



# Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



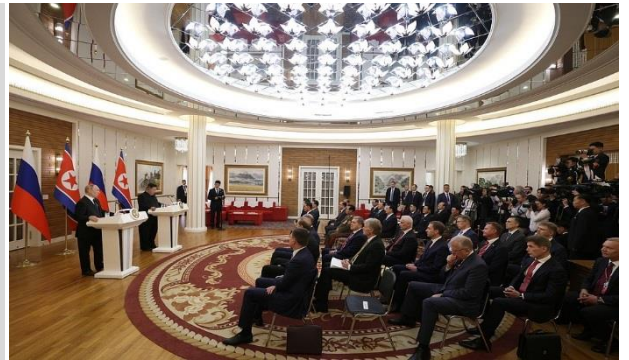
## INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

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### ABOUT US

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

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### INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

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

#### Cover Image:

*Russia' President Vladimir Putin and Chairman of State Affairs of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea Kim Jong-un deliver press statements following their summit, June 19, 2024. Source: President of Russia website*

*The U.S. Navy and the Royal Canadian Navy conducted joint operations in the South China Sea from June 18-20, 2024, involving the USS Ralph Johnson and HMCS Montreal. Source: [Commander, US 7th Fleet](#)*

*Leaders and Invitees at Session 6 of the Apulia G7 Summit, June 14, 2024. Source: G7 Italia 2024*

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# INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

June 2024

## Abstract

Indo-Pacific activity was at relatively low key during the month, with the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, and the G7 Summit, taking up diplomatic attention.

Elections in India returned Prime Minister Modi and the National Democratic Alliance to power with a reduced majority. India's international activity picked up after elections, with Foreign Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar visiting Sri Lanka and the UAE.

In other regional elections, Cyril Ramaphosa was re-elected President of South Africa on June 14 with the support of the Democratic Alliance and other parties, after his African National Congress failed to obtain a majority.

Russia's President Vladimir Putin paid a state visit to North Korea on June 18-19, signing a comprehensive partnership treaty under which the two countries pledged to assist each other in the event of an external attack. He also visited Vietnam on June 20, signing 11 memorandums of cooperation in areas ranging from civil nuclear cooperation to energy and education.

US National Security Adviser Jack Sullivan undertook his twice postponed visit to India for the annual review meeting of the US-India initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET) on June 17. An ambitious and expansive Joint Statement was issued on the occasion.

In the South China Sea, tensions between China and the Philippines escalated following a Philippines' submission seeking an extended Continental Shelf before the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf, and a navy-led attempt to resupply its outpost on the Second Thomas Shoal.

Exercise RIMPAC 2024 commenced off Hawaii on June 27. The US, Japan and ROK carried out the first edition of Exercise Freedom Edge from June 27-29, bringing to fruition an agreement during the trilateral Camp David summit in August 2023.



The first group of Australian submarine workers proceeded to Pearl Harbour for training on maintenance of Virginia Class submarines on June 22. Australia also approved the life extension of its Collins Class submarines on June 5, with the first boat scheduled to commence in 2026.



## Elections India 2024

The early part of June witnessed the culmination of the 2024 General Elections in India and Narendra Modi being sworn in as the Prime Minister of India for the third consecutive time, only the second time this has happened in India's history. Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won 240 of the 543 seats in India's parliament, emerging as by far the largest single party. The pre-election coalition National Democratic Alliance (NDA), however, won 293 seats, lifting it above the 272-seat mark required for a majority. The Indian National Congress trailed with 99 seats, while its INDIA alliance obtained 234 seats.

The magnitude and uniqueness of elections in India can be gauged from some statistics. India has an electorate of over 968 million, substantially larger than the entire population of the European Union, United States and Japan combined. Of these, around 66% or 642 million people, including 312 million women, voted. Around 15 million government employees and security personnel were deployed for the conduct of elections, with a mandate that no registered voter should have to travel more than 2 Km to cast his/her vote. Over 1.1 million voting booths were set up in the country, using 5.5 million electronic voting machines. This included polling officers trekking over 39 Km in difficult terrain to reach a single voter, in Malogam, near the border with China in Arunachal Pradesh. Facilities for home voting were provided to voters over 85 years of age, as well as to those with disabilities.

The elections were spread over seven phases, with voting on April 19 and 26, May 03, 13, 20 and 25, and on June 01. Exit poll results were allowed to be aired only after the last phase of polling had been completed. They showed the NDA returning with a majority and obtaining between 316 and 415 seats, depending on the polling agency. The stock market gained sharply in anticipation of the return of the BJP to power. In the event, the actual results reflected the unreliability of exit polls.

Counting commenced on June 04. The results were declared by evening on June 04, bringing to an end what is easily the most complex exercise of its type in the world. The well-below expected tally of the BJP and NDA resulted in a stock market crash on June 04, but the market recovered within days consequent upon the formation of a stable government and a third term for Prime Minister Modi. Modi government 3.0 was sworn in on June 09. Leaders



from India's neighbourhood and the Indian Ocean Region were present for the swearing in<sup>1</sup>. A spate of congratulations from world leaders followed.

India's neighbours other than Pakistan, including Indian Ocean Island States, attended the swearing in ceremony, reflecting India's emphasis on the neighbourhood first and SAGAR policies.

