



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

Donald Trump won a resounding victory in the US elections held on November 5. After voting in the Diet on November 11, Shigeru Ishiba was named Japan's 103rd prime minister. He is in charge of a minority government, which suggests that Japan will see political unrest for some time to come.

On November 8, the Philippines unveiled a new Maritime Zones Act that delineated its continental shelf, exclusive economic zone, contiguous zone, and territorial sea. Claiming that the Scarborough Shoal and Spratly Islands were unquestionably Chinese territory, China denounced the action as an attempt to incorporate the "illegal" South China Sea arbitration ruling into domestic law.

The ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus was held on November 21 after the ASEAN Defence Ministers convened in Vientiane, Lao PDR, on November 20. On the sidelines, the defense minister of India met with his counterparts from China and the United States. On November 25, Japan and Italy signed an agreement allowing their military forces to provide each other with supplies and services.

On November 16, India and Japan reached an agreement to co-develop and co-produce the UNICORN (Unified Complex Radio Antenna) mast in India. The Mogami class from Mitsubishi Heavy Industries and the Meko A200 from ThyssenKrupp Marine System were shortlisted for Australia's upcoming frigate program, the country said on November 25.

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

Vol IV, No 07, 07 December 2024

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Read more about it at :-

<https://www.csis.org/analysis/us-india-under-trump-20-return-reciprocity>

QUOTE

A free, open and rules-based Indo-Pacific is vital for the peace and progress of the entire region. The approach to maintain peace in the Indo-Pacific region should be of development, rather than "expansionism"

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi

Opinions/Review/Expert View

Trump 2.0: The Second Coming

Source: Vivek Mishra | ORF

<https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/trump-2-0-the-second-coming> 22 November 2024



Image Source: Getty

With Donald Trump’s return to the White House after winning the 2024 presidential election, there is an implicit Yeatsian ‘the Second Coming’ allegory at play. The poem’s hint at the apocalypse in post-war European doom and gloom resonates strongly with the Republican narratives that catapulted Trump to a historic mandate in both the electoral college and popular vote. The narrative that this was America’s last chance to save the country and its military from ‘woke’ ideologies and the real inflation crisis may have had greater purchase with the American voter base than the Democratic party’s appeal to Trump representing a threat to American democracy.

Trump’s victory potentially marks a shift on multiple fronts. First, the emphasis on recentring the government’s focus back on domestic priorities could significantly change

the American state’s outlook. The United States’ international agenda will be governed by the domestic, political, bureaucratic and financial overhaul within US institutions. The Trump 2.0 administration will be intent on changing the focus of the US both internally and externally.

Internal

Donald Trump has swiftly assembled a new Cabinet for his second term, learning from the challenges of his first. This time, his choices reflect a cautious yet assertive approach, signalling a departure from perceived institutional pressures that shaped his earlier administration. Pending Senate confirmations, the appointments are provocative at best and controversial at worst, with critics dubbing them a "show of force" to highlight his unflinching policy agenda. Key nominations include Senator Marco Rubio as Secretary of State, Michael Waltz as National Security Advisor, Pete Hegseth

The United States’ international agenda will be governed by the domestic, political, bureaucratic and financial overhaul within US institutions.

as Secretary of Defense, Matt Gaetz as Attorney General, Tulsi Gabbard as Director of National Intelligence, and Kristi Noem as Secretary of

Homeland Security. These selections suggest a hard-line stance on policy and a pivot away from the compromises Trump felt compelled to make in his first term. They signal a comprehensive transformation within the departments of state, defence, homeland security and health services. The Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), headed by Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy

remains a wild card, with little clarity on its functioning.

The administration's domestic focus is expected to reduce external engagements that drain US resources while prioritising the domestic economy and encouraging job growth. Trump's emphasis on energy independence includes plans to expand oil drilling and shale gas fracking, positioning the US as a leading energy exporter. This strategy is likely to disrupt global supply chains, especially in the Indo-Pacific and Europe, where nations may need to pivot towards US energy imports.

Simultaneously, sanctions on countries like Iran and (potentially) Russia will be leveraged to maintain US dominance in global energy markets. Trump's economic vision also includes the reintroduction of tariffs on international imports, likely affecting supply chains and exacerbating tensions in trade relationships with key partners such as China and the European Union (EU). While these policy measures may resonate with his base, their broader economic repercussions will attract close scrutiny.

