



CENTRE FOR AIR POWER STUDIES (CAPS)

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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

From the Editor's Desk

Throughout the month, the maritime order toward the east and west of India remained unstable. In the West, efforts by the US and Europe to defend Red Sea trade against Houthi attacks on commercial ships were hampered. India's External Affairs Minister Dr S. Jaishankar made two bilateral visits to South Korea and Japan. He first visited South Korea from 5-6 March to co-chair the 10th India-ROK Joint Commission Meeting (JCM) and visited Japan from 7-8 March for the 16th Strategic Dialogue between the Foreign Ministers. One of the major focus of the visits was ensuring peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific and exploring new avenues of cooperation.

Tensions erupted in the South China Sea to the east of India as Chinese naval forces used force, including water cannons and collisions, to halt Philippine resupply missions in the Second Thomas Shoal.

Furthermore, On March 5, China revealed a defence budget of roughly \$231.67 billion. The sum exceeds the total yearly defence budgets of Australia, Japan, South Korea, India, and Japan. The ruling coalition in Japan decided to relax the country's stringent defence export regulations in order to facilitate the sale of the GCAP fighter, which is being developed in collaboration with the UK and Italy, under certain restrictions. A revamped defence and security cooperation pact was also signed by Australia and the UK, which called for a considerably stronger UK involvement in the Indo-Pacific. This covers the 2025 arrival of a Carrier Strike Group in the area.

This month we present specially selected opinions and cherry picks covering all this and more. Do check out our Social Media Corner for some engaging and insightful content, including debates, interviews and podcasts from eminent experts.

Jai Hind

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Read more about it at :-

<https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/military-balance/2024/03/chinas-defence-budget-boost-cant-mask-real-pressures/>

QUOTE

"India sees Japan as a natural partner in its development and transformation, and in its quest for peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region"

- Dr. S. Jaishankar, EAM

Opinions/Review/Expert View

Why Russia will keep Supporting China in the Indo-Pacific

Source: David Batashvili | *The Diplomat*

<https://thediplomat.com/2024/03/why-russia-will-keep-supporting-china-in-the-indo-pacific/> 16 March 2024



Credit: Russian Presidential Press and Information Office

The. Russia's foreign policy has been growing more helpful to China lately, with Moscow granting diplomatic support to Beijing on the Indo-Pacific issues and the scope of the Russian-Chinese joint military maneuvers increasing. This process has profound strategic reasons underneath it, and is therefore set to continue and further develop in the future.

The Russian-Chinese joint statement on strategic cooperation from March 21, 2023, besides promising "decisive mutual support on the issues of protecting one another's core interests," included Russia's vow to oppose Taiwan's independence "in any form," and "firmly support actions of the Chinese side for the defense of its state sovereignty and territorial integrity." Moscow's representatives, such

Russian-Chinese joint military maneuvers are also developing, including naval exercises and air patrols in East Asian waters, as well as naval exercises in the Arabian Sea and off the coast of South Africa.

as Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, regularly give China support on the Indo-Pacific regional issues, attacking the Quad format of the Australia, India, Japan, and the U.S. and accusing the United States and its allies of attempting to "create a long-term source of tension" in the region and seeking to contain China.

Russian-Chinese joint military maneuvers are also developing, including naval exercises and air patrols in East Asian waters, as well as naval exercises in the Arabian Sea and off the coast of South Africa. In the summer of 2023, 11 ships of the Russian and Chinese navies jointly maneuvered near the coast of Alaska, in the far northwestern United States.

This Russian tilt toward China in the Indo-Pacific is no longer restrained even by Russia's partnership with India, which Moscow traditionally has sought to maintain. China's geopolitical ambitions are a major challenge to India's interests and foreign policy. This fact is reflected in India's growing partnership with the United States, Japan, and other like-minded countries in the Indo-Pacific. Russia's current

policy toward China might gradually put such a strain on its closer relationship with India that Moscow will find it hard to maintain good ties with New Delhi. And yet, Russia pursues its ever-growing alignment with China despite the India factor.

One reason influencing this Russian policy might be Moscow's growing dependence on China as a consequence of the Russo-

Ukrainian War and the resulting sanctions. But the Russian-Chinese alignment was growing even before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The war may have accelerated development of this alignment, but it did not cause it. The reasons behind it are not transactional but deeply strategic.

The ultimate outcome sought by Russia's current foreign strategy is the end of the global leadership of the United States and its allies. Moscow wants it replaced by a world of a few major powers that dominate smaller countries in their respective geographic spheres, and compete or cooperate in the rest of the world. Democracy is not the leading form of government in such a world, nor is individual freedom the basis of political thought and practice. It is such a world that the regime in the Kremlin deems safe for its own existence, and this is the result Moscow pushes for both in its official rhetoric and in its actions.

