
The India-Australia Security and Defence Relationship: Developments, Constraints and Prospects

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In coming years, India is likely to become one of Australia's most important partners in the region. This article explores how the security and defence relationship has developed in recent times. It discusses challenges in the relationship before exploring potential areas for enhanced security and defence cooperation. It argues that if Australia wishes to be successful in its objectives of promoting greater cooperation with India, it will need to move in a consistent and sustained manner with a time horizon considerably longer than it is generally used to. In some cases, Australia may also need to move past any immediate expectations of the reciprocity that would be expected in developing security partnerships with most countries.

In coming years, India is likely to become one of Australia's most important partners in the region. The rise of India will make it one of Australia's most important economic relationships and a key diplomatic collaborator. There are also growing expectations that India will take greater responsibility for regional security.

While they share many institutions and values, India and Australia have long operated in largely separate strategic spheres. But these spheres are converging. The two countries now share many security concerns, including the growing impact of China on the strategic environment. Australia has recognised India as an important new strategic partner. India too is beginning to see Australia as one of several new security partners in the Indo-Pacific.

Part 1 of this article provides an overview of recent developments in the relationship and the challenges faced in developing a security and defence partnership. Part 2 then explores in detail the many potential areas for enhanced cooperation between them, while Part 3 includes observations on prospects for the relationship.¹ The article concludes that if Australia wishes to enhance its security and defence relationship with India, it must be prepared to act outside its comfort zone. In many ways, India represents a *sui generis* case in Australia's regional relationships, certainly in the degree

¹ Much of this article is based on confidential interviews conducted by the author in 2013 with serving and retired military officers, diplomats, government officials, corporate executives and analysts in India and Australia.

of caution it exhibits in relation to security and defence cooperation with other countries. This represents a considerable challenge for Australia in developing an effective model for engagement with India. Policy-makers must accept that Australia will need to move in a consistent and sustained manner with India, with a time horizon considerably longer than it is generally used to.

1. Developments in the Strategic Relationship—and Challenges

For most of their history as independent states the political and strategic relationship between India and Australia has not been close: bilateral relations have often been characterised by long periods of indifference interspersed with occasional political irritations. During the Cold War and for some time after, India was preoccupied with its immediate security problems in South Asia, while Australia traditionally focused on security concerns in East Asia and the Pacific. Australia rarely figured in New Delhi's security calculations except as a US stooge. Canberra considered India as difficult to deal with, anti-American, and too close to the Soviets.²

But Australia and India's spheres of strategic interest are now converging and their strategic interests are coming into much greater alignment. The emergence of both China and India as major powers with strategic interests across the Indo-Pacific is bringing India and Australia closer together and forcing them to engage on security and defence issues much more than ever before. Two factors, in particular, have been important in overcoming previous constraints on the relationship. The first is India's limited strategic rapprochement with the United States over the last decade or so. The distance of the India-US relationship had previously caused both India and Australia to look at each other with faint suspicion. This roadblock is now much diminished. The second is shared concerns about the rise of China, although as will be discussed later, India and Australia hold mildly different perspectives on the issue. But, importantly, certainly from Canberra's perspective, the US and China factors should not be seen as overshadowing the many other reasons for the closer bilateral engagement between Australia and India.

Over the last decade or so, Australia has pursued the relationship with considerable enthusiasm. This has led to a series of bilateral agreements that provide a formal basis for cooperation on security and defence-related matters. This included a Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation in 2009. This established a framework for further cooperation in security matters and provides for the formalisation of regular consultations and dialogues between foreign ministers, military and diplomatic representatives, and joint working

² For a history of the strategic relationship, see David Brewster, *India as an Asia Pacific Power* (London: Routledge, 2012).

groups on maritime security operations and counter-terrorism and immigration.³ India has made analogous declarations only with the United States and Japan.