Illegal immigration remains a central issue in Trump's domestic agenda. Measures under consideration include reinstating travel bans on certain Muslim-majority countries, mass deportations, increased funding for border security, and a legislative push to overhaul the asylum system. Trump has

signalled his intent to challenge the principle of birthright citizenship, a move that could have far-reaching implications for immigrant communities, including Indian-origin migrants who have benefited from this policy.

External

Trump's foreign policy will focus on resolving the ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East, aligning with his campaign promise to end "endless wars". In Europe, his administration is likely to pressure Vladimir Putin and NATO (North Atlantic Treaty

Organisation) allies to negotiate a resolution to the Russia-Ukraine war. Stability in the region could pave the way for expanded US energy exports to Europe, reducing the reliance on Russian supplies.

Trump's strategy in the Indo-Pacific will likely emphasise countering China's influence through strengthened alliances such as the Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, which includes Australia, India, Japan, and the US), and trilateral partnerships with Japan and Australia.

In the Middle East, Trump will likely double down on Israel-Arab normalisation, leveraging initiatives such as the Abraham Accords and potentially the I2U2—a grouping of India, Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and the US—along with the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). However, his administration's hard-line stance on Iran could exacerbate tensions in the region, especially if it includes heightened sanctions or military posturing.

China will remain a focal point of Trump's foreign policy. With hawkish advisors like Rubio and Waltz, the administration is expected to adopt a tougher stance, including

higher tariffs and intensified competition in critical and emerging technologies. Trump's strategy in the Indo-Pacific will likely emphasise countering China's influence through strengthened alliances such as the Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, which includes Australia, India, Japan, and the US), and trilateral partnerships with Japan and Australia. This approach may have ripple effects, reshaping supply chains and forcing US partners to recalibrate their economic and strategic policies.

India

India is poised to remain a key partner under Trump's second administration. The structural depth of their bilateral relationship—spanning defence, security, trade, and technology—will continue to drive cooperation. However, longstanding issues like technology transfer restrictions under the International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR) could resurface, requiring deft negotiation. The Trump administration may push India to take on a more proactive role in regional security, particularly in the Indo-Pacific. In return, India could gain greater access to US defense technology and intelligence-sharing platforms, enhancing their bilateral synergy. India has long sought greater access to cutting-edge US technology, especially in critical emerging sectors such as semiconductors, artificial intelligence, quantum computing and advanced defence systems. However, the Trump administration's

America First policy and its Make America Great Again ethos might create friction with New Delhi's Make in India initiative.

Resolving these tensions will require innovative solutions that balance US concerns about intellectual property and technology security with India's ambitions for self-reliance in defence and technology. Key areas of focus might include co-development and co-production agreements, technology-sharing arrangements under ITAR (International Traffic in Arms Regulations) exemptions, and a full-throttle operationalisation of the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET).

Trump is expected to adopt a protectionist stance, which could see increased tariffs on specific Indian exports, particularly in the pharmaceutical, textile, and information technology sectors.

Trade relations between the two nations are likely to face renewed scrutiny. Trump is expected to adopt a protectionist stance, which could see increased tariffs on specific Indian exports, particularly in the pharmaceutical, textile, and information technology sectors. Moreover, the Trump administration may pressure India on issues such as the elimination of agricultural subsidies, further opening up its markets to US goods, and advancing negotiations on a long-pending free trade agreement (FTA). India, for its part, is likely to resist such demands, citing domestic economic priorities and the need to protect vulnerable sectors like agriculture.

The strategic partnership, underpinned by foundational agreements like BECA (Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement), LEMOA (Logistics Exchange Memorandum

of Agreement), COMCASA (Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement), and GSOMIA (General Security of Military Information Agreement), is expected to have stability and continuity in defence cooperation. India's designation as a Major Defense Partner and the robust 2+2 Dialogue format with the US will continue to anchor bilateral defence and security relationships. Key deliverables, such as the timely acquisition of MQ-9B drones and advanced anti-submarine warfare technologies like sonobuoys, will play a crucial role in enhancing India's military capabilities. These systems will not only bolster India's maritime domain awareness, but also strengthen its role as a net security provider in the Indo-Pacific.