Unlike the Soviet Union during the Cold War, modern Russia is unable to attempt bringing down the Western-led world on its own. Its resources are insufficient for the task. Therefore, a key feature of Moscow's foreign strategy is developing alignment with other adversaries of the United States and its allies, most importantly with the major ones – China and Iran.

There is a school of thought in the U.S. that insists that the main threat for Russia

comes from China, and that on this basis it should be possible to achieve Russia's geopolitical realignment, resulting in Moscow joining the ranks of China's opponents. The trouble is that the regime in Moscow radically disagrees with this analysis.

Whatever Russian leaders think or feel about China, they see the U.S.-led global order as the main threat facing them. They say this openly and officially. More importantly, their words are matched by Russia's systematic and audacious geostrategic actions aimed at ending the U.S. global leadership.

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Russia's developing alignment with China is not an aberration. It is a logical policy based on the strategic goals that the Kremlin regime has chosen to set before itself. This alignment, therefore, will keep getting deeper, and will be reflected in Russia's new actions and policies concerning the Indo-Pacific. No relatively superficial, transactional considerations can stop this process. They are trumped by Moscow's main purpose.

Every player with vital interests in the Indo-Pacific region will benefit from taking into full account this aspect of Russia's foreign strategy.

India-Japan-South Korea Trilateral: Time to Chart new paths in the Indo-Pacific

Source: Abhishek Sharma And Simran Walia | First Post

<https://www.firstpost.com/opinion/india-japan-south-korea-trilateral-time-to-chart-new-paths-in-the-indo-pacific-13745814.html> 06 March 2024



Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, left and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, shake hands after making press statements following their meeting in New Delhi, on 20 March, 2023. AP; Prime Minister Narendra Modi with South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol during a meeting, in Hiroshima, on 20 May, 2023. PTI

In 2011 an idea was germinated in New Delhi over a dinner reception, and that idea led to the formation of a trilateral between India, South Korea, and Japan. After its conceptualisation, the first meeting was hosted by India in June 2012, followed by the second in November 2013 in Japan. However, that effort was unable to fructify as expected. At its first attempt, the trilateral could not succeed due to the absence of some important elements such as strategic alignment and strong convergence between the three partners. In addition, there was a hesitation to only focus on 'softer, [and] noncontroversial issues.' All these issues led to its failure. However, that effort gave some critical insights that need to be incorporated

The three nations must take the opportunity to fortify their partnership to safeguard their interests and uphold the international rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific.

to build a more successful trilateral in its second birth.

As the India, South Korea and Japan trilateral re-emerges, it is important to look at it from a new perspective. The contemporary time demands the addition of new strategic vocabulary and a focus on critical issues and themes in the trilateral. The renewed effort to resuscitate the trilateral must take note of the changing regional environment, from Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific, reflecting the importance of rules-based international order, essential to safeguard maritime trade and security.

We have identified three major areas where the trilateral can focus initially, these are Indo-Pacific Maritime security, Development cooperation, and Critical and Emerging Technology: semiconductors, EVs and critical minerals.

Re-Emergence of India-South Korea-Japan Trilateral: Finding new Convergences

Today, the 'free and open' Indo-Pacific needs more multilateralism efforts from regional countries. In strengthening multilateralism, trilateral has been crucial in the Indo-Pacific, providing like-minded countries with a platform

to convene on shared concerns and objectives. Today, India, Japan, and South Korea are more comfortable with the Indo-Pacific concept and have converging interests between India's Act East Policy and Indo-Pacific vision, South Korea's Indo-Pacific Strategy, and Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Vision. This article is an attempt again to nudge the trilateral cooperation between the three countries, particularly before External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar visits South Korea

and Japan in his East Asia tour. The continuity in his visit from South Korea to Japan highlights a common thread driving the increasing need to have a trilateral today. This is easier today when all three countries are engaged in many trilaterals with each other, India-Japan-US, India-Japan-Australia, India-US-South Korea, and US-Japan-ROK.

The first important area that demands cooperation is maritime regional security. This comes at a time when the entire Indo-Pacific region is experiencing turbulence in the maritime domain, from the western Indian Ocean to the South China Sea (SCS), conflict is affecting maritime trade and energy security. The concerns regarding the Red Sea crisis have risen in Japan, South Korea, and India. In this India has taken the responsibility to provide security to vessels moving from the western Indian Ocean towards East Asia in line with its SAGAR vision. Japan and South Korea can utilise this opportunity to collaborate on Maritime security focusing on the Indo-Pacific region, particularly the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and SCS, where all three have converging interests.

India can take the leadership role in the IOR. Defence cooperation through coordinated maritime patrol, anti-piracy operations, and strengthening maritime domain awareness are some areas where the three can work together. Japan and South Korea can leverage trilateral relations with India to bolster maritime security initiatives in the Indian Ocean region and Southeast Asia. Japan's Official Security

Assistance programme, India's developmental aid, and South Korea's military cooperation with regional countries can be synchronised to achieve two aims, defence modernisation and developing capabilities (sharing best practices, joint exercises, and military collaboration). For Instance, India, South Korea, and Japan are helping in building the Philippines's maritime capabilities in a bilateral format to assist in improving its maritime capacity.

