



# Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



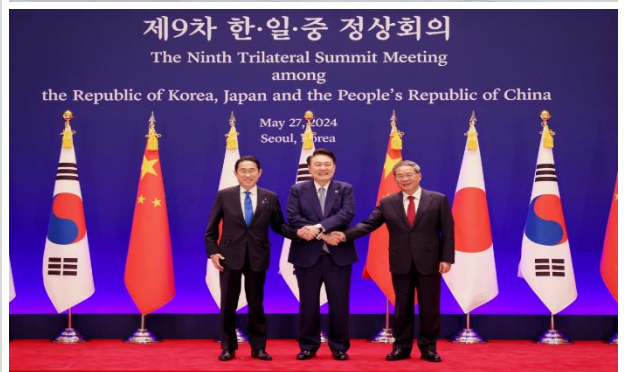
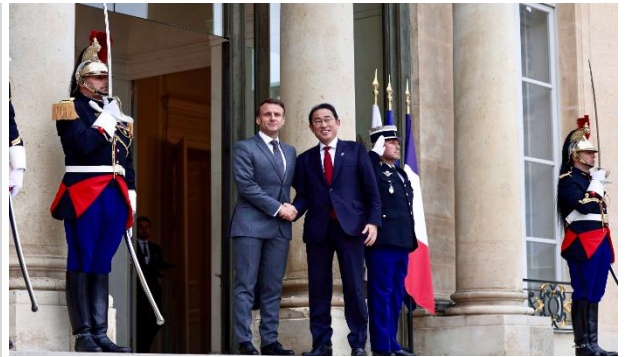
## INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

MAY 2024

*Author*

Lalit Kapur

Volume V, Issue 5



Delhi Policy Group

Core 5A, 1st Floor, India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi- 110003

[www.delhipolicygroup.org](http://www.delhipolicygroup.org)



# Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power

## INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

Volume V, Issue 5

May 2024

### ABOUT US

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

Since 2016, in keeping with India's increasing global profile, DPG has expanded its focus areas to include India's regional and global role and its policies in the Indo-Pacific. In a realist environment, DPG remains mindful of the need to align India's ambitions with matching strategies and capabilities, from diplomatic initiatives to security policy and military modernisation.

At a time of disruptive change in the global order, DPG aims to deliver research based, relevant, reliable and realist policy perspectives to an actively engaged public, both at home and abroad. DPG is deeply committed to the growth of India's national power and purpose, the security and prosperity of the people of India and India's contributions to the global public good. We remain firmly anchored within these foundational principles which have defined DPG since its inception.

### INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

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

#### Cover Image:

*French President Emmanuel Macron and Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio meet in Paris, May 02, 2024. Source: Prime Minister's Office of Japan*

*Presidents Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin meet at Zhongnanhai in Beijing, May 16, 2024. Source: The State Council of the People's Republic of China*

*President Yoon Suk Yeol of the Republic of Korea, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida of Japan and Prime Minister Li Qiang of the People's Republic of China meet at the Trilateral Summit in Seoul, May 27, 2024. Source: Prime Minister's Office of Japan*

© 2024 by the Delhi Policy Group

#### Delhi Policy Group

Core 5A, 1st Floor,

India Habitat Centre,

Lodhi Road, New Delhi- 110003.

[www.delhipolicygroup.org](http://www.delhipolicygroup.org)

INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR  
Volume V, Issue 5  
May 2024

Contents

Abstract .....	2
The Xi Jinping Visit to France .....	3
The China Russia Summit .....	6
The Northeast Asian Trilateral Summit .....	8
Budgeting for Australia's Security .....	10
The Punishment War Games .....	13
India's Operations, Exercises and Capability Enhancement .....	14
Other Indo-Pacific Developments .....	16



# INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

May 2024

## Abstract

Four Indo-Pacific nations witnessed leadership changes during the month. In the Solomon Islands, Jeremiah Manele of the ruling OUR Party became the Prime Minister on May 02, taking over from Manasseh Sogavare. Lawrence Wong was sworn in as Singapore's fourth Prime Minister on May 15; his predecessor Lee Hsein Loong remained in the cabinet. In Vietnam, Truong Thi Mai, the head of the Central Organisation Commission of the Communist Party of Vietnam was forced to resign from the Politburo for unspecified violations and shortcomings. In Taiwan, Lai Ching-te of the ruling DPP was inaugurated as Taiwan's 16<sup>th</sup> President on May 20.

Five summit-level meetings took place during the month. In the first, Japan's Prime Minister, visiting France for the OECD Ministerial Council Meeting, met President Macron on May 2. China's President Xi Jinping made his third State Visit to France from May 06-07. Russia's President Vladimir Putin visited Beijing from May 16-17. On May 23, Malaysia's Prime Minister Dato Seri Anwar bin Ibrahim met Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in Tokyo. On May 26-27, Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and China's Prime Minister Li Qiang travelled to Seoul for the first Trilateral Summit in over four years.

Defence and Foreign ministers from Australia and South Korea met in Melbourne on May 01 for the Sixth Australia-ROK 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue. Defence Ministers from Japan, Australia and the US met in Hawaii on May 02 for the Trilateral Defence Ministers' Meeting. Immediately thereafter, the Philippines' Defence Secretary joined them for the Pacific Quad (nicknamed SQUAD) Defence Ministers' Meeting, in Hawaii. The Defence Ministers also attended the change of command ceremony in Hawaii on May 03, when Admiral Samuel Paparo took over as the 27<sup>th</sup> Commander of the Indo-Pacific Command.

Australia unveiled a defence budget of over AUD 58 billion (about \$ 38.93 billion), or about 2.03% of GDP for 2024-25. It also announced that this would rise to 2.3% of the GDP over a five-year period. On May 28, Australia announced the names of design partners for its new SSN production yard, marking another milestone in the long road to the AUKUS submarine.



Representatives of Adani Ports, India's largest port operator, met Philippines President Marcos on May 03, seeking to develop Bataan Port in the Philippines. India and Iran signed a 10-year contract for the development and operation of the Shahid Beheshti Terminal at Iran's Chabahar port on May 13.

Ships from India's Eastern Fleet proceeded on their annual South China Sea deployment, visiting Singapore, Vietnam, Malaysia, Philippines and Brunei during the month.

Confrontation between the China and the Philippines in the South China Sea continued, with the former preventing attempts to resupply Philippine personnel in the Scarborough and Second Thomas Shoals using collisions and water cannon. China's fourth aircraft carrier, Fujian, commenced sea trials. China launched what were billed as punishment war games around Taiwan on May 24-25 in response to the new President's inaugural address.

The Red Sea crisis continued, with Yemen's Houthi rebels using a variety of missiles and drones to disrupt traffic flow. Notably, at least two merchant vessels hit by Anti-Ship Ballistic Missiles suffered no casualties and were able to continue their voyage under own power, calling into question the destructiveness of these missiles.

## The Xi Jinping Visit to France

China's President Xi Jinping made his third state visit to France on May 6<sup>8</sup>7, 2024. Coming a year after President Macron came to China in April 2023<sup>1</sup>, the visit provided an opportunity to review the state of relations between these two great powers and permanent members of the UN Security Council. President Xi's signed article in French media on the eve of his visit spoke of opening new vistas in China-France relations, further opening of the Chinese economy, and strengthening coordination with France to uphold world peace and stability<sup>2</sup>. His arrival statement spoke of the hope that the visit would enhance political

---

<sup>1</sup> For an overview, see Lalit Kapur, "The Macron visit to China", Indo-Pacific Monitor, Volume IV Issue 4, April 2023,

[https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads\\_dpg/publication\\_file/indo-pacific-monitor-4889.pdf](https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads_dpg/publication_file/indo-pacific-monitor-4889.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Carrying Forward the Spirit that guided the Establishment of China-France Diplomatic Relations, Working Together for Global Peace and Development, May 05. 2024,

[https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/202405/t20240505\\_11293002.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/202405/t20240505_11293002.html)



trust, build strategic consensus and deepen exchanges and cooperation in various fields<sup>3</sup>.

