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India - Australia Defence  
Partnership Building  
Integrated Deterrence

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# *India - Australia Defence Partnership Building Integrated Deterrence*

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## **Abstract**

The India-Australia defence partnership has evolved from diplomatic engagements to operational military integration, thus reshaping the Indo-Pacific security architecture of 21<sup>st</sup> century. Built on joint operations, information sharing and exercises, this cooperation is reinforced by diplomatic, economic and technological convergence. Amid growing Chinese assertiveness, the partnership provides a model of networked autonomy, enabling middle powers to aggregate capabilities while preserving strategic independence.

**Keywords:** Indo-Pacific, Great Power Competition, India-Australia Defence Partnership, FIPIC

## **Introduction**

The Indo-Pacific faces fundamental power recalibration driven by great power competition. Within this volatile landscape, the India-Australia defence partnership has matured from simple diplomatic initiatives into a multifaceted framework of operational military integration. High-level engagements now span government, defence and technology sectors. Recent milestones including the Defence Minister's October 2025 visit (first in 12 years) {PIB, 2025}, reflect this priority. To realise the full potential, progress must translate into deeper service-level engagements, building on the Chief of Defence Staff's visit in March 2025 and recently concluded visit of the Chief of the Army Staff to Australia in February 2026. This article explores how the India-Australia convergence serves as a vital military-strategic pillar for credible and integrated deterrence within the modern Indo-Pacific security framework.

## **Historical Evolution**

The journey of India-Australia relations began with the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1941. Australia was notably among the first nations to recognise India's independence. Despite this early start, the Cold War era created significant divisions—Australia aligned itself with the United States and New Zealand through the ANZUS Treaty (1951) and joined SEATO (1954) {UN Treaty Series, 1955}, while India professed Non-Aligned Movement (1961) {Bhattacharya, S. 2024}. Bilateral defence cooperation was virtually non-existent during this period and relations reached their **nadir** in 1998 following India's Pokhran nuclear tests, which led Australia to suspend all diplomatic and defence engagements (Bhattacharya, S. 2023).

The turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century brought transformative changes, primarily catalysed by shifting regional security dynamics and geo-strategic flux. The 9/11 attacks served as an early catalyst for counter-terrorism cooperation, laying the groundwork for initial defence dialogues. A major breakthrough occurred in 2006 when Australian Prime Minister, John Howard visited India and signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Defence Cooperation (MEA, 2006). This enabled high-level dialogues and military exchanges, paving the way for the first Quadrilateral

Security Dialogue (QUAD) meeting in 2007 (MEA, 2025) and the inaugural inclusion of Australia in Exercise MALABAR (Khurana, G.S. 2007) that same year.

Subsequently, the relationship continued to gain momentum, most notably Australia's 2011 decision to export uranium to India, which was formalised in 2014 (Ramana, M.V. and Jeffery, C. 2020). The 2014 Framework for Security Cooperation (DFAT, Australia, 2014) further expanded the scope of engagements, which by 2020, was elevated to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) {MEA, 2020}, significantly broadening ties to include maritime security, Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), cyber security and counter-terrorism. Today, this convergence has moved beyond policy and into the realm of defence industry ties, thus making it one of the most comprehensive bilateral partnerships in the region.

### **Strategic Context: The China Catalyst**

The primary catalyst for this accelerated convergence is China's rapid military modernisation. The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) has grown to be the world's largest naval force by hull count, possessing around 400 vessels (3 aircraft carriers, 50 destroyers, 50 frigates, 60 submarines). China has also militarised artificial islands in the South China Sea (Zwartz, H. 2025), threatening maritime trade routes that carry over 55% of Indian (Singh, R.R. 2022) and 60% of Australian commerce (Sang, H. 2017).

