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INDO-PACIFIC NEWSLETTER



**A Monthly Newsletter on Security and Strategic Issues on Indo-Pacific Region from
Centre for Air Power Studies**

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Multilateral summits took place this month which were vital for the entire Indo-Pacific region. The 43rd ASEAN summit happened followed by the 18th East Asia summit at Jakarta from September 05-07 wherein, Indonesia unveiled the first ASEAN Maritime Outlook. The action plan for cooperation on the ASEAN Outlook of the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) with partner nations was also the focus of the summit. The G20 summit held in New Delhi on September 9-10 brought global leaders together and its comprehensive Leaders' Declaration contained 73 outcomes and 39 annexed documents and also raised the issue of securing the Indo-Pacific region.

On September 9, Australia and the Philippines changed their collaboration status from a comprehensive partnership to a strategic partnership. The US and Vietnam bilateral relationship was elevated to a comprehensive strategic partnership on September 10 as a result of a US president's visit to Hanoi. This is Vietnam's fifth such cooperation.

The Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) conducted the bilateral air combat training exercise Bushido Guardian 23 until September 15 and RAAF deployed six F-35A Lightning II aircraft to Japan for the first time. On September 22, the Quadrilateral Foreign Ministers met in New York and proceeded to develop their vision of multilateral cooperation for the Indo-Pacific.

China installed a floating barrier to keep Filipino fishermen out of the Scarborough Shoal after the Philippines Coastguard cut it off in an effort to further consolidate its authority over the first island chain. Taiwan showcased its first submarine made entirely domestically.

Jai Hind

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*Was the G20 Summit a Turning Point
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Read more about it at :-

<https://www.cfr.org/councilofcouncils/global-memos/was-g20-summit-turning-point-global-south>

QUOTE

“Peace, security and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region is in the interest of us all. The need of the hour is such that an Indo-Pacific, where international law including UNCLOS, is equally applicable to all countries”

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi

Opinions/Review/Expert View

How Defence Diplomacy can Help India Achieve its Global, Geostrategic Ambitions

Source: Sujan Chinoy | First Post

<https://www.firstpost.com/opinion/how-defence-diplomacy-can-help-india-achieve-its-global-geostrategic-ambitions-13113132.html> 12 Septmeber 2023



India's key objectives are to ensure (i) sovereignty and territorial integrity, and (ii) a peaceful and stable environment in which it can achieve rapid economic growth and prosperity for its people. The foundations of India's external engagement rest on the teachings of Buddha and Gandhi, essentially shaping the vision of peaceful coexistence and the oneness of humankind as evidenced in the motto for India's G20 presidency — "One Earth, One Family, One Future". That sentiment, deeply ingrained in India's civilisational ethos, flows from the Sanskrit saying, "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" (the world is one family), of the Maha Upanishad.

Non-violence is at the heart of India's vision, but it is not an impediment in the defence of the nation against aggressors. Even

Mahatma Gandhi, a fervent advocate of peace and non-violence, said in 1924 that "between violence and cowardly flight, I can only prefer violence to cowardice".

Carl von Clausewitz, the German-Prussian soldier and theorist of the 18th century famously, said that "war is the continuation of politics by other means". Kautilya's Arthashastra reflects on the importance of the Mandalas, the "circles" in which defence, statecraft and diplomacy are readily applied. It highlights the nature and importance of allies and the principles of self-interest which govern such ties. Above all, it wisely suggests that when a state has an army, allies remain friendly and even the enemy becomes friendlier.

Maintaining strong defence forces and engaging in defence diplomacy are two sides of the same coin. They go hand in hand. That is perhaps the basis of Theodore Roosevelt's cautionary advice: "Speak softly and carry a

big stick; you will go far."

A strong military, similarly, helps to further the objective of peace. American scholars Giles Harlow and George Maerz said, "You have no

idea how much it contributes to the general politeness and pleasantries in diplomacy when you have a little quiet armed force in the background."

As one of the world's largest countries with contested borders in the north with China and in the west with Pakistan, India needs to continue to work for the peaceful settlement of disputes, but at the same time, to keep its powder dry. India also needs to build strong

India has also used its growing defence logistics capabilities to build its credibility as a first responder in dealing with regional crises.

defence forces that are capable of ensuring peace with neighbours as well as deterring aggression.

Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Indian armed forces have been better funded and better equipped than ever before to meet multiple challenges and threats along its continental and maritime domains. India is promoting self-reliance and *aatmanirbharta* in defence manufacturing.

India has a long history of practising defence diplomacy. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata are replete with examples of defence diplomacy. In the Mahabharata, Lord Krishna acts as a peace envoy to prevent war between the warring Kauravas and the Pandavas.

India's indigenous strategic thought is rich in scope and content. There is much that can be learnt from the Arthashastra, including the use of Sama (dialogue), Daam (inducement), Dand (coercion) and Bhed (sowing divisions).