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The Trump administration is expected to double down on its China strategy, further underscoring India's indispensability as a partner in the Indo-Pacific. Initiatives such as the Quad and broader regional mechanisms such as the trilateral partnership with Japan and Australia are likely to intensify. India, in turn, could leverage US support to enhance its own regional strategy, particularly, to counter Chinese assertiveness along its borders and in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). The two nations may also collaborate to reshape global supply chains and reduce the dependence on China, by investing in resilient infrastructure and critical technologies.

The Trump administration's initial focus will be on delivering tangible results within

the first two years, ahead of the 2026 midterm elections. While this urgency may drive bold decisions, it also carries the risk of overreaching policies. Key metrics for success will include the administration's ability to stabilise inflation, manage immigration effectively and navigate complex foreign policy challenges. Trump's second term promises to recalibrate US policies, both domestically and globally. While his administration's assertive approach may yield short-term political gains, its long-term impact on America's alliances and global standing remains to be seen.

Manila and Beijing Clarify Select South China Sea Claims

Source: Harrison Prétat and Gregory B. Poling | CSIS

<https://www.csis.org/analysis/manila-and-beijing-clarify-select-south-china-sea-claims> 21 November 2024



Photo: Philippines' Presidential Communications Office

On November 8, Philippine president Ferdinand Marcos Jr. signed into law two pieces of legislation: the Philippine Maritime Zones Act and the Philippine Archipelagic Sea Lanes Act. The laws elaborate Philippine maritime claims, including in the South China Sea, ensuring they are in line with international law. These two pieces of legislation were quickly condemned by Beijing, which responded on November 10 by publishing

territorial baselines around Scarborough Shoal, a disputed atoll in the South China Sea that China seized from Philippine control in 2012 and which remains the site of frequent confrontations between their vessels.

These events cap a series of South China Sea legal developments in recent months clarifying Southeast Asian claims to the waterway under international law. Those efforts contrast with Beijing’s continued refusal to bring its claims into accordance with international law. That growing divide carries important implications for the future of the disputes.

How do the new Philippine maritime acts impact its position in the South China Sea?

The Philippine Maritime Zones Act does not change the Philippines’ claims in the South China Sea, but it does clarify them while enshrining the tenets of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the findings of the 2016 South China Sea arbitration into domestic law. This insulates the Philippines’ claims from future administrations that might, like that of previous president Rodrigo Duterte, seek to shelve the findings of the arbitral award in the interest of relations with China. It also provides a basis for other claimants to negotiate and delimit maritime boundaries with the Philippines and resolves ambiguities in how the Philippines distinguishes its various maritime zones.

The Philippine Archipelagic Sea Lanes Act establishes three designated passages for foreign vessels to navigate through the Philippine archipelago. UNCLOS dictates that archipelagic states like the Philippines must allow foreign

South China Sea legal developments in recent months clarifying Southeast Asian claims to the waterway under international law.

vessels “archipelagic sea lane passage”—a right to transit in their normal mode of operation rather than the more limited “innocent passage” permitted in the territorial sea—through “routes normally used for international navigation.” In failing to designate archipelagic sea lanes, the Philippines had previously left it to foreign vessels to decide for themselves where such routes were. This led to frequent disagreements even with close partners, including regular freedom of navigation operations by U.S. Navy vessels through Philippine waters. The new act will help reduce those tensions and will allow the Philippines to better enforce its laws against Chinese military vessels, which have, in recent years, repeatedly lingered inside the archipelago without permission. But the designation of only three archipelagic sea lanes is a significant

reduction from the number of transit routes in common use. This will likely cause pushback from the International Maritime Organization, which must review the act before the Philippines can begin

enforcement.

What is the significance of China’s publication of baselines around Scarborough Shoal?

In response to the passage of the Philippine maritime laws, China published baselines around Scarborough Shoal on November 10. The publication was a signal of China’s determination to assert its own claims in the South China Sea, a message given added effect by the fact that Beijing wrested control of Scarborough from Manila in 2012. Beyond the symbolic timing, a baseline claim around Scarborough Shoal is not all that surprising, though the details matter. China has since 1996 said that it would eventually declare

baselines around what it calls the Nansha Qundao (Spratly Islands), Dongsha Qundao (Pratas Reef), and Zhongsha Qundao (Scarborough Shoal and underwater features including Macclesfield Bank).

