



GUARDIANS OF THE INDO-PACIFIC: INDIA AND AUSTRALIA'S SECURITY COLLABORATION

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Abstract

In recent years, there has been increasing cooperation between India and Australia in the Indo-Pacific area, known for its complicated geopolitical nature and strategic importance. This article examines the complex security alliance between the two countries, explicitly emphasising their collaborative endeavours to maintain peace in the area and tackle shared concerns such as maritime security issues, terrorism, and geopolitical conflicts. The paper examines the progression of India-Australia ties from a historical perspective to a strong security alliance by studying significant policy efforts, military exercises, and bilateral agreements. This research paper highlights the crucial significance of this partnership in mitigating the impact of emerging powers and upholding a free and open Indo-Pacific region. By conducting a thorough study it highlights the crucial role that India and Australia play in defining the security environment of the Indo-Pacific region. Their concerted efforts make them essential "Guardians of the Indo-Pacific." This paper offers valuable insights into the potential and difficulties of maintaining this crucial bilateral partnership in a progressively intricate global context.

Keywords: Indo-Pacific Region, Defence Policy, Security Cooperation, Maritime Security, Indian Ocean, China, QUAD

Introduction:

The Indo-Pacific region, spanning from the eastern coast of Africa to the western coast of the Americas, has substantial geopolitical rivalry and collaboration. The strategic alliance between India and Australia has become more prominent as regional and global nations compete for influence. This partnership is essential for establishing an equilibrium of power and fostering peace and stability. This article explores the complex nature of the security collaboration between India and Australia, examining its origins, progression, and potential for

the future. Both nations have included the Indo-Pacific concept in their foreign policy formation. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has expressed a clear and comprehensive vision for an Indo-Pacific region characterised by freedom, openness, and inclusivity. India has initiated diplomatic relations with Russia, Japan, Australia, and other nations in the Indo-Pacific region due to the increasing uncertainties and the emerging possibilities of smaller groupings and two-party agreements.

Growing Engagement:

Australia is conducting a significant evaluation of its defence and strategic positions in the Indo-Pacific due to the escalating competition between the United States (US) and China, as well as China's assertive actions in the maritime domain. Australia revealed its Defence Strategic Review (DSR) in April 2023. The primary objective of the DSR is to guarantee that Australia possesses the essential capacity to safeguard itself in the exceedingly intricate strategic landscape that we have faced as a nation for more than 70 years. The DSR is based on the fundamental idea that the United States no longer has sole leadership in the Indo-Pacific region and that a growing power distribution among several nations will influence the area's future. Australia aims to strengthen its ties with regional countries such as India and Japan to establish a "strategic equilibrium," as Wong describes it. The Defense Strategic Update (DSR) also advocates for a comprehensive government strategy incorporating trade, supply chains, the blue economy, technology, and the private sector as integral components in safeguarding Australia's national interests. The 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue focused on discussions about bilateral strategic relations, the expansion of trade relations, and agreements concerning vital minerals. Both aspects were given prominence throughout the dialogue.

Although India and Australia have had a positive diplomatic relationship for a significant period, their defence connections have been restricted. Nevertheless, apprehensions over China's maritime development and the imperative to safeguard supply lines have compelled both parties to reassess their strategic alliances. In 2020, the bilateral ties between the two countries were elevated to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) level. The Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) led to the increased involvement of both parties in joint military drills, the establishment of channels for exchanging information, and the identification of prospective areas for cooperation in science and technology. Furthermore, the CSP also established the foundation for the emergence of unified perspectives on the Indo-Pacific region. The establishment of the 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue occurred directly from the CSP, serving as a platform for discussing strategic matters.