Over the last decade or so, regular bilateral dialogues have significantly expanded opportunities for engagement on security and defence. These include annual meetings of Australian and Indian Foreign Ministers, regular meetings of Defence Ministers, annual Defence Policy Talks at senior official level, regular visits of Service Chiefs and regular staff talks between senior officers of the three services. But these dialogues, as important as they are, have so far yielded few concrete results. Many observers do not consider that they yet have a great deal of substance and engagement at an operational or tactical level remains extremely thin. Indeed, despite much rhetoric, the road towards a closer security partnership is likely to be a slow and frustrating one for its proponents.

To a considerable extent this reflects differences in historical experience and cultures of India and Australia. While these differences have been narrowing in recent years, they continue to have significant effect on the dynamics of the relationship and will likely continue to do so for many years to come. Some of these challenges include differences in strategic traditions; differences in decision-making processes; and perspectives on China and Pakistan.

DIFFERENCES IN STRATEGIC TRADITIONS

Through their history as independent states, India and Australia have developed different strategic traditions and attitudes towards security cooperation, and this remains a significant issue in their engagement today. In short, Australia sees security alignments and cooperation as an important means of *enhancing* its influence while many in New Delhi effectively see cooperation as *reducing* India's influence and inconsistent with a national objective of achieving 'strategic autonomy'. This objective is often seen as being closely linked with India's aspirations to become a great power. Though rarely defined, it has a strong resonance in Indian strategic thinking, just as the idea of 'non-alignment' was an ideological touchstone during the Cold War. This differs significantly from Australia's strategic view of the world. Indeed, strategic autonomy should be seen as part of India's 'national DNA', just as strategic collaboration is part of Australia's.

The idea of strategic autonomy leads many among the Indian elite to have strong instincts against security cooperation with other states, except under the clear banner of the United Nations. For many, security cooperation, particularly on operational matters, carries the taint that India's strategic

³ For a detailed discussion of the Australia-India Security Declaration, see David Brewster, 'The Australia-India Security Declaration: the Quadrilateral redux?', *Security Challenges*, vol. 6, no. 1 (Autumn 2010), pp. 1-9.

autonomy will be undermined.⁴ These concerns are intensified in relation to the United States, which many in Delhi still see as having hidden motives with respect to India. For this reason, Australia has been relatively careful in keeping its defence and security engagement with India on a bilateral basis and not simply trying to piggy-back on the United States.

These suspicions about security cooperation *per se* tend to be more muted in the Indian Navy. In comparison to the other services and many defence bureaucrats, the Indian Navy has a more international outlook that reflects the global perspectives it inherited from the Royal Navy and the fact that it often operates far from India's shores, frequently in (informal) cooperation with other navies. Over the last two decades, the Indian Navy has been at the forefront of pushing for cooperation with other regional navies and it takes what initiatives it can within the strictures imposed by the Indian Ministry of Defence (MoD) and the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).

Some in New Delhi also question whether there is any real need for India to cooperate with others, believing that India, as a rising power, should be able to 'go it alone' in expanding its regional security role as part of an overall objective of achieving strategic autonomy. Why should India tie itself down in engagements with other powers? As one mid-ranking Indian naval officer commented, "Why would a growing power like India want to cooperate with a declining power like Australia?" This is compounded by the view of some in New Delhi (one that is admittedly waning) that Australia is not an 'independent' strategic actor due to its relationship with the United States. More sophisticated Indian interlocutors with Australia have a good understanding of the complexities of Australia's strategic perspectives beyond the US alliance, but the US alliance still remains a material factor in Indian thinking about Australia.

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES ON THE ROLE OF DEFENCE RELATIONSHIPS

Another major challenge in developing the relationship is the very different perspectives on the role and importance of defence relationships as part of foreign policy. Australia sees its defence forces as playing an important foreign policy role. As the 2013 Defence White Paper states: "Australia's international defence engagement is a critical component of the Government's approach to managing the strategic transformation occurring in our region."⁵ For decades Australia has made significant investments in

⁴ For example, Indian Defence Minister A. K. Antony commented that there were no prospects of Indian and US forces ever operating together and senior defence ministry officials have completely ruled out actual joint operations with the United States because they are tantamount to becoming part of a military alliance. Sourabh Gupta, 'US-India Defence Ties: The Limits to Interoperability', *East Asia Forum*, 31 July 2011.