It is notable that the new baselines are limited to Scarborough Shoal and drawn largely in line with international practice. This contrasts with the wildly excessive baselines China drew around the Paracel Islands (Xisha Qundao) in 1996. The Chinese legal community has spent the last several years promoting a new justification for its claims based on a novel concept of “offshore archipelagos.” They argue that each of the four sha, or island groups, Beijing claims in the South China Sea should be treated as a single unit with three major features: the islands and reefs of each group should be connected by straight baselines (which these lawyers argue do not have to follow any of the limits set out in UNCLOS); underwater features within those baselines can therefore be claimed as sovereign territory; and the ability of the island groups to “sustain human habitation”—the key test for whether an island is entitled to a full 200-nautical-mile exclusive economic zone and continental shelf—should be judged based on the group as a whole rather than any individual island. All of this is in contravention of both UNCLOS and the 2016 arbitral award, and the U.S. Department of State dedicated an entire annex of its Limits in the Seas series of legal analyses to debunking it.

Beijing has had little success selling the international community on this newest justification for its claims. That may explain why the new Scarborough baselines are not the most

extreme versions China could have drawn. Had Beijing chosen to enclose the entire Zhongsha “island group,” Scarborough Shoal would have been just the easternmost corner of a much larger set of straight baselines around Macclesfield Bank and other underwater features. The newly published baselines suggest Beijing concluded that using underwater features as basepoints would be a step too far. That doesn’t necessarily mean that China will not someday use the outermost underwater features it claims in the south, such as James Shoal off Malaysia and Vanguard Bank off Vietnam, as basepoints for the Spratly Islands, but it gives hope.

The Philippine Archipelagic Sea Lanes Act establishes three designated passages for foreign vessels to navigate through the Philippine archipelago.

As for Scarborough Shoal itself, the basepoints don’t significantly alter the state of the dispute. Sovereignty over the feature is still contested by China and the Philippines (and

Taiwan) since that issue was beyond the jurisdiction of the 2016 arbitral award. Beijing still claims a 12-nautical-mile territorial sea and 200-nautical-mile exclusive economic zone and continental shelf from the atoll, despite the award declaring that Scarborough is not entitled to the latter since it cannot sustain human habitation. And both parties still enjoy traditional fishing rights at the shoal as awarded by the tribunal, though Beijing has never recognized that and continues to harass Filipino fishers. The baselines could complicate this matter, as UNCLOS only allows traditional fishing rights in the territorial sea, not internal waters. Having declared everything inside the new baselines to be internal waters, China might grow even more aggressive in driving Filipinos out of the lagoon of Scarborough, forcing them to fish farther from the reef.

How have other claimants and the international community reacted?

The U.S. Department of State on November 8 publicly supported the new Philippine maritime laws and called for other claimants to follow Manila's lead in conforming their claims to UNCLOS and the 2016 arbitration ruling. On November 14, Malaysia sent a note protesting the laws due to their reference to the Philippines' dormant claim to Sabah. Once the Philippines publishes a forthcoming map of its maritime zones, including from claimed features in the Spratlys, Vietnam will likely issue a statement opposing those claims and reiterating its own, which should be read as a symbolic rather than substantive protest.

The other claimants and outside parties will likely remain silent on China's baselines around Scarborough Shoal, as sovereignty is disputed only by the Philippines, and the baselines do not harm freedom of navigation in the way that the Paracel baselines do.

Where do the disputes go from here?

The new maritime laws are the latest step the Philippines has taken to bring its claims into accordance with UNCLOS. Such clarifications add to the contrast between the nature of the Philippines' claims and those of China, imposing more reputational costs on Beijing for remaining outside the bounds of international law. The Philippines likely also hopes it will lead to opportunities for Southeast Asian claimants to strike agreements on their overlapping maritime claims and present a united front against China's extralegal position.

This approach has already had some modest success. In July, the Philippines submitted its extended continental shelf claim in the South China Sea to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf, joining Malaysia and Vietnam, which had done so in stages between 2009 and 2024. In response, Hanoi said it was interested in entering negotiations with Manila on the area of overlap between their continental shelf claims.

But there are obstacles that will likely prevent

The U.S. Department of State on November 8 publicly supported the new Philippine maritime laws and called for other claimants to follow Manila's lead.

all Southeast Asian claimants from coming to a unified position on maritime claims. The Sabah issue is likely to sink any efforts at maritime boundary delimitation between Malaysia and the Philippines,

as Kuala Lumpur has long maintained its stance to be absolute and nonnegotiable while Manila, despite several attempts, has been unable to relinquish its claim due to domestic political factors.