One of the first examples of defence diplomacy for a newly independent India was the dispatch of the 60th Field Ambulance contingent to the Korean Peninsula from November 1950 till February 1954, to provide medical assistance to both South Korean and US troops as well as to members of the Chinese People's Volunteer Army, North Korean Prisoner of Wars (PoWs) and civilians. India also chaired the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission (NNRC) to monitor the exchange of PoWs, under the chairmanship of Major General KS Thimayya.

Over the years, the Indian armed forces have distinguished themselves in UN Peacekeeping Operations, from Congo to Cambodia. India has contributed about 195,000 troops, the largest number from any country, and participated in more than 49 missions. 168 Indian peacekeepers have laid down their lives in the service of peace and progress in different parts of the world. Today, India is the second-largest troop contributor. Indian troops and force commanders have proved to be the finest exemplars of defence diplomacy and building peace and harmony in conflict-prone regions.

India has also used its growing defence logistics capabilities to build its credibility as a first responder in dealing with regional crises. Indian troops were despatched to the Maldives in 1988 (Operation Cactus) to prevent a coup. India used its considerable naval and airlift capabilities to conduct humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations (HADR) in the region in 2004 in the aftermath of the tsunami. More recently, Indian armed forces evacuated stranded Indians from Yemen (Operation Rahat) in 2015, Operation Ganga (Ukraine) in 2022 and Operation Kaveri (South Sudan) in 2023. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the Indian armed forces delivered oxygen, medical equipment and other assistance to a number of countries as part of defence diplomacy.

When the ships of the Indian Navy pay friendly visits and port calls around the world, they engage in joint exercises, project Indian culture and cuisine and often help in repairing

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local infrastructure and strengthening capacity-building programmes. Likewise, when India's air warriors and Army personnel carry out joint exercises with counterparts of friendly nations, they create the grounds for a shared convergence in furthering a rules-based international order.

As part of its defence diplomacy, India has also gifted aircraft, naval patrol vessels and helicopters to many nations, often at the cost of equipping its own forces, in order to create friendship and goodwill with countries such as Mauritius, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and others.

The contributions made by the Indian Navy's Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), the International Fleet Review, and especially India's grand Republic Day parade, in the conduct of defence diplomacy, are noteworthy. Each of the three defence services has its own programmes for building bridges with counterparts around the world. The defence training institutions in India also host foreign defence officials from friendly countries for various training courses.

At times, defence diplomacy is employed to defuse tensions and avoid conflicts by engaging in confidence-building measures. Even with countries with which India has adversarial relations and unresolved boundary disputes, there is scope for defence diplomacy to play a key role. India and China, for instance, have an institutionalised dialogue mechanism including scheduled

border personnel meetings, unscheduled flag meetings and hotlines on the border which have helped maintain contact and dialogue in the aftermath of the bloody Galwan incident in 2020. Dialogue at the level of the Corps Commanders and their lower echelons have helped to disengage in some places.

It is an unfortunate fact that defence diplomacy has scant use, if any, in India's dealings with Pakistan. The Army establishment in Pakistan uses cross-border terrorism as part of its destabilising tactics against India. Apart from the occasional exchange of sweets at border crossings during national festivals, the use of defence diplomacy with Pakistan is infructuous because Rawalpindi finds any civilised contact with India's armed forces counter-productive to sustaining its radical narrative that India is an enemy "to be bled by a thousand cuts".

The Indian armed forces observe high standards of human dignity even in dealing with the enemy's war casualties. One may recall that even at the height of the

Kargil War in 1999, the Indian Army had given the dead Pakistani soldiers an honourable burial in accordance with religious practice, and where possible, returned their mortal remains to the Pakistani side. That is part of the rich tradition of the Indian armed forces.

Today, in an uncertain world in which the balance of power is constantly shifting, India's strategic autonomy enables it to take appropriate decisions in determining cooperation with like-minded partners in defence manufacturing and

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logistics. As a continental and maritime power, India conducts defence diplomacy, whether on our land borders, the extended neighbourhood or in the extensive maritime domain across the Indo-Pacific. Defence diplomacy has many uses. It is used to build friendship and cooperation with friendly countries. High-level defence exchanges, joint exercises, friendly cultural contacts and sports events are part of India's tool-kit and support its rise as a power that contributes to the global good.

The author, a former Ambassador, is the Director General of the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses. Views expressed in the above piece are personal and solely that of the author. They do not necessarily reflect Firstpost's views.

The UK seeks to contribute to deterrence against China through the AUKUS, which has taken numerous steps in the last two years to expand defence collaboration in emerging technologies and industrial capabilities.

The UK's New Direction: Prioritising the Indo-Pacific

Source: Girish Luthra | ORF

<https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/the-uks-new-direction-prioritising-the-indo-pacific/> 25 September 2023



In March 2021, the United Kingdom (UK) released 'The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development, and Foreign Policy', outlining its vision, priorities, and strategies for 'Global Britain in a Competitive Age.' While it covered a broad range of areas aligned with its national objectives, two aspects stood out from a policy-reorientation perspective. One, a departure from its earlier approach of cordiality and accommodation with China; and two, its decision to deepen engagement with and play a more active role in the Indo-Pacific region. It included a separate section 'The Indo-Pacific Tilt: A Framework', which stressed that "we will be the European partner with the broadest and most integrated presence in the Indo-Pacific."