Four joint statements marked discussions between the two leaders. The first, on agricultural exchanges and cooperation, sets out a range of measures to strengthen scientific and technological cooperation in the agricultural field, as well as provide market access for French products under the “From the French Farm to the Chinese Table” initiative launched in April 2023<sup>4</sup>. The second, on the situation in the Middle East<sup>5</sup>, condemns all violations of international humanitarian law during the ongoing conflict in Gaza and calls for an immediate and lasting ceasefire; commits both to preserve the international nuclear non-proliferation regime as well as the promotion of peace in the Middle East in the context of Iran and the JCPOA; calls for an immediate cessation of attacks against civilian ships in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden; and calls on all to respect the Olympics truce during the 2024 Summer Olympics. The third is an agreement to cooperate on the development and security of artificial intelligence (AI), as well as promoting effective international governance to foster the secure development of AI<sup>6</sup>. The last, on biodiversity and the oceans, is an agreement to cooperate across seven pillars<sup>7</sup>: marine and coastal biodiversity and environmental multilateralism; the fight against IUU fishing; the fight against pollution; the financing of Sustainable Development Goal No. 14; scientific knowledge related to the oceans; greening of maritime transport; and the blue economy. Left untouched were economic or strategic matters related to the Asia-Pacific.

---

<sup>3</sup> Arrival Statement by H.E. Xi Jinping, President of the People’s Republic of China at Paris Orly Airport, France,

[https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/202405/t20240505\\_11292998.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/202405/t20240505_11292998.html)

<sup>4</sup> Joint Declaration by France and China on Agricultural Exchanges and Cooperation, May 06, 2024, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2024/05/06/declaration-conjointe-de-la-france-et-de-la-chine-sur-les-echanges-et-la-cooperation-agricoles>

<sup>5</sup> Declaration Between France and China on the Situation in the Middle East, May 06, 2024, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2024/05/06/declaration-entre-la-france-et-la-chine-sur-la-situation-au-proche-orient>

<sup>6</sup> Joint Declaration between the French Republic and the People’s Republic of China on artificial intelligence and the governance of global issues, May 06, 2024, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2024/05/06/declaration-conjointe-entre-la-republique-francaise-et-la-republique-populaire-de-chine-sur-lintelligence-artificielle-et-la-gouvernance-des-enjeux-globaux>

<sup>7</sup> From Kunming-Montreal to Nice: Joint declaration for strengthened cooperation between France and China on Biodiversity and the Ocean, May 06, 2024, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2024/05/06/de-kunming-montreal-a-nice-declaration-conjointe-pour-une-cooperation-renforcee-entre-le-france-et-la-chine-sur-la-biodiversite-et-locean>



There are other points of agreement. In his post-summit remarks to the press<sup>8</sup>, President Xi welcomed President Macron for another visit to China. He made a point of mentioning that the two have agreed to respect each other's core interests and engage through multiple channels. He noted that the two countries will expand cooperation in trade, agrifood, finance, advanced joint research and development, and innovation in sectors including aviation and civil nuclear energy. He also spoke of accelerating people-to-people exchanges, extending short-duration visa exemptions to France, direct flights between Shanghai and Marseilles, and his desire to bring the number of French students in China to more than 10,000. President Macron, on his part, spoke of the role that China-France relations could play in the broader Chinese relationship with Europe<sup>9</sup>; the shared desire with China to preserve the framework of the UN Charter; the welcome Chinese commitment to refrain from selling weapons or aid to Moscow and to strictly control the export of dual-use goods; the European desire for a fair competition framework based on reciprocal, legitimate rules; and the 20 cooperation agreements signed.

As in April 2023 in China, Macron included a trilateral meeting with the President of the European Commission in the agenda. Some difficult areas figured in the trilateral discussion<sup>10</sup>. These included the need to curtail delivery of dual-use goods to Russia that find their way to the battlefield and correcting distortions in the economic and trade relationship. Three areas came in for specific mention as matters of concern: China's surplus production and subsidized products flooding the European market, to oppose which the EU would coordinate with the G7 and emerging economies; reciprocal access to China's market, resulting in market distortion practices leading to deindustrialization in Europe; and the need to improve resilience of supply chains and diversity sources of critical raw materials. Europe said it would not waver from taking tough decisions to protect its economy and security.

None of these points figure, however, in China's readout of the trilateral<sup>11</sup>. This consists essentially of advice to the EU on what it should do, including

---

<sup>8</sup> Full text of Xi Jinping's remarks at the joint meeting with the press with French President Emmanuel Macron, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2024-05-07/Full-text-of-Xi-s-remarks-at-joint-meeting-with-the-press-with-Macron-1toCr4PdMyY/p.html>

<sup>9</sup> Statement by the President of the Republic on the occasion of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of diplomatic relations between France and China, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2024/05/06/visite-detat-de-xi-jinping-president-de-la-republique-populaire-de-chine-premiere-journee-a-paris>

<sup>10</sup> Press Statement by President von der Leyen following the trilateral meeting with French President Macron and President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping, May 06, 2024, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement\\_24\\_2464](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_24_2464)

<sup>11</sup> President Xi Jinping Holds China-France-EU Trilateral Leaders' Meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen,



developing the right perception of China and adopting a positive China policy, respecting each other's core interests and major concerns, and upholding the basic norms of international relations. China's readout denies the existence of overcapacity and surplus production and advises the EU and France to strengthen cooperation with China as this bears on the future of Europe.

All does not seem well with the China-France and the China-EU relationship. The political trust President Xi hoped for does not appear evident. Nor does a strategic consensus: China's outlook continues to be shaped by its strategic competition with the US and the belief that the US guides Europe's policies. There was little of substance in the joint statements, notwithstanding the continued appeal of China's market. There were some incremental advances in cooperation with France, but little agreement with the EU. In sum, President Xi Jinping may have received a warm welcome from President Macron, but also received some unpalatable truths from President Ursula von der Leyen. The relationship appears destined to remain a troubled one.

## The China Russia Summit

2024 marks the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of China-Russia relations. Russia was the first country to recognise the People's Republic of China when it was founded in October 1949. Both nations are permanent members of the UN Security Council. They are also comprehensive strategic partners. Their joint statement of February 2022 proclaims, "Friendship between the two States has no limits, there are no 'forbidden' areas of cooperation, strengthening of bilateral strategic cooperation is neither aimed against third countries nor affected by the changing international environment and circumstantial change in third countries"<sup>12</sup>. These words have led to considerable suspicion about Chinese motives from the US and Europe.

Two months after having been re-elected as Russia's President, Vladimir Putin travelled to Beijing for a summit meeting with China's President Xi Jinping on May 16-17. Xi had earlier made his first foreign visit to Russia after re-election in March 2023. The two have met more than 40 times over the last decade<sup>13</sup>, during which period the China-US romance soured, the US tried to pivot to the

---

May 06, 2024,

[https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/202405/t20240506\\_11293488.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/202405/t20240506_11293488.html)

<sup>12</sup> Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China in the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development, February 4, 2022, <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/5770>

<sup>13</sup> Interview to Xinhua News Agency, May 15, 2024, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/74027>





Asia-Pacific, and China has become a strategic adversary for both the US and India. This was Putin's first foreign visit after his re-election in March 2024.