The second focus area is development cooperation, particularly on high-quality infrastructure and connectivity projects in South Asia. Japan is currently engaged in nine developmental projects amounting to \$1.55 billion across sectors in the region. Similarly, South Korea is also looking to increase its ODA to India. These ODAs are utilised to build the infrastructure that

India can take the leadership role in the IOR. Defence cooperation through coordinated maritime patrol, anti-piracy operations, and strengthening maritime domain awareness are some areas where the three can work together.

is necessary for economic growth, such as roads, bridges, and airports. Japan and South Korea can coordinate ODA projects in India. Northeast India is one sub-region where the three can collaborate on projects, giving much impetus to easing connectivity with Southeast Asia, which converges with the interests of all three partners. The three can coordinate better on foreign ODA such as the railway project in the Philippines.

Further, South Korea and Japan can harmonise institutional working methods between JICA and KOICA to ease bureaucratic and budgetary systems in India and South Asia to fund ODA projects by creating a basket fund to be utilised for project implementation. This can be a coordinated approach rather than a joint approach, which

will be more flexible. These projects can also be focused on imparting training skills that help in achieving the SDGs of low-income developing countries in the region.

The third area of cooperation is critical and emerging technology (CET). India is eyeing to expand its manufacturing capacity and is attracting South Korean and Japanese Tech conglomerates to invest in semiconductor supply chains, EVs, and Critical minerals. Many South Korean and Japanese companies are looking to diversify their new investments in the region and India is emerging as an attractive alternative in China plus one strategy. India with its incentives, market, economic growth potential, and human capital stands out among other options.

Trilateral on CET will enhance the tech partnership ensuring technical sovereignty in the region which currently remains elusive of any consensus. EVs and critical mineral supply chain cooperation is another vital area of cooperation that needs closer cooperation between countries as all three have an embedded interest in de-risking the supply chain from China for their economic security. The three countries can form their i-CET version to enhance collaboration in R&D, in line with the announcement of the India-South Korea-US CET informal dialogue last year.

The three nations must take the opportunity to fortify their partnership to safeguard their interests and uphold the international rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific. This is the appropriate time for India, Japan, and South Korea to bolster this trilateral cooperative mechanism, particularly after correcting the mistakes that it made in the past as mentioned above. The three

China, as of June 2022, held 52 per cent of Sri Lanka's bilateral debt. Japan was the second largest creditor, at 20 per cent, followed by India at 12 per cent and France at three per cent.

avenues of collaboration—Indo-Pacific maritime security, development cooperation, and Critical and Emerging Technology: Semiconductors, EVs, and critical minerals, can be the focal points that can later be expanded to other sectors.

Will Success in Agalega Compensate for India's Assumption Island Debacle?

Source: Gaurav Sen | The Diplomat

<https://thediplomat.com/2024/03/will-success-in-agalega-compensate-for-indias-assumption-island-debacle/> 13 March 2024



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a bilateral meeting with Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, prime minister of Mauritius, at Gandhinagar, Gujarat, India, Apr. 25, 2022. Credit: Indian Ministry of External Affairs

In The small, remote Mauritian island of North Agalega, located in the southwest Indian Ocean 1,122 kilometers north of the main island of Mauritius, is currently seeing a frenzy of development activity. On February 29, Prime Minister of Mauritius Pravind Jugnauth and India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi virtually

inaugurated a jetty and an aviation strip on the island.

The Indian Navy's staging base at Agalega will enable marine patrols over the Mozambique Channel and allow the navy to keep an eye on commercial corridors throughout southern Africa. This could be seen as a significant development in light of the fierce and ongoing Sino-Indian competition in the Indian Ocean. The advent of Indian-built infrastructure in Agalega is perceived as having put an end to India's long-standing quest to establish a naval facility in the center of the Indian Ocean.

This development is even more significant given that the Maldives has turned its back on India in favor of China, while another Indian Ocean state, Seychelles, rejected a deal to host Indian military infrastructure.

India Falls Short in Seychelles and the Maldives

India considers the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) as its strategic backyard. Due to its geographic position above the Indian Ocean and the presence of a vast peninsula, India is increasingly seen as a maritime power in the region.

In recent years, to counter the growing Chinese presence in the IOR, the Indian Navy has reoriented its Indian Ocean naval strategy. Driven by its great power aspirations, New Delhi is expanding its maritime capabilities and strategic partnership with the Indian Ocean littoral states. The objective is to pay greater attention to building relationships with countries that are key entry points to the western Indian Ocean, which is a strategic subtheater connecting the African Indian Ocean littoral states with the broader IOR.

