosses over China's concerted and ongoing effort to establish its domestic jurisdiction in the South China Sea, as well as disregard of a binding award by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in this regard. Over half a century after ASEAN's formation, cooperation in tackling governance challenges in maritime Southeast Asia, including piracy and trafficking in narcotics, arms and humans receives attention more in words than deeds: Southeast Asia remains the world's premier maritime piracy and armed robbery hot spot, well ahead of the Gulf of Guinea and the Caribbean in terms of numbers¹³.

Consequently, regional problems continue to fester. China's activity in the South China Sea continues unabated, with ASEAN's collective unity having fallen victim to China's economic attractions and disregarding the legitimate

¹² Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/20131230235433.pdf>

¹³ IMB Piracy and Armed Robbery Map 2023, <https://www.icc-ccs.org/piracy-reporting-centre/live-piracy-map>



rights of at least two of ASEAN's members (the Philippines and Vietnam). ASEAN statements repeatedly emphasise the importance of self-restraint and speak of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC)¹⁴; ASEAN joined China in celebrating the 20th anniversary of the DOC's signing with a Joint Statement¹⁵. The substantial change in the ground situation in the South China Sea with numerous reefs having been reclaimed and militarised, is suppressed. Interminable discussions on the Code of Conduct the DOC envisaged continue. Fundamental differences in the positions of China and Southeast Asian countries indicate that no resolution is likely, but bureaucrats continue to meet and pretend a COC is around the corner. Myanmar is in turmoil; though ASEAN has adopted a common position during the summit, differences between those who are Myanmar's neighbours and the rest continue playing out on ground. ASEAN has reiterated its position on North Korea, the Middle East and Ukraine; this is more for guidance of the stand to be taken by its members than for any impact on the ground.

A stark divergence in perspectives is emerging. On the one hand, ASEAN's officials describe the 42nd Summit as being of very high quality. They emphasise that while ASEAN moves slowly, it has come far. The strategic community, on the other hand, questions the pace of progress, and even ASEAN's relevance in the current era. They expect much more by way of improving the regional security architecture, including developing regional norms for great power behaviour. They expect ASEAN to get to grips with growing security challenges confronting the region and take measures to deny external powers the benefits of egregious behaviour, instead of relying on bureaucratise to obfuscate the situation. Individual nations, meanwhile, are hedging and building their own relationships independent of ASEAN. The Philippines, for example, has visibly tilted towards the US, Indonesia is expanding its external bilateral relationships, while continental Southeast Asia tilts towards China.

ASEAN and its subsidiary mechanisms will no doubt meander along, with incremental progress to show for their existence. How effective they will be as the era of globalisation gives way to an era of great power competition, even contestation, remains questionable. The Indo-Pacific needs an effective ASEAN, not one that is handicapped by bureaucratic dogma and the desire for continuity. The ASEAN Community post-2025 vision, this time spread over the

¹⁴ Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea,
<https://asean.org/declaration-on-the-conduct-of-parties-in-the-south-china-sea-2/>

¹⁵ Joint Statement in the 20th Anniversary of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea,
https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt_665385/2649_665393/202211/t20221114_10974284.html



2025-2045 time frame, will largely shape what the world can expect from ASEAN in the years ahead.

The Quad Hiroshima Summit of May 20, 2023

At Tokyo on May 24, 2022, the Quad leaders had agreed to host their next in-person summit in Australia in 2023¹⁶. Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced that he looked forward to hosting his Quad counterparts in Sydney a month ago¹⁷. The White House advised the press that President Biden would go from Hiroshima via Papua New Guinea to the Quad Leaders' Summit in Sydney¹⁸. A domestic crisis in the US, viz. staving off the risk of default, forced a change of plans, with President Biden deciding to return to the US on May 21¹⁹. The initial impression was that the third Quad in-person summit stood cancelled. It was, however, eventually held at Hiroshima on May 20, with other leaders adjusting their programs accordingly. It was chaired by Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese.

The Quad adopted a shared vision statement²⁰. This vision seeks a region that is peaceful and prosperous, stable and secure, respectful of sovereignty, free from intimidation or coercion, where disputes are settled in accordance with international law, and where countries and peoples can exercise free choice on how they cooperate and trade based on partnership, equality and mutual respect. It sets out four principles to guide the Quad's working: the commitment to provide options that build resilience, open communication and economic growth to the region; managing competition responsibly and upholding an international order based on the rule law; respecting the centrality, agency and leadership of regional institutions such as ASEAN, IORA and PIF and working in partnership with them; and working transparently to implement a practical agenda that delivers sustained economic and social

¹⁶ Quad Joint Leaders' Statement, May 24, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/05/24/quad-joint-leaders-statement/>

¹⁷ Australia to Host Quad Leaders' Summit, April 26, 2023, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/australia-host-quad-leaders-summit>

¹⁸ Statement from Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre on President Biden's Historic Travel to Papua New Guinea May 09, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/05/09/statement-from-press-secretary-karine-jean-pierre-on-president-bidens-historic-travel-to-papua-new-guinea/>

¹⁹ Statement by White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre on President Biden's Historic Travel to Papua New Guinea, May 16, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/05/16/statement-by-white-house-press-secretary-karine-jean-pierre-on-president-bidens-travel-to-australia-and-papua-new-guinea/>

²⁰ Quad Leaders' Vision Statement – Enduring Partners for the Indo-Pacific, May 20, 2023, https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/36573/Quad_Leaders_Vision_Statement_Enduring_Partners_for_the_IndoPacific



value, is responsive to regional partners and contributes to global priorities. The vision did not mention China.

The Quad Joint Statement reflected progress in existing commitments and set out new areas of cooperation²¹. Pride of place went to the urgent need to address the climate crisis. Under the Climate Information Services Initiative, the Quad announced their intent to coordinate collective resources to support early warning systems in the Indo-Pacific and to seek meaningful outcomes on climate action and clean energy transition in the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF). The leaders underlined their intention to increase the region's access to climate finance and climate smart technology, through measures such as the Quad Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Package (Q-CHAMP), the Sydney Energy Forum and the Quad Clean Hydrogen Partnership. They issued a statement of principles on clean energy supply chains in the region to provide a basis for their engagement²².

On the health front, the leaders announced evolution of the Quad Vaccine Partnership into a broader Quad Health Security Partnership. This will expand and integrate surveillance for key pathogens, increase workforce training for pandemic preparedness and response, expand virtual training and telemedicine capacity, strengthen vaccine data systems, and strengthen diagnosis and treatment capacity of core hospitals.

On the infrastructure front, three new initiatives were launched to provide training, capacity and resources to improve ongoing and future projects. A Quad Infrastructure Fellowship will provide at least 1800 scholarships, work exchanges and other executive programs to government officials on best practices surrounding the design, delivery and management of high-standard infrastructure projects. A Quad Partnership for Cable Connectivity and Resilience will bring together public and private sector actors to address gaps in infrastructure and coordinate on future builds. Australia will establish a new Indo-Pacific Cable Connectivity and Resilience Programme to share best practices and provide technical assistance to regional governments.

On the investment front, a newly launched Quad Investors Network (QUIN) will facilitate access by the region to capital and technology partnerships through establishment of an Advisory Board of business leaders and expert working

²¹ Quad Leaders' Joint Statement, May 20, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/05/20/quad-leaders-joint-statement/>

²² Quad Statement of Principles on Clean Energy Supply Chains in the Indo-Pacific, May 20, 2023, https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/36572/Quad_Statement_of_Principles_on_Clean_Energy_Supply_Chains_in_the_IndoPacific



groups. Quad countries will establish a Memorandum of Cooperation between their export credit agencies to strengthen collaboration for the promotion of trade, financing of trade-enabling projects, economic development and knowledge-sharing with respect to the export of goods and services. The Quad will work together to identify and address gaps in manufacturing capacity for critical clean energy materials and technologies, in particular in supply chains for solar photovoltaics, hydrogen electrolyser and electric vehicle battery technologies. QUIN will convene a Quad Clean Energy Supply Chain Conference to showcase incentives and public financing opportunities, promote investment in vertical clean energy supply chains and identify and address non-financial barriers to clean energy deployment.

On the technology front, the Quad released its principles on critical and emerging technology standards²³. It will partner with the Government of Palau to design, implement and operationalize the deployment of Open RAN capabilities, to modernise Palau's national mobile network. The Quad also released the Open RAN Security Report, outlining security considerations associated with using Open RAN to develop network architecture. The report will serve as a global resource to support adoption of open, interoperable and trusted network architectures.