The joint statement released on the occasion focuses on ten areas<sup>14</sup>. These encompass the decision to grandly celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries; promoting the all-round development of the bilateral comprehensive strategic partnership (defence cooperation and cooperation in the field of law enforcement and security find special mention under this head); promoting inclusive economic globalisation and satisfaction at the marked advancement in economic cooperation between the two countries; people-to-people links and cultural exchanges; the commitment to building a more just and stable multi-polar international architecture in keeping with the purposes and principles of the UN Charter; cooperation under frameworks like the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and BRICS; the increased levels of confrontation between countries including nuclear weapon states; addressing climate change; Russia's appreciation of China's position on Ukraine; and the belief that all countries share a common destiny and no country should seek its own security at the expense of others. The statement was noticeably taciturn on the extent of bilateral economic, financial and military ties, but this is probably because both want to avoid acknowledging data that could lead to western sanctions.

President Xi opined that progress in China-Russia ties was attributable to five principles: both are committed to mutual respect and always support each other's core interests; both are committed to win-win cooperation as the driving force of relations (bilateral trade has crossed \$ 240 billion last year); they are committed to lasting friendships as the foundation of relations; both sides are committed to strategic coordination as an underpinning of relations and steer global governance in the right direction; China and Russia are committed to fairness and justice as the purpose of relations and dedicated to political settlement of hot spots.

Following a hiatus of about three decades during which border disputes made China's relations with its northern neighbour adversarial leading it to make common cause with the US against the Soviet Union, China began re-engaging with the successor country, Russia in the 1990s. There has, however, been a dramatic change in the relationship over the years. In the early stages,

---

<sup>14</sup> Joint Statement between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation on Deepening the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination for a New Era on the occasion of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries (full text), May 16, 2024, [https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/ziliao\\_674904/1179\\_674909/202405/t20240516\\_11305860.shtml](https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/ziliao_674904/1179_674909/202405/t20240516_11305860.shtml)



China was evidently a junior partner, dependent on the USSR for technology, developmental assistance and goodwill. The tables today have turned. China's nominal GDP is about \$ 18.5 trillion, as against the just over \$ 2 trillion GDP of Russia. From being a buyer of technology and defence platforms, China today has turned to an exporter, sustaining Russia by buying energy and minerals at favourable prices, which Russia otherwise has difficulty in selling due to sanctions.

Notwithstanding the pomp and ceremony and verbosity of the joint statement, the content appears limited. China continues going slow on the Power of Siberia-2 pipeline: Xi expects Russia to foot the entire cost of construction while continuing to offer Beijing steep discounts on energy prices. China pays Russia barely 60% of what Europe and Turkey were paying Russia for gas. Moreover, there are no moves towards a full-fledged military alliance including commitments to mutual defence. China continues to preach win-win cooperation, while Moscow is in a full-fledged confrontation with the West.

So, what does the China-Russia engagement mean for the Indo-Pacific? Not much, notwithstanding Russia's support for China's position on Taiwan and in the larger Indo-Pacific. China is unlikely to accept the costs of a full-fledged military alliance with Russia, but will keep providing what support it thinks it can get away with, without antagonising the West permanently. The Indo-Pacific part of the partnership is thus at a nascent stage, though it could grow quickly.

## The Northeast Asian Trilateral Summit

China's third summit of the month was the long-awaited trilateral summit, involving the People's Republic of China, Japan and the Republic of Korea. China's Prime Minister Li Qiang, Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, and South Korea's President Yoon Suk Yeol. The three leaders convened for about 75 minutes in Seoul on May 27 for the Ninth Trilateral Summit, over 53 months after the then leaders had met in Chengdu for the eighth one. The main outcome appeared to be a reset in relations between the three Northeast Asian nations, although this remains more in words than deeds. The leaders also agreed to restart negotiations for a trilateral free trade agreement.

Three joint statements were published to mark the occasion. First is a ten-year vision for trilateral intellectual property (IP) cooperation<sup>15</sup>. This directs the IP offices of the three countries to establish an IP system that can accommodate

---

<sup>15</sup> Joint Statement on a 10 Year Vision for Trilateral IP Cooperation, May 27, 2024, <https://eng.president.go.kr/briefing/KNDS7Z6d>



and embrace fast-changing technologies and to improve relevant rules, examination practices and systems to ensure that the right type of IP is issued, in a timely manner, particularly in the sector of fourth industrial revolution technologies such as AI and IoT. The offices are also directed to enhance public accessibility and encourage utilization of patent information by the private sector. Second is a joint statement on future pandemic prevention, preparedness and response, which essentially enjoins the three cooperating to achieve universal health coverage and incorporate future pandemic prevention, preparedness and response<sup>16</sup>.

The main content, however, is the Joint Declaration of the Ninth ROK-Japan-China Trilateral Summit<sup>17</sup>. This sets three directions for trilateral cooperation. The first is institutionalising trilateral cooperation through regular summits as well as meetings at the foreign minister level, and through meetings of consultative bodies in areas like education, culture, tourism, sport, trade, public health and agriculture. The second direction is cooperation projects in six specified areas: people-to-people exchanges; sustainable development including through climate change response; economic cooperation and trade; public health and aging society; science and technology cooperation, digital transformation; disaster relief and safety. The third direction is enhancing trilateral + X cooperation so that the region benefits, particularly with ASEAN.

The leaders also met bilaterally on May 26. Kishida used the opportunity to raise Japan's concerns about China's actions in the Senkaku Islands and military activities in area surrounding Japan including in collaboration with Russia; removal of the Chinese buoy installed in Japan's EEZ; the situation in the South China Sea, in Hong Kong, in Xinjiang, and on Taiwan (he reiterated that peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait is extremely important for the international community, including Japan)<sup>18</sup>. He also sought lifting of restrictions imposed by China on food imports from Japan, and the early release of Japanese nationals detained by China. Meanwhile, China and South Korea agreed to accelerate the second phase of the Free Trade Agreement negotiations between the two countries<sup>19</sup>.

---

<sup>16</sup> Joint Statement on Future Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response, May 27, 2024, <https://japan.kantei.go.jp/content/000149024.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Joint Declaration of the 9<sup>th</sup> RK-Japan-China Summit, May 27, 2024, <https://japan.kantei.go.jp/content/000149022.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Japan-China Summit Meeting (Summary), May 26, 2024, [https://japan.kantei.go.jp/101\\_kishida/diplomatic/202405/26china.html](https://japan.kantei.go.jp/101_kishida/diplomatic/202405/26china.html)

<sup>19</sup> China, S Korea to accelerate second phase of FTA negotiations, May 26, 2024, [https://english.www.gov.cn/news/202405/26/content\\_WS66533410c6d0868f4e8e77b0.html](https://english.www.gov.cn/news/202405/26/content_WS66533410c6d0868f4e8e77b0.html)



Japan-China-ROK trilateral cooperation was launched in the aftermath of the Asian financial crisis in 2008. It included 21 ministerial meetings and more than 70 dialogue mechanisms, resulting in the trade between them ballooning to over \$ 650 billion in 2023 (it was over \$ 720 billion in 2018, but has contracted in the aftermath of the pandemic)<sup>20</sup>. Trilateral cooperation thus played an important role in regional economic growth.