Modi 2.0 had been marred by narratives of democratic backsliding as well as sniping at Election Commission of India over the Electronic Voting Machines. The successful conduct of elections brought an end to both. Speaking at the Stimson Centre on June 12, Kurt Campbell, the US Deputy Secretary of State, noted the remarkable resilience of democracy in India and said that what India had just experienced was the most successful democratic experiment and demonstration in modern history<sup>2</sup>. He also described Prime Minister Modi's acceptance of the outcome as an extremely effective demonstration of democratic machinery.

Speaking at the G7 Summit, Prime Minister Modi said, "The entire electoral process has been made fair and transparent by the ubiquitous use of technology and the results of such a large election were also declared within a few hours. This was the biggest festival of democracy in the world and the biggest in the history of humanity"<sup>3</sup>.

There can be little doubt that successful and blemish-less conduct of the elections and their outcome has embellished India's image as a functioning, resilient democracy. The senior positions in the Cabinet in Modi 3.0 are occupied by the same ministers as before. Political stability will impel the India growth story, with economic continuity and reform expected to help in India's quest to emerge as the world's third largest economy within this decade. Foreign policy is expected to continue unchanged, with continued growth in India-US relations and a continued insistence on stability and a return to status quo in relations with China as well as Pakistan. Military reforms are expected to continue.

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<sup>1</sup> Participation of leaders from India's neighbourhood and Indian Ocean Region in the Swearing-in Ceremony of Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers, June 9, 2024, [https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/37858/Participation\\_of\\_leaders\\_from\\_Indias\\_neighbourhood\\_and\\_Indian\\_Ocean\\_region\\_in\\_the\\_swearingin\\_ceremony\\_of\\_Prime\\_Minister\\_and\\_Council\\_of\\_Ministers](https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/37858/Participation_of_leaders_from_Indias_neighbourhood_and_Indian_Ocean_region_in_the_swearingin_ceremony_of_Prime_Minister_and_Council_of_Ministers)

<sup>2</sup> The Indo-Pacific and the World: A Conversation with US Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell, June 12, 2024, <https://www.stimson.org/2024/indo-pacific-initiative/>

<sup>3</sup> English translation of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's address at the Outreach Session of the G7 Summit, June 14, 2024, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2025448>



## iCET Update

The twice-postponed visit of US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan to India for the review meeting of the US-India initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET) materialised during the month. Sullivan and India's National Security Advisor Ajit Doval chaired the second meeting of the iCET at New Delhi on June 17. An ambitious and far-reaching joint fact sheet was issued by the US side<sup>4</sup>.

The fact sheet records the shared commitment to ensure that technology is designed, developed and deployed in a manner consistent with democratic values and respect for human rights. Notably, it also records recognition that the future security and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific will hinge on the strength of the India-US partnership. It spells out the vision of the two countries for the next chapter of their strategic technology partnership, across eight priority areas: bridging innovation ecosystems, space technology cooperation, defence innovation and industrial cooperation, advanced telecommunications, biotechnology and biomanufacturing, semiconductor supply chains, the clean energy and critical minerals partnership, and quantum, AI and high-performance computing.

Over \$90 million has been committed to the US-India Global Challenges Institute to forge university and research partnerships between US and Indian institutions in specified areas, including semiconductor technology and manufacturing, clean energy and other critical technologies. Another \$5 million has been announced in funding awards for areas such as next generation telecommunications, connected and autonomous vehicles, and machine learning. The second "Innovation Handshake" event featured 14 Indian startups and 12 American industry representatives in clean energy technology.

A carrier has been secured for the first ever joint effort between NASA and ISRO astronauts at the International Space Station. The Strategic framework for Human Spaceflight Cooperation will shortly lead to advanced training for ISRO astronauts at the NASA Johnson Space Centre. The NISAR satellite is being prepared for launch. A new partnership has been launched between the US Space Force and two Indian startups, encompassing advanced space

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<sup>4</sup> Joint Fact Sheet: The United States and India Continue to Chart an Ambitious Course for the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/06/17/joint-fact-sheet-the-united-states-and-india-continue-to-chart-an-ambitious-course-for-the-initiative-on-critical-and-emerging-technology/>





situational awareness, data fusion technologies and infra-red sensor semiconductor manufacturing. India was an observer at the US Space Command's Global Sentinel Exercise in February and will return as a participant in the 2025 exercise. The Advanced Domains Defence Dialogue at the Pentagon in May featured a US-India space table-top exercise and included exchanges on emerging domains including artificial intelligence. Opportunities are being explored for India's participation in the Lunar Gateway Program.

On the defence front, discussions on India's planned acquisition of MQ-9B platforms, as well as the co-production of land warfare systems continue. An INDUS-X Investor Summit will take place in Silicon Valley in September 2024. Negotiations for the co-production of GE F414-INS6 engines by HAL continue.

The US-India Open RAN Acceleration Roadmap has been finalised. USAID has provided a \$5 million grant to Qualcomm and Mavenir to test its ORAN stack in partnership with Bharti Airtel, Qualcomm is contributing an additional \$9.4 million to the project. General Atomics has launched a new semiconductor partnership with 3rdiTech to co-develop semiconductor design and manufacturing for precision-guided ammunition and other national security-focused electronics platforms.