The 'tilt' framework met with scepticism, in some cases with cynicism, because the UK had remained somewhat withdrawn, in general, and

peripheral to the Indo-Pacific region, in particular, in the preceding few years. There were questions about the UK's seriousness and headroom available for resource allocation to follow through with this new strategy. Notwithstanding, the UK government started to take new steps, as well as moving forward with some earlier initiatives related to the Indo-Pacific. The big announcement in September 2021 of AUKUS (Australia, the UK, and the US), an informal security alliance focused on the western Pacific, sent the clearest signal that the 'tilt' was more than just a strategy paper. It also indicated that the plans "... to enhance China facing capabilities to respond to systemic challenges it poses to our security, prosperity, and values..." would be realised through partnerships and alliances. The UK seeks to contribute to deterrence against China through the AUKUS, which has taken numerous steps in the last two years to expand defence collaboration in emerging technologies and industrial capabilities.

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While the use of 'tilt' in official language may fade away, the UK is likely to continue to lean heavily towards the Indo-Pacific.

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The gathering in Delhi has exposed the lack of focus and usual faultlines, despite its ‘consensus’ declaration on Ukraine.

Indo-Pacific strategy: Uniting all the players on the board

Source: *The Guardian*

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/sep/10/modi-boosted-image-but-g20-achieve-little-else> 10 September 2023



India's prime minister Narendra Modi (right) talks to Rishi Sunak during the G20 Leaders' Summit in New Delhi, India. Photograph: Press Information Bureau/Shutterstock

What is the point of the G20, the group of 19 countries plus the EU, whose annual summit is being held in Delhi? It’s a question that gets harder to answer with each passing year. As ever, there was no shortage of global problems to discuss: food security, debt relief, the climate crisis, disease, banking reforms and digital infrastructure, to name a few. The difficulty was the apparent chronic lack of agreed, substantive and credible action to tackle them.

One explanation is that the G20 is a disparate group whose membership is based on relative economic heft rather than, say, shared ideas, beliefs or experience. When discussing endemic hunger, for example, it’s possible Ethiopia (not a member) has a deeper understanding of the issues than Canada (a member). A lack of tangible outcomes and follow-through is linked

to the fact the G20 has no permanent secretariat. It is, in effect, the sum of its summits, which too often turn into interesting but ineffectual talking shops.

Summit hosts tend to hijack these one-off occasions to showcase their countries and impress domestic audiences. Narendra Modi, India's prime minister, is no exception. He has used the event to advertise what he sees as India's leadership role as the "voice of the global south". The world, Modi warned, was suffering a "crisis of trust". His blatant use of the summit to boost his personal image and his chances in next year's Indian elections showed how sadly true that is.

Modi was adamant that geopolitical issues, meaning Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, should not be allowed to distract attention from the wider G20 agenda. He refused to invite Ukraine to attend. Yet this approach was never going to work, given that key global south issues, such as the price and availability of grain, are directly and negatively affected by the war. Russia's attacks on Ukraine's ports, and its refusal to renew a UN-brokered export pact, most hurt the countries Modi most wants to help. But as expected, the summit's "consensus" declaration failed to condemn Russia's invasion or its war crimes.

Modi's efforts to concentrate on developing world problems was further undermined by a summit boycott by China's president, Xi Jinping. It appears Xi had no desire to meet Modi or the US president, Joe Biden, both of whom he considers geopolitical rivals and potential foes.

Biden used his absence to further strengthen US-India defence ties in talks with Modi. Xi's snub was irresponsible and self-defeating, given China's economic might and its huge overseas lending.

By insisting on making Ukraine a priority in his summit talks, Rishi Sunak exploited another absence – that of Russia's president, Vladimir Putin. But the prime minister's political focus swiftly shifted to a free trade deal with India. Modi reportedly wants a "quickie" pre-election agreement. Sunak needs a deal, too, so he can pretend Brexit is working. But the terms and scope will require a lot more work if, as with other trade deals, Britain is not to be sold short again.

Like Biden, Sunak also faces renewed questions about his courting of an authoritarian leader whose attachment to open government and key principles such as free speech and a free press appears shaky at best. Modi's "strongman" style, Hindu majoritarian bias and disregard for human rights in Kashmir and Manipur are an embarrassment for any democratic country that wants to do business with India.

The decision to invite the African Union to become a permanent G20 member may emerge as this summit's most substantive achievement. Yet enlarging the group could make it even more unwieldy and unfocused. Next up after India are Brazil and South Africa, in 2024 and 2025 respectively. Their presidencies may be make or break for the G21.