⁵ Commonwealth of Australia, *Defence White Paper 2013* (Canberra: Department of Defence, 2013), p. 55.

the development of defence forces of regional partners through defence training and cooperation.⁶

In contrast, India has a narrower view of the role of its armed forces, including the role of defence force relations with other countries. New Delhi does not see the Indian armed forces as being a principal foreign policy actor. The Indian bureaucracy keeps a tight reign over the defence forces, seeing them as fulfilling only a narrow military role, and although many senior Indian military officers see the benefit of greater contact with their foreign counterparts, they face considerable bureaucratic and political constraints.⁷ The Indian Defence Minister A. K. Antony has also limited the amount of contact between the Indian and foreign officers, especially with the United States and its allies, apparently from concerns that Indian officers may become tainted by Western perspectives.⁸ The Indian Navy has been permitted (or has carved out for itself) a relatively greater measure of freedom in dealing with foreign counterparts—usually on the basis that such interactions take place well out of sight of New Delhi.

But this is not just a bureaucratic issue. Keeping its defence relationships within tight parameters is consistent with India's policy of 'poly-alignment' with many different counterparts. For example, although it has a close security relationship with Israel in defence technology and intelligence, India keeps the relationship within certain bounds to allow it to continue to have friendly relations with Iran and other countries in West Asia.

These differences in perspectives of the role of defence forces in foreign relations are reflected in the differences in resources committed to foreign liaison. Despite India's huge military establishment, the Defence Protocol and Foreign Liaison Division, the defence diplomacy group within the Indian MoD, is staffed with merely half a dozen officers. In contrast, Australia's main defence diplomacy group, the International Policy Division of the Australian Department of Defence (DoD), has a staff of around fifty, which is in addition to the foreign liaison groups operated by the individual armed services. As a result, the Indian MoD is often overwhelmed by requests from many states wishing to interact with India, many of whom are of more immediate importance to New Delhi than Australia.

⁶ See generally, Sam Bateman, Anthony Bergin and Hayley Channer, *Terms of Engagement: Australia's Regional Defence Diplomacy*, ASPI Strategy Series (Canberra: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 18 July 2013), p. 9.

⁷ See generally, Stephen P. Cohen and Sunil Dasgupta, *Arming without Aiming: India's Military Modernisation* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2010).

⁸ Sandeep Unnithan, 'Lone Dissenter; Antony Reins in Military Ties with the US and Emerges as the Lone Dissenter in the Government', *India Today*, 18 April 2011.

DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

One of the biggest causes of frustration for those tasked with developing the relationship is the differences in political and bureaucratic decision-making processes and style.

As noted above, the Australian armed forces have quite a deal of latitude in engaging with foreign counterparts as a way of encouraging cooperation and extending Australia's influence. In contrast, the Indian armed forces operate under the tight control of the civilian bureaucracy in the MoD. On top of this is the additional requirement that the Indian MoD itself must also obtain clearance from the Indian MEA for its foreign liaison activities (for example, in arranging foreign visits by senior officers), which places yet another level of bureaucratic constraints on India's activities.

Australian interlocutors report considerable frustrations in dealing with the Indian bureaucracy which often springs from differences in the way they work. The implementation of initiatives believed to have been previously agreed are frequently blocked or delayed by the Indian bureaucracy for no discernible reason. These reports are by no means specific to Australia and are consistent with the experiences of many foreigners in dealing with New Delhi. Indian bureaucracy also has a strong tendency towards inertia, being sprinkled with power centres that have power to veto initiatives but little incentive to approve them. Indian bureaucratic decision-making in general also tends to be *ad hoc*, with only broad guidelines set by the political leadership, giving bureaucrats considerable scope to implement (or not) decisions. This gives bureaucrat decision-makers considerable power to prevent the implementation of initiatives even when they have received in-principle approval at the political level. However, it is equally true that the latitude allowed to Indian bureaucrats means that they can sometimes move fast to implement measures they approve of. Interlocutors require the skill (or luck) to encounter the latter and not the former.