Cooperation under iCET is still at a nascent stage and will take time to show results. There is pressing need to address barriers to bilateral strategic trade, technology and industrial cooperation, including in the commercial and civil space sector; this the two NSAs have committed to addressing. The success or otherwise of iCET will play large part in shaping the future of the India-US strategic relationship.



## South China Sea Developments

Four events during the middle of the month promise to add another layer of complexity to the differences between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea.

In the first on June 15, the Philippines officially registered its entitlement to an extended continental shelf to the West of Palawan Island with the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) on June 15<sup>5</sup>. The claim is in accordance with the provisions of UNCLOS. If accepted, it will entitle the Philippines to exploit what lies on or under the seabed in this part of the South China Sea, extending from 200-350 nautical miles from Palawan. The claimed region lies well within China's ten-dash line and encompasses virtually all of the Spratly Islands, including Mischief Reef, Subi Reef and Fiery Cross Reef where China has reclaimed large areas and built airstrips. It may be recalled that China had earlier disregarded the final and binding ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration that its claims in the South China Sea were extinguished when it signed and ratified UNCLOS. The submission adds another layer to the simmering dispute between the Philippines and China about their claims and entitlements in the South China Sea.

China's response was to state that there are territorial issues and disputes over maritime delimitation between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea. The Philippines' unilateral submission infringes on China's sovereign rights and jurisdiction, violated international law including UNCLOS, and goes against the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea. China's spokesperson also observed that the CLCS would not consider the Philippines' submission, since it involves delimitation of disputed waters<sup>6</sup>.

The same day, regulations of the China Coast Guard empowering it to use deadly force towards all foreign vessels refusing to leave waters China believes to be its own were brought into force. China's spokesperson said regulations are intended to enforce China's Coast Guard Law, standardise the administrative law-enforcement procedures of Coast Guard agencies and

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<sup>5</sup> Philippines Makes Official Submission to UN on Entitlement to an Extended Continental Shelf in the West Philippine Sea, June 15, 2024, <https://dfa.gov.ph/dfa-news/statements-and-advisoriestupdate/34907-philippines-makes-official-submission-to-u-n-on-entitlement-to-an-extended-continental-shelf-in-the-west-philippine-sea>

<sup>6</sup> Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lin Jian's Regular Press Conference on June 17, 2024, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/2511\\_665403/202406/t20240617\\_11437317.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/202406/t20240617_11437317.html)



better uphold order at sea. He claimed these provisions were consistent with universal practices<sup>7</sup>.

The third event involves a collision and violence between Philippines' vessels and Chinese Coast Guard boats in the Second Thomas Shoal<sup>8</sup>. Philippines' vessels attempted to resupply BRP Sierra Madre under command of the Philippines Navy, as against under the Coast Guard in previous attempts. The rubberised boats they used were intercepted by Chinese Coast Guard boats, one of which rammed a Filipino boat at high speed, severing the thumb of a Filipino seaman holding on to the side of his boat<sup>9</sup>. The Chinese personnel then boarded the Philippines boat, deploying tear gas, "blinding" strobe lights and continuously blaring sirens, looted seven disassembled rifles meant for delivery to BRP Sierra Madre, destroyed the outboard motor and communication and navigation equipment and took the personal cell phones of the Filipino personnel. They brandished axes and punctured the rubber boat with knives. The extreme violent actions of Chinese personnel marked a change from the normal and were likened to their actions at Galwan (in India's Ladakh region) in June 2020.

The Philippines protested, denouncing the illegal and aggressive activity of Chinese authorities that had resulted in personnel injury and vessel damage<sup>10</sup>. China's spokesperson, however, said that the one supply vessel and two speed boats from the Philippines had illegally intruded into the waters near Ren'ai Jiao (China's name for the Second Thomas Shoal) in an attempt to send materials including construction materials to the military vessel illegally grounded there, and China's Coast Guard took necessary action in accordance with the law. He said the measures taken were professional, restrained, justified and lawful<sup>11</sup>.

The final event was the Maritime Cooperation Activity (MCA) conducted by the US, Canada, Japan and the Philippines within the Philippines Exclusive

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Philippines Says Sailor Was Injured in China Ship Collision, June 17, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/06/17/world/asia/china-philippines-boats-collide.html>

<sup>9</sup> 'Only pirates do this': Philippines accuses China of using bladed weapons in major South China Sea escalation, June 20, 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/06/20/asia/philippines-footage-south-china-sea-clash-china-intl-hnk/index.html>

<sup>10</sup> DFA Statement on the RORE Incident on 17 June 2024, June 19, 2024, <https://dfa.gov.ph/dfa-news/statements-and-advisoriestupdate/34933-dfa-statement-on-the-rore-incident-on-17-june-2024>

<sup>11</sup> Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lin Jian's Regular Press Conference on June 17, 2024, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/2511\\_665403/202406/t20240617\\_11437317.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/202406/t20240617_11437317.html)



Economic Zone on June 16 & 17<sup>12</sup>. Featuring USS Ralph Johnson, HMCS Montreal, JS Kirisame and BRP Andres Bonifacio, the MCA involved a series of activities and manoeuvres to test and validate the interoperability of the doctrines, tactics, techniques and procedures of the ships of the four countries, and was designed to uphold the freedom of navigation and overflight in the exercise area. The use of military vessels was designed to signal to China that the four countries stand together in enforcing the rights of the Philippines in its own EEZ. China's threat to these rights, however, comes from maritime militia and Coast Guard vessels and is projected as enforcement of law and order, and not as activity to assert claims in a territorial dispute.