The Mozambique Channel, Strait of Hormuz, and the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb are important passageways for commercial vessels and oil tankers, and are expected to shape the future dynamics of the Indian Ocean power struggle.

As a result, the strategically-located small island states of the Indian Ocean have become the center of major power competition in the Indian Ocean. Seychelles, Mauritius, and the Maldives have been particularly part of this tug of war between great powers.

The Indian Navy's staging base at Agalega will enable marine patrols over the Mozambique Channel and allow the navy to keep an eye on commercial corridors throughout southern Africa.

In Seychelles, India desired to establish a base on Assumption Island to guard major sea lines of communication off eastern Africa's coast, and to counter China's growing influence in the western Indian Ocean owing to China's overseas military base in Djibouti. Nonetheless, India's pursuit of Assumption Island was floundered by a change in the leadership.

There were basically two broad rationales in Seychelles for opposition the Indian infrastructure. First, there were environmental concerns stemming from Assumption Island's close vicinity to Aldabra, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The other worries were centered on sovereignty concerns, and the possibility that this coast guard station might eventually turn into an Indian military installation. It was the second of these two issues that eventually sank the project.

India tried to explain that the infrastructure was "a joint project" that India was only "executing at the request of the Government of Seychelles," but the opposition's charge against

the base gained a great deal of public support. The project became so entrenched in the debate over sovereignty that no government was likely to find it politically feasible, but it had no chance once Wavel Ramkalawan, one of the leaders of the anti-base movement, won Seychelles' presidential election in 2020. In a post-election interview, Ramkalawan made it clear that "our sovereignty is sacred, there will never under my watch be a foreign military base in the Seychelles."

India has apparently given up and moved beyond Assumption Island to strengthen its relationship with Seychelles on other issues.

More recently, India faced a similar setback in the Maldives. A wave of anti-Indian sentiment has swept the Maldives since Mohamed Muizzu was elected president in September 2023. In the last few months, New Delhi has been made fully aware of the current allegiances of the Muizzu government. Muizzu followed through on his pledge to remove Indian military personnel from the country, demanding that India withdraw

77 troops stationed in the Maldives to help operate helicopters and aircraft donated by India

Agalega Island Base and the Western Indian Ocean

In the context of these setbacks, India's successful inauguration of a jetty and an airstrip in Mauritius is a welcome development for New Delhi.

Mauritius and India have worked closely

together on a number of issues, including marine security. Around 20 Indian defense officers are on appointment to Mauritius; according to the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, as of October 2023, "An Indian Navy officer heads the Mauritian National Coast Guard; an Indian Air Force officer commands the Police Helicopter Squadron and an Indian Naval Officer heads the Mauritius Hydrography Services." India is also credited with helping to establish a Coastal Surveillance Radar System in the country.

In addition to a few other community development projects, India and Mauritius have

The Indian Navy could base Dornier aircraft at the current airfield on North Agalega Island, but the expanded airstrip will enable the Indian Navy to additionally use P-8I maritime surveillance aircraft. Operating out of Agalega, the Indian Navy's long-range aircraft will be equipped to keep an eye on the western and southern Indian Ocean, along with the eastern and southern shores of Africa.

jointly opened an airstrip and jetty that India constructed on the pair of islands known as Agalega in the western Indian Ocean. The bigger North Island and the smaller South Island together make up the Mauritian dependency of Agalega. They are located roughly 1,100 kilometers north of Port Louis, the capital city of Mauritius, and 2,500 kilometers southwest of Male, the capital of the Maldives. Important strategic initiatives such as the renovated jetty and airstrip could help India better cover the waters off the east coast of Africa and increase its influence in the Indian Ocean.

Access to Seychelles' Assumption Island would have placed the Indian Navy in a position to guard both Bab-el-Mandab and Mozambique simultaneously, and to neutralize China's influence in the region. However, using infrastructure on Agalega, India can still improve its access to the Indian Ocean on both sides of Mauritius.

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The facilities on Agalega will enhance India's capacity to conduct a variety of marine operations and its maritime domain awareness in the area, especially vis-a-vis the Mozambique Channel lying between Comoros and Madagascar, an important chokepoint. The timing could not be more crucial: Unrest in the vicinity of the Red Sea has resulted in an increase in transits and ship activity throughout the western Indian Ocean, with many commercial vessels on east-west trips rerouting to the Cape of Good Hope.

Conclusion

Along with North Agalega Island, India has inaugurated a new base on its own Minicoy Island, part of the strategically crucial Lakshadweep Islands. The renovated naval base, INS Jatayu, which Naval Detachment Minicoy will commission, will be a significant step toward the Indian Navy's goal of gradually enhancing regional security.

In addition, India has been attempting in the past several years to strengthen its military and diplomatic relations with Seychelles and other African countries, such as Madagascar.