A new area of cooperation is Advancing Innovation to Empower Nextgen Agriculture (AI-ENGAGE). Through AI-ENGAGE, Quad science agencies will fund collaborative research on how to leverage the latest science and technology advances to benefit farmers, targeting increased crop yield and resilience.

The Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) initiative launched at the Tokyo Summit on May 24, 2022 is now bringing cutting-edge satellite-based data to partners in the region through two pilot programs in the Pacific Islands and Southeast Asia, with a third program due to begin in the Indian Ocean. It improves the ability of regional partners to counter IUU fishing, respond to climate change and natural disasters and enforce the law near their shores.

In other areas of cooperation, the first class of Quad fellows under the Quad STEM Fellowship will begin their studies in the US in August 2023. The Fellowship will expand in the coming years to include education and professional opportunities in Australia, India and Japan. Quad partners have

²³ Quad Principles on Critical and Emerging Technology Standards, May 20, 2023, https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/36575/Quad_Principles_on_Critical_and_Emerging_Technology_Standards



developed joint principles for cyber security of critical infrastructure, enabling strengthening of defences against cyber threats. The partners have also developed joint principles to collectively improve software security²⁴. They are committed to strengthening cooperation on commercial space activities as well as on leveraging space situational awareness and space traffic coordination for safety and sustainability of the outer space environment.

Quad leaders also announced a shared position on global and regional issues. They resolved to uphold peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific maritime domain, opposed destabilising actions seeking to change status quo by force or coercion and emphasising the importance of adherence to international law, including UNCLOS. They expressed serious concern at the militarisation of disputed features, the dangerous use of coastguard and maritime militia vessels and efforts to disrupt offshore resource exploitation activities of other nations. They reiterated their support for the UN Charter and the pillars of the UN system and voiced their intent to strengthen the multilateral system so that it better reflects the aspirations of the Indo-Pacific. They resolved to continue rendering humanitarian assistance to Ukraine for its recovery and expressed their commitment to dialogue and diplomacy to obtain a just and lasting peace consistent with the UN Charter. They condemned North Korea's destabilising ballistic missile launches and pursuit of nuclear weapons, expressed their concern about the deteriorating situation in Myanmar and supported ASEAN-led efforts to bring peace. They unequivocally condemned terrorism and violent extremism in all its forms and manifestations, including cross-border terrorism and called for accountability for the perpetrators of terrorist attacks, including at Mumbai and in Pathankot. They endorsed the outcomes of the March 3 Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting in New Delhi, and announced that India would host the next in-person Quad Leaders' Summit in 2024.

Responding to a question regarding China's view of the Quad and Indo-Pacific strategy pursued by the US, Japan, India and Australia, Wang Yi, then China's Foreign Minister, had said "It seems there is never a shortage of headline-grabbing ideas. They are like the sea foam in the Pacific or Indian Ocean: they may get some attention, but soon will dissipate". He added, "Contrary to the claim made by some academics and media outlets that the Indo-Pacific Strategy aims to contain China, the four countries' official position is that it

²⁴ Quad Cybersecurity Partnership: Joint Principles for Secure Software, May 20, 2023, https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/36574/Quad_Cybersecurity_Partnership_Joint_Principles_for_Secure_Software



targets no one. I hope they mean what they say and their actions will match their rhetoric”²⁵.

The “headline grabbing idea” has not only not dissipated, it has assumed remarkable longevity. That there have been five Quad summits since March 2021, two virtual and three in-person, speaks for itself. Leaders have already committed to the next Quad Summit, to be held in India in 2024. Their agenda has expanded, from just three areas (vaccines, critical and emerging technologies and climate) in March 2021 to well over a dozen areas now. Mutual comfort levels have grown and the combined outlook remains positive. There is growing acceptability of the Quad and fears about it usurping ASEAN’s central role have been allayed. More than 50% of the respondents in a recent Southeast Asian survey gave it a positive rating, while another 37.4% were neutral and only about 12% had a negative opinion²⁶. More than two-thirds of the respondents in this survey felt that cooperation with the Quad will be beneficial for the region or will be complementary to ASEAN’s efforts; only 10.4% of the respondents worried that it would force countries to choose sides, while 13.9% worried that it would threaten ASEAN centrality. Indonesian President Joko Widodo described the Quad and AUKUS as partners, not competitors to ASEAN in a recent interview²⁷.

China and its acolytes, however, continue to portray the Quad as an anti-China alliance and an Asian NATO, indicating growing concern. This is only to be expected: for a party leadership bent on pulling the region into China’s orbit, any attempt to provide an alternate gravitational centre is a challenge to China’s hegemonic ambitions. The Quad’s potential to stiffen spines across the whole of the Indo-Pacific cannot be denied²⁸.

The Quad has so far focused on providing public goods, repeatedly iterated that its vision is inclusive and prioritised working with regional mechanisms like ASEAN, IORA and the PIF. The bureaucratic tendency to showcase numerous new areas of cooperation has been backed by delivery of results in visible areas,

²⁵ Foreign Minister Wang Yi Meets the Press, March 9, 2018, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/wjbz_663308/2461_663310/201803/t20180309_468677.html

²⁶ 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>

²⁷ Jokowi: Aim is to make ASEAN region stable, May 8, 2023, <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2023/05/906846/exclusive-jokowi-aim-make-asean-region-stable-nsttv>

²⁸ Kevin Rudd, “Why the Quad Alarms China”, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2021-08-06/why-quad-alarms-china?utm_medium=newsletters&utm_source=fatoday&utm_campaign=Why%20the%20Quad%20Alarms%20China%20&utm_content=20210806&utm_term=FA%20Today%20-%20112017



even though it is still early days for the Quad. Going forward, the statement of resolve to uphold peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific maritime domain and strong opposition to destabilising or unilateral actions that seek to change the status quo by force or coercion should result in acceleration of maritime security cooperation. Exercise Malabar, the next edition of which will be held in August 2023, and the web of bilateral and trilateral partnerships that have been built up between Quad partners, provide the underlying hard power architecture that can be strengthened rapidly should the need arise. The inaugural ASEAN-India Maritime Exercise 2023 and the fourth India Indonesia Exercise Samudra Shakti, both conducted in the South China Sea for the first time, may provide indicators of a changing trend.

The recognition of India's lead role in formulation of the IOIP and its leadership in the Indian Ocean; accommodation of its position on Ukraine without condemning Russia and acknowledgement of concerns regarding cross-border terrorism are positives. The Quad vision statement moves it towards an Indo-Pacific Charter, somewhat like the New Atlantic Charter²⁹, with the difference that the collective security element is conspicuous by its absence. There is, however, a long way to go. For the foreseeable future, analysts and media personnel may continue to speculate about the Quad's efficacy and ultimate objectives. The Quad is, however, well on its way towards becoming an important force for public good in the region. It serves the interests of the four partners well and does act as a brake on regional countries being forced into China's orbit.

Prime Minister Modi's Visit to Sydney

"Prime Minister Modi will visit Sydney, Australia, on 22-24 May 2023 at the invitation of H.E. Mr Anthony Albanese, Prime Minister of Australia, to participate in the Quad Leaders' Summit", stated a Press Release on May 16, 2023³⁰. The Quad Summit, however, was advanced and took place in Hiroshima on May 20. President Biden and Prime Minister Kishida pulled out of the Sydney visit, putting to naught the over A\$ 23 million the Australian government had budgeted for the event. PM Modi, however, went ahead, announcing a bilateral visit on May 19³¹ and displaying a sensitivity to the

²⁹ The New Atlantic Charter, June 10, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/06/10/the-new-atlantic-charter/>

³⁰ Prime Minister's Visit to Japan, Papua New Guinea and Australia, May 16, 2023, https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/36550/Prime_Ministers_visit_to_Japan_Papua_New_Guinea_and_Australia

³¹ Official Visit to Australia by the Prime Minister of India, 22 May 2023, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/official-visit-australia-prime-minister-india>



other's perceptions not often seen in world affairs. His visit content comprised interaction with prominent Australian personalities including the leader of the opposition³² and business leaders, a community event also attended by Australia's political leaders, leader-level interaction and other courtesy calls.

There was much to show. First was the composition of the Advisory Board of the newly created Centre for Australia-India Relations to be headquartered at Parramatta, a suburb of Sydney. Foreign Minister Penny Wong had in February announced that Ms Swati Dave would be the inaugural chair of the board³³. Prime Minister Albanese had followed up by announcing during his March visit to India that Tim Thomas would be the CEO³⁴. The two jointly announced the names of 11 other members of the Advisory Board³⁵. The Centre is intended as a national platform bringing together all levels of government, the industry and the broader community to drive the Australia-India engagement³⁶. It will work with Indian diaspora, promote connections between government and non-government institutions through enhanced policy dialogue, work with business to promote greater awareness and understanding of the growing India market, build business literacy and support new business partnerships. It will also administer over A \$ 20 million in Maitri (friendship) initiatives, including scholarship, fellowships, cultural partnerships and grants.