The situation changed after the onset of the pandemic, China's aggressive approach towards realizing its regional interests and the onset of US-China competition. Commercial interests continue working towards increased trilateral cooperation, particularly economic, but geopolitical security interests are not in consonance. It is notable that the leaders had, in 2019, set eight goals for the coming decade. These include improving trilateral cooperation, maintaining durable peace and security, advocating open and win-win cooperation, enhancing scientific and technological cooperation, enhancing regional connectivity cooperation, achieving the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, promoting cultural and people-to-people exchanges and achieving overall revitalization and common development. The agenda appears to have shrunk. Taiwan, China's assertion in the South and East China Seas, human rights issues and China's unfair trade practices appear to have been brushed under the carpet. The major achievements of the trilateral appear to have been the agreement to meet in Japan for the 10<sup>th</sup> summit (the date for this remains unspecified) and the resuscitation of discussions in the trilateral format.

## Budgeting for Australia's Security

The Australian Defence Strategic Review, unveiled in April 2023, had judged that the Australian Defence Force (ADF) was no longer fit for purpose and reconceptualised the strategy to correct this situation<sup>21</sup>. An independent analysis team was thereafter constituted to recommend the future shape of the Australian Navy's surface fleet<sup>22</sup>. Australia's National Defence Strategy (NDS) and the Integrated Investment Program, published in April 2024, had set out the defence strategy and investment required to carry out a once in a

---

<sup>20</sup> Trilateral Cooperation Vision for the Next Decade, December 24, 2019, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000552950.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> For an overview, see Lalit Kapur, "Assessing Australia's Defence Strategic Review", DPG Policy Brief Volume VIII, Issue 16, [https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads\\_dpg/publication\\_file/assessing-australias-defence-strategic-review-4896.pdf](https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads_dpg/publication_file/assessing-australias-defence-strategic-review-4896.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> For an overview, see Lalit Kapur, "The Future of Australia's Surface Fleet", DPG Policy Brief Volume IX Issue 8, [https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads\\_dpg/publication\\_file/the-future-of-australias-surface-fleet-5109.pdf](https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads_dpg/publication_file/the-future-of-australias-surface-fleet-5109.pdf)



generation recapitalisation of the ADF<sup>23</sup>. The Australian Defence Budget for 2024-25, unveiled on May 14, begins the process of periodically delivering the funding required to bring into being the reconceptualised defence strategy and recommended surface fleet.

Australia's Defence portfolio comprises four major departments: Defence and the ADF, the Australian Signals Directorate, the Australian Submarine Agency, and Defence Housing Australia. Total resources allocated to these departments for 2024-25 are AUD 58.089 billion<sup>24</sup> (about \$38.93 billion<sup>25</sup>), an increase of AUD 915.752 over estimated actual expenditure for 2023-24. Defence has an allocation of AUD 52.85 billion (about \$ 35.42 billion), the Signals Directorate gets AUD 2.723 billion, and the Submarine Agency AUD 383 million. The forward estimate of allocations for defence in 2027-28 is AUD 71.418 billion (about \$ 47.86 billion). Interestingly, the budget for the Australian Signals Directorate is projected to decrease, from AUD 2856.6 million in 2023-24 to AUD 2723.5 million in 2024-25 and AUD 2210.9 million in 2027-28.

Projected defence spending by key cost category is tabulated below (all figures in AUD):

	2023-24 Estimated Actuals	2024-25 Budget Estimates	2027-28 Forward Estimate	Five Year total
<b>Workforce</b>	15,770.7	16,694.7	19,413.0	87,745.9
<b>Operations</b>	338.6	223.8	1.3	566.3
<b>Capability acquisition</b>	15,774.3	16,674.3	23,028.4	92,250.6
<b>Capability sustainment</b>	16,303.0	17,157.5	20,266.8	90,831.0
<b>Operating</b>	3,048.6	2,657.0	2,904.4	13,971.4

The intent is to restructure the ADF from a balanced force capable of responding to a large range of contingencies to an integrated, focused force designed to address Australia's most significant strategic risks. The six priorities associated with this restructuring are acquisition of nuclear-powered

<sup>23</sup> For an overview, see Lalit Kapur, "Australia's National Defence Strategy" in the Indo-Pacific Monitor, Volume V Issue 4, [https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads\\_dpg/publication\\_file/indo-pacific-monitor-5128.pdf](https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads_dpg/publication_file/indo-pacific-monitor-5128.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> All figures cited are taken from Portfolio Budget Statements 2024-25, Budget Related Paper No. 1.4A, Defence Portfolio, [https://www.defence.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-05/2024-25\\_Defence\\_PBS\\_00\\_Complete.pdf](https://www.defence.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-05/2024-25_Defence_PBS_00_Complete.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> Rate of exchange AUD 1 = \$ 0.67, this figure is used for all subsequent calculations.



submarines to improve deterrence capability; develop long range precision strike capability with munitions made in Australia; improve ability to operate from the northern bases; improve the growth and retention of the workforce; enable rapid translation of disruptive new technologies into ADF capability; and deepen diplomatic and defence partnerships with key Indo-Pacific partners.

Manpower costs are estimated at about 31.3% of the budget in 2024-25; they will marginally shrink to 30.8% in 2027-28. Acquisition costs are estimated at 31.2% of the budget in 2024-25; they are projected to grow to 32.33% in 2027-28. Maintenance costs, about 32.1% of the budget in 2024-25, are projected to reduce to 31.8% in 2027-28. The costs of operations and exercises, 5.4% of the budget in 2024-25, is projected to reduce to 4.9% of the budget in 2027-28, mainly on account of cutting back on ongoing operations. The ratio of manpower to acquisition costs is a healthy one, permitting expansion of the ADF. Sustainment costs appear to be on the higher side, while the cost of operations is a small and reducing proportion of the overall budget, in keeping with the shift of focus to a strategy of denial.

Projected defence spending for 2024-25 amounts to 2.03% of the GDP, and the intent is to increase this to 2.3% of the GDP over the next five years. This, however, will be subject to continuity in government. The opposition has opposed the increased funding, and given that major projects such as the SSN-AUKUS and the new surface fleet have long gestation periods (the first of the new Hunter class frigates as well as the first of the new general-purpose frigates will be delivered only towards the end of the decade, while the SSN-AUKUS will be delivered well into the next decade), continuity in funding remains in question. More so as the opposing coalition has refused to support the AUD 50.3 billion in new defence funding if they are elected<sup>26</sup>.

Australia's department of defence presently has 58,242 uniformed and 18,048 civilian employees. The numbers are projected to grow, to 63,597 uniformed and 19,127 civilian employees in 2024-25; and 66,873 uniformed and 20,150 civilian employees in 2027-28. Australia has already taken steps such as retention bonuses and improved welfare measures to attract talent in a country with a relatively small population base and low unemployment. Nevertheless, the challenge of growing the workforce will remain substantial.

---

<sup>26</sup> Address to the Defence Connect Budget Summit 2024, May 17, 2024, <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/speeches/2024-05-17/address-defence-connect-budge-summit-2024>



## The Punishment War Games

On May 20, Taiwan's President Lai Ching-te delivered his inaugural address<sup>27</sup>. Describing democratic Taiwan as a global beacon and a pilot for global peace, he said, "China's military actions and gray-zone coercion are considered the greatest strategic challenges to global peace and stability"<sup>28</sup>. He said his government would uphold the four commitments: to a free and democratic constitutional system; that the Republic of China and the People's Republic of China should not be subordinate to each other; to resist annexation or encroachment on Taiwan's sovereignty; and that the future of the Republic of China (Taiwan) must be decided in accordance with the will of the Taiwanese people. He went on to call on China to cease its political and military intimidation and share with Taiwan the responsibility of maintaining peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait. He also hoped that China would face the reality of the Republic of China's existence, respect the choices of the people of Taiwan, choose dialogue over confrontation, exchange over containment, and engage in cooperation with the legal government chosen by the Taiwanese people.