Small island states have a significant influence in determining the approach of major powers, and the Indian Ocean has emerged as a noteworthy example. The island states are key assets in

The naval base at Agalega could serve India's needs and can monitor China's gray-zone activities in the Indian Ocean. However, China's influence in the Indian Ocean is not limited to the Maldives only. China's military based in Djibouti, control of the port at Gwadar, and suspected activities in Sri Lanka and Myanmar signal that India faces profound competition in the Indian Ocean. Agalega and Minicoy will prove to be particularly helpful in maintaining India's access to the entire western Indian Ocean.

the emerging geopolitical, geoeconomic, and geostrategic environment of the Indo-Pacific. Therefore, engagement with these states is necessary to help to realize India's potential in the Indo-Pacific and contribute to fulfilling its aspiration as a net security provider in the region.

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Japan-UK-Italy Fighter Consortium Powers Forward: Exports Next on the Agenda?

Source: nippon.com

<https://www.nippon.com/en/in-depth/d00976/>

28 March 2024



Japanese Minister of Defense Kihara Minoru (at center) shakes hands with British Minister of Defence Grant Shapps (right) and Italian Minister of Defense Guido Crosetto (left) at the Ministry of Defense in Tokyo on December 14, 2023. (© Jiji)

The Historic Global Combat Air Programme

In late 2023, Japan's foreign and defense ministers signed a historic defense agreement with Britain and Italy to jointly develop a sixth-generation fighter jet. The fruit

of a joint statement by the Italian, British, and Japanese leaders in December 2022, the Global Combat Air Programme rapidly took shape during 2023. This precipitated the visit to Tokyo of British Minister of Defence Grant Shapps and his Italian counterpart Guido Crosetto to consolidate the partnership in the form of a treaty. Following the December

14 signing, Japan's Minister of Defense Kihara Minoru shared his conviction that the partnership

“brings together the best technologies from Japan, the United Kingdom, and Italy to strengthening deterrence in the face of the most challenging and complex security environment since World War II.”

The treaty establishes an intergovernmental organization called GIGO (GCAP International Government Organization) to supervise and coordinate the joint development process. The GIGO convention is historic because it is the first time that Japan has committed to the codevelopment of a major military platform with a country other than its sole ally, the United States. Many such partnerships fail to get beyond the exploratory stage, so the agreement shows that the program is gathering steam toward a formal start date in 2025. The goal of GCAP is to deploy a sixth-generation fighter by 2035.

NATO's Future Mainstay Fighter?

In addition to establishing GIGO, the three governments also agreed to establish a joint venture as the commercial arm of the project. Reflecting the project's collaborative nature,

GIGO will be headquartered in Britain but headed up by a Japanese national, while the joint venture lead will come from Italy.

Comments surrounding the agreement show high hopes for the consortium. London for example anticipates that the project will harness and integrate cutting-edge technologies, thereby making the GCAP fighter “one of the

world's most advanced, interoperable, adaptable, and connected fighter jets in service globally.” It

Japan has reached agreement with Britain and Italy on the joint development of a next-generation fighter aircraft platform to be deployed by 2035. A look at the Global Combat Air Programme, which could integrate Japan more closely in defense and security efforts with partners in NATO and elsewhere around the globe.

will be a supersonic stealth fighter with advanced sensors that deploys next-generation artificial intelligence technology. Capable of unmanned flight and armed with hypersonic weapons, the jet “will boast a powerful radar that can provide 10,000 times more data than current systems, giving a battle-winning advantage.”

Tokyo envisages the GCAP jet becoming its secondary fighter, replacing the 90 or so currently deployed Mitsubishi F-2 jets, originally codeveloped in the 1980s with the United States and based on the F-16. The F-35 will remain Japan’s mainstay aircraft for the time being. However, London and Rome envisage the GCAP fighter becoming their own mainstay aircraft, replacing their Eurofighter Typhoon inventories of 144 and 94 fighters respectively.

For Japan, GCAP’s significance goes beyond updating the Self-Defense Forces’ own aging platforms and economizing budgetary resources. Britain and Italy are both foundational, influential members of NATO that worked together in developing the Eurofighter Typhoon. NATO members have procured over 500 Eurofighter units since 1994. The decision by London and Rome could therefore pave the way for even greater procurement and sales of the GCAP fighter.

While another consortium consisting of France, Germany, and Spain is also working on a next-generation fighter as part of the Future Combat Air System project, the Times of London recently reported that Germany had expressed interest in GCAP’s progress following

difficulties surrounding different Franco-German requirements for the FCAS fighter. There is also the possibility that new NATO members such as Sweden or even Middle Eastern nations like Saudi Arabia will consider procuring the GCAP fighter if the program meets its goals.