It is apparent that the China – Philippines standoff in the Second Thomas Shoal has entered a more violent phase. China's Coast Guard will enforce its law, and has the means to do so. The Philippines does not possess the means to enforce its claim to the Second Thomas Shoal. Nor does it possess a maritime militia, which could keep activity below the military level. Under the circumstances, the utility of military demonstrations such as the MCA is questionable. Meanwhile, which way Southeast Asia swings will be decided based on the interests of individual countries, which have large financial stakes in adopting China's narrative, irrespective of its merits.

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<sup>12</sup> US, Canada, Japan and Philippines Conduct Multilateral Operations, June 17, 2024, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/3808572/us-canada-japan-and-the-philippines-conduct-multilateral-operations/>



## Exercise RIMPAC-24

Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) exercise, one of the largest multinational maritime exercise, runs from June 27 till August 1 in the Hawaiian Islands<sup>13</sup>. This year's RIMPAC theme is "Partners: Integrated and Prepared" and with specifically focus on "robust and complex tactical phase, comprehensive humanitarian and disaster relief operations, and integrated multi-domain warfare". The exercise will be conducted in two phases: the harbour phase which includes professional interactions, military symposiums, sports events and social fixtures and the sea phase, during with the ships will participate in various exercises covering the entire gamut of maritime operations including multi-domain warfare in a range of scenarios from anti-submarine warfare, multi-ship surface warfare, multinational amphibious landings, and multi-axis defence of the carrier strike group against live forces<sup>14</sup>. With inclusivity at its core, RIMPAC aim to fosters multi-national cooperation and trust, leverages interoperability, and achieves respective national objectives to strengthen integrated, prepared, coalition partners<sup>15</sup>.

RIMPAC-24 is the 29th exercise in the series that began in 1971<sup>16</sup>. Started as a response to the growing Russian naval threat and massive naval exercise Okean '70, the largest exercise conducted since World War II, the United States and its allies in the Pacific created RIMPAC to contain soviet's expansion<sup>17</sup>. Initially, it began as an annual exercise in 1971 with participation from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom (U.K.), and the United States (U.S.). In 1974, it became a biennial exercise. Following the collapse of Soviet Union and end of the Cold War era, RIMPAC's objectives evolved from a wartime exercise to a platform for strengthening maritime partnerships, enhancing interoperability, and sharpening capabilities across a range of environments.

RIMPAC gradually opened its participation to more countries in the Asia-Pacific region. From 14 participating countries in 2010, RIMPAC grew to

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<sup>13</sup> U.S. Pacific Fleet, "U.S. Pacific Fleet Announces 29th RIMPAC Exercise". (n.d.).  
<https://www.cpf.navy.mil/Newsroom/News/Article/3783565/us-pacific-fleet-announces-29th-rimpac-exercise/>

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Pacific Fleet, "RIMPAC 2022 Concludes". (n.d.).  
<https://www.cpf.navy.mil/Newsroom/News/Article/3118534/rimpac-2022-concludes/>

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Pacific Fleet, "RIMPAC 2024 Kicks Off in Hawaii". (n.d.).  
<https://www.cpf.navy.mil/Newsroom/News/Article/3822005/rimpac-2024-kicks-off-in-hawaii/>

<sup>16</sup> Wikipedia, Exercise RIMPAC, July 1, 2024.  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exercise\\_RIMPAC#RIMPAC\\_2024](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exercise_RIMPAC#RIMPAC_2024)

<sup>17</sup> Revista de Marina, "Rimpac: Balance of power in the Pacific?", 20 December, 2019  
<https://revistamarina.cl/es/articulo/rimpac-balance-of-power-in-the-pacific>



include 22 countries by 2012, with the Russian Navy participating for the first time<sup>18</sup>. RIMPAC 2014 marked an important step in expanding the U.S. strategic relations, with the first-ever participation of India and China in the exercise<sup>19</sup>. In 2014, at the invitation of Obama administration ahead of his state visit<sup>20</sup>, China's People's Liberation Army participated in the RIMPAC. China joined the U.S.-led exercise with 4 ships, including a destroyer, frigate, supply ship, and hospital ship, with over 1,100 Chinese officers and soldiers taking part. China also participated in RIMPAC in 2016. In 2018, however, the U.S. under Trump administration 'disinvited' China from participating, citing China's continued militarisation of the South China Sea (SCS)<sup>21</sup>.

India also first participated in RIMPAC in 2014 with indigenously built guided missile stealth frigate INS Sahyadri. Throughout the Cold War period, the relationship between India and the U.S. remained frosty. In the late 1960s India's close relation with the USSR further widened the gap minimising the possibility of a partnership between the two countries<sup>22</sup>. But relations witnessed a remarkable shift after President Barack Obama visited India. Both countries saw an unprecedented increase in joint military exercises, and defence trade emerged as a central facet of the U.S.-India security partnership. The US Congress also designated India a "Major Defence Partner" in 2016.