Lai Ching-te also said that so long as China refuses to renounce the use of force against Taiwan, all Taiwanese should understand that even if they accepted the entirety of China's position and gave up their sovereignty, China's ambition to annex Taiwan would not simply disappear. There was thus need to demonstrate the resolve to defend the nation. This necessitated actively strengthening national defence, improving economic security, maintaining stable and principled cross-strait leadership, and values-based diplomacy.

Three days after Lai's address, on May 23, China's Eastern Theatre Command started joint military drills named Joint Sword 2024A surrounding Taiwan<sup>29</sup>. The area of the drills encompassed the Taiwan Strait, the north, south and east of Taiwan, as well as the areas around the islands of Kinmen, Matsu, Wuqiu and Dongyin. The drill focused on joint sea-air combat-readiness patrol, joint seizure of comprehensive battlefield control, and joint precision strikes on key targets. Chinese vessels and aircraft closed in on areas around Taiwan and integrated operations both inside and outside the island chain to test their joint real combat capability. The drills were also intended as a strong punishment

---

<sup>27</sup> Inaugural Address of ROC 16<sup>th</sup>-term President Lai Ching-te, May 20, 2024, <https://english.president.gov.tw/NEWS/6726>

<sup>28</sup> The commitments were made at the 2021 National Day Address by then President Tsai Ing-wen on October 10, 2021. See "President Tsai delivers 2021 National Day Address", <https://english.president.gov.tw/News/6175>

<sup>29</sup> PLA conducts joint military drills surrounding Taiwan Island, May 23, 2024, [http://eng.mod.gov.cn/xb/News\\_213114/TopStories/16310652.html](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/xb/News_213114/TopStories/16310652.html)



for the separatist acts of “Taiwan independence” forces and a stern warning against interference and provocation by external forces. They were the largest ever in scale and vessels moved closer to Taiwan than ever before<sup>30</sup>. Lai’s inaugural speech was described as filled with hostility and provocations, showing that he has adopted an even riskier and more radical approach towards Taiwan Independence than his predecessors. The intent was to show the Taiwanese people that preservation of its military power was an illusion.

Taiwan’s reaction was limited to urging China to exercise self-restraint, stop actions that undermine peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and raise tensions in the region<sup>31</sup>. The US Department of State expressed deep concern over the drills and urged Beijing to act with restraint<sup>32</sup>. A US Department of Defense statement expressed confidence in the current US force posture and operations in the Indo-Pacific to safeguard peace, stability and national interest. It said the US had closely monitored the drills by the PLA and communicated its concerns both publicly and directly<sup>33</sup>. There was, however, an announcement that the US Secretary of Defense would meet Admiral Dong Jun, China’s Defence Minister, during a visit to Singapore to participate in the annual Shangri-La Dialogue<sup>34</sup>. Japan, on its part, appears more focused on providing assistance to Ukraine than to neighbouring Taiwan.

The drills ended on May 24. For all the posturing, China does not appear ready to invade Taiwan yet. The confrontation between Taiwan and China will not, however, ease. It is perhaps time for both the US and Japan to demonstrate a stronger position on China’s coercion of Taiwan. Failing this, the Indo-Pacific must be prepared to deal with a rising probability of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan.

## India’s Operations, Exercises and Capability Enhancement

SMART Test. The Supersonic Missile-Assisted Release of Torpedo System (SMART) was successfully flight-tested by the DRDO from Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam

<sup>30</sup> PLA’s latest drill surrounding Taiwan Island largest in scale, May 24, 2024, [http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/CHINA\\_209163/TopStories\\_209189/16311085.html](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/CHINA_209163/TopStories_209189/16311085.html)

<sup>31</sup> MOFA urges China to stop raising tensions in Taiwan Strait and region, May 23, 2024, [https://en.mofa.gov.tw/News\\_Content.aspx?n=1328&sms=273&s=117426](https://en.mofa.gov.tw/News_Content.aspx?n=1328&sms=273&s=117426)

<sup>32</sup> PRC Military Drills near Taiwan, May 25, 2024, <https://www.state.gov/prc-military-drills-near-taiwan/>

<sup>33</sup> Statement Attributed to DoD Spokesperson Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder, May 25, 2024, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3788070/statement-attributed-to-dod-spokesperson-maj-gen-pat-ryder/>

<sup>34</sup> Secretary of Defense Travel to Singapore, Cambodia and France, May 24, 2024, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/3787873/secretary-of-defense-travel-to-singapore-cambodia-and-france/>



Island on May 01<sup>35</sup>. The SMART missile has a range of about 643 Km and carries a lightweight torpedo with a 20 Km range.

Keel Laying of India's First Next Generation OPV. The keel-laying ceremony of India's first Next Generation OPV was held at Goa Shipyard Limited on May 03<sup>36</sup>. Eleven of these OPVs will enter service in the coming years, seven built by GSL and the remaining four by GRSE. Delivery of the ships is expected to commence in September 2026 and to be completed by early 2030.

Eastern Fleet Ship Deployment to the South China Sea. IN ships Delhi, Kiltan and Shakti, part of India's Eastern Fleet, proceeded on their annual deployment to the South China Sea during the month. A tabulation of ports they visited during their deployment is below.

Ships	From	To	Port Visited
Delhi, Kiltan, Shakti	May 06	May 09	Singapore <sup>37</sup>
Kiltan	May 12	May 15	Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam <sup>38</sup>
Delhi, Shakti	May 12	May 15	Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia <sup>39</sup>
Delhi, Kiltan, Shakti	May 20	May 23	Manila, Philippines <sup>40</sup>
Kiltan	May 25	May 28	Muara, Brunei <sup>41</sup>

Keel Laying of 8<sup>th</sup> ASW SWC. The keel-laying ceremony of the 8<sup>th</sup> ASW Shallow Water Craft was held at GRSE Kolkata on May 10<sup>42</sup>. Eight of these craft are being built by GRSE.

<sup>35</sup> Supersonic Missile-Assisted Release of Torpedo System Successfully Flight-Tested by DRDO off the Odisha Coast, May 01, 2024, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2019266>

<sup>36</sup> Keel Laying of the First Next Generation Offshore Patrol Vessel (ex-GSL) on 03 May at Goa Shipyard Limited, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2019622>

<sup>37</sup> Indian Naval Ships Delhi, Shakti, and Kiltan Completed their visit to Singapore, May 09, 2024, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2020103>

<sup>38</sup> Visit to Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam by Indian Naval Ship Kiltan, May 12, 2024, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2020379>

<sup>39</sup> Visit of Indian Naval Ships to Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2020376>

<sup>40</sup> Indian Naval Ships Delhi, Shakti and Kiltan Complete Their visit to Manila, Philippines, May 23, 2024, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2021395>

<sup>41</sup> Visit to Muara, Brunei by Indian Naval Ship Kiltan, May 25, 2024, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2021634>

<sup>42</sup> Keel Laying of 8<sup>th</sup> ASW SWC (ex GRSE) on 10 May 2024 at M/S GRSE Kolkata, May 10, 2024, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2020235>



RudraM-II Air to Surface Missile. The RudraM-II air-to-surface missile was successfully flight-tested from a Su-30 MKI platform on May 29, 2024<sup>43</sup>. This hypersonic solid fuel propelled air-to-ground missile with a maximum range of 300 Km will be manufactured at Hyderabad by Adani Defence and Aerospace on completion of flight tests. It is intended to replace the IAF's Kh-31 missiles.