The economic benefits also go beyond export sales. Major industrial players in each country, including joint venture participants Leonardo (Italy), Mitsubishi Heavy Industries (Japan), and BAE Systems (Britain), welcomed the conclusion of the treaty. The GCAP partnership is expected to have deeper industrial benefits for all three countries involved by attracting R&D investment and fostering opportunities to cultivate the next generation of skilled engineers and technicians. Approximately

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9,000 people worldwide are expected to be directly involved in the development, and more than 1,000 Japanese companies could be involved in both development and the provision of parts and components. By supporting and enhancing specialized human resources, GCAP could enhance Japan’s commercial strength and technological innovation potential while also providing a lifeline for Japan’s struggling domestic defense industry.

The expansion of sales beyond the GCAP consortium would bring more than just economic and industrial benefits. Japan, Italy, and Britain are all committed to ensuring that the final aircraft will be interoperable with other NATO allies, especially the United States. Japan’s involvement in developing, refining, and manufacturing a

mainstay fighter would embed Japan more firmly than ever in global defense relations with NATO, with which the country has strengthened ties in recent years, enhancing its own deterrence capabilities and diplomatic influence. Japanese involvement in development and exports for the GCAP program would enhance Tokyo's security cooperation with Britain, Italy, and other NATO members, contributing to global peace and stability by dissuading unilateral changes in the status quo on either side of Eurasia by authoritarian states such as China and Russia.

“No Divorce for the Next 40 Years”

In March 2023, the then British Minister of Defence Ben Wallace spoke about what the commitment to GCAP signifies in his keynote speech at DSEI Japan: “GCAP isn't going to be a short love affair. It's going to be a marriage,” and therefore, “there's no going back. The three partners have to keep each other going with forward momentum. There's no changing our mind at the end of the decade or halfway through because to do so is to let each other down.” Only a few months prior Tokyo and London had signed a Reciprocal Access Agreement, which establishes procedures for visiting forces when conducting port calls and joint exercises in each other's country. This was only Japan's second RAA following the one signed with Australia in 2022. The RAA and the GIGO treaty and the joint fighter development effectively makes Britain a “quasi-ally” for Japan much like Australia.

For Britain, the RAA and the GIGO treaty are the logical extension of its Indo-Pacific strategic “tilt” and London's increasing awareness of the

need to balance China's growing regional and global ambitions. British Prime Minister Sunak had previously said that the partnership with Japan and Italy had underlined that “the security of the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific regions are indivisible.” Following the signing of the GIGO pact, defense minister Shapps shared his belief that “It will strengthen our collective security” at a time when “the risks and problems from Europe to Indo-Pacific are clear for all to see.”

For London, fighter development is the foundation of a new “alliance” with Japan that will facilitate Britain's Indo-Pacific outreach. The GIGO agreement follows the drastically changing global security environment of the last few years. Russia's invasion and occupation of Ukrainian territory is ongoing, and China's rapid military modernization and build-up program continues apace despite its economic slowdown. Furthermore, there are no signs that the declining global influence of the United States will be reversed. Therefore, the joint development of the next-generation fighter jet shows the strategic significance of cross-bracing between advanced nations that share common values of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

Importantly, the trilateral partnership has been welcomed by the United States. The US Department of Defense and Japanese Ministry of Defense released a joint statement in 2022 making it clear that “The United States supports Japan's security and defense cooperation with . . . the United Kingdom and Italy—two close partners of both of our countries.” The joint statement also positioned US-Japan defense equipment

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cooperation as complementary to GCAP and was optimistic that “cooperation with likeminded partners” would enable “joint responses to future threats in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond.”

Kōmeitō’s Reluctance

The realization of the GCAP fighter cannot be taken for granted, however. The GIGO convention clearly points toward exporting the GCAP fighter to third countries—certainly that is the intention of both Britain and Italy. The development of military platforms like these costs trillions of yen, and the export of fighter jets to Europe, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia is on the agenda to take advantage of economies of scale and offset the development costs with export sales. Exporting this platform would also solidify security relations with importing nations.

Tokyo, however, has long officially kept the door shut on its own export of the jet and components to third-party countries. The ruling coalition not only includes the conservative Liberal Democratic Party but the ostensibly “pacifist” junior partner Kōmeitō. While Kōmeitō had previously indicated its willingness to relax defense equipment export restrictions, it suddenly began dragging its feet in late 2023 precisely around the time the GIGO pact was signed.

The consent of all three consortium members for exporting the finished product and codeveloped components to third-party countries will be desirable if not necessary. If Japan remains reticent, it may harm British and Italian national interests in addition to Japan’s own by raising doubts about the wider availability of the GCAP fighter in the future. Indeed, at a press conference

at the British Embassy in Tokyo immediately following the signing of GIGO, defense minister Shapps expressed his expectation that Japan would review its defense export principles out of consideration for its “global position” and to ensure the joint development project would move forward.

The government has asked the ruling parties to conclude talks by the end of February to at least allow the export of equipment developed with international partners to third countries.