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An India–Middle East–Europe Corridor is Unlikely to Boost Saudi–Israel Normalization

Source: Ahmed Aboudouh | Chatham House

<https://www.chathamhouse.org/2023/09/india-middle-east-europe-corridor-unlikely-boost-saudi-israel-normalization> 15
September 2023

At the G20 summit President Joe Biden announced that India, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), together with Israel, France, Germany, Italy and the US, want to create an ‘India– Middle East–Europe Corridor’ (IMEC).

This rail and shipping route would include advanced fibre optics, clean hydrogen pipelines and economic zones stretching from India, through the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Israel, to Piraeus Port in Greece.

A working group will lay out timetables, financing plans and projects in the next two months. If it materializes, the grandiose project could create a new dimension of economic integration between the Middle East, South Asia and Europe.

Some in Israel are tempted to see the initiative as a way to fire-up normalization with Saudi Arabia – a diplomatic effort integral to US strategy in the Middle East.

Israel’s National Security Adviser, Tzachi Hanegbi, called the corridor ‘the most meaningful evidence’ that both sides are moving from ‘a shot in the dark’ towards meaningful efforts to normalize relations between the two countries.

But the obstacles to an economically feasible project are significant, and Riyadh has other

motives for participation.

A means to an End for Washington

For the US, the project to normalize relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia is a means to an end.

The Biden administration has been pushing for a deal as part of a broader plan to contain Iran and check China’s expanding influence in the Middle East (A Beijing-brokered deal to restore Saudi–Iran diplomatic ties, announced in March, was a wake-up call for Washington).

The US plan aims to reshape the Middle East’s geoeconomic landscape through connectivity projects like IMEC, helping to alleviate Gulf countries’ doubts about its commitment, reduce tensions with Iran and bolster its leadership in the Gulf.

The corridor would complement other coalitions of friendly powers such as the India–UAE–Israel–US I2U2 and the G7-led Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGI) – seen as a rival China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

And the US believes its strategic objectives will not be realized without pushing forward Israel’s Abraham Accords normalization agenda, especially with Saudi Arabia.

Israel–Saudi Relations are Key

This explains the pressure the US is allegedly placing on Riyadh to trim down its deepening ties with China and normalize relations with Israel – in exchange for a security pact and support developing its own civilian nuclear program.

The obstacles to an economically feasible project are significant, and Riyadh has other motives for participation.

Despite its reluctance to officially join, the new IMEC already makes the Saudis de facto signatories to the I2U2 with Israel.

As time passes, it's hoped, the corridor will therefore create the economic and psychological conditions to facilitate normalization.

For India, Israel's 2020 Abraham Accords with the UAE boosted its relations with the US and the Middle East and galvanised its vision for more multilateralism and multipolarity.

However, to India the IMEC is about searching for alternative trade routes to the North-South Transport Corridor to Russia via Iran, and thwarting 'encirclement' by the BRI.

The View from Riyadh

For those sitting in Riyadh or Abu Dhabi however, things look different. The corridor fits into a broader Saudi plan for economic diversification and an effort to create a more independent foreign policy.

It is viewed neither as part of strategic competition with Iran nor as part of an effort to establish relations with Israel. Unlike in the US, Gulf States never saw the latter as a prerequisite for, or even linked to, the former.

Regardless, normalization has another set of challenges to overcome, ranging from the US Congress' staunch opposition to a civilian nuclear program for Saudi Arabia to an ultra-far-right Israeli government.

Saudi Crown Prince Mohamed Bin Salman might also be tempted to kick negotiations beyond

the 2024 US presidential elections to potentially clinch a better deal from a Republican president.

Jordan, a central node in the new corridor, has kept silent to avoid an internal backlash to doing business with Israel, which further complicates the corridor's prospects.

Economic Feasibility

The project's feasibility may also not match the political hype.

According to some estimates, goods could reach Europe from Mumbai using the new route 40 per cent faster than the Suez Canal and cut the cost by 30 per cent.

This sounds hyperbolic, given the loading and unloading costs involved and time in each port along the way, as well as the future transit tolls and fees.

Insufficient infrastructure is another hurdle. While some parts of the railway network connecting the gulf are still incomplete, Jordan's entire antique railway system needs a makeover.

Financing is also a thorny issue. The main sponsors are yet to be revealed – a crucial element as the corridor is touted as a component of the PGI, which (unlike the BRI) relies on private-sector investments.

Private investors may find the cost and longevity of the project prohibitive.

Along the way, regulations, taxation, and customs procedures must also be aligned.

Above all, the project's success hinges on

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economic growth and demand in India, the Middle East and Europe, which in turn depends on global economic recovery.

The new corridor may take decades to be realized, if ever. In the meantime, the US will continue its efforts to topple China from its status as the biggest economic partner in the Middle East.

The Saudis and Israelis do not need an economic corridor to keep talking, so they will. Hopes that the IMEC will boost normalization may therefore be merely a pipe dream.