The leaders reiterated their shared ambition for early conclusion of the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA)³⁷. Apart from giving Australia a head start in gaining access to India's economy (and vice-versa), the agreement will provide a template for India's trade negotiations with other advanced countries. They announced finalisation of the Australia-India Migration and Mobility Partnership Arrangement, which will promote two-way mobility of students, graduates, academic researchers and business people, while also enhancing cooperation to prevent irregular migration and people smuggling, thus strengthening India's living bridge to Australia. Australia's

³² Leader of Opposition of Australia Called on Prime Minister, https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/36602/Leader_of_Opposition_of_Australia_called_on_Prime_Minister

³³ Centre for Australia India Relations Chair, Feb 23, 2023, <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/penny-wong/media-release/centre-australia-india-relations-chair>

³⁴ Centre for Australia India Relations CEO, March 10, 2023, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/centre-australia-india-relations-ceo>

³⁵ Inaugural Advisory Board for Centre for Australia-India Relations, 23 May, 2023, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/inaugural-advisory-board-centre-australia-india-relations>

³⁶ Centre for Australia-India Relations, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/india/bolstering-our-ties-india/request-submissions-shaping-centre-australia-india-relations/centre-australia-india-relations#:~:text=The%20Centre%20will%20be%20a,gravity%20for%20the%20bilateral%20relationship>

³⁷ Celebrating Australia-India Ties with Prime Minister Modi, May 24, 2023, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/celebrating-australia-india-ties-prime-minister-modi>



Deakin University is already establishing a campus in Gujarat, Wollongong University will follow.

The leaders announced agreement on the terms of reference for the Australia-India Green Hydrogen Task Force, which will report to the Australia-India Ministerial Energy Dialogue on opportunities in both countries to cooperate in renewable hydrogen. PM Albanese again spoke of Australia's fifth consulate in India, at Bengaluru, while PM Modi announced the setting up of India's consulate-general in Brisbane to supplement its mission at Canberra and Consulates-General at Perth, Sydney and Melbourne. Prime Minister Modi invited Australian business leaders to invest in India, telling them of the favourable ecosystem being created and opportunities in diverse fields like electronics, defence and other sectors³⁸. He expressed his happiness at welcoming PM Albanese to India for the G20 Summit in September, and invited him and all Australian cricket fans to witness the Cricket World Cup, to be held from October 5 to November 19, as well as India's Diwali festival.

The issue of attacks on Indian temples in Australia and the adverse activities of separatist elements came up for mention. Prime Minister Modi thanked PM Albanese for the steps he had already taken in this regard. PM Albanese in turn assured PM Modi that he would continue to take strict steps to maintain peace³⁹. He was measured and careful in his response to provocative questions from the media regarding India being soft on Russia⁴⁰, not respecting the international rule of law⁴¹, repressing political opponents and discriminating against Muslims⁴², whether Australia could rely on India in the event of a China contingency, etc. He observed that India had in fact called for peace in Ukraine, that it had the right to determine its own foreign policy, that Australia's relationship with India had never been stronger. He highlighted India's fraught relationship with China, refused to pass comments on India's internal politics or to leak text messages with other world leaders⁴³ and highlighted India's

³⁸ Opening Remarks – Bilateral Meeting with the Prime Minister of India, May 24, 2023, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/opening-remarks-bilateral-meeting-prime-minister-india>

³⁹ Press Statements – Sydney, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/press-statements-sydney>

⁴⁰ Transcript Television Interview Today, 24 May 2023, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/television-interview-today>

⁴¹ Television Interview ABC News Breakfast, May 24, 2023, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/television-interview-abc-news-breakfast-10>

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Television Interview ABC News Breakfast, May 24, 2023, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/television-interview-abc-news-breakfast-10>



economic growth and the massive support PM Modi commanded⁴⁴. His Foreign Minister was similarly reserved in her interaction with the media⁴⁵.

Relations between India and Australia have undergone a sea change since Prime Minister Modi first visited the country in 2014. Australia's turn away from China, spurred by the wolf-warrior experience and the renewed security partnership with the US is a significant driver. Others are economic complementarities and India's market potential, the living bridge that India's diaspora in Australia provide, and convergent Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific interests. Given the backdrop of the tepid bilateral relationship for the first six decades of India's independence, progress in advancing the bilateral relationship across the board has been significant.

India will not provide Australia security guarantees in the way its alliance with the US does⁴⁶. As fellow members of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, however, Australia and India will play a consequential part in shaping geopolitical developments in the Indo-Pacific. A mutually beneficial bilateral relationship will help. The visible bonhomie and mutual respect as well as growing cooperation across the board indicate the bilateral relationship is blossoming. Prime Minister Modi's recent visit to Sydney adds to this progress.

The IORA Indo-Pacific Outlook

The 22nd COM Meeting in Dhaka noted, "We conveyed appreciation to India for leading the development of the IORA Outlook on the Indo-Pacific" (IOIP)⁴⁷. The IOIP was adopted at this meeting. It was, however, posted on the IORA website only on April 14, 2023⁴⁸.

Like others before it, the IORA Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (IOIP) highlights the centrality of the Indo-Pacific in today's world. It notes that the region contributes over 60% of the global GDP and about half the world's trade takes place through maritime routes passing through the Indian Ocean.

⁴⁴ Transcript Television Interview Sunrise 24 May 2023,

<https://www.pm.gov.au/media/television-interview-sunrise-11>

⁴⁵ Interview with James Valentine, ABC Radio Sydney, 24 May 2023,

<https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/penny-wong/transcript/interview-james-valentine-abc-radio-sydney>

⁴⁶ For an overview of Australia's National Security Concept, see Lalit Kapur, "Assessing Australia's Defence Strategic Review", DPG Policy Brief, Vol VIII Issue 16,

https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads_dpg/publication_file/assessing-australias-defence-strategic-review-4896.pdf

⁴⁷ The Dhaka Communiqué 2022, November 24, 2022,

<https://www.iora.int/media/24391/dhaka-communication-2022.pdf>

⁴⁸ IORA's Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, <https://www.iora.int/media/24429/indo-pacific-outlook.pdf>



Connectivity, regional and inter-regional cooperation are growing, and there are greater economic opportunities. The Indian Ocean Rim, represented by IORA, is an essential part of the Indo-Pacific. IORA has a strong interest in ensuring peace, prosperity, economic cooperation, maritime safety and security, and stability for the peoples of the region. It is in the interest of IORA to support cooperation among its member states, dialogue partners, regional and international organisations, as well as relevant stakeholders who aim to enhance regional cooperation.

The IOIP identifies four principles for cooperation. First is respect for sovereign equality, territorial integrity, political independence, non-interference in internal affairs, peaceful co-existence and mutual benefit. Second, bilateral and other issues likely to generate controversy and impede regional cooperation will be excluded from deliberations. Third, promotion of good governance by member states will enable smooth implementation of programmes. Fourth is respect for the IORA Charter and adherence with international law, including UNCLOS and other UN treaties and conventions, as applicable.

It then sets out 12 objectives to guide its engagement in the Indo-Pacific: enhancing maritime safety and security and the unimpeded use of the seas in accordance with UNCLOS; promoting economic growth and shared prosperity; promoting conservation, sustainable use and management of marine resources and addressing the challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, marine pollution and other harmful environmental impacts; establishing frameworks that build trust, promote friendship, facilitate dialogue and enable collaborative action and cooperation to advance peace and security; strengthening existing mechanisms that can deliver security and prosperity for all in a transparent, stable, inclusive and non-intrusive environment; enhancing coordination and collaboration among stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific; realising a fair, non-discriminatory, non-coercive, inclusive, equitable, transparent, sustainable, predictable and stable trade and investment environment; promoting greater and more efficient connectivity initiatives in the Indo-Pacific; supporting efforts by other regional organisations to foster regional cooperation and dialogue; and strengthening collaboration with relevant sub-regional and regional associations and organisations to bolster regional cooperation and enhance complementarity.