Australian policy-makers and officials have decades of experience of dealing with their counterparts in East Asia and have become more culturally acclimatised to developing security relationships in that region. But they clearly are still learning how to work around the Indian bureaucratic system—including how to make contact with the bureaucracy at the right level. As one senior Indian naval officer commented, one must engage at a level where a bureaucrat will have time and interest in the relevant matter. It is not a question of trying to go as high as possible in the hierarchy, because if you try to engage at too high a level “you will get jammed”.

On top of these bureaucratic differences, there is a basic difference in how foreign policy is formed. In general, the Indian foreign policy decision-making process is highly reactive, and Delhi often only takes action in the face of a crisis—and there is simply no immediate security crisis that requires cooperation between India and Australia.

PERSPECTIVES ON CHINA

Mutual concerns about China are also an important factor in the relationship, although differences in perceptions can sometimes cause problems. China is a major factor in India's strategic calculations, including numerous claims about China's so-called 'String of Pearls' strategy to develop a naval presence in the Indian Ocean. Decision-makers in New Delhi may not wholly believe these claims, but they do reflect a visceral concern that China wants to restrict India's freedom of action in the Indian Ocean. In contrast, Australian analysts tend to be more understanding of China's interests in protecting its trading routes in the Indian Ocean and treat claims about Strings of Pearls with a degree of scepticism.⁹

Despite these differences, there can be little doubt that China plays an important role in the India-Australia relationship. Among other things, both India and Australia want to be in a position to signal to China that they have options in terms of forming regional security partnerships if China becomes overly assertive in the Indian Ocean or Southeast Asia. As one former Indian diplomat put it: "What can India and Australia do together that will send the right signals to China?"

PERSPECTIVES ON PAKISTAN

There are also differences in perspectives towards Pakistan, although these are currently being managed reasonably well. In the years after the Cold War, there was talk of other states 'de-hyphenating' or 'de-linking' their relationships with India and Pakistan. In fact, over the last decade, Canberra has largely de-linked India and Pakistan in its strategic thinking. Canberra now clearly recognises that India is an important economic and security partner, and a net security provider to the region, while Pakistan is considered by many in Canberra as a significant threat to regional stability and a potential failed state.

Nevertheless, despite the 'de-hyphenation' Australia's relationship with Pakistan could still be somewhat of a drag on the relationship with India. Australia has a security relationship with Pakistan dating back to the Cold War. Australia's military presence in Afghanistan and its focus on counterterrorism in recent years has caused the engagement to grow further, and Australia now provides considerable assistance in training of the Pakistan army. However, Canberra may come to the view that the drawdown of Australia's military commitment in Afghanistan provides an opportunity to downgrade its defence engagement with Pakistan.

⁹ See, for example, Andrew Selth, *Chinese Military Bases in Burma: The Explosion of a Myth*, Regional Outlook Paper No. 10 (Brisbane: Griffith University, 2007).

2. Opportunities for Security and Defence Cooperation

Although there are considerable challenges in developing the relationship these are more than offset by the possible opportunities. This section examines potential areas for enhanced cooperation between India and Australia, such as:

- security dialogues;
- cooperation in Indian Ocean regional institutions;
- cooperation in other international groupings;
- people-to-people contacts;
- naval exercises and training;
- humanitarian and disaster relief/search and rescue;
- maritime piracy;
- maritime border protection and maritime domain awareness;
- cooperation between other military services;
- defence technology cooperation; and
- Antarctic research.

While there are many potential opportunities, Australia needs to act strategically in proposing areas of cooperation that fit well with India's strategic perspectives and traditions and do not push political hot buttons. Australia should not simply try to replicate defence engagement programs that it has used with other neighbours.

SECURITY DIALOGUES

As previously discussed, over the last few years Australia and India have established a number of regular bilateral security dialogues or engagements. Even if these are frequently more form than substance, they represent a big step forward compared with the previous level of engagement. Canberra's current approach is to regularise these engagements and avoid pushing too hard to give them substance. It is assumed that they will gain more substance over time as a relationship of trust is developed, although some observers still have their doubts about this.