The GIGO convention clearly points toward exporting the GCAP fighter to third countries—certainly that is the intention of both Britain and Italy.

However, Kōmeitō, considered one of the most China-friendly parties in the Diet, remained steadfast in its reluctance until mid-March, when it reached agreement with its coalition partner, the LDP, on approval for exports. [On March 26, the cabinet reached a decision easing restrictions on arms exports to countries with which Japan has entered defense pacts.—Ed.]

Some observers believe that the hardening of Kōmeitō’s stance may have been related to a November visit to China by Kōmeitō leader Yamaguchi Natsuo. If Kōmeitō remains a barrier to exports of the GCAP fighter in the future, it could bring the project to a standstill, tarnishing Japan’s international reputation and posing a serious diplomatic problem. Kōmeitō should turn to pragmatic pacifism based on a global perspective and agree to ease exports to protect Japan’s national interests.

Australia and Britain deepen defence cooperation, but are they allies?

Source: Euan Graham | ASPI

<https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/australia-and-britain-deepen-defence-cooperation-but-are-they-allies/> 25 March 2024



Australia and Britain have concluded a new treaty-level Defence and Security Cooperation Agreement (DSCA). To what extent does this move the dial of their close defence relationship towards a formal alliance? This question matters because the informal, customary nature of the Australia-UK relationship may no longer be appropriate for the strategic tests that lie ahead.

The answer is that they've moved significantly closer to becoming de facto allies, with commitments that approach, though do not quite reach, the level of Australia's alliance with the US, ANZUS. Also, Anglo-Australian military cooperation is intensifying.

The DSCA includes a clause that, according to Friday's AUKMIN joint statement, codifies 'the established practice of consulting on issues

affecting our sovereignty and regional security'. This may not sound like much of an elevation on the face of it, but then Article III of the ANZUS treaty is similarly based on an agreement to consult. ANZUS Article IV further commits both parties to 'act to meet the common danger'. The Australia-UK DSCA may not be so explicit in terms of its commitments, but the process of closer coordination it has initiated is still likely to be consequential, including the establishment of regular staff talks to discuss and coordinate collective action in response to the most pressing threats in each country's region.

The other noteworthy point about the DSCA is that it includes a status of forces agreement (SOFA), to smooth two-way access for the armed forces of both countries. This is the first time that Britain has concluded a NATO-standard SOFA outside of NATO. While the DSCA is not yet in the public domain, the SOFA is apparently more legally permissive than the reciprocal access

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agreements that Australia and Britain have each separately signed with Japan.

The decision to upgrade the existing Anglo-Australian defence agreement follows a steady convergence of strategic outlooks and

deepening defence activities over the past five years. Australian Deputy Prime Minister Richard Marles said this week that Australia's relationship with Britain had become 'much more strategic'. He also noted that that the 'UK has a much greater presence in the Indo-Pacific than we have seen in a very long time.'

Yet many Australian commentators remain unconvinced that Britain is, or can be, a

consequential and durable security partner for Australia. These doubts have seeped into criticisms of AUKUS that have intensified in recent weeks, including questions about British industrial ability to deliver on the SSN-AUKUS project.

Despite the advent of the DSCA and a flurry of defence and security announcements around last week's AUKMIN meeting, including confirmation that BAE Systems will build the SSN-AUKUS submarines, Marles and Foreign Affairs Minister Penny Wong stopped short of describing Britain as an ally. That remains a bridge too far for the Australian government, possibly for political reasons as well as legalistic ones, since Labor has more Anglosceptic tendencies than the Liberal and National parties.

Nevertheless, AUKMIN confirmed that the two sides share closely aligned threat perceptions and a strong belief in the inter-connectedness of the Indo-Pacific and Euro-Atlantic.

The impetus to upgrade their defence relations is mutual. The 2023 DSR contains a little-noticed but clear demand signal from Australia that 'engagement with the United Kingdom in the Indo-Pacific must be enhanced, including through AUKUS.'

While the bilateral defence relationship has been generally a comfortable one, underpinned by a common professional military culture, it has waxed and waned in intensity. Since 2021, AUKUS has played an important forcing function, motivating Britain and Australia to formalise and elevate their bilateral defence

interactions to a level closer to the alliance relations that each has with the United States.

And AUKUS is significantly more than just a capability development and technology-sharing initiative. It commits the US and Britain to forward deploy submarines, in an arrangement called 'Submarine Rotational Force—West' (SRF-West), from the late 2020s. This is as part of triangulated strategic effort to close Australia's submarine capability gap and bolster deterrence. Britain's commitment to send one of its seven Astute-class submarines to SRF-West was the major driver on the UK side behind the new SOFA. This is how allies behave.