US-Indonesia Security Relations Flourish in a Changing Indo-Pacific

Source: Joseph Rachman | The Diplomat

<https://thediplomat.com/2023/09/us-indonesia-security-relations-flourish-in-a-changing-indo-pacific/> 14 September 2023



A U.S. Marine Corps AH-1Z Viper pilot with Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 265, 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit, conducts flights before a combined-arms, live-fire exercise during Super Garuda Shield in Indonesia, Sept. 9, 2023

Credit: U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Christopher Lap

Imagine this scenario: an Indonesian company is drilling for oil within its exclusive economic zone in the South China Sea, when the platform is suddenly swarmed by Chinese navy and coast guard vessels. Not far away, there is a U.S. Navy ship, perhaps on a routine patrol through contested waters. What does the Indonesian government decide to do next?

Defense cooperation between Washington and Jakarta is on an upswing, but on the Indonesian side clear limits remain.

This and similar scenarios have been the subject of tabletop exercises conducted in recent years by Indonesian and U.S. think tanks, says Dewi Fortuna Anwar, a Research Professor at the National Research and Innovation Agency in Jakarta.

She says that for Indonesian officials and policymakers, the answer is always the same. “All Indonesians, whether civilians or military, said we want the information from the U.S., if we need assistance maybe some technology,” she says, “but we do not want the U.S. ship to come over.”

Despite this ambivalence, the U.S.-Indonesian security relationship is intensifying. The most obvious symbol of this is the Super Garuda Shield, which just wrapped up. The U.S.-Indonesian military exercise held since 2007 has increased sharply in scale and complexity over the past two years. Roughly 2,100 U.S. and 1,900 Indonesian service members from across multiple military branches participated.

The context of America’s growing push to contain China in the Indo-Pacific by strengthening its security partnerships with regional powers is hard to miss. Close U.S. allies and partners including Japan, Australia, Singapore, the United Kingdom, and France joined the exercises as participants, and 12 countries sent observers. Notably, Australia will be deploying battle tanks abroad for the first time since the Vietnam War – transporting some itself and others transported by the U.S. Army.

Yet on the Indonesian side, clear limits remain. China’s ongoing claims to parts of the North Natuna Sea, the name that Jakarta uses for the portions of its exclusive economic zone near the Natuna Islands, incentivizes Indonesia to strengthen its relationship with the United States. However, Indonesia remains wedded to its long tradition of non-alignment and is wary

of becoming over-reliant on the U.S. for security provisions.

U.S.-Indonesian security ties have a long history, reaching their high point in the de facto, though firmly not de jure, alliance during the Suharto period. However, relations declined when the end of the Cold War allowed the U.S. to develop scruples about supporting dictators generally and Indonesia’s bloody occupation of East Timor in particular. In 1992, the U.S. ceased providing training under the International Military Education and Training program, in 1998 stopped training Indonesia’s elite special forces Kopassus, and in 1999 imposed an arms embargo against Indonesia.

From 2005 on, however, the relationship started to be repaired. The arms embargo ended and IMET was restored. The Garuda Shield exercises were established two years later, and in 2019 restrictions on training with Kopassus were finally brought to an end. That same year, the U.S. also dropped a ban on Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto entering the United States. Put in place due to Prabowo’s human rights record when he served as a general under Suharto, his assumption of office in 2019 forced a change in U.S. policy.

Now the relationship seems to be advancing once more. Indonesia attempted to modernize its military since the presidency of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. In the process, the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) has shifted its focus from internal threats to external ones, and from the TNI’s land forces to the navy and air force. The U.S. is working to support this, most

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recently authorizing significant sales of military equipment to Indonesia including F-15 fighter jets and Black Hawk helicopters.

The U.S. has also provided quiet help to other forces such as Bakamala, the Indonesian Maritime Security Agency. In 2021, the U.S. began constructing a maritime training center for Bakamala on the strategically located island of Batam.

Most visibly, both countries have also ramped up the Garuda Shield exercise, reflected in the “Super” that was affixed to its name last year. For the second year running the exercise ended with a CALFEX – a combined arms live fire exercise – a challenging exercise that tests the interoperability of the various participating forces.

“The scope and scale of that live fire was not something we could have done two years ago. And it’s even bigger than last year’s because it includes more partners and allies, and it includes more live fire assets,” said Maj. Jeff Tolbert, deputy public affairs officer for the 25th Infantry Division. “It’s just that next level up.”

The balance between a U.S. desire to build security relations with Indonesia for their own sake and as part of the broader Indo-Pacific strategy facing China remains ambiguous. Col. David Zinn of the 25th Infantry Division firmly denied any link between the exercises and Washington’s China containment policy. However, when asked about the importance and strategic context of the partnership with Indonesia, Zinn did refer to Operation Pathways, an annual operation and the U.S. Pacific Army’s game plan to deploy forces throughout the Pacific to secure interior lines in the event of a conflict.

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The Super Garuda Shield exercise doesn’t only let the U.S. flex its muscles in front of China, says Fitri Bintang Timur, a visiting fellow at the International Institute of Strategic Studies. It also lets America test its interoperability with allies in a key theater, and how fast it can deploy in the region.