Australia has experienced this assertiveness firsthand, including interception of RAAF P-8A aircraft (Yeo, M. 2022), laser targeting of an Australian aircraft (ADF, 2022) and the circumnavigation of the Australian continent by PLAN Task Force 107 in early 2025 (DoD, Australia, 2025) demonstrating China's sustained blue-water operations capability. For India, the challenge is dual-fronted, manifesting in both maritime and continental domains. Tensions on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) remain high following the fatal 2020 Galwan Valley clash. China continues to invest heavily in border infrastructure like bridges and dual-use airports. In the maritime domain, China's port access in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Pakistan and Bangladesh, along with its military base in Djibouti (Baruah, D.M. 2025), has raised security stakes significantly.

This imperative is further reinforced by a shared acknowledgement of US' erratic and transactional strategic calculus, which renders the extra-regional security doubtful, thus making self-reliant regional partnerships all the more essential.

### **Geographical Convergences**

The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is a vital global artery, seeing the annual transit of roughly 100,000 ships and carrying 42% of the world's crude oil (Ahmad, T. 2024). The geography of the two nation provides a unique military-strategic advantage, wherein they can exercise significant outreach and control over critical IOR choke points. Australia's 2024 National Defence Strategy explicitly identifies India as a '**top-tier security partner**' (DoD, Australia, 2024).

Their extensive Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) enable collaborative domain awareness. Australia's proximity to Pacific Island nations, which account for 20% of the world's EEZs (Pacific Data Hub), complements India's regional interests, effectively bridging the two regional theatres into a unified Indo-Pacific framework. This necessitates strengthening of Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC) through military engagements amid growing Chinese influence in the region.

### **Military Cooperation**

**Maritime Domain.** Maritime cooperation forms the 'operational core'. Indian Navy vessels now regularly utilise Australian facilities, highlighted by August 2023 submarine deployment to

Fremantle (PIB, 2023); 2025 Implementing Arrangement on Mutual Submarine Rescue Support and Cooperation (PIB, 2025) enables underwater operations support, which is critical as Australia acquires AUKUS nuclear submarines.

**Air Power.** Air power cooperation addresses the vast Indo-Pacific distances. The 2024 Air-to-Air Refueling arrangement allows Australian KC-30A tankers to refuel Indian aircrafts (DoD, Australia, 2024), hence allowing them maritime air operations across a much larger area to support the naval operations. Exercises like ‘Tarang Shakti’ and ‘Pitch Black’, build high-end air combat proficiency.

**Land Forces Integration.** On land, Exercise ‘AUSTRAHIND’ focuses on sub-conventional warfare in complex terrains. High-level visits from Army Chiefs on both sides signal a deepening of these ties. Furthermore, India has begun participating as an observer in Exercise ‘Talisman Sabre’— the premier joint exercise between Australia and the US, with plans to transition to full participation across all three services.

**Space, Cyber, Intelligence and EW.** India-Australia ‘Space MAITRI’ program (Australian Space Agency, 2024) demonstrates complementary capabilities with potential expansion into Space Situational Awareness. Tri-Services coordination for AI-enabled systems and quantum-resilient communications would further strengthen deterrence, while 2025 Agreement of Defence Information Sharing enables tactical and operational information exchanges. This enhanced interoperability can be exploited in other fields as EW for operations as well as co-production.

### **Defence Industrial Cooperation**

Defence industrial ties, which previously lagged behind strategic goals, are now accelerating. India has offered Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) services for Royal Australian Navy (RAN) vessels at Indian dockyards (PIB, 2025), extending their operational sustainability. The Critical Minerals Investment Program (PIB, 2023) addresses the strategic vulnerability arising from Chinese dominance on supply chains, which is essential for military equipment and operational effectiveness.

However, challenges remain, including divergent procurement timelines, US ITAR restrictions on technology sharing and mismatched industrial scales. Despite these hurdles, the focus on co-creation is vital for reducing dependence on external suppliers.

### **Recommendations**

To ensure India-Australia partnership remains a credible deterrent, several strategic and operational steps are recommended: -

**Reciprocal Operational Access.** Move beyond logistics support towards permanent operational base access with pre-positioned maintenance equipment and personnel.

- Pre-positioning maintenance equipment and personnel.
- Setup joint logistics hubs in Indian and Australian islands, as well as the Pacific Islands.

**Pacific Islands Capacity Building.** Support Australian initiatives in the Pacific by providing military equipment, training teams and HADR support.