## Other Indo-Pacific Developments

Solomon Islands Elections. Jeremiah Manele of the Ownership, Unity and Responsibility Party was declared elected as the Prime Minister of the Solomon Islands on May 02, security support of 31 of the 50 members of parliament<sup>44</sup>. Manasseh Sogavare, the former Prime Minister, became the Minister for Finance and the Treasury in the new government.

Singapore Prime Minister. Lawrence Wong assumed charge as Singapore's fourth Prime Minister on May 15<sup>45</sup>. Acknowledging the role played by his predecessors in developing Singapore, he expressed his gratitude to former Prime Minister Lee Hsein Loong for having agreed to continue serving in his cabinet. He noted that the three-decade interregnum of peace and stability in the Asia Pacific had transitioned to an era of conflict and rivalry, with great powers competing to shape a new, yet undefined, global order. The transition period would be marked by geopolitical tension as well as protectionism and rampant nationalism and would stretch for years, if not decades. His speech was about how he visualised taking his country forward in this transitional era.

Lai Ching-te Inaugurated as President of Taiwan. Delivering his inaugural address titled "Building a democratic, peaceful and prosperous new Taiwan", President Lai Ching-te said "China's military actions and gray-zone coercion are considered the greatest strategic challenges to global peace and stability"<sup>46</sup>. He called on China to cease its political and military intimidation against Taiwan, share with Taiwan and hoped that China would face the reality of the Republic of China's existence, respect the choices of the people of Taiwan and choose dialogue over confrontation. He also noted that so long as China refuses to renounce the use of force against Taiwan, the people must

---

<sup>43</sup> Rudram-II air-to-surface missile successfully flight-tested by DRDO from Su-30 MKI off the Odisha coast, May 29, 2024, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2022076>

<sup>44</sup> Solomon Islands picks China-friendly Manele as new prime minister, May 2, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/solomon-islands-chooses-jeremiah-manele-new-prime-minister-2024-05-02/>

<sup>45</sup> PM Lawrence Wong at the Swearing-In Ceremony, May 15, 2024, <https://www.pmo.gov.sg/Newsroom/PM-Lawrence-Wong-at-the-Swearing-In-Ceremony-May-2024>

<sup>46</sup> Inaugural Address of ROC 16<sup>th</sup>-term President Lai-Ching-te, May 20, 2024, <https://english.president.gov.tw/NEWS/6726>



understand that even giving up Taiwan's sovereignty would not result in China's ambition to annex Taiwan disappearing. The inaugural address was marked for spelling out Lai Ching-te's vision of how Taiwan should be governed in the years ahead.

The Kishida Macron Summit Meeting. Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, who visited France to attend the OECD Ministerial Council Meeting, met French President Macron bilaterally on May 2<sup>47</sup>. The two leaders agreed to commence negotiations on the Japan-France Reciprocal Access Agreement. They took stock of bilateral relations and exchanged views on regional and global developments. They looked forward to the Olympic games in Paris as well as Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai next year.

Japan – Malaysia Summit Meeting. On May 23, Malaysia's Prime Minister Dato Seri Anwar bin Ibrahim met Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in Tokyo<sup>48</sup>. Malaysia appreciated the surveillance equipment provided by Japan under the Overseas Assistance Programme. Both leaders exchanged views on bilateral relations as well as on regional and international challenges.

Chabahar Port. India's India Ports Global Limited and the Ports and Maritime Organisation of Iran signed a long-term contract for the development and operation by India of the Shahid Beheshti Port Terminal at Chabahar on May 13<sup>49</sup>. The ten-year deal will enable India to bypass the blockage created by Pakistan and obtain trade access to Afghanistan and Central Asia. India will invest \$ 120 million in equipping Chabahar and has also offered a credit window of \$ 250 million for mutually identified projects to improve Chabahar infrastructure.

Maldives Foreign Minister Visits New Delhi. A week after the fourth meeting of the India-Maldives High Level Core Group wherein both sides had reviewed ongoing efforts to enable continued operation of Indian aviation platforms in the Maldives<sup>50</sup>, Mr Moosa Zameer, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Maldives visited New Delhi<sup>51</sup>. The MEA spokesperson confirmed that while the

<sup>47</sup> Japan France Summit Working Lunch (Summary), May 2, 2024, [https://japan.kantei.go.jp/101\\_kishida/diplomatic/202405/02luncheon.html](https://japan.kantei.go.jp/101_kishida/diplomatic/202405/02luncheon.html)

<sup>48</sup> Japan-Malaysia Summit Meeting, May 23, 2024, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/s\\_sa/sea2/my/pageit\\_000001\\_00001.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/s_sa/sea2/my/pageit_000001_00001.html)

<sup>49</sup> Long-term Main Contract for development of Shahid Beheshti Port Terminal, Chabahar signed between India Port Global Limited (IPGL) and Ports and Maritime Organisation (PMO) of Iran

<sup>50</sup> Fourth Meeting of India-Maldives High Level Core Group, May 03, 2024, [https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/37796/Fourth\\_Meeting\\_of\\_the\\_IndiaMaldives\\_High\\_Level\\_Core\\_Group](https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/37796/Fourth_Meeting_of_the_IndiaMaldives_High_Level_Core_Group)

<sup>51</sup> Remarks by EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar during meeting with Foreign Minister of Maldives, May 09, 2024, <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches->



first and second batches of Indians providing technical support to the Maldives had come back, a third batch was presently in the Maldives to provide medical and humanitarian services to the people<sup>52</sup>.

Launch of Centre for Australia-India Relations. Launching the Centre for Australia-India Relations in Sydney on May 20, Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong spoke of “great plans to grow our economic partnership and deepen two-way trade and investment”, as well as the launch of new climate initiatives in green steel and hydrogen, critical minerals and innovation and technology<sup>53</sup>. The recipients of the inaugural Maitri Scholars and Fellowships programs were also announced<sup>54</sup>. Australia will soon commence consultations with India on the future Australia-India economic roadmap.

Sixth Australia – ROK 2+2. The Sixth Australia – Republic of Korea Foreign and Defence Ministers’ Meeting took place in Melbourne on May 01<sup>55</sup>. The focus of the joint statement is enhancing cooperation between the two countries in the Indo-Pacific. The base remains their alliance with the US. ROK expressed an interest in the Quad and its activities while Australia welcomed its complementary strengths. Shared concerns about developments in the South China Sea, peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and enforcement of UNSC sanctions on North Korea figured prominently in the statement, though there was no movement towards meaningful cooperation on the first two. Meanwhile, both agreed to strengthen their participation in each other’s joint exercises and to enhance cooperation in critical and emerging technologies, particularly Artificial Intelligence, Quantum and Telecommunications technologies.