On the Indonesian side, security cooperation with the U.S. does benefit its efforts to push back against China’s maritime claims. “ASEAN is in the business of creating norms and values. But, when you have to deal with real issues you don’t go to ASEAN,” says Dewi. Cooperation on a bilateral or minilateral level is much more common, and effective, she suggests.

Indonesia did recently propose a joint ASEAN naval exercise, but its fate remains uncertain. Internal divisions over the South China Sea, and the possible concerns of some member states about Indonesia becoming too influential could stymie the idea.

However, the Indonesian government is also wary of becoming overly dependent on the United States. While there are few outward signs that Defense Minister Prabowo or other officers resent the U.S. policies of disassociating itself from the Indonesian military in the 1990s and 2000s, the memory remains.

When it comes to military purchases Indonesia has made substantial orders of military equipment from not just America but also from France, Japan, Italy, Qatar, and Turkey. The past U.S. arms embargo played a role in pushing Indonesia to seek out diverse suppliers of military equipment, Dewi suggests.

Indonesia is even more averse to anything that might imply a broader geopolitical alignment with the U.S., let alone an alignment against China. As with Vietnam or even Singapore, security relations with the U.S. allow Indonesia to hedge against increasing Chinese power and assertiveness in the region. But, this is balanced against a historical commitment to non-alignment – Indonesia’s preference for a foreign policy that is *bebas dan aktif* (free and active) – and strong relations with China, not least in the economic sphere.

Indeed, if anything, Indonesia tends to view American actions as overly confrontational. When the Trump administration launched its Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy, Indonesia recoiled at the confrontational tenor of the policy and responded by spearheading the formulation of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, as former U.S. Ambassador to Indonesia Scot Marciel wrote in his recent book. AUKUS was even more unwelcome, with Indonesia now pushing the International Energy Agency to implement tighter controls on the transfer of fissile materials. As tensions flared over Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s visit to Taiwan in August 2022, Indonesia called on all sides to de-escalate the situation.

The difficulties Indonesia can face calibrating its relationship with the U.S. were on display last month when Prabowo visited Washington, D.C. A purported joint statement by him and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, issued by the Pentagon, not only expressed support for Indonesia’s military modernization but also condemned China’s claims in the South China Sea as “inconsistent with international law.”

China protested indignantly. And, according to a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, received assurances from the Indonesian government that the statement was not true. “Indonesia is on the record saying that the South China Sea issue should be resolved through international law,” Marciel told *The Diplomat*. “That’s not really new, but it wouldn’t really surprise me that they don’t necessarily want to be seen at the Pentagon standing next to the U.S. shouting it.”

Looking ahead, figures on both the U.S. and Indonesian side expect security relations to continue to deepen. However, the ultimate trajectory will be shaped by the broader course of the Sino-American rivalry. As one Indonesian

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officer now serving as a lecturer at the Indonesian Defense University noted, “The relationship could elevate to a higher level if any open conflict takes place in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly in the South China Sea.”

Yet, there is also the risk that the U.S. relies on the security relationship as a crutch to compensate for its limited offerings in other spheres. When it comes to security ties the U.S. has a distinct edge over China. In the past two decades, it has trained thousands of Indonesian officers and performed nearly a hundred joint exercises with the country. China has trained a bare handful and no joint exercises have been held since 2015 due to the territorial dispute.

Nonetheless, China remains a key Indonesian partner due to its economic importance to Indonesia – both as a source of investment and as a destination for exports. If the U.S. cannot broaden

its relationship and what it offers to Indonesia it may find that in the diplomatic sphere, security ties will take it only so far.

India-South Korea Relations in the Age of Indo-Pacific: Challenges and Opportunities

Source: Air Marshal Anil Chopra, Director General, Centre for Air Power Studies | First Post

<https://www.firstpost.com/opinion/india-south-korea-relations-in-the-age-of-indo-pacific-challenges-and-opportunities-13147742.html> 20 September 2023



(File) Prime Minister Narendra Modi and South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol at Hiroshima, Japan, on 20 May, 2023. PTI

The year 2023 marks 50 years of India and the Republic of Korea (RoK), South Korea, bilateral relations. The two countries have had a civilisational connection. The 16-year-old princess Suriratna, the daughter of King Padmasena, the ruler of the kingdom of Kausala in North India, with Ayodhya as the capital, traveled in 48 BCE to Korea and married Kim Suro, founder and King of Geumgwan Gaya in south-eastern Korea. This relationship is a cherished part of the folklore in that country.

More recently, India's contributions during

the Korean War, shared values of democracy, the deepening of the Special Strategic Partnership, India's rising global status, and the presidency of the G20 all bring into focus the potential for intensified bilateral engagement. The core areas are security and defence, trade and investment, sustainable development, future mobility, new and emerging technologies.