The IOIP prioritises the same six priority and two cross-cutting issues that already mark IORA's focus⁴⁹: maritime safety and security; trade and investment facilitation; fisheries management; disaster risk management;

⁴⁹ IORA Priorities, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/international-relations/regional-architecture/indian-ocean/iora/iora-priorities>



academic, science and technology cooperation, tourism and cultural exchanges; the blue economy and women's economic empowerment. It notes that IORA could consider the creation of new working groups or functional bodies based on consensus and in accordance with existing institutional mechanisms set out in the IORA Charter, while the IORA Special Fund can be used to finance the implementation of agreed projects.

Asia has two maritime faces (the Pacific and Indian Oceans). The regional architecture in the Pacific, however, has evolved far more rapidly than in the Indian Ocean. First off the block was East Asia, where the US involvement first in WW II and then against the communist threat in Korea put in place the US-led hub-and-spokes structure, which still continues.

Next came Southeast Asia's ASEAN, whose initial focus was establishing a bulwark against communism and preventing internal divisions from being exploited against the region. Even though it straddled both oceans, its focus was the Asia Pacific; it made itself central to Southeast Asia, economically, politically and institutionally, though not yet on the strategic security front. ASEAN has now been in existence for nearly 56 years. It held its 42nd summit from May 9-11, 2023. All Southeast Asian countries are members: leaders welcomed the Prime Minister of East Timor for the first time at the recent 42nd Summit⁵⁰. Its relationship and economic dependence on China have expanded so much that Southeast Asia is content to downplay China's assertion and provocation in the South China Sea so as not to jeopardise the economic relationship. To a substantial extent, Southeast Asian countries have become China's economic satellites.

The Indian Ocean, a strategic backwater during the Cold War and lacking leadership, lagged far behind. In large part, this was because no state provided the leadership, vision and resources required to establish and nurture a regional architecture. British power, which held responsibility for Indian Ocean security after WW II, withdrew from east of Suez in the late 1960s. The US lacked interest: for it, the Indian Ocean was tertiary, of use primarily as a connector between its Atlantic and Pacific forward deployed personnel. China and Russia had neither the capacity nor the maritime outlook, both are relatively recent developments. Furthermore, the region was largely underdeveloped and lacked the maritime capacity or resources to secure a vast ocean. India was pre-occupied with security of her continental borders and articulated its first integrated ocean vision only in 2015! Regional states were

⁵⁰ Chairman's Statement of the 42nd ASEAN Summit, Labuan Bajo, Indonesia, 10-11 May 2023, <https://asean.org/chairmans-statement-of-the-42nd-asean-summit/>



too underdeveloped to provide either the vision or the resources for an Indian Ocean security architecture.

IORA, the Indian Ocean's premier regional body, is thus 30 years younger than ASEAN. It owes its genesis to the visit by Nelson Mandela to India in 1995 and his concept of an Indian Ocean Rim Association for socio-economic cooperation⁵¹. It has succeeded in getting its leaders together for a summit only once, at its 20th anniversary in 2017. Indian Ocean countries like Pakistan and Myanmar are not members; the list expands if states in the Red Sea and Persian Gulf such as Eritrea, Sudan, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar are taken into account. The result is that IORA is still in the consolidation phase, its convening power does not match that of ASEAN, its agenda is still somewhat limited, and it remains handicapped by a paucity of resources.

Nevertheless, the geographic centrality of the Indian Ocean to Asia is as important today as that of Southeast Asia to the Asia-Pacific. It is the Indian Ocean that connects the world's energy hubs to Asia's industrial consumers; and Asia's manufacturing industry to consumers in West Asia, Africa, Europe and the American Atlantic Coast. Without a secure and stable Indian Ocean, the Indo-Pacific aspirations of France, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, the EU and NATO become a chimera: these developed nations can neither link up with East Asian partners economically nor militarily. It is recognition of the centrality of the Indian Ocean to global geopolitics that has resulted in both the ASEAN⁵² and Quad⁵³ Summits noting the IORA Outlook on the Indo-Pacific.

IORA remains by far the best suited regional body to foster cooperation in the Indian Ocean and manage geopolitical competition as well as engagement with the great powers and the larger Indo-Pacific. Its dialogue partners include the US, UK, Germany, Italy, Türkiye, Egypt, Russia, China, Japan and South Korea. The need is for a guiding vision, which the IOIP now provides, focused leadership, astute and persuasive diplomacy, and delivery of results on IORA projects.

China launched a rival body and held its first Indian Ocean Regional Conference in November 2022. Notably, the event was attended by delegates from Afghanistan, Australia, Bangladesh, China, Djibouti, Indonesia, Iran, Kenya, Madagascar, Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nepal, Oman, Pakistan,

⁵¹ About IORA, <https://www.iora.int/en/about/about-iora>

⁵² Chairman's Statement of the 42nd ASEAN Summit, Labuan Bajo, Indonesia, 10-11 May 2023.

⁵³ Quad Leaders' Joint Statement, May 20, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/05/20/quad-leaders-joint-statement/>



Seychelles, South Africa, Sri Lanka and Tanzania and attended by a former Australian Prime Minister⁵⁴, currently Australia's Ambassador to the US.

Going ahead, IORA has its task cut out as geopolitical competition will inevitably spread into the Indian Ocean. IORA will have to find a way to expand its activities, generate better cohesion among its members, find a way to incorporate states on either side of the Arabian Peninsula (Egypt is already a dialogue partner), enhance its funding and strengthen its linkages with ASEAN. India's having taken the lead to develop the IOIP and the decision of the 42nd ASEAN Summit to invite the Chairs of IORA and the PIF to the 18th East Asia Summit as guests of the Chair are good steps. More imaginative action will, however, be required if the limitations of ASEAN are not replicated in IORA and become easy pickings for exploitation by competing great powers to subvert regionalism in the Indian Ocean for their own ends. As the vice-chair of IORA 2023-2025 and the chair two years hence, India will have to do more to ensure the IORA does not become the playground for great power rivalry.

The Indo-Pacific Outlook of Bangladesh

Bangladesh released its Indo-Pacific Outlook on April 24, 2023⁵⁵, becoming the second Indian Ocean state and the tenth overall, apart from the Indo-Pacific outlooks of ASEAN, IORA and the EU. As a littoral state in the Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh considers stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific crucial for realising her own vision of building a modern, knowledge-based developed country by 2041. She envisions a free, open, peaceful, secure and inclusive Indo-Pacific for the shared prosperity of all.

The outlook sets out four guiding principles: friendship towards all, malice towards none; conduct of relations based respect for national sovereignty, equality, political independence, non-interference in internal affairs, peaceful settlement of disputes and respect for international law; adherence to relevant treaties and conventions including UNCLOS; and constructive regional and international cooperation for sustainable development, international peace and security, humanitarian action, and fundamental rights and freedoms. It identifies 15 objectives: mutual trust and respect and the forging of partnerships to ensure peace, prosperity, security and stability for all in the Indo-Pacific; strengthening mechanisms for maritime security and safety and upholding the exercise of freedom of navigation and overflight; value-driven

⁵⁴ Kunming Joint Press Statement of China-Indian Ocean Region Forum on Development Cooperation, http://en.cidca.gov.cn/2022-11/22/c_832998.htm

⁵⁵ Indo-Pacific Outlook of Bangladesh, https://mofa.gov.bd/site/press_release/d8d7189a-7695-4ff5-9e2b-903fe0070ec9



contributions to international non-proliferation, peacekeeping, peace building and counterterrorism efforts; supporting the combating of transnational organised crime through normative and practical actions; enhancing the focus on women, peace and security, promoting interfaith dialogue and building just and peaceful societies in the region; promoting open, transparent and rules-based multilateral systems that enable equitable and sustainable development in the region; enhancing physical, institutional, energy, digital and human connectivity, facilitating movement of goods and promoting technology transfer; leveraging domestic sectors towards building regional and global value chains to promote unimpeded and free flow of commerce in the Indo-Pacific; promoting conservation and sustainable use of the oceans and their resources; promoting food security, water solidarity and disaster risk reduction in the Indo-Pacific; fostering cooperation to ensure energy security for all; developing coordinated response to future pandemics and ensuring health security; collaborating with partners to bolster regional cooperation and enhance complementarities; and strengthening collaboration and cooperation in science and technology.

The outlook is largely aspirational. It does not spell out the resources Bangladesh is willing to commit to achieve the desired objectives, or what compromises it will find acceptable. It does, nevertheless, mark recognition that the nation's and region's future lies in the maritime domain. It provides a foundation for neighbours and other interested parties to engage with Bangladesh on. Going ahead, much will depend on which elements of its Indo-Pacific and Indian Ocean outlooks Bangladesh prioritises.