Milestones in Security Collaboration:

Australia recognises India as an emerging influential state in the Indo-Pacific region and a crucial security ally, especially in maritime affairs. Marine cooperation has been a significant component of the broader bilateral relationship between India and Australia due to their shared marine geography and increasing security links. The two nations have a substantial Joint Declaration on a Shared Vision for Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, announced during the inaugural virtual Prime Ministers' Summit 2020. This declaration acknowledges that many future issues will arise from the maritime domain. The naval engagements between the two nations have been frequent, shown by Australia's participation in the Malabar drills alongside other Quad countries in 2020 and the regular bilateral exercises known as AUSINDEX, conducted between the

Indian and Australian warships. Australia had invited India to participate in the next Exercise Talisman Sabre (TS), Australia's largest military exercise held in 2023. This invitation aims to strengthen the collaborative defence capabilities between the two nations. The naval forces of both nations also took part in the just-finished RIMPAC 2022 biannual exercise in Hawaii, which involved 26 countries. At the recent meeting, both parties voiced anticipation for India's involvement in the Indo-Pacific Endeavour exercise conducted by the Australian Defence Force (ADF) scheduled for October 2022. The exercise seeks to enhance the area's security and stability by fostering bilateral and multilateral interactions.

During the recent 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue, both sides reiterated their dedication to expediting the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) discussions. The CECA, which stands for Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement, is a trade agreement initially proposed in 2010. Although all parties acknowledge that the agreement will result in reciprocal advantages, the negotiating process has been arduous and was halted in 2016. The ongoing deliberations over the CECA are centred around various topics, such as the agriculture industry, mining, essential minerals, and collaboration in space exploration.

Key Areas of Security Cooperation:

Maritime Security: Because the Indo-Pacific is so strategically important, has much economic activity, and has essential naval chokepoints like the Malacca Strait, marine security has become a significant issue. India and Australia are both important countries in the area, and their maritime security strategies are becoming more similar in dealing with problems like piracy, illegal fishing, and territorial issues. The Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, which run from the Indian region to the coast of Australia, are vital for trade worldwide. Protecting these seas is crucial for keeping everyone's economies and societies stable and growing in the region and worldwide. This shared understanding has led to solid cooperation between the two countries in improving maritime domain awareness (MDA), holding joint military drills, and exchanging information to keep the rules-based maritime order safe from threats.

One of the most critical ways India and Australia collaborate on naval security is by participating in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), including the United States and Japan. This strategic meeting shows that these countries want the Indo-Pacific to be free, open, and welcoming for everyone. India and Australia have done several well-known military drills as part of the Quad. These exercises, like the Malabar exercises, are meant to improve their ability to work together and show that they can defend themselves against possible maritime threats. Both countries have also signed many security agreements, such as the Mutual Supplies Support Agreement (MLSA), making it easier for military bases from both countries to be used for supplies and refuelling. This gives both countries a lot more maritime operating reach. These deals show how strategic ties are strengthening and how both sides want to keep the seas safe and stop anyone from acting assertively or coercively in the area.

India and Australia have promised to do more than work together on drills and deals. They also want to improve efforts to build up each other's security skills and share technology. One example is working together to improve marine situational awareness in real-time by using unmanned systems and satellite tracking to build spying capabilities. They are also working together on projects to provide humanitarian aid and disaster

relief (HADR), which is very important in an area often hit by natural disasters. These projects strengthen their cooperation in marine security and help keep the area stable by making other Indo-Pacific countries more trusting and robust. India and Australia work together as guardians of the Indo-Pacific to protect it from marine security problems. They do this by creating a safe and stable maritime environment essential for the region's and the world's economic growth.

India-Australia Naval Exercises¹

Exercise Name	Start Year	Frequency	Location	Key Objectives	Participants
AUSINDEX	2015	Biennial	Indian Ocean, Bay of Bengal	Enhance interoperability, improve mutual understanding	Indian Navy, Royal Australian Navy
Malabar (Quad)	1992 (Australia rejoined 2020)	Annual	Indian Ocean, Western Pacific	Enhance naval cooperation, address regional security challenges	India, Australia, USA, Japan
PASSEX (Passing Exercise)	2018	Ad-hoc	Indian Ocean, Indo-Pacific	Ensure readiness, improve tactical manoeuvring	Indian Navy, Royal Australian Navy
Coordinated Patrol (CORPAT)	2020	Annual	Indian Ocean	Strengthen maritime security, surveillance operations	Indian Navy, Royal Australian Navy
Indo-Pacific Endeavour (IPE)	2017	Annual	Indo-Pacific	Regional engagement, disaster response, maritime security	India, Australia, regional Indo-Pacific navies
Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Exercises	Ongoing	As needed	Indo-Pacific region	Disaster response, humanitarian assistance	India, Australia