After its successful debut in 2014, India has continued to participate in subsequent editions of RIMPAC. In 2016, the Indian Navy sent the guided-missile destroyer INS Satpura and the fleet tanker INS Shakti. In 2018, the Indian Navy participated with the guided-missile destroyer INS Ranvijay, the fleet tanker INS Shakti, and a submarine. In 2022, the Indian Navy's INS Satpura and one P8I maritime patrol aircraft participated in the exercise<sup>23</sup>. In 2024<sup>24</sup>, indigenous stealth frigate INS Shivalik is participating.

<sup>18</sup> Exercise RIMPAC. Wikipedia, July 1, 2024.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exercise\\_RIMPAC#RIMPAC\\_2024](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exercise_RIMPAC#RIMPAC_2024)

<sup>19</sup> Whitehouse -FACT SHEET, "Advancing the Rebalance to Asia and the Pacific". November 16, 2016.<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/11/16/fact-sheet-advancing-rebalance-asia-and-pacific>

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Panda, A, The Diplomat, "What the Trump Administration's Decision to Disinvite the Chinese Navy From RIMPAC 2018 Means", May 24, 2018.  
<https://thediplomat.com/2018/05/what-the-trump-administrations-decision-to-disinvite-the-chinese-navy-from-rimpac-2018-means/>

<sup>22</sup> India-U.S.: Major Arms Transfers and Military Exercises. (2024), Congressional Research Service (CRS), May 30, 2024. <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/IF12438.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> PIB, RIMPAC 14, July 1, 2024. <https://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=105994>

<sup>24</sup> PIB, "INS Shivalik Reaches Pearl Harbour To Participate In Rim Of The Pacific Exercise (RIMPAC) – 24. (n.d.). June 29, 2024.  
<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2029512#:~:text=RIMPAC%2D24%2C%20spanning%20over%20six,of%20the%20multi%2Ddimensional%20exercise.>



In the wake of Russia's invasion of Crimea, Russia was not invited to RIMPAC 2016 and since 2018, China has not been invited to participate in RIMPAC. This year RIMPAC-24 will include ships and personnel from 29 countries, but China and Russia are not among them. The U.S., Australia and Canada have been the only countries to participate in all RIMPAC exercises since the first one in 1971.

In some way, the 2024 look relatively similar to previous editions with 29 countries, 40 surface ships, 3 submarines, 14 national land forces, over 150 aircraft, and more than 25,000 personnel<sup>25</sup>. But some more nuanced details that underline the differences. The RIMPAC will host largest humanitarian aid and disaster relief exercise with eight countries, five ships, five landing craft, five aircraft, multiple land forces, and over 2,500 total participants<sup>26</sup>.

In terms of unit contribution, the US remains the largest contributor, with forces including the aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson (CVN-70), guided-missile cruiser USS Princeton (CG-59), and two submarines USS North Carolina (SSN-777) and USS Topeka (SSN-754). After the U., the Republic of Korea the second largest contributor with two Guided missile destroyers, one submarine and one tank landing ship. The participation of other naval powers also highlights the evolution of their capabilities. For example, Indonesia is sending its new guided-missile multi-mission stealth frigate, equipped with long-range sonar, KRI Raden Eddy Martadinata (331). Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force's is sending newest guided missile destroyer with ballistic missile defence capabilities JS Haguro (DDG-180) equipped with a variety of sensors, including a flight deck and hangar for one SH-60K helicopter. Other notable participants include Royal Canadian Navy HMCS Max Bernays (AOPV 432) and HMCS Vancouver (FFH 331), and Royal Australian Navy HMAS Sydney (D48)<sup>27</sup>.

Among the highlights of RIMPAC 24 is the planned sinking of the ex-USS Tarawa<sup>28</sup>, which has generated curiosity among some analysts. It will be the first time an amphibious assault ship of any class has been intentionally sunk since the ex-USS New Orleans in RIMPAC 2010 exercise. Global Times, a Chinese state-owned media house stated that, "the 40,000-ton target ship is

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<sup>25</sup> U.S. Pacific Fleet, "U.S. Pacific Fleet Announces 29th RIMPAC Exercise". (n.d).  
<https://www.cpf.navy.mil/Newsroom/News/Article/3783565/us-pacific-fleet-announces-29th-rimpac-exercise/>

<sup>26</sup> U.S. Pacific Fleet, "RIMPAC 2024 Kicks Off in Hawaii". (n.d.).  
<https://www.cpf.navy.mil/Newsroom/News/Article/3822005/rimpac-2024-kicks-off-in-hawaii/>

<sup>27</sup> U.S. Pacific Fleet, "RIMPAC Participants — U.S. Pacific Fleet". (n.d.).  
<https://www.cpf.navy.mil/RIMPAC/Participants/>

<sup>28</sup> U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, "RIMPAC Units Participate in Sinking Exercise. (n.d.)".  
<https://www.pacom.mil/JTF-Micronesia/Article/1574875/rimpac-units-participate-in-sinking-exercise/>



being sunk to is aimed at countering China's development of large amphibious assault ships and aircraft carriers, and their potential deployment around the island of Taiwan."<sup>29</sup>

RIMPAC-24 is taking place amid heightened tensions and strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific region. The increased military exercises around Taiwan and clashes with the Philippines in the South China Sea, has raised the risk of potential conflict. Russia, on the other hand, has also become an increasingly active player in the Asia-Pacific, with President Putin making high-profile visits to China, North Korea, and Vietnam, seeking support and signing mutual defence pact<sup>30</sup> with North Korea.