The ASEAN India Maritime Exercise

Six months after the maiden India-ASEAN Defence Ministers' meeting wherein Shri Rajnath Singh appreciated ASEAN's support for the India-ASEAN Maritime Exercise (AIME)⁵⁶, the first such exercise became reality. ASEAN had already conducted the ASEAN-China Military Exercise in October 2018 co-hosted by the Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN) and PLAN⁵⁷, the ASEAN-US Maritime Exercise co-hosted by the Royal Thai Navy and the USN in September 2019⁵⁸, and the ASEAN-Russia Maritime Exercise co-hosted by the Indonesian and

⁵⁶ Raksha Mantri and his Cambodian counterpart co-chair maiden India-ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting in Siem Reap, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1878047>

⁵⁷ ASEAN and China Successfully Conclude ASEAN-China Maritime Exercise, https://www.mindef.gov.sg/web/portal/mindef/news-and-events/latest-releases/article-detail/2018/october/27oct18_nr

⁵⁸ First ASEAN-US Maritime Exercise Successfully Concludes, <https://www.c7f.navy.mil/Media/News/Display/Article/1954403/first-asean-us-maritime-exercise-successfully-concludes/>



Russian navies in December 2021⁵⁹. Indian Naval Ships Delhi and Satpura led India's participation in the inaugural ASEAN-India Maritime Exercise (AIME)⁶⁰, co-hosted by the navies of India and Singapore from May 2-8⁶¹. The day the IN ships arrived at Changi Naval Base, the second Exercise Bilateral Cooperation between the RSN and the PLAN drew to a close at the same location⁶².

The AIME comprised a harbour phase from May 2-4 and a sea phase from May 7-8. Ships from India, Singapore, Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam; aircraft from Indian, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines and over 1800 personnel from these countries participated. Admiral R Harikumar, India's Chief of Naval Staff, jointly inaugurated the exercise with his RSN counterpart⁶³. He also participated in the 8th edition of the International Maritime Security Conference, organised by the RSN and RSIS, held in conjunction with the International Maritime Defence Exhibition and Conference (IMDX) Asia 2023.

The harbour phase comprised activities to break the ice and familiarise crews with each other, through visits by participants to each other's ships, subject matter expert exchanges and planning meetings⁶⁴. It provided rich opportunity for India to showcase its well-developed shipbuilding capability, an opportunity Admiral R Harikumar, India's Navy Chief, availed by showing his Philippines' counterpart V Adm Toribio D Adaci around INS Delhi and briefing him on India's maritime capacity-building progress⁶⁵. The sea phase included tactical manoeuvres, cross-deck landings by helicopters, seamanship evolutions and other maritime exercises⁶⁶. Exercise content was necessarily limited to evolutions enabling dealing with challenges to the governance of seas in the region, including disaster management and constabulary actions

⁵⁹ Russia Southeast Asia conclude first joint naval exercise, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/russia-southeast-asia-conclude-first-joint-naval-exercise-2021-12-04/>

⁶⁰ ASEAN-India Maritime Exercise (AIME-2023): Indian Navy Ships Arrive at Singapore, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1921224>

⁶¹ Singapore Co-hosts ASEAN-India Maritime Exercise, 02 May 2023, https://www.mindef.gov.sg/web/portal/mindef/news-and-events/latest-releases/article-detail/2023/May/02may23_nr

⁶² Singapore and Chinese Navies Strengthen Maritime Cooperation in Maritime Bilateral Exercise, 01 May 2023, https://www.mindef.gov.sg/web/portal/mindef/news-and-events/latest-releases/article-detail/2023/May/01may23_nr

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ ASEAN-India Maritime Exercise 2023 begins at Singapore, <https://indiannavy.nic.in/content/asean-india-maritime-exercise-2023-begins-singapore>

⁶⁵ Adm R Harikumar CNS met V Adm Toribio D Adaci FOIC Philippines Navy, <https://indiannavy.nic.in/content/adm-r-hari-kumar-cns-met-vadm-toribio-d-adaci-foic-philippine-navy>

⁶⁶ Sea Phase of ASEAN-India Maritime Exercise 2023, <https://indiannavy.nic.in/content/sea-phase-asean-india-maritime-exercise-%E2%80%93-2023>



such as dealing with transnational crime. ASEAN, with its diverse membership, will not countenance exercises to address challenges of coercion by adversarial nation states yet.

The immediate aftermath of AIME-2023 witnessed IN ships participating in the 39th India-Thailand CORPAT; Exercise Samudra Shakti with Indonesia and visiting Sihanoukville in Cambodia and Da Nang in Vietnam. India is clearly showing its flag in the region in a substantial and sustained way.

Growing India seeks a greater role in the region towards its east, as is evident from the joint statement upgrading the India-ASEAN partnership to the comprehensive level⁶⁷. The connectivity it requires for this cannot be through land: the Trilateral Highway will be further delayed on account of the continuing instability in Myanmar. Air connectivity has inherent limitations in the movement of large volumes. The primary connector will have to be maritime, particularly with Indonesia and the Philippines, which between them make up a dominant share of ASEAN's population, GDP and security expenditure. A secure maritime connection is in the interests of both. But the connection faces multiple challenges, ranging from natural disasters to piracy and armed robbery, terrorism, transnational crime, trafficking in humans, illegal migration, the smuggling of arms and drugs and IUU fishing, among others. Geopolitical challenges as an assertive China flexes its muscles and the US and allies push back add to the list.

Southeast Asian nations lack both the capacity and capability for effective governance of individual or shared maritime regions, let alone of dealing with geopolitical challenges. They necessarily have to depend on bigger powers for this purpose. But having undergone the colonial experience and won their independence with difficulty, suspicion of the hegemonic intent of great powers remains strong. China was a potential partner so long as it was hiding its strength and biding its time. But a China that is increasingly assertive about its South China Sea claims and hegemonic intentions is cause for concern.

India, with its SAGAR vision, shared values and outlook and growing maritime capability could provide the perfect fit. India's maritime engagement with Southeast Asia has been growing. The bilateral coordinated patrols (CORPATs) with Indonesia, Myanmar and Thailand enable familiarisation with each other, both in port and in the common operating environment. Bilateral exercises with Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia and Vietnam and the trilateral with

⁶⁷ Joint Statement on ASEAN-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, November 12, 2022, <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Joint-Statement-on-ASEAN-India-CSP-final.pdf>



Singapore and Thailand help dispel reservations about India's intentions. India has provided capacity building assistance to Cambodia, Vietnam, Myanmar and the Philippines. Building mutual confidence is a long and complex process, easily derailed by unconnected developments as well as the activities of other powers.

The activities undertaken during AIME-2023 were one step in the long and tortuous road leading to strengthened confidence of ASEAN in India as a benign, capable and reliable partner. They enabled India to display its indigenous shipbuilding capability and overall maritime prowess. Interoperability is a far cry: the odd exercise lasting for a few days no more results in interoperability than political statements result in meaningful outcomes. Far more will have to be done. A beginning has, however, been made. It is for leaders on both sides to follow up to ensure that this beginning results in steady progress towards a secure, stable and peaceful region.

Other Indo-Pacific Developments

G7 Summit. The G7 Summit from May 19-21 brought leaders of the affluent group, comprising Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK, the US and the EU, along with invitee leaders from Australia, Brazil, the Comoros, Cook Islands, India, Indonesia, Vietnam, the Republic of Korea and the World Bank together at Hiroshima. It resulted in the G7 Hiroshima Leaders' Communiqué⁶⁸, a document running into over 19,000 words, covering a range of issues the world has to deal with today. Other outcome documents included the G7 Leaders' Hiroshima Vision on Nuclear Disarmament⁶⁹, G7 Leaders' Statement on Ukraine⁷⁰, the G7 Clean Energy Economy Action Plan⁷¹, G7 Leaders' Statement on Economic Resilience and Economic Security⁷², Hiroshima Action Statement for Resilient Global Food Security⁷³, a Factsheet on the G7 Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment⁷⁴, the G7 Fact Sheet

⁶⁸ G7 Hiroshima Leaders' Communiqué, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/05/20/g7-hiroshima-leaders-communication/>

⁶⁹ G7 Leaders' Hiroshima vision on Nuclear Disarmament, https://www.g7hiroshima.go.jp/documents/pdf/230520-01_g7_en.pdf

⁷⁰ G7 Leaders' Statement on Ukraine, https://www.g7hiroshima.go.jp/documents/pdf/230519-01_g7_en.pdf

⁷¹ G7 Clean Energy Economy Action Plan, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/05/20/g7-clean-energy-economy-action-plan/>