Insomuch as clarification of claims in the South China Sea is a prerequisite to delimitation and management, the new Philippine laws are a welcome step in the right direction. But, in the near term, they will do little to reduce tensions in disputed waters. China has shown no interest in compromising on its claim to rights across all the waters encompassed by its nine-dash line, which remains irreconcilable with UNCLOS. This means that negotiations on a Code of Conduct for the South China Sea are liable to remain deadlocked while the claimants continue to jockey with coast guard, navy, and militia boats to assert their claims on the water—with a significant risk of escalation.

India, Japan to Develop 'Stealth Antenna System' for Indian Navy Warships; Ink Memorandum of Intent

Source: Ritu Sharma | Eurasiantimes

https://www.eurasiantimes.com/india-japan-ink-agreement-to/#google_vignette 17 November 2024



Indian and Japanese officials after signing the agreement. (Via PIB India)

The long-drawn negotiations between India and Japan culminated in the two countries' agreement to co-develop the UNICORN (Unified Complex Radio Antenna) Nora-50 integrated mast for the Indian Navy's warships.

India has been finding it difficult to access the technology. The Japanese UNICORN Nora-50 integrates multiple communication antennas into a single piece (mast).

India still faces difficulties making weapon-grade antennas, especially radars. It still relies on imported sets for its communication network. Encryption in the military-grade communication set is another issue.

The Memorandum of Intent for the antenna that will be put on board future Indian destroyers was inked in Tokyo. The event was attended by

the Indian Ambassador to Japan, Sibi George, and Japan's DG of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industries, Fukunaga Tetsuro. The officials of the Indian Navy and Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) were also present at the signing event.

The Indian public sector undertaking BEL is likely to be the co-developer of this sophisticated technology. The co-development will take place under the India-Japan Defense Technology Cooperation.

At present, the Indian Navy uses the BEL-supplied Advanced Composite Communication System (ACCS), a fourth-generation voice and data integrated system for the ship's external communication.

The long-drawn negotiations between India and Japan culminated in the two countries' agreement to co-develop the UNICORN (Unified Complex Radio Antenna) Nora-50 integrated mast for the Indian Navy's warships.

The units include the 1kW Transmitter Aerial Switching Rack (ASR) to switch four High-Frequency (HF) Transmitters to four HF Antennas. This assists the user in switching any radio to any of the antennas for redundancy,

and the user can also remotely control the same utilizing an IP-based Network.

In other words, the Indian philosophy is to follow space-frequency diversity.

Unicorn systems are in service onboard Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force's Mogami-class destroyers. The system's horn-shaped structure has numerous antennas for tactical data links. TACAN (Tactical Air Navigation System) and communications are integrated within the mast's design, reducing signature and ship-building

time and saving below-deck space. It will also improve the stealth characteristics of Naval Platforms.

“Unicorn’s pathbreaking design brings improvements by way of reduction of the antennas’ mutual interference, reducing the ship’s overall Radar Cross Section (RCS), enhancing maintainability and lightning resistance,” Commander Milind Kulshrestha (retired) from the Indian Navy explained.

“This innovative Japanese design has evolved from their TACAN antenna design framework. In a TACAN system, the Naval platform constitutes a mobile transmitting unit. The airborne unit, in conjunction with the Naval platform, processes the transmitted signals to a visual presentation of both azimuth and distance information,” he adds.

The UNICORN system can detect the movement of missiles and drones from afar by sensing radio waves over a wide area.

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The NORA-50 antenna was jointly developed by Japanese companies, including electronics maker NEC and Yokohama Rubber. A report in the Nikkei Asia said that the Japanese government is still deciding how many antennas will be sold and is working out the contract cost. The deal is seen from the prism of strengthening deterrence of like-minded countries in the Indo-Pacific region.

The Japanese law forbids the export of defense equipment that could be used as a lethal weapon. The UNICORN would not violate the

law as it is a communication tool. The deal with India is the second instance of Japan exporting defense equipment since it revoked the ban on military sales in 2014. The first military export happened in 2023 when radar systems were exported to the Philippines.

Japan-India has signed an agreement on defense equipment and technology transfer in 2015.

Recently, India has placed great emphasis on technology transfer to boost the manufacturing of defense equipment in India. The agreement with Japan will pave the way for future collaboration between the two countries on new and critical technologies, including semiconductors, artificial intelligence, renewables, electric mobility, and more.