Trilateral Defence Ministers’ Meetings in Hawaii. The meeting of Defence Ministers of Japan, Australia and the US met for the 13<sup>th</sup> time in Hawaii on 02 May indicated the shape of the evolving regional security architecture. The

---

[Statements.htm?dtl/37802/Remarks\\_by\\_EAM\\_Dr\\_S\\_Jaishankar\\_during\\_meeting\\_with\\_Foreign\\_Minister\\_of\\_Maldives](#)

<sup>52</sup> Transcript of Weekly Media Briefing by the Official Spokesperson (May 09, 2024), [https://www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/37805/Transcript\\_of\\_Weekly\\_Media\\_Briefing\\_by\\_the\\_Official\\_Spokesperson\\_May\\_09\\_2024](https://www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/37805/Transcript_of_Weekly_Media_Briefing_by_the_Official_Spokesperson_May_09_2024)

<sup>53</sup> Speech at Centre for Australia-India Relations, May 20, 2024, <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/penny-wong/speech/speech-centre-australia-india-relations>

<sup>54</sup> Strengthening ties through the Centre for Australia-India Relations, May 20, 2024, <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/penny-wong/media-release/strengthening-ties-through-centre-australia-india-relations>

<sup>55</sup> Australia – Republic of Korea 2+2 Joint Statement, May 01, 2024, <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/statements/2024-05-01/australia-republic-korea-22-joint-statement>



ministers agreed upon a range of issues impacting the Indo-Pacific<sup>56</sup>. This includes strong opposition to attempts by China to unilaterally change the status quo by force or coercion in the South and East China Seas. They strongly objected to China's claims and actions that are inconsistent with international law including UNCLOS, emphasised the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, reaffirmed their commitment to ASEAN centrality and unity, noted the progress on introduction of counterstrike capabilities by Japan and the investment in long-range strike capabilities by Australia, and took stock of the range of developments in their military cooperation.

Pacific Quad Defence Ministers' Meeting. Defence Ministers from Australia, Japan, the Philippines and the US came together for the second time in Hawaii on May 02 and, in a joint statement, expressed serious concern about the situation in the East and South China Seas. They strongly objected to the dangerous use of coast guard and maritime militia vessels in the South China Sea, reiterated serious concern about the PRC's repeated obstruction of Philippine vessels exercising high seas freedoms and the disruption of supply lines to the Second Thomas Shoal, describing it as constituting dangerous and destabilising conduct. They emphasised their commitment to strengthen cooperation in support of regional security and stability and discussed opportunities to further advance defence cooperation, including through continued maritime cooperation in the South China Sea. Evidently, the four have decided to push back harder against China's revisionist efforts in the South China Sea.

US-Japan Agreement for Glide Phase Interceptor Cooperative Development Project. The US Department of Defense and Japan's Ministry of Defense finalised a formal agreement for a Glide Phase Interceptor Cooperative Development Project Arrangement on May 15, 2024<sup>57</sup>. The agreement is expected to strengthen regional deterrence while enhancing long-standing missile defense cooperation between the two countries.

India's Biggest Port Operator Seeks to Invest in Bataan Port in the Philippines. The Philippines Presidential Office has indicated that India's biggest port operator, Adani Ports and Special Economic Zones (APSEZ) Limited, plans to

---

<sup>56</sup> United States-Japan-Australia Trilateral Defense Ministers' Meeting (TDMM) Joint Statement, May 2, 2024, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3764063/united-states-japan-australia-trilateral-defense-ministers-meeting-tdmm-2024-jo/>

<sup>57</sup> US Department of Defense Statement on the Signing of the Glide Phase Interceptor Cooperative Development, May 15, 2024, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3775546/us-department-of-defense-statement-on-the-signing-of-the-glide-phase-intercepto/>



develop Bataan Port in the Philippines<sup>58</sup>. Bataan, about 40 Km to the West Manila across Manila Bay, is the start point of the Luzon Economic Corridor announced at the Trilateral Summit between the Philippines, Japan and the US on April 11, 2024<sup>59</sup>. It can presently accommodate Bulk Cargo vessels with a draught of 14 metres. APSEZ plans to develop it to accommodate PANAMAX vessels with a draught of up to 25 metres.

India Indonesia Defence Cooperation Committee Meeting. The 7<sup>th</sup> India – Indonesia Joint Defence Cooperation Committee Meeting, co-chaired by India's Defence Secretary and Indonesia's Secretary General of the Ministry of Defence, took place in New Delhi on 03 May<sup>60</sup>. Both sides identified means to enhance existing areas of cooperation in the field of defence industry ties, maritime security and multilateral cooperation. This may translate into an increased trilateral maritime exercise involving India, Indonesia and Australia.

China Prevents Philippines Supply Mission in South China Sea. Three Chinese Coast Guard cutters rammed and used water cannon to prevent a Philippines Patrol and Supply Mission in the South China Sea near the Scarborough Shoal<sup>61</sup>. The targets were BRP Bagacay and BRP Datu Bankaw, deployed to resupply Philippines fishermen operating in the Scarborough Shoal. Simultaneous water cannon blasts damaged railings and other superficial structures on BRP Bagacay, while the other vessel was rammed thrice and sustained eight water cannon blasts, resulting in damage to the vessels electrical and radio communication systems, as well as navigational equipment. China's spokesperson accused the Philippines' vessels of entering the waters of the Scarborough Shoal without permission, thus infringing China's sovereignty. When questioned about the damage to Philippines's ships, he said the China Coast Guard took necessary measures in accordance with the law and the way it handled the situation was professional, proper and lawful<sup>62</sup>.

<sup>58</sup> India's biggest port operator eyes Bataan for expansion due to PH's stable leadership, environment, May 03, 2024, [https://pco.gov.ph/news\\_releases/indias-biggest-port-operator-eyes-bataan-for-expansion-due-to-phs-stable-leadership-environment/](https://pco.gov.ph/news_releases/indias-biggest-port-operator-eyes-bataan-for-expansion-due-to-phs-stable-leadership-environment/)

<sup>59</sup> For an overview, see "The Japan US Philippines Trilateral Summit" in the Indo-Pacific Monitor, April 2024, [https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads\\_dpg/publication\\_file/indo-pacific-monitor-5128.pdf](https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads_dpg/publication_file/indo-pacific-monitor-5128.pdf)

<sup>60</sup> 7<sup>th</sup> India-Indonesia Joint Defence Cooperation Committee meeting held in New Delhi, May 03, 2024, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2019551>

<sup>61</sup> China Coast Guard Attacks Philippine Ships Near Scarborough Shoal, Say Officials, April 30, 2024, <https://news.usni.org/2024/04/30/china-coast-guard-attacks-philippine-ships-near-scarborough-shoal-say-officials>

<sup>62</sup> Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lin Jian's Regular Press Conference on April 30, 2024, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/2511\\_665403/202404/t20240430\\_11291753.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/202404/t20240430_11291753.html)



Fujian Commences Sea Trials. The PLA Navy's third aircraft carrier, Fujian, sailed from Jiangnan Shipyard, Shanghai for her first sea trial on May 01<sup>63</sup>. Unlike the first two, she will be China's first Catapult Assisted Take-off Barrier Arrested Recovery (CATOBAR) carrier, reportedly using a Chinese version of the Electromagnetic Aircraft Launch System (EMALS). The ship, displacing over 80,000 tons, is expected to commission in late 2025 or early 2026. Meanwhile, reports indicate that China is expected to announce a fourth carrier soon, and will also reveal whether this will be nuclear or conventionally powered.

Change of Indo-Pacific Command. Admiral Samuel J Paparo assumed charge as the 27<sup>th</sup> commander of the US Indo-Pacific Command from Admiral John C Aquilino on May 03<sup>64</sup>. Admiral Paparo was earlier commander of the US Pacific Fleet.