Since its inception, RIMPAC has evolved from a wartime exercise to one focused on naval diplomacy, partnership building, disaster relief operations, and humanitarian assistance. This year, RIMPAC comes at a time of high tension between the U.S. and China, mainly due to China's military activities and assertiveness in both the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea. China's exclusion from RIMPAC and U.S.'s enhanced FONOPS may be symbolic move aimed at 'punishing' China, but it will unlikely deter Chinese actions.

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<sup>29</sup> Global Times, "US-led RIMPAC drill kicks off, with PLA amphibious assault ship in mind." June 27, 2024.

<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202406/1314965.shtml#:~:text=Zhang%20Junshe%2C%20another%20Chinese%20military,US'%20so%2Dcalled%20Indo%2D>

<sup>30</sup> Ap. Russian President Vladimir Putin makes a rare visit to North Korea, an old ally. The Hindu, June 19, 2024. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/russia-president-vladimir-putin-makes-a-rare-visit-to-north-korea-an-old-ally/article68305524.ece>





## Other Indo-Pacific Developments

US Japan ROK Trilateral Ministerial Meeting. Defence Ministers from the US, Japan and South Korea met on the sidelines of the Shangri-la Dialogue in Singapore and decided to hold trilateral ministerial meetings, trilateral Chiefs of Defense meetings and Defence Trilateral Talks, with the intent to rotate hosting beginning in 2024<sup>31</sup>. The object of their trilateral cooperation was stated to be to deter nuclear and missile threats posed by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and to achieve the complete denuclearization of the DPRK. The ministers also decided to execute the first edition of a new multi-domain trilateral exercise FREEDOM EDGE this summer, and to conduct a trilateral tabletop exercise to discuss how to effectively deter and respond, based on various threats in the Korean Peninsula and the Indo-Pacific. The growing trilateral cooperation is follow-up of the pathbreaking trilateral Camp David Summit in August 2023 and the decisions then to institutionalise trilateral security cooperation, including senior level policy consultations, information sharing, trilateral exercises and defence exchange cooperation.

Russia North Korea Treaty. The state visit by Russia's President Vladimir Putin to Pyongyang saw him signing the DPRK-Russia Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. The treaty obligates both sides to "permanently maintain and develop the comprehensive strategic partnership based on mutual respect for state sovereignty, territorial inviolability, non-interference in internal affairs, principle of equality and other principles of international law". The two sides "shall exchange views on the issues of bilateral relations and international issues of mutual concern through dialogue and negotiations including summit talks". In case of armed invasion against one side, the two "shall immediately operate the channel of bilateral negotiations for the purpose of adjusting their stands at the request of any one side and discussing feasible practical measures to ensure mutual assistance for removing the prevailing threat". In the event of war due to armed invasion against any one side, the other shall provide military and other assistance with all means in its possession without delay. The treaty is to be in effect indefinitely and for all practical purposes constitutes an alliance. It is in many respects similar to the 1961 treaty of friendship and cooperation between USSR and DPRK<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> United States-Japan-Republic of Korea Trilateral Ministerial Meeting (TMM) Joint Press Statement, June 2, 2024, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3793913/united-states-japan-republic-of-korea-trilateral-ministerial-meeting-tmm-joint/>

<sup>32</sup> USSR and DPRK Treaty of friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance, signed at Moscow, July 6, 1961,



State Visit by Bangladesh Prime Minister. Sheikh Hasina, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, was the guest at the first incoming State visit of Modi 3.0. Welcoming her, Prime Minister Modi described Bangladesh as India's biggest development partner and reiterated India's commitment to a stable, prosperous and progressive Bangladesh<sup>33</sup>. The joint statement issued on the occasion described Bangladesh as "close and valued neighbour" at "the converging point of India's Neighbourhood Policy, Act East Policy, SAGAR doctrine and the Indo-Pacific vision"<sup>34</sup>. The two states agreed to pursue a transformative partnership with collaboration in transportation, energy and digital connectivity, intra-regional electricity trade, emerging technologies, trade and investment linkages, water resource management, defence cooperation to modernise the Bangladesh Armed Forces, development, people-to-people ties, medical and youth development areas. They also reiterated their commitment to a free, open, inclusive, secure and rules-based Indo-Pacific region. The two countries agreed to co-lead the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management pillar of the Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative.

Solomon Islands Prime Minister Visits Australia. Solomon Islands Prime Minister Jeremiah Manele visited Australia from June 23-29, his first visit abroad after becoming the PM. A joint statement was issued on the occasion<sup>35</sup>. Amongst other things, it commits Australian support to increase the Solomon Islands Police Force from 1500 to 3000 personnel, eventually rising to 5000 over time. The objective is to reduce reliance on external partners (meaning China). The next visit by PM Manele is to China.