⁷² G7 Leaders' Statement on Economic Resilience and Economic Security, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/05/20/g7-leaders-statement-on-economic-resilience-and-economic-security/>

⁷³ Hiroshima Action Statement for Resilient Global Food Security, https://www.g7hiroshima.go.jp/documents/pdf/session6_01_en.pdf

⁷⁴ Factsheet on the G7 Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100506918.pdf>



on Promoting Gender Mainstreaming through the Nexus Approach⁷⁵, the G7 Hiroshima Progress Report on Advancing Resilience in Times of Crisis: Food Security and Nutrition, Migration and Refugees⁷⁶, and the G7 Hiroshima vision for Equitable Access to Medical Countermeasures⁷⁷. Prime Minister Modi delivered opening statements at Working Sessions 6⁷⁸, 7⁷⁹ and 9⁸⁰. A substantial portion of the G7 Hiroshima Communiqué focused on China. The leaders' stated their preparedness to build constructive and stable relations with China and recognised the importance of engaging candidly and expressing concerns directly. They called on China to engage with them, including in international fora, on areas such as the climate and biodiversity crisis and conservation of natural resources. They noted that their approaches were not designed to harm China, nor did they seek to thwart China's economic progress and development. At the same time, they recognised that economic resilience necessitated de-risking and diversifying. They would push for a level playing field for their workers and companies, seek to address challenges posed by China's non-market policies and practices which distort the global economy, and counter malign practices such as illegitimate technology transfer or data disclosure. They expressed their serious concern about the situation in the East and South China Seas, opposing any unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion. They reaffirmed the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait while stating there was no change in the basic positions of G7 members on Taiwan. They opposed China's expansive maritime claims and militarisation activity in the South China Sea, voiced concerns about the human rights situation in China, including in Tibet and Xinjiang, and called on China to honour its commitments with respect to Hong Kong. They also called on China not to conduct interference activity aimed at undermining the security and safety of their communities and to press Russia

⁷⁵ G7 Fact Sheet: Promoting Gender Mainstreaming through the Nexus Approach, https://www.g7hiroshima.go.jp/documents/pdf/session2_01_en.pdf

⁷⁶ G7 Hiroshima Progress Report – Advancing Resilience in Time of Crises: Food Security and Nutrition, Migration and Refugees, https://www.g7hiroshima.go.jp/documents/pdf/session4_01_en01.pdf

⁷⁷ G7 Hiroshima Vision for Equitable Access to Medical Countermeasures, https://www.g7hiroshima.go.jp/documents/pdf/session3_01_en.pdf

⁷⁸ English translation of Prime Minister's opening statement at Working session 6 of the G7 Summit, https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/36566/English_translation_of_Prime_Ministers_opening_statement_at_the_Working_session_6_of_the_G7_Summit

⁷⁹ Working Session 7: Common Endeavour for a Sustainable Planet (including Climate, Energy, Environment), https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/36567/English_translation_of_Prime_Ministers_opening_statement_at_the_Working_session_7_oftheG7Summit

⁸⁰ Working Session 9: Toward a Peaceful, Stable and Prosperous World, https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/36580/English_translation_of_Prime_Ministers_opening_statement_at_the_Working_session_9_oftheG7Summit



to stop its military aggression on Ukraine. The Summit was remarkable for the unity displayed by the G7 on China, Ukraine, economic security, building clean energy economies, nuclear disarmament and responding to global challenges. China, on the other hand, hit back at the G7, accusing them of hindering international peace, undermining regional stability and curbing other countries' development, and of brazenly smearing and attacking China and interfering in its internal affairs⁸¹.

Third FIPIC Summit. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Papua New Guinea (PNG) Prime Minister James Marape jointly hosted the Third Summit of the Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC) at Port Moresby on May 22, 2023⁸². All 14 Pacific Island Countries attended. PM Modi described them as large ocean countries, not small island states⁸³. He was keen to obtain their views as representatives of the Global South and offered India's expertise as a developmental partner, ready to share capabilities and experience without hesitation. He announced the establishment of a super-speciality cardiology hospital in Fiji completely funded by India⁸⁴, assistance to set up of dialysis units in all 14 Pacific Island Countries (PICs), and the provision of sea ambulances to all PICs, the organisation of two Jaipur Foot camps in the PICs every year. He also offered them over 1800 high-quality generic medicines at prices substantially lower than the prevailing market cost, the establishment of yoga centres in their countries, a project for the development of the SME sector in every PIC, conversion of at least one government building to operate on solar power in each country, and 1000 ITEC training opportunities in India over the next five years. To address water scarcity, he pledged to provide desalination units for every PIC. At a time when the PICs are being driven to choose between China on the one hand and the US and its allies on the other, India offers them an opportunity to engage a rising power without having to go through Australia, New Zealand, Japan or France. This will no doubt create

⁸¹ Foreign Ministry Spokesperson's Remarks on G7 Hiroshima Summit's Hying up of China-related Issues, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/202305/t20230520_11080750.html

⁸² Prime Minister's Departure Statement Ahead of his Visit to Japan, Papua New Guinea and Australia, May 19, 2023, https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/36558/Prime_Ministers_departure_statement_ahead_of_his_visit_to_Japan_Papua_New_Guinea_and_Australia

⁸³ English translation of Prime Minister's Opening statement at the FIPIC III Summit, May 22, 2023, https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/36587/English_translation_of_Prime_Ministers_opening_statement_at_the_FIPIC_III_Summit

⁸⁴ English translation of Prime Minister's closing statement at the FIPIC III Summit, May 22, 2023, https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/36588/English_translation_of_Prime_Ministers_closing_statement_at_the_FIPIC_III_Summit



some angst in these countries who have exploited the PICs in the past; that will have to be managed.

Philippines President Marcos Visit to the US. Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos had made a two-day bilateral visit to Beijing in January 2023⁸⁵. He visited the US for five days (April 30 – May 4, 2023). His visit closely followed the 3rd US-Philippines 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue in April 2023⁸⁶. A joint statement resolved that the US and the Philippines will remain the closest of allies, working together to deliver a better future and tackle the challenges of the 21st century⁸⁷. The US reaffirmed that its alliance commitments encompassed an armed attack in the South China Sea on Philippine Armed Forces, public vessels or aircraft. The two countries will adopt defence guidelines that institutionalise key bilateral priorities, mechanisms and processes to deepen cooperation and interoperability in all domains. The US will transfer four patrol vessels and three C-130H aircraft to the Philippines. It will work closely with local communities in the vicinity of its nine EDCA sites to fully realise their positive value for local development. A range of other economic and people-to-people cooperation initiatives were announced. The return of the Philippines to the US fold is evident. This will impact China's actions in the region, though China can be expected to continue exploring and expanding the envelope for coercive activity.

Japan South Korea Summit. Less than two months after South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol visited Japan⁸⁸, Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida followed up by visiting Seoul on May 7⁸⁹. The visit marked the beginning of 'shuttle diplomacy' to improve relations between the two countries. Premier Kishida conveyed his support to the ROK as chair for the Japan-ROK-China Process. The leaders welcomed the resurgence of business and political exchanges and Kishida informed his counterpart that Japan has decided to resume youth exchanges with a greater number of participants than earlier. Kishida accepted the visit of a South Korean on-site inspection team to the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station to evaluate the safety of discharge of

⁸⁵ 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

⁸⁶ For an overview, see "The US-Philippines Alliance – Full Circle" in the Indo-Pacific Monitor, Volume IV Issue 4, https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads_dpg/publication_file/indo-pacific-monitor-4889.pdf

⁸⁷ Joint Statement of the Leaders of the United States and the Philippines, May 1, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/05/01/joint-statement-of-the-leaders-of-the-united-states-and-the-philippines/>

⁸⁸ Japan Korea Summit Meeting, March 16, 2023, https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/a_o/na/kr/page1_001529.html

⁸⁹ Japan Korea Summit Meeting, May 7, 2020, https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/a_o/na/kr/page6_000851_00001.html



treated water from the plant. The leaders agreed to strengthen deterrence and response capabilities to North Korea's Provocative actions through their respective alliances with the US and also agreed to hold a Japan-ROK-US Summit on the margins of the Hiroshima Summit. The leaders met again at Hiroshima on May 21, offering prayers for the ROK's atomic bombing victims⁹⁰. The same day, they joined US President Biden for a trilateral meeting to raise Japan-US-ROK coordination to new heights⁹¹. The demonstration of unity through continued improvement in relations between Japan and South Korea will substantially enhance the deterrent capability of both.