US DoD Freedom of Navigation Report. The US Department of Defense published its Freedom of Navigation Report for FY 2023 on May 08<sup>65</sup>. Target countries for FON operations during the year include Cambodia, Colombia, Croatia, the People's Republic of China, the Dominican Republic, Iran, Japan, Latvia, Maldives, Malta, Oman, Russia, Taiwan, Thailand, the UAE, Vietnam and Yemen.

Taiwan Strait Transit. USS Halsey transited through the Taiwan Strait on May 08, remaining in the corridor that is beyond the territorial sea of any state<sup>66</sup>.

USS Halsey Freedom of Navigation Operation. USS Halsey conducted a Freedom of Navigation operation near the Paracel Islands<sup>67</sup>, challenging the excessive claims by PRC, Vietnam and Taiwan as well as the PRC's straight baselines enclosing the Paracel Islands, on May 10.

---

<sup>63</sup> Chinese Aircraft Carrier Fujian Leaves for First Set of Sea Trials, May 01, 2024, <https://news.usni.org/2024/05/01/chinese-aircraft-carrier-fujian-leaves-for-first-set-of-sea-trials>

<sup>64</sup> US Indo-Pacific Command Holds Change of Command Ceremony, May 03, 2024, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/3765368/us-indo-pacific-command-holds-change-of-command-ceremony/>

<sup>65</sup> DOD Releases Fiscal Year 2023 Freedom of Navigation Report, May 08, 2024, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3769479/dod-releases-fiscal-year-2023-freedom-of-navigation-report/>

<sup>66</sup> 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet Destroyer Transits Taiwan Strait, May 08, 2024, <https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/Press-Releases/display-pressreleases/Article/3768629/7th-fleet-destroyer-transits-taiwan-strait/>

<sup>67</sup> US Navy Destroyer Conducts Freedom of Navigation Operation in South China Sea, May 10, 2024, <https://www.cpf.navy.mil/Newsroom/News/Article/3772441/us-navy-destroyer-conducts-freedom-of-navigation-operation-in-the-south-china-s/>



USS Ronald Reagan Departs Yokosuka After 9 Years. USS Ronald Reagan departed Yokosuka for the last time as the US Navy's forward-deployed aircraft carrier on May 16<sup>68</sup>. The carrier will complete her final Indo-Pacific patrol and then hand over to USS George Washington before returning to Bremerton, Washington later this year.

Netherlands and US Navies Exercise in South China Sea. USS Mobile, USNS Wally Schirra and Royal Netherlands Navy ship HNLMS Tromp exercised together in the South China Sea on May 22, 2024<sup>69</sup>.

RIMPAC Exercise. The US Navy's Pacific Fleet announced that the next RIMPAC exercise would be held from June 26 – August 2 in and around the Hawaiian Islands<sup>70</sup>. RIMPAC is the world's largest maritime exercise. 29 nations (including India), 40 surface ships, 3 submarines, 14 national land forces, over 150 aircraft and over 25,000 personnel are expected to participate.

Australia Announces Concept Design Partners for Nuclear Powered Submarine Construction Yard. The Albanese government announced that Kellogg, Brown and Root (KBR) and an AECOM and Aurecon Joint Venture would be design partners for the new Nuclear Powered Submarine Construction Yard (NPSCY)<sup>71</sup>. KBR will design the area of the NPSCY to be used for steel processing and fabrication facilities, while the AECOM and Aurecon JV will deliver the concept design for the rest of the NPSCY site, encompassing outfitting, consolidation and commissioning of the submarines. The project is expected to create up to 4000 direct jobs at the peak of construction, and another 4000-5500 direct jobs for building of the submarines. The announcement marks the achievement of yet another milestone along the long path to Australia's attainment of SSN capability.

JMSDF Annual Training Cruise. The JMSDF announced that its training squadron comprising JS Kashima and JS Shimakaze would proceed on a round

<sup>68</sup> Ambassador Emmanuel, US Navy and JMSDF leaders bid farewell to USS Ronald Reagan after 9 years as FDNF-Japan Carrier, May 16, 2024, <https://www.c7f.navy.mil/Media/News/Display/Article/3776893/ambassador-emanuel-us-navy-and-jmsdf-leaders-bid-farewell-to-uss-ronald-reagan/>

<sup>69</sup> Netherlands, US naval forces conduct South China Sea operations, May 22, 2024, <https://www.cpf.navy.mil/Newsroom/News/Article/3784611/netherlands-us-naval-forces-conduct-south-china-sea-operations/>

<sup>70</sup> US Pacific Fleet Announces 29<sup>th</sup> RIMPAC Exercise, May 21, 2024, <https://www.cpf.navy.mil/Newsroom/News/Article/3783565/us-pacific-fleet-announces-29th-rimpac-exercise/>

<sup>71</sup> Concept design partners announced for South Australia's new nuclear-powered submarine construction yard, May 28, 2024, <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/media-releases/2024-05-28/concept-design-partners-announced-south-australias-new-nuclear-powered-submarine-construction-yard>





the world training cruise between May and November 2024<sup>72</sup>. Amongst the 13 ports of call, the Indian Ocean ones are Victoria (Seychelles) and Cape Town (South Africa).

China's Dedicated Drone Carrier. Even as the PLA Navy's Fujian aircraft carrier undergoes sea trials, imagery analysis has unveiled what appears to be the world's first dedicated drone carrier, built in secrecy by a shipyard on the Yangtze River<sup>73</sup>. Media reports indicate that the ship is about a third of the length and half of the width of the US or Chinese strike carriers, making it about the size of Escort Carriers used in WW II. It could technically operate a small number of aircraft, but the straight deck arrangement does not permit their simultaneous launch and recovery. The hull is a widely spaced catamaran configuration, permitting higher speed and stability. The flight deck is sufficient to operate drones with a wingspan of about 20 metres.

ASBM Attacks in the Red Sea. MT Wind, a Panama-flagged and Greek-owned and operated tanker was struck by a Houthi-launched Anti-ship Ballistic Missile in the Red Sea on May 18, 2024<sup>74</sup>. The impact of the ASBM caused flooding which resulted in loss of propulsion and steering. However, the crew was able to restore propulsion and steering and resume course under own power. No casualties were reported. On May 28, a Marshall Islands flagged Greek owned bulk carrier, M/V Laax, reported being struck by three ASBMs<sup>75</sup>. No injuries were reported, and the ship continued its voyage under own power. That both ships not only survived, but were able to resume their passage under own power despite direct hits ASBMs speaks volumes about the effectiveness of the missiles.

\*\*\*

---

<sup>72</sup> Overseas Training Cruise 2024, May 9, 2024,

<https://www.mod.go.jp/msdf/en/release/202405/20240509en.pdf>

<sup>73</sup> HI Sutton, "China Builds World's First Dedicated Drone Carrier", May 15, 2024,

<https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2024/05/china-builds-worlds-first-dedicated-drone-carrier/>

<sup>74</sup> Houthis Strike M/T Wind in Red Sea, May 18, 2024,

<https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/PRESS-RELEASES/Press-Release-View/Article/3780036/houthis-strike-mt-wind-in-red-sea/>

<sup>75</sup> 28 May Red Sea Update, May 28, 2024, <https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/PRESS-RELEASES/Press-Release-View/Article/3789367/28-may-red-sea-update/>



**Delhi Policy Group**  
Core 5A, 1st Floor,  
India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road  
New Delhi - 110003  
India

[www.delhipolicygroup.org](http://www.delhipolicygroup.org)