Eisenhower Carrier Strike Group Departs Red Sea. The Eisenhower Carrier Strike Group, which had been employed in the Red Sea region to provide cover to shipping against Houthi strikes departed on June 22<sup>36</sup>. The departure calls into question the staying power of the US for long duration conflict

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<https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20420/volume-420-I-6045-English.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> English Translation of Press Statement by Prime Minister Narendra Modi During the State Visit of Prime Minister of Bangladesh to India [https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/37895/English\\_Translation\\_of\\_Press\\_Statement\\_by\\_Prime\\_Minister\\_Shri\\_Narendra\\_Modi\\_during\\_the\\_State\\_Visit\\_of\\_Prime\\_Minister\\_of\\_Bangladesh\\_to\\_India](https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/37895/English_Translation_of_Press_Statement_by_Prime_Minister_Shri_Narendra_Modi_during_the_State_Visit_of_Prime_Minister_of_Bangladesh_to_India)

<sup>34</sup> India-Bangladesh Shared Vision for Future: Enhancing Connectivity, Commerce and Collaboration for Shared Prosperity, June 22, 2024, [https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/37897/IndiaBangladesh\\_Shared\\_Vision\\_for\\_Future\\_Enhancing\\_Connectivity\\_Commerce\\_and\\_Collaboration\\_for\\_Shared\\_Prosperty](https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/37897/IndiaBangladesh_Shared_Vision_for_Future_Enhancing_Connectivity_Commerce_and_Collaboration_for_Shared_Prosperty)

<sup>35</sup> Australia – Solomon Islands Leaders' meetings, June 26, 2024, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/australia-solomon-islands-leaders-meeting>

<sup>36</sup> Statement from Pentagon Press Secretary Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder on Eisenhower Strike Group Departing the CENTCOM Area of Responsibility, June 22, 2024, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3814264/statement-from-pentagon-press-secretary-maj-gen-pat-ryder-on-the-eisenhower-car/>



deployments. It also reduces the level of security available to merchant vessels transiting the Red Sea.

Philippines Submission on Extended Continental Shelf. The Philippines officially registered its entitlement to an extended continental shelf in the West Palawan Region with the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf on June 15<sup>37</sup>. If accepted, the Philippines claim will entitle it to exploit what lies on or under the seabed in this part of the South China Sea in the region extending from 200-350 nautical miles from Palawan. The claimed region lies well within China's ten-dash line and encompasses virtually all of the Spratly Islands, including Mischief Reef, Subi Reef and Fiery Cross Reef where China has reclaimed large areas and built airstrips. It may be recalled that China had earlier disregarded the final and binding ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration that its claims in the South China Sea were extinguished when it signed and ratified UNCLOS. The submission adds another layer to the simmering dispute between the Philippines and China about their claims and entitlements in the South China Sea.

Houthi Attacks on Merchant Ships. MV Tutor, a Liberia flagged bulk carrier transiting the Southern Red Sea, was attacked by an unmanned surface vessel and an anti-ship missile on June 12<sup>38</sup>. One crew member was killed and the ship was seriously damaged, resulting in her being abandoned by her crew. The ship subsequently sank on June 18. On June 13, the Houthis successfully attacked MV Verbena, a Palauan flagged bulk carrier owned by Ukraine and operated by Poland, with anti-ship cruise missiles<sup>39</sup>. The two incidents indicate increasing effectiveness of Houthi attacks and will further constrain use of the Red Sea shipping route by merchant traffic.

Exercise JIMEX 24. The eighth edition of the bilateral India-Japan Exercise JIMEX took place South of Kanto, Japan on June 14-15<sup>40</sup>. India fielded INS Shivalik, while Japan fielded JS Yuugiri and a submarine<sup>41</sup>. Exercises

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<sup>37</sup> Philippines Makes Official Submission to UN on Entitlement to an Extended Continental Shelf in the West Philippine Sea, June 15, 2024, <https://dfa.gov.ph/dfa-news/statements-and-advisoriesupdate/34907-philippines-makes-official-submission-to-u-n-on-entitlement-to-an-extended-continental-shelf-in-the-west-philippine-sea>

<sup>38</sup> Houthi Sinking of Merchant Ships in the Red Sea, June 20, 2024, <https://www.state.gov/houthi-sinking-of-merchant-ships-in-the-red-sea/>

<sup>39</sup> Sailor injured, cargo ablaze after missile attack by Yemen's Houthis, June 14, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/6/14/one-sailor-injured-merchant-ship-on-fire-after-houthi-missile-attack>

<sup>40</sup> Japan India Maritime Exercise JIMEX-24 Commenced at Yokosuka, Japan, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2024261>

<sup>41</sup> Japan-India Bilateral Exercise JIMEX24, [https://www.mod.go.jp/msdf/en/release/202406/20240617\\_03en.pdf](https://www.mod.go.jp/msdf/en/release/202406/20240617_03en.pdf)



conducted encompassed the air, surface and underwater domains. While the scope and complexity of the exercise has grown over the years, the participation of just one ship from each country symbolises a box being ticked rather than a focused effort to gain from each other's tactical doctrines.

Exercise RIMPAC. Exercise RIMPAC-2024 began in Hawaii on June 27<sup>42</sup>. The exercise involves 29 nations sending 40 surface ships, three submarines, 14 national land forces and over 150 aircraft<sup>43</sup>, making it the largest of multinational exercise in the world. It will encompass multi-domain warfare, anti-submarine warfare, surface warfare, amphibious landings and the defence of the carrier strike group against live threats.