The bilateral defence relationship has meanwhile grown alongside AUKUS. Ministers agreed at AUKMIN to enhance cooperation on amphibious and littoral manoeuvre. Later this year, Britain's Littoral Response Group—South and a Commando contingent will be involved in the annual Predators Run exercise in Australia with US and Australian forces. This will build on the Royal Gurkha Rifles' participation in Exercise Predators Walk last year. Next year, Britain's Carrier Strike Group will take part in another exercise, Talisman Sabre, marking an important certification milestone for the aircraft carriers of the Queen Elizabeth class. It was also announced at AUKMIN that Britain will contribute personnel to the Combined Intelligence Centre within the Australia's Defence Intelligence Organisation. Australia, for its part, is continuing to send military personnel to Britain for AUKUS-related activities and to train Ukrainian troops there.

Australian and British armed forces have in recent decades had only limited overlap in frontline equipment, but commonality is now growing, enhancing inter-operability.

Australian and British armed forces have in recent decades had only limited overlap in frontline equipment, but commonality is now growing, enhancing inter-operability. Under the Seedcorn program, British crews are embedded in Australia learning to operate the E-7 Wedgetail air-surveillance aircraft. Britain, like Australia, already operates the P-8 and F-35. Their two navies will both operate frigates based on the Type 26 and a common AUKUS submarine design. Both armies will also operate the Boxer armoured fighting vehicle.

Large-scale industrial collaboration should further help to undergird the Anglo-Australian defence partnership. Work on the Hunter frigate program and SSN-AUKUS will endure for decades. AUKUS Pillar I will require careful coordination to ensure workforce mobility across all three partner nations without poaching.

After a long period of semi-absence from the region, the British government has delivered convincingly on the defence components of its so-called tilt to the Indo-Pacific. The next challenge for Whitehall, affirmed in last year's Integrated Review Refresh, is to make an Indo-Pacific presence a permanent part of British strategic settings.

British general elections are due later this year, but UK Labour is solidly behind AUKUS and understands the need to remain deeply and broadly engaged in the Indo-Pacific. A change of government should help with political alignment.

If Labour wins, it will inherit AUKUS, Britain's Dialogue Partner status with ASEAN, and older parts of the regional defence

architecture where the UK and Australia have long worked closely together, such as the Five Power Defence Arrangements (which the AUKMIN ministers endorsed as an anchor of peace and stability in the region).

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Doubts about the willingness of British governments to fund defence adequately are perennial, but many of the most effective military elements of the UK tilt to the Indo-Pacific have been delivered on a shoestring. What matters most is maintaining a political consensus that a persistent British defence presence in the Indo-Pacific is important to sustaining the UK's long-term security and prosperity.

The UK is more strategically aligned with Australia now than at any time since the early 1960s or even earlier. Their shared path might never take the form of a de jure alliance, but, as last week's developments demonstrate, they are well on track to becoming de facto allies.

Cherry-Picks of the Month

1. Chinese coast guard hits Philippine boat with water cannons in the disputed sea, causing injuries - <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/chinese-coast-guard-hits-philippine-boat-with-water-cannons-in-disputed-sea-causing-injuries/article67984068.ece>
2. EAM Jaishankar's Japan visit explores ways to strengthen global partnership - https://www.business-standard.com/world-news/eam-jaishankar-s-japan-visit-explores-ways-to-strengthen-global-partnership-124030900098_1.html
3. Indo-Pacific Diplomacy: Jaishankar's Strategic Engagement in South Korea and Japan - <https://www.financialexpress.com/business/defence-indo-pacific-diplomacy-jaishankars-strategic-engagement-in-south-korea-and-japan-3411905/>

Debates/ Podcasts

4. Deterring an attack on Taiwan: policy options for India and other non-belligerent states - <https://aspi.org.au/report/deterring-attack-taiwan-policy-options-india-and-other-non-belligerent-states>

5. Japan's ruling coalition approves export of future joint fighter jet - <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2024/03/15/japan/fighter-jet-export-approval/#:~:text=The%20ruling%20Liberal%20Democratic%20Party,the%20multinational%20Global%20Combat%20Aircraft>

1. Piers Morgan vs John Mearsheimer | On Putin, Israel-Hamas And More - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4GqGCjSANWg&t=102s>

2. Dr. S. Jaishankar visits Japan & other updates | DD India News Hour - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Is6KoQlfBEE>

CAPS Experts- Infocus

1. India-Japan Edging Closer: Strategic Ties - <https://capsindia.org/india-japan-edging-closer-strategic-ties/>



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Centre for Air Power Studies

P-284 Arjan Path, Subroto Park, New Delhi - 110010

Tel.: +91 - 11 - 25699131/32 Fax: +91 - 11 - 25682533

Email: capsnetdroff@gmail.com

Website: www.capsindia.org

Editorial Team: Ms Simran Walia and Mr Gaurav

Composed and Formatted by: Mr Rohit Singh, CAPS

Contact: +91 9716511091

Email: rohit_singh.1990@hotmail.com

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