Defence Spending and Military Collaboration:

During the Financial Year 2020-21 (FY 2021), India set aside about 24% of its defence spending, or USD 15.6 billion, for buying new equipment. Indian Defense Minister Rajnath Singh said in February 2021 that India plans to spend about USD 130 billion on modernising its military “over the next 7-8 years.” If defence spending does not change much over the next ten years, that is about USD 185 billion. In FY 2021, Australia spent about 11 billion USD, or 34% of its budget, on buying things for the government. PM Morrison promised in July 2020 to spend AUD 270 billion, about USD 186 billion, on defence over the next ten years.²

¹ <https://www1.defence.gov.au/exercises/talisman-sabre-21>

² Laxman Kumar Behera, “India’s Defence Budget 2020-21”, *Manohar Parikkar Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses*, February 04, 2020.

The Australian government spends about half as much on defence as India, but Canberra doesn't spend much less on purchases than New Delhi. India needs to fix its capital-to-revenue spending ratio. However, the fact that both countries have similar acquisition budgets and are focused on the China threat is a good thing in the short term because it could make it easier for both sides to align their acquisition priorities and build up their capabilities. However, there will still be problems because the two countries have different ideas about defending themselves.

India and Australia have significantly improved their defence cooperation to deal with the many security problems in the Indo-Pacific area. This strengthens their position as important peace and stability bases. Joint military exercises like AUSINDEX and Australia's participation in the Malabar naval exercises are examples of the many bilateral and multilateral activities that make up this partnership. These exercises improve maritime security, interoperability, and readiness against common threats. Both countries have made essential deals, such as the Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA), which lets them share military bases and other logistical resources. This makes their tactical skills and strategic reach stronger. They work together on defence technology, share information, and are committed to maintaining a rules-based marine order. This shows their goals are aligned, and both countries want the Indo-Pacific to be free, open, and safe. This strong defence cooperation makes the region safer. It shows that India and Australia are determined to fight regional pressure and keep the security system strong in one of the world's most essential and rapidly changing areas.

Balancing Regional Power Dynamics:

India and Australia can work together to build up the military in third countries they care about, like Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Timor Leste, and even countries on the coast of the Indian Ocean, like Sri Lanka and the Maldives. There is work to be done in areas like UN Peacekeeping Missions, HADR exercises involving not only the Navy but also the National Disaster Management Association (NDMA) and similar groups in other countries, low-level maritime training, operations to stop piracy, and patrols against illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. The above places can be the subject of Joint Maritime Domain Awareness Initiatives. Underlines of credit, India and Australia can sell defence goods to give ASEAN countries like Indonesia and the Philippines the necessary boost. Supply guard ships and frigates are examples of things that could be exported.

India and Australia work together on strategic security issues, crucial to keeping the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific area as its politics change. This relationship arose because both countries were worried about the rise of solid powers, especially China. China's growing military power and growing impact threaten the stability and independence of Indo-Pacific countries. With stronger bonds between the two countries and more joint military drills like the Malabar naval exercises and the AUSINDEX, India and Australia are improving their defence and keeping the peace in the area. Their cooperation goes beyond standard security measures and includes projects to improve hacking, marine domain awareness, and the ability of smaller countries to do more. This encourages a group effort to keep the balance in the region. This balanced approach ensures that no one power can take over the Indo-Pacific. This creates an atmosphere that is good for peace, security, and long-term growth in the whole area.