India approved its first semiconductor fabrication plant and two assembly units in March 2024. They will be developed jointly by local conglomerates and companies from Japan, Taiwan, and Thailand.

Enemy’s Enemy Is A Friend

Japan, India, the US, and Australia are members of the QUAD. In recent times, their security interests have converged in the face of China’s increasingly assertive economic and military activities in the Indo-Pacific. The two countries have drawn closer under a shared vision of realizing “a free and open Indo-Pacific.”

Japan has seen Chinese coast guard vessels repeatedly enter its waters around the Tokyo-

controlled, Beijing-claimed Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea. At the same time, India has a long-running territorial dispute with China in the Himalayan border areas.

The year 2024 saw the first air visit by Japanese fighters to India and their participation at Tarang Shakti, the first multilateral exercise hosted by the Indian Air Force. The countries also conducted the maiden edition of the bilateral fighter exercise 'Veer Guardian 2023' between the Japan Air Self Defence Force (JASDF) and the Indian Air Force (IAF).

Japan is also helping India develop the Andaman and Nicobar Island chain, strategically located near the mouth of Southeast Asia's main shipping lane. This is part of New Delhi's broader plan to monitor China's naval assets, especially its submarines.

Japan has given India 4.02 billion yen (\$31 million) in aid to develop the islands. This was the first time that India accepted foreign assistance for development on the islands.

The islets are the only area in India with naval, air, and ground forces intended to deter China. If an armed conflict breaks out in the South China Sea, and if the US and, by default, Japan get involved, the Andaman and Nicobar could potentially play a crucial role.

There have been reports that India will be installing the Japan-US "fishhook" SOSUS (Sound Surveillance System, a chain of sensors designed to track submarines), creating a counter-wall against Chinese submarines loitering in the

Andaman Sea and deep South China Sea.

It will be a crucial collaboration, as it is said that once up and running, Japan will share intelligence with the United Kingdom, Australia, and India.

Japan, Germany Listed as Finalists for Royal Australian Navy's Future Frigates

Source: Takahashi Kosuke | *The Diplomat*

<https://thediplomat.com/2024/11/japan-germany-listed-as-finalists-for-royal-australian-navys-future-frigates/>
29 November 2024



HMAS Anzac is farewelled from Surabaya by members of the TNI AL during Exercise Indo-Pacific Endeavour 2023. Credit: Australian Department of Defence

The Australian government has shortlisted Japan's Mitsubishi Heavy Industries (MHI) and Germany's Thyssenkrupp Marine Systems (TKMS) over Spanish and South Korean contenders to build the Royal Australian Navy (RAN)'s future general purpose frigates.

Will Australia strategically choose Tokyo to strengthen bilateral cooperation? Or will it opt for a German-designed frigate that is familiar to the Royal Australian Navy?

The Australian Department of Defence (DoD) on November 25 said in selecting a

winner for the 10 billion Australian dollars (US\$6.5 billion) project, it will now work with the two shipbuilders and Australian industry partners to further develop the proposals for their respective ship designs. MHI is pitching the upgraded Mogami-class frigate to the Albanese government, meanwhile, TKMS has offered its MEKO A-200 design.

Under the decade-long general purpose frigate program known as Project Sea 3000, the Australian government plans to ensure the RAN “is equipped with a larger and more lethal surface combatant fleet to respond to our strategic circumstances,” the DoD said in a statement.

Australia’s new general purpose frigates “will be equipped for undersea warfare and local air defense in order to secure maritime trade routes and our northern approaches,” it added.

Australia plans to acquire 11 new general purpose frigates to complement the country’s combat-ready fleet of warships by replacing the eight aging Anzac-class frigates commissioned in the 1990s and early 2000s.

The first three ships will be built offshore, with the first to be delivered to the RAN in 2029 and enter service in 2030. The remaining eight will be built at Henderson shipyard in Western Australia.

Japan regards Australia as its second most important “quasi-ally” in terms of security after its only formal ally, the United States. And as the military threat from China rapidly increases in

the Indo-Pacific region, Japan and Australia have moved closer than ever before. Tokyo is striving to make the Mogami-class export a success and further strengthen the bilateral relationship.

On November 28, the Japanese government announced that it has decided to allow joint development and production, if the upgraded Mogami-class is selected as Australia’s new frigate. The decision came after it held a National Security Council meeting and deliberated based on its three principles for the transfer of defense equipment and technology.