With the unprecedented economic and military growth of China, the global focus and competition have shifted to the Indo-Pacific. There is a congruence of situations and challenges between the two nations. They face similar security and supply chain challenges. Undoubtedly, there is a need to take stock of the close bilateral relations and to deepen strategic cooperation in areas like futuristic manufacturing, renewables, healthcare, space, digital transformation, etc.

India's independence saw a bloody partition in 1947. Similarly, the RoK emerged as a nation after the Korean War (1950-53) that split the Korean peninsula across the 38th parallel. While RoK was brought under the security umbrella provided by the United States, India chose to be non-aligned. RoK's immediate security concerns are the nuclear powers communist China

India-South Korea bilateral defence deals and the recently held Korea-India Foreign Policy and Security Dialogue show the convergence between new Delhi and Seoul.

and North Korea, the latter being backed by the former. Similarly, India's security concerns are with nuclear powers Pakistan and China, with both working collusively. China has had a hand in both

North Korea and Pakistan's nuclear and missile programs. India has had full wars with both its neighbours and continues to have border incidents and skirmishes with them. North Korea is continuously threatening RoK with missile firings. Though located at diametrically opposite

ends of China, the security situations for India and RoK are somewhat similar.

India-RoK established formal diplomatic relations in 1973, and engagements ever since have been multi-dimensional. South Korea is currently the fifth-largest source of investment in India. Korean brand names, LG, Samsung, and Hyundai are household names and have manufacturing and service facilities in India. In July 2018, South Korean President Moon Jae-in and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi jointly inaugurated Samsung Electronics' smartphone assembly factory in Noida, the largest such factory in the world. There are many Korean companies in infrastructural development. Tata Motors purchased Daewoo Commercial Vehicles and highlighted India's investments in Korea. Buddhism also binds the two nations.

Chinese military buildup and their actions in South and East China Seas, and more recent aggressive posturing against Taiwan and Japan, have shifted global attention to the Indo-Pacific. Also, North Korea continues to grow its nuclear stockpile and ballistic missile capability. They are conducting, on average, one missile test every other week. Both China and North Korea are ruled by ambitious autocratic leaders.

Like-minded major democracies of the Indo-Pacific region, Japan, Australia, the U.S., and India, formed the QUAD. The members have a shared vision for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific and a rules-based maritime order in the East and South China Seas. The Quad Plus meetings included representatives from RoK, New Zealand, and Vietnam. Later, the United States hosted a

meeting of Quad nations, which also included Brazil, Israel, and RoK, ostensibly to discuss a global response to COVID-19. President Biden just hosted leaders of Japan, RoK at Camp David to help them bridge their historic differences and animosity.

As of 2023, Quad countries together have nearly 35 per cent of the global GDP. The numbers are much higher with Quad-plus or non-member partners. Though not a military alliance, Quad and its members hold bilateral and multilateral military exercises like Malabar, among others.

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China continues to be a dominant economy. It is a leading trade partner of most global economies. However, all its main allies in the region, Pakistan, North Korea, Myanmar, and Cambodia, are in financial or political mess. The war in Ukraine and the sanctions against Russia have pushed the major military power Russia into China's fold. The West has thus created a dual containment situation for itself. China has meanwhile increased its engagement in West and Central Asia. They brokered the Saudi-Iran deal. They are engaging with UAE and others. China has a major standing in Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), now expanding BRICS, Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and many other multilateral institutions.

The global approach to China is still evolving. The ASEAN countries and most others prefer engagement to confrontation. I feel that the world needs to continue to engage China and selectively and slowly decouple. In May this year, India participated in the inaugural ASEAN-

India Maritime Exercise (AIME 2023) held in the South China Sea. It took the India-ASEAN Comprehensive Strategic partnership to the next level. The Philippines, US, and Japan also held a trilateral exercise in the SCS. The Indian Air Force (IAF) and Japan Air Self Defence Force (JASDF) had a bilateral air exercise 'Veer Guardian 2023' in Japan, in January 2023.

The preference for the Philippines to be a partner with Quad is understandable. Meanwhile, Japan announced its new National Security Strategy and the Defence Buildup Programme (DBP) in December 2022. Their defence budget has started going up with a target of reaching 2 percent of GDP by 2027. By signing the four foundational military logistics and security agreements, COMCASA, BECA, LEMOA, and GSOMIA, India and the USA have moved closer.

India has clearly emerged as the leader of the global south and maintains strategic autonomy. It is already the world's fifth-largest economy with one of the highest growth rates. It has the fourth most powerful military. It is among the top space powers. It has a huge demographic advantage of a youthful highly skilled population. It is a great market and has a high potential as a manufacturing hub. The world is wooing India.

Meanwhile, India finds strong market and trade synergies with Japan, RoK, and ASEAN as much as it does with China. Over 50 per cent of India's global trade passes through the South China Sea (SCS). India has two oil exploration blocks off the coast of Vietnam. SCS may not seem to be an immediate security concern for India, but India is building a blue-water navy, and IAF's reach has

been growing with long-range fighter operations using aerial refueling to defend India's global and regional interests.