UK Japan Strategic Partnership. Following the accession by UK to the CPTPP, the UK and Japan established a "Dynamic Strategic Partnership for the 21st Century"⁹², coming back to the early part of 20th century when they were allies. They decided to reinforce their collaboration in global peace and security, global growth and prosperity, and science, technology, innovation, education and culture. They made a mutual commitment to defend and protect the global commons on the high seas, in cyberspace and outer space and to work together to support an international system based on the rule of law and international norms. The partnership will include developing proposals for cooperation towards supporting international efforts to maintain peace and stability, supporting each other's visiting military personnel and assets, allowing reciprocal access to each other's forces, mutual support when the forces deploy together, establishing a new mechanism for information sharing and analysis, and a programme of joint exercises between the two militaries. They committed to holding a foreign and defence ministerial meeting in London to make specific proposals for the above, identify a range of defence equipment projects for joint development and production, working closely together in the areas of security, policing and cyber security, and reducing the risk of terrorism for their citizens.

EAM on the Indo-Pacific. External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar spoke at two Indo-Pacific related conferences during the month. At the inaugural of the 6th Indian Ocean Conference in Dhaka on May 12⁹³, he congratulated Bangladesh for joining the group of countries that had recognised and

⁹⁰ Japan-ROK Summit Meeting, May 21, 2023,

https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/na/kr/page1e_000700.html

⁹¹ Exchange of Views among Japan-US-ROK Leaders, May 21, 2023,

https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/na2/page1e_000702.html

⁹² UK-Japan Joint Statement: A Dynamic Strategic Partnership for the 21st Century,

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-hiroshima-accord>

⁹³ Remarks by External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar at the Inaugural Session of the 6th

Indian Ocean Conference, May 12, 2023, https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/36547/Remarks_by_External_Affairs_Minister_Dr_S_Jaishankar_at_the_Inaugural_Session_of_6th_Indian_Ocean_Conference



acknowledged the Indo-Pacific. He then focused on the need to address the needs of the Indian Ocean and its distinct regions and ecosystems as well as the larger Indo-Pacific in parallel. He highlighted regional concerns regarding unsustainable debt, the importance of renewing connectivity, the need to act to secure maritime spaces, and the challenges of countering climate change and terrorism. At the concluding session of the EU Indo-Pacific Ministerial Forum in Stockholm on May 13, he noted that the EU had major stakes in and could no longer remain agnostic about Indo-Pacific developments; the fact that how to respond to non-market economics is proving a more formidable challenge than was anticipated; the increasing centrality of the Indo-Pacific to global politics; that leveraging of market shares, production capacities and resources could no longer be overlooked, nor could connectivity and project financing be taken at face value; the potential of India as a partner to the EU in the Indo-Pacific; and the impact of the Quad, IPEF and IPOI. He sought regular, comprehensive and candid dialogue between the EU and India, which took a long-term view and was not limited to the crisis of the day.

Raksha Mantri Visits the Maldives. India's Defence Minister Shri Rajnath Singh visited the Maldives from May 01-03 on the invitation of his counterpart, Ms Mariya Didi. The two ministers welcomed progress in ongoing defence cooperation and noted the importance of sharing best practices and expertise in counter-terrorism, disaster management, cyber security and maritime security⁹⁴. They identified defence trade, capacity building and joint exercises as additional areas of cooperation. Shri Rajnath Singh handed over a Fast Patrol Vessel, commissioned as MNDF CGS Huravee and a Landing Craft Assault to the Maldives National Defence Force and witnessed the laying of the foundation stone for the MNDF Coast Guard harbour being built at Sifavaru as one of India's biggest grant-in-aid projects.

Singapore-Australia Joint Ministerial Committee Meeting. The 13th Meeting of the Singapore-Australia Joint Ministerial Committee on May 1, 2023, brought Defence, Foreign Affairs and Trade Ministers of the two countries together in a 3+3 format. Their Joint Communique⁹⁵ welcomed significant progress on all six pillars of the 10-year road map of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) of 2015. The ministers tasked officials to begin developing the agenda for the next chapter of the CSP, welcomed the strong bilateral trade and investment partnership, underlined the importance of an open, inclusive, rules-based and

⁹⁴ Joint Press Communique on Hon Indian Defence Minister H.E. Shri Rajnath Singh's visit to Maldives on the Invitation of his Maldivian Counterpart HE Mariya Didi, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1921563>

⁹⁵ Joint Communique of the 13th Meeting of the Singapore-Australia Joint Ministerial Committee, <https://www.mfa.gov.sg/Newsroom/Press-Statements-Transcripts-and-Photos/2023/05/20230501sajmc1>



resilient Indo-Pacific region that supports and promotes free trade and open markets, and agreed to promote further economic integration, investment and liberalisation of goods and services trade. On the defence and security front, Australia reiterated its support to ASEAN and ASEAN centric mechanism, discussed the need to ensure that the Indo-Pacific remains open, stable and prosperous, welcomed the Quad's support for ASEAN centrality and the AOIP, noted the depth and breadth of bilateral defence and security cooperation, reaffirmed the value of the Five Power Defence Arrangements and welcomed steps to increase the complexity of bilateral exercises. The partners recognised the strong people-to-people, science and innovation, digital economy and green economy links between their countries. They shared a commonality of views on global and regional challenges such as the war in Ukraine, the worsening situation in Myanmar, the need to promote peace and stability in the South China Sea, and the need to promote peace and stability in the wider Indo-Pacific.

Secretary Blinken in PNG. The abrupt decision by President Biden to return home from Hiroshima, instead of engaging PNG and Pacific Island Countries followed by Australia as originally planned⁹⁶, meant that Secretary of State Antony J Blinken had to fill in at the planned engagements with PNG and PIC leaders. The date still coincided with the planned visit of India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Notably, PNG Prime Minister James Marape spoke extensively about the Modi visit during his joint press event with Secretary Blinken⁹⁷. He noted that leaders of the PICs were satisfied with the outcomes of their dialogue with India and the great rapport that had been established. He also noted that Prime Minister Modi had left the PNG extremely satisfied. At the bilateral level, Secretary Blinken and PNG Prime Minister Marape signed a new defence cooperation agreement which Marape committed to making public shortly⁹⁸, signed another agreement to counter illicit transnational maritime activity, noted the provision by the US Department of Defence of personal protective equipment for the PNG Defence Forces, and discussed a range of other cooperative activity. Secretary Blinken also met PIF leaders, apologised for President Biden's inability to join them and invited them to come to

⁹⁶ Statement from Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre on President Biden's Historic Travel to Papua New Guinea, May 9, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/05/09/statement-from-press-secretary-karine-jean-pierre-on-president-bidens-historic-travel-to-papua-new-guinea/>

⁹⁷ Secretary Antony J Blinken and Papua New Guinean Prime Minister James Marape at Joint Press Availability, May 22, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-and-papua-new-guinean-prime-minister-james-marape-at-a-joint-press-availability/>

⁹⁸ Secretary Antony J Blinken at a Defense Cooperation Agreement and Shiprider Signing Ceremony, May 22, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-at-a-defense-cooperation-agreement-and-shiprider-signing-ceremony/>



Washington this fall for a second summit to develop new initiatives critical to their collective future⁹⁹.

Australia Philippines Joint Statement. Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong undertook an official visit to the Philippines on May 16-18 for a review of the bilateral comprehensive strategic partnership¹⁰⁰. The two countries agreed to expand trade and investment cooperation including on critical minerals, people-to-people connections and maritime security cooperation.

IPEF Negotiations. The 14 partners of the Indo-Pacific Economic Forum announced substantial conclusion of negotiations for the first-of-its-kind international IPEF Supply chain Agreement on May 27, 2023¹⁰¹. The Agreement envisages the establishment of three bodies to facilitate cooperation: the IPEF Supply Chain Council, the IPEF Supply Chain Crisis Response Network and the IPEF Labour Rights Advisory Board. The partners also noted good progress under the trade, clean economy and fair economy pillars of IPEF¹⁰².