- Setup joint training centres in partner nations.

- Joint scholarship programs for Pacific Island officers.

***Crisis Response Coordination Mechanisms.*** Develop joint contingency plans for regional scenarios including HADR and Non-Combatant Evacuation operations.

- Pre-positioning of HADR items in forward areas.
- Annual HADR exercises with Pacific Island nations.

***Space Situational Awareness.*** Consolidate existing space cooperation to include future space-based surveillance.

- **Collaboration in Positioning, Navigation and Timing (PNT) resilience.**
- **Joint research in counter-space technologies.**

***Enhanced Service Coordination.***

- **AUSINDEX** to include full carrier battle group operations.
- Service RAN vessels in India to enhance maritime sustenance.
- **Upscale AUSTRAHIND** to battalion-level manoeuvres incorporating joint fires, logistics sustainment, and command & control integration.
- Exploit geographical peculiarities for enhanced operational benefits viz. mechanised warfare, urban/ semi-urban warfare, engineering cooperation and Special Forces interoperability.
- The Indian Navy participation in Australia led Exercise 'Black Carillon' (PIB, 2023).
- The Indian Army participation in Exercise 'Puk Puk' to enhance footprint in Pacific Islands region.
- Participate in Exercise 'Talisman Sabre' with adequate units and personnel commensurate to enhance India - Australia bilateral relations.
- Bring countries with greater regional influence (Indonesia, Singapore, Japan and South Korea) onboard for service specific trilateral exercises with India and Australia.
- Establish bilateral intelligence sharing platform (other than CENTRIX) and enhance sharing of operational information.
- Establish a tri-service intelligence fusion centre for Common Operational Plot and include SIGINT, HUMINT, GEOINT and joint analysis cells.
- Sharing of operational lessons.

- Conduct tri-Services cyber exercises focusing on both offensive and defensive operations.

***Industrial Roadmap.*** A formal ‘Defence Industry Cooperation Roadmap’ could include:

- Leverage Australia's Guided Weapons and Explosive Ordnance Enterprise and India's artillery production ecosystem (Dhanush, ATAGS, K-9 Vajra, Pinaka MBRL) to co-develop and co-produce precision munitions.
- Co-production of 155 mm precision ammunition for cost effective precision strike capabilities.
- Priority programs for integration of precision guidance kits with ammunition, rockets and missiles adapted for use by military platforms of both countries.
- Collaboration in the field of unmanned systems (UAS and C-UAS) for co-development.
- Cooperation in development of Remotely Operated Vehicles (ROVs) and Autonomous Underwater Vehicles (AUVs).
- Cooperation in the field of ship construction.
- Research and development of hypersonic weapons and Directed Energy Weapons (DEWs).
- Research and development of customised simulators.
- Cooperation in AI and cyber, and co-development and production of EW equipment.
- Critical Minerals Program expansion for future military applications with military specific selective stockpiling and supply chain routes.

***Training/ Think Tank Exchanges***

- Exchange of faculties between relevant military institutions.
- Formalise interaction between Think Tanks to enhance research and dialogues.
- Establish alumni connect as long term cultural investment.

***Mitigation Strategies***

To overcome existing barriers, both nations must proactively address technology transfer restrictions. This involves negotiating with the US for specific ITAR exemptions for India-Australia projects. It is also essential to maintain a clear distinction between operational cooperation and formal political-military commitments to preserve **strategic autonomy**.

## Conclusion

The India-Australia partnership demonstrates that military cooperation is the primary engine driving the broader bilateral relationship. In just six years since the CSP was announced, the two nations have moved from basic dialogue to operational integration, encompassing logistics access, air refueling and intelligence sharing.

While no single nation can counter the rise of China alone, this partnership offers a model that combines complementary strengths while preserving national sovereignty. Unlike traditional alliances, this **flexible model of networked autonomy** allows for deep coordination based on aligned interests. As the Indo-Pacific faces its most critical decade, the India-Australia partnership stands as a vital pillar for maintaining regional independence and ensuring that middle powers can collectively shape a secure and stable future.

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