“This joint development and production project will contribute to significantly

improving interoperability and compatibility with Australia, strengthen the shipbuilding and maintenance base in the Indo-Pacific region, and improve the future capabilities of Japan’s ships, and is of great significance to Japan’s security,” the Japanese government said in a statement.

If this is realized, it will be the first defense equipment transfer case involving a Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) ship.

The Mogami-class frigate, also known as 30FFM, is the JMSDF’s stealthy multi-mission frigate, intended for surveillance missions in waters surrounding the Japanese archipelago. It is equipped with enhanced multirole capabilities, including the ability to conduct anti-mine warfare operations.

Most notably, the Mogami-class only needs about 90 crew members, which is about half the

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crew complement of destroyer-type vessels such as the Asahi-class.

In contrast, Australia's existing Anzac-class requires about 180 personnel.

The Australian government is giving two shipbuilders the opportunity to propose modifications to their off-the-shelf designs.

Japan is bidding with the upgraded Mogami-class with a standard displacement of 4800 tons.

"'Upgraded Mogami' is superior in low signatures design, high speed(30+kt), automation and low manning (approx.90), improved air defense capability and survivability, reduced lifecycle cost, mine hunting capability etc.," according to one Japanese MoD document presented at the Maritime/Air/Space Technologies (MAST) Australia 2024 event held on November 19-21 in Adelaide.

The JMSDF plans to build a total of 12 Mogami-class frigates until the fiscal year 2023, with plans to acquire a new class of 12 FFM's from 2024 until 2028.

This new class frigate will essentially be improved Mogami-class ships. The Japanese defense ministry said the new-class FFM will be fitted with longer-range missiles, enhanced anti-submarine capabilities, and improved capabilities for various maritime operations.

Specifically, the ship-launched, improved version of the Type 12 SSM and the new ship-

to-air guided missile (or simply A-SAM) will be equipped with the new-class FFM, defense officials said.

With better anti-aircraft and search capabilities, the new FFM may become closer to the FFG (missile frigate).

On the other hand, there is a strong view that the German MEKO A-200 has the advantage. The class has been exported to three countries: South Africa, Algeria, and Egypt.

"The German MEKO design is a bigger and more modern version of the Anzacs and is seen as the lower-risk choice because of this familiarity, as well as TKMS' experience as an exporter," the Australian Financial Review reported on November 7.

Mogami-class frigate, also known as 30FFM, is the JMSDF's stealthy multi-mission frigate, intended for surveillance missions in waters surrounding the Japanese archipelago.

"Mitsubishi's Mogami design is favoured by some on strategic grounds, as a way of binding together the Japanese and Australian navies at a time of increasing concern over China's rapid military build-up. However, Japan has a lack of an export culture around selling ships to foreign navies," the article pointed out.

Will Australia strategically choose the upgraded Mogami-class to strengthen bilateral cooperation in the face of the growing threat that China poses to the Indo-Pacific region? Or will it opt for the German-designed frigate that is familiar to — and compatible with — the existing Royal Australian Navy? Great attention is focused on the Australian government's final decision scheduled for 2025.

Cherry-Picks of the Month

1. Just how big was Donald Trump's election victory? - <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cn5w9w160xdo>
2. Trump 2.0 and the Indo-Pacific: Balancing economic and security imperatives - <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/trump-2-0-and-the-indo-pacific-balancing-economic-and-security-imperatives>
3. Italy, Japan sign agreement on defence cooperation - statement - <https://www.reuters.com/world/italy-japan-sign-agreement-defence-cooperation-statement-2024-11-25/>
4. Enhanced Stealth for Indian Navy with Pathbreaking Japanese Communication - <https://www.financialexpress.com/opinion/enhanced-stealth-for-indian-navy-with-pathbreaking-japanese-communication-antenna/3675655/>
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1. Japan gives India, Communication Antenna under 2+2 for Navy: Malaysia says Give evidence against Pak - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r59Qh1x7D3o>
2. China Attacks Philippines with Full Force | Watch Water Cannon Showdown | South China Sea Drama - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=otJY4u9ZyCk>
3. Philippines Accuses China of Aggressive Actions, Water Cannon Attack Near Scarborough Shoal | N18G - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPRt8IkXnFw>



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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

Composed and Formatted by: Mr Rohit Singh, CAPS
Contact: +91 9716511091
Email: rohit_singh.1990@hotmail.com

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