India's approach towards its eastern neighbours includes Act East, Neighborhood First, and Security and Growth of All in the Region (SAGAR) policies. For India, ASEAN Centrality is fundamental to this approach as well as towards the multilateral frameworks in the region.

Amidst intensifying US-China rivalry in the region, Seoul has to balance between the US as its security partner and China as its largest trading partner. Also, with China, Seoul has to manage the North Korean nuclear dynamics. Seoul's recently released Indo-Pacific strategy sees RoK as a pivotal state that actively seeks out an agenda for cooperation and shapes discussions in the regions and the wider world. The strategy outlines nine core lines of effort centered on international norms, priority sectors, and cooperation through partnerships.

India-RoK bilateral defence deals and the recently held Korea-India Foreign Policy and Security Dialogue show the convergence between India and South Korea. They see India as a special strategic partner. Korea's aging population and technology could combine with progressive youthful India and make a manufacturing hub. We also need to explore opportunities to work jointly in third countries.

On bilateral terms, India has widely supported South Korea over the looming North Korean nuclear threat and has expressed apprehension regarding North Korea's missile tests at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Seoul

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has also pledged to strengthen the foundation for increased economic cooperation by upgrading the ROK-India Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA).

The big elephant in the room is India's rising trade deficit. India has been negotiating with the Korean government for opening up its markets for Indian products. In a competitive world, India has to offer products that RoK can buy. Also, the Korean friends tell us that it is better for India to have a trade deficit with them than with China.

India and South Korea have increased their defence and security cooperation. The K9 Vajra, the 155mm artillery gun, is produced by the Indian company L&T, with Korea's Hanwha Defence. Indian companies have reached out to reliable Korean partners to explore collaborations on utility helicopters, light tanks, diesel submarines, and military-grade lithium batteries.

Korean industry is also considering transferring various advanced naval shipbuilding technologies to support upcoming Indian naval projects, such as Mine Countermeasure Vessels (MCMV), Fleet Support Ships (FSS), and Landing Platform Docks (LPD). Though there remain issues of the extent of technology transfer and the quantum of investments. These bottlenecks need resolution. Perhaps it's best to target low-hanging fruits. Semiconductor collaboration would be mutually beneficial, and so will be electric vehicles.

RoK and Indian aircrew interacted with each other at a multilateral air exercise in the UAE. These need to be built on through greater military

exchanges to transform the warm friendship into a strong strategic partnership. The two are vibrant democracies with similar value systems and somewhat linked destinies. Economic and defence cooperation are the two main pillars. We need to bridge the distance.

RoK greatly appreciates the work done during India's G20 Presidency and its motto, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, which translates to "One Earth, One Family, One Future." Both nations have a significant interest in the outcome of the ongoing power struggle between the US and China and need to work closely. Progress has to be driven

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by a substantial alignment of interests, reciprocal positive sentiments, and frequent high-level interactions. We need to find ways to strengthen complementarities and iron out differences to build stronger bilateral, minilateral, and

multilateral connections between the two major middle powers. Freedom, peace, and prosperity are the desired goals. Trust and mutual benefit will be the pillars.

Cherry-Picks of the Month

1. U.S. Recognizes Cook Islands and Niue Amid China's Pacific Inroads - <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Indo-Pacific/U.S.-recognizes-Cook-Islands-and-Niue-amid-China-s-Pacific-inroads>
2. Southeast Asians Wary of New Conflicts As Big Powers Join ASEAN Summit - <https://www.reuters.com/world/world-leaders-talk-trade-security-asean-led-summit-2023-09-07/>
3. Fostering Peace and Cooperation: The Significance of IPACC in the Indo-Pacific - <https://www.financialexpress.com/business/defence-fostering-peace-and-cooperation-the-significance-of-ipacc-in-the-indo-pacific-3255490/>

4. Japan Expanding its Reach on the World Stage - <https://asiatimes.com/2023/10/japan-expanding-its-reach-on-the-world-stage/>

5. Can ASEAN find a Role in the Rapidly Evolving Indo-Pacific Reconfiguration? - <https://thediplomat.com/2023/09/can-asean-find-a-role-in-the-rapidly-evolving-indo-pacific-reconfiguration/>

CAPS Experts- Infocus

1. A new Military Grouping is Emerging in the Indo-Pacific - <https://capsindia.org/a-new-military-grouping-is-emerging-in-the-indo-pacific/>

Panel Discussions/ Podcasts

1. Indian Diplomacy: Geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XyQIScX00VY>

2. Indo-Pacific Army Chiefs Meet: Delegates from 30 Nations Participate in Meet - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PfBne2rE-No>

3. Asia Pacific Defence Reporter - <https://shows.acast.com/asia-pacific-defense-report/episodes/651646a66d392d0011f1a8fe>

4. Podcast: Key Takeaways from MRO Asia-Pacific - <https://aviationweek.com/podcasts/mro-podcast/podcast-key-takeaways-mro-asia-pacific>



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