Exercise Red Flag 2024. An IAF contingent comprising Rafale aircraft, assisted by IL-78 refuellers and C-17 transports, participated in the second edition of Exercise Red Flag 2024 hosted by the USAF at Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska, from June 4-14<sup>44</sup>. Aircraft from the Air Forces of Singapore, UK, Germany and the Netherlands, apart from the USAF, also participated in the exercise.

Exercise Freedom Edge. Ships from the navies of the US, Japan and Republic of Korea carried out the inaugural Exercise Freedom Edge in the Western Pacific from June 27-29<sup>45</sup>. The Exercise, announced at the Camp David Summit in August 2023, drills the ships in cooperative ballistic missile defence, air defence, anti-submarine warfare, maritime interdiction and other domains.

Keel Laying For Cadet Training Ship. The keel of the second of three Cadet Training Ships being built for the Indian Navy was laid at L&T Shipyard, Kattupalli, on June 03<sup>46</sup>. The keel of the first ship had earlier been laid in February 2024. Delivery of the ships, being built at an overall cost of Rs 3108.09 crores (about USD 372.5 million) is scheduled to commence in 2026.

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<sup>42</sup> RIMPAC 2024 Kicks Off in Hawaii, June 28, 2024, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/3822182/rimpac-2024-kicks-off-in-hawaii/>

<sup>43</sup> RIMPAC to Begin June 27, June 12, 2024, <https://www.cpf.navy.mil/Newsroom/News/Article/3804692/rimpac-to-begin-june-27/>

<sup>44</sup> IAF Contingent Completes Successful Participation in Exercise Red Flag 2024, June 16, 2024, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2025644>

<sup>45</sup> Trilateral Statement – First Execution of Multi-Doman Japan-ROK-US Exercise Freedom Edge, June 27, 2024, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/3819042/trilateral-statement-first-execution-of-multi-domain-japan-rok-us-exercise-free/>

<sup>46</sup> Keel Laying of the Second Cadet Training Ship (Yard 18004) at M/S L&T Shipyard, Kattupalli, June 03, 2024, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2022624> A



Steel Cutting for Australia's First Hunter Class Frigate. The steel cutting ceremony for the first of Australia's new Hunter Class frigates took place at the Osborne Shipyard on June 21<sup>47</sup>.

Life Extension for Collins Class Submarines. Australia announced that HMAS Farncomb would be the first of Australia's six Collins-class submarines to undergo sustainment and capability enhancement under a life-of-type extension program to be implemented commencing 2026<sup>48</sup>. The program will not include adding Tomahawk cruise missile capability, which has been judged unviable, for the class. The life extension will be done within Australia, at the Osborne Shipyard.

Long Range Deployment of INS Sunayna. INS Sunayna escorted Seychelles Coast Guard Ship Zoroaster, which had completed her refit at GRSE Kolkata, to Port Victoria, Seychelles, arriving on June 15<sup>49</sup>. After carrying out an EEZ patrol, Sunayna proceeded to Port Louis in Mauritius and was there from June 20-22<sup>50</sup>. Opportunity was availed to carry out maritime surveillance of the Mauritius EEZ along with Mauritius Coast Guard Ship Barracuda. The ship thereafter returned to Port Victoria, Seychelles to take part in the 38<sup>th</sup> National Day celebrations of Seychelles on June 29<sup>51</sup>.

INS Tabar in Alexandria. As part of her deployment to Africa and Europe, INS Tabar visited Alexandria from June 27-30<sup>52</sup>.

Saudi Naval Trainees Embark 1 TS. 76 trainees from the Royal Saudi Naval Forces embarked ships of the Indian Navy's First Training Squadron for a four week long afloat attachment on June 24<sup>53</sup>. Their training will be conducted along with that of Indian trainees. This is the second batch of RSNF trainees to be trained in India.

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<sup>47</sup> <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/media-releases/2024-06-21/first-step-boosting-navys-undersea-warfare-and-strike-capability>

<sup>48</sup> Government approves next phase of Collins Class life-of-type extension, June 5, 2024, <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/media-releases/2024-06-05/government-approves-next-phase-collins-class-life-type-extension>

<sup>49</sup> INS Sunayna in Port Victoria, Seychelles, June 18, 2024, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2026190>

<sup>50</sup> INS Sunayna in Port Louis, Mauritius, June 22, 2024, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2027843>

<sup>51</sup> INS Sunayna Enters Port Victoria, Seychelles, June 27, 2024, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2029191>

<sup>52</sup> Indian Naval Ship Tabar Reaches Alexandria, Egypt, June 27, 2024, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2029177>

<sup>53</sup> Royal Saudi Naval Forces (RNSF) Trainees Joint First Training Squadron (1 TS) for Afloat Attachment, June 26, 2024, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2028748>



AUKUS Submarine Training. The first batch of 30 Australian submarine workers departed for Pearl Harbour for AUKUS training for maintenance of Virginia-Class submarines<sup>54</sup>. The first submarine is to be inducted in Australia around 2032, although their rotational presence in the country has begun.

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<sup>54</sup>, <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/media-releases/2024-06-22/first-group-australian-submarine-workers-depart-pearl-harbor-aukus-training>



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