US Outreach in the Indian Ocean. Following the inclusion of the IORA Outlook in the Indo-Pacific in the recent Quad Summit Statement, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Verma, the former US Ambassador to India, travelled to Mauritius, the Comoros and Seychelles from May 29 – June 01 to deepen US engagement in the Indian Ocean Region¹⁰³. His schedule included meeting with the IORA Secretary General¹⁰⁴, as well as with leaders of the government and opposition in the countries he visited. A fact sheet of the US relationship with IORA and commitment to the Indian Ocean was issued¹⁰⁵. It is to be hoped that outcomes

⁹⁹ Secretary Antony J Blinken at the US-Pacific Islands Forum Dialogue, <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-at-the-u-s-pacific-islands-forum-dialogue/>

¹⁰⁰ Joint Statement on the official visit to the Philippines of Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong, May 18, 2023, <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/penny-wong/media-release/joint-statement-official-visit-philippines-australian-foreign-minister-penny-wong>

¹⁰¹ Press Statement on the Substantial Conclusion of IPEF Supply Chain Agreement Negotiations May 27, 2023, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100510680.pdf>

¹⁰² Press Statement for the Trade Pillar, Clean Economy Pillar and Fair Economy Pillar, May 27, 2023, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100510681.pdf>

¹⁰³ Deputy Secretary Verma's Travel to Mauritius, Comoros and Seychelles, <https://www.state.gov/deputy-secretary-vermas-travel-to-mauritius-comoros-and-seychelles/>

¹⁰⁴ Deputy Secretary Verma's Meeting with IORA Secretary General Al Farisi, <https://www.state.gov/deputy-secretary-vermas-meeting-with-iora-secretary-general-al-farisi/>

¹⁰⁵ US Relationships with the Indian Ocean Rim Association and Commitment to the Indian Ocean Region, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relationship-with-the-indian-ocean-rim-association-and-commitment-to-the-indian-ocean-region/>



from this visit will be in consonance with the objectives of concerned Quad partners, including India and Australia.

New US Visa Policy to Promote Democratic Elections in Bangladesh. Secretary of State Antony J Blinken announced a new visa policy to promote democratic elections in Bangladesh¹⁰⁶. The policy permits the US to restrict the issuance of visas for any Bangladeshi individual believed to be responsible for or complicit in undermining the democratic election process in Bangladesh, including current and former Bangladeshi individuals, members of pro-government and opposition political parties, and members of law enforcement, the judiciary and the security services.

Spain Joins Blue Dot Network. The US, Japan, Australia and the UK welcomed Spain to the Steering Committee of the Blue Dot Network¹⁰⁷.

China's Naval Modernisation. China's Navy is expected to comprise of 400 ships in 2025, as compared to the USN size of 286 ships at the same time¹⁰⁸. China's fleet then will include six SSBNs, 10 SSNs, 55 conventional submarines, 55 capital ships and 120 escorts. The planned ultimate size of the PLA (N) remains unknown. To counter this expansion, the USN has shifted a greater percentage of its fleet to the Pacific and assigned its most capable ships and aircraft to the region, increased presence operations and exercises and cooperation with other navies, and shifted to a more distributed fleet architecture that includes significant numbers of unmanned vessels.

Sudan Evacuation. India showcased its capability for non-combat evacuation operations yet again as the IAF and IN teamed up in Operation Kaveri from April 24 to May 5 and successfully evacuated 3862 people from strife-torn Sudan. The IAF undertook 17 flights from Sudan, while five IN ships were involved in the operation. UN Minister of State for External Affairs V. Muraleedharan provided oversight for rescue efforts from Saudi Arabia. The operation included an unprecedented assault approach by an IAF C-17, superficially akin to that adopted by Israeli aircraft for Operation Thunderbolt (the raid on Entebbe on July 4, 1976), except that India used a similar modus

¹⁰⁶ Announcement of Visa Policy to Promote Democratic Elections in Bangladesh, May 24, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/announcement-of-visa-policy-to-promote-democratic-elections-in-bangladesh/>

¹⁰⁷ Joint Statement from the United States, Japan, Australia and the United Kingdom on Spain Joining the Blue Dot Network, <https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-from-the-united-states-japan-australia-and-the-united-kingdom-on-spain-joining-the-blue-dot-network/>

¹⁰⁸ CSR Report RL33153, May 15, 2023,



operandi to rescue ladies, children and wheelchair bound elderly people including foreign nationals¹⁰⁹.

Indian Navy External Outreach. As part of its outreach towards the region, the Indian Navy conducted the first ever India-ASEAN Maritime Exercise (AIME) from May 2-8 in the South China Sea¹¹⁰. The 35th India-Thailand Coordinated Patrol was conducted from May 3-10¹¹¹. The 4th India-Indonesia bilateral exercise Samudra Shakti took place from May 14-19¹¹². The Chief of the Naval Staff hosted Vice Admiral Priyantha Perera, commander of the Sri Lanka Navy, in India from May 23-27¹¹³. The sea phase of the second bilateral exercise 'Al Mohed Al-Hindi' between the Indian and the Royal Saudi Navies took place off Jubail from May 23-25¹¹⁴.

Maiden Night Trap of Mig 29K on Vikrant. The first ever night trap of a Mig-29K on board the newly built indigenous aircraft carrier, INS Vikrant on May 24 marks a significant step towards full operationalisation of the ship¹¹⁵.

India and NATO Plus. One of the recommendations of the US Congress Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party's Policy Recommendations to Preserve Peace and Stability in the Taiwan Strait is "Develop Joint Plans with US allies and partners to enact severe diplomatic and economic costs on the CCP in the event that it engages in military aggression against Taiwan"¹¹⁶. Among the components of this recommendation is "The United States should strengthen the NATO Plus arrangement to include India". The Select Committee hopes this recommendation will be included in NDAA 2024, making it law. NATO Plus presently comprises five US allies who are becoming NATO partners: Israel, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea. The proposal remains to be approved by NATO.

¹⁰⁹ Tactical Rescue Operation from Sudan by IAF C-17 non-stop Operation of Nearly 24 Hours, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1922246>

¹¹⁰ A commentary on the exercise is included in this edition of the Indo-Pacific Monitor.

¹¹¹ 35th Edition of Indo-Thai Coordinated Patrol (CORPAT), <https://indiannavy.nic.in/content/35th-edition-indo-thai-coordinated-patrol-corpat>

¹¹² India-Indonesia Bilateral Exercise Samudra Shakti – 23, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1924058>

¹¹³ Vice Admiral Priyantha Perera Commander of the Sri Lanka Navy Visit to India, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1926970>

¹¹⁴ India-Saudi Arabia Bilateral Maritime Exercise Al-Mohed Al-Hindi 23, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1927721>

¹¹⁵ Night Traps of Mig-29K on board INS Vikrant, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1927354>

¹¹⁶ Ten for Taiwan: Policy Recommendations to Preserve Peace and Stability in the Taiwan Strait, <https://selectcommitteeonthecp.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/selectcommitteeonthecp.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/ten-for-taiwan-final-with-cover-page-2.pdf>



Australian Follow up of DSR Recommendations. Following up expeditiously on the recommendations of the Australian Defence Strategic Review, the Albanese government offered members of the ADF who have completed their initial mandatory period of service and served at least four years a continuation bonus if they opt to continue in service for at least three more years¹¹⁷. It plans to earmark A\$ 400 million towards this initiative. It will also commit A\$2 million to improve defence housing. The objective is to increase retention rates and avoid the drain of trained manpower to industry or other jobs. It committed A\$ 180 million over the next five years to build a Multi-Ammunition Soft Kill System indigenously at Brisbane, thereby indigenising soft kill missile defence capability for its frigates and destroyers¹¹⁸. It announced the appointment of Air Marshal Leon Phillips as the first head of the Guided Weapons and Explosive Ordnance Enterprise, charged with the establishment of a local long-range guided weapons and munitions manufacturing industry in Australia from May 08¹¹⁹, and of Maj. Gen Natasha Fox as the first Chief of Personnel of the Australian Defence Force, to assume charge on June 05 in the rank of Lt. Gen¹²⁰. It also announced the establishment of an External Advisory Panel comprising Mr. Dennis Richardson, Ms. Rosemary Huxtable and Mr. Richard Maude to oversee the implementation of the DSR recommendations¹²¹.

¹¹⁷ Albanese Government invests in our future Defence Force,
<https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/media-releases/2023-05-02/albanese-government-invests-our-future-defence-force>

¹¹⁸ Australia secures anti-ship missile defence capability,
<https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/media-releases/2023-05-05/australia-secures-anti-ship-missile-capability>

¹¹⁹ Moving ahead to manufacture long-range weapons and munitions in Australia,
<https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/media-releases/2023-05-05/moving-ahead-manufacture-long-range-weapons-and-munitions-australia>

¹²⁰ Appointment of Inaugural Chief of Personnel,
<https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/media-releases/2023-05-25/appointment-inaugural-chief-personnel>

¹²¹ Defence Strategic Review External Advisory Panel appointed,
<https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/media-releases/2023-05-27/defence-strategic-review-external-advisory-panel-appointed>



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