Enhancing Regional Security Mechanisms:

With its changing politics and strategic importance, the Indo-Pacific area has become a more important focus for attempts to keep the world safe. India and Australia have become key players in improving regional security in response to rising economic stresses, maritime security risks, and territorial disagreements. Their cooperation is based on shared goals, like protecting freedom of passage, fighting terrorism, and limiting the power of regional solid forces. A big part of these efforts is their strong involvement in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (or Quad), which comprises China, the US, and Japan. The Quad is a multinational platform that helps with many things related to maritime security, including sharing information and holding joint military drills. It is often seen as a reaction to the growing geopolitical threats in the Indo-Pacific. Working together not only strengthens their security but also shows that they are all committed to keeping the region's order based on rules.

Geopolitical and Strategic Challenges:

India and Australia's membership in the Quad is vital to strengthening a regional security framework that can deal with everyday and unusual dangers. India's sizeable naval footprint and Australia's strong ties with Western allies are two strategic benefits that the two countries can use to improve their ability to project power and handle problems in the Indo-Pacific. The Quad's activities, like the Malabar naval drills, help member states work together better, which is essential for responding to problems in the area. In addition to military problems, they are also involved in important things like crisis relief, building infrastructure, and surveillance, all of which are necessary for the overall security of the area. India and Australia work together in the Quad to protect the Indo-Pacific and make it a safer, more stable, and more prosperous place. They do this by opposing selfish actions that risk the sovereignty and security of Indo-Pacific countries.

Even with these problems, the security relationship between India and Australia offers ample chances to make the area safer and better serve both countries' needs. A strong dedication to a free, open, and welcoming Indo-Pacific allows military and strategic cooperation to grow. The quad structure comprises the United States, Japan, and three other countries. It allows them to work together better and show they are united against threats in the area. Both countries want to protect marine trade lines and fight terrorism and piracy, making it easier for them to work together on maritime security, share information, and respond to disasters. The critical position of India in the Indian Ocean and Australia's advanced military technology and training sites are two other ways that the two countries can work together to make a more robust and complete security system. With China becoming more assertive, the political scene is changing, which gives India and Australia a reason to improve their relationship and play a crucial part in keeping peace and order in the Indo-Pacific.

Conclusion:

India and Australia's Indo-Pacific security alliance is strong and strategic, tackling the region's complex geopolitical issues. As major democratic nations, both countries support a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific, emphasising the significance of regional stability despite escalating geopolitical tensions. Their collaboration in maritime security, defence cooperation, and multilateral engagements like the Quad shows their importance in protecting the Indo-Pacific from territorial conflicts, piracy, and developing powers like China. Through combined military exercises, strategic agreements, and a shared vision, this alliance

strengthens their ability to balance regional power dynamics and promote peace and economic progress.

Policy Recommendations

- To strengthen collaborative military capabilities, consider expanding bilateral exercises like AUSINDEX and Malabar to improve operational interoperability and preparedness against common threats.
- Enhance Maritime Security Cooperation: - Create Real-time Maritime Domain Awareness: Implement joint initiatives to monitor and mitigate maritime threats like piracy and illegal fishing through satellite tracking and data sharing and to improve strategic reach throughout the Indo-Pacific, extend the Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA) to provide access to each other's naval bases and support operational logistics.
- Enhance Regional Security Architecture: -To maintain a rules-based regional order and improve the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) through coordinated maritime security, disaster response, and infrastructure development activities.
- Leverage Economic and Strategic Partnerships: - Finalise Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA): Accelerate discussions to increase economic relations and strategic interdependence and Enhance Trade and Supply Chain Security: Create policies to protect vital trade routes and strengthen economic resilience in the Indo-Pacific region.
- Engage in Multilateral Security Initiatives: - Participate in Regional Security Dialogues, Build consensus and coordinate responses to Indo-Pacific security challenges and enhance Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) skills by training and coordinating to respond quickly and effectively to natural disasters and humanitarian crises.

By implementing these recommendations, India and Australia may enhance their security cooperation and contribute to a stable, prosperous, and safe Indo-Pacific region.

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