One priority for Australia should be to expand these dialogues to include other partners. An important missed opportunity in this respect was the so-called Quadrilateral Security Dialogue among Japan, the United States, India

and Australia which was proposed by Japan in 2007. However, although Australia participated in some initial consultations, it later publicly backed away from the proposal, causing considerable damage to Australia's credibility in New Delhi. Although India too backed away from the Quadrilateral, it was the manner in which Australia acted that caused lasting damage to its reputation. India now participates in a Trilateral Security Dialogue with the United States and Japan at the sub-secretary level. The establishment of an analogous dialogue involving India, Australia, and the United States would represent a significant step forward in the relationship. Although New Delhi has resisted Australian proposals to establish such a dialogue, this view may change after the forthcoming Indian general elections.

Both Australia and India also see considerable benefit in working together to draw Indonesia into greater diplomatic and security cooperation in the region. India, Australia, and Indonesia are the past, current, and incoming chairs of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA),¹⁰ while Australia and Indonesia are respectively the current and incoming chairs of Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS). This creates practical opportunities for more dialogue among this 'troika'. In September 2013, the first track 2 Trilateral Indian Ocean Dialogue among India-Australia-Indonesia was held in New Delhi and there are plans for further such dialogues in 2014. Regular dialogues would represent an important acknowledgement by the three countries of their common interests in regional security.

COOPERATION WITHIN INDIAN OCEAN REGIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Unlike East Asia, where an alphabet soup of institutions provides numerous forums for dialogue and cooperation, the Indian Ocean region is thin on pan-regional groupings. This reflects the great diversity of states within the region and, indeed, the lack of any real understanding that the Indian Ocean constitutes a region at all.

The two pan-Indian Ocean groupings of any significance are IORA and IONS, the latter of which is a forum for interaction between regional navies based on the model of the Western Pacific Naval Symposium. While these groupings are likely to provide only limited scope for region-wide cooperation, they are both becoming useful loci of bilateral cooperation between India and Australia.

IORA was established in 1997 with the principal aim of promoting regional trade, but has had few concrete achievements since that time. Over the last few years, Australia and India have both attempted to revive interest in the grouping. Australia assumed the chair from India in November 2013. In 2011, India and Australia worked together to bring maritime security-related issues onto IORA's agenda for the first time. Despite these developments, it

¹⁰ Previously called the Indian Ocean Rim—Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC).

is unlikely that IORA will become a significant actor in regional security any time soon. Its role is likely to be limited to a useful talk-shop for littoral states on 'soft' maritime security issues, although that in itself is a major step forward from the current position. IORA could however potentially act as an umbrella grouping to encourage the implementation of security initiatives among members on a sub-regional basis (for example, among India, Australia, and Indonesia in the eastern Indian Ocean).

IONS is the only pan-Indian Ocean grouping of states that has a significant security element. The grouping, which was established in 2008 under the sponsorship of the Indian Navy, involves a biennial meeting of navy chiefs with the objective of encouraging an exchange of perspectives on a relatively informal basis. IONS includes the navies of all the littoral states of the Indian Ocean. Although the majority of navies in the Indian Ocean have severely limited capabilities and function as little more than coastguards, IONS still represents a potentially important forum for the exchange of perspectives on maritime security. It also represents a potential platform through which countries like India and Australia can take small steps towards common perspectives on security issues and even on operationalising cooperation on such matters as maritime domain awareness. As the chair of IONS Australia now has an opportunity to breathe more life into the grouping, particularly in encouraging greater cooperation between Australia, India, and ASEAN states.

COOPERATION IN OTHER INTERNATIONAL SECURITY GROUPINGS

There may also be scope for India-Australia cooperation on security issues at a global level, including within various non-proliferation regimes. These include the Australia Group (a grouping of some forty-one states and international organisations that collaborate to prevent the abuse of dual-use technology and materials for chemical and biological weapons programmes), the Nuclear Supplier Group (suppliers of nuclear materials and technology), the Missile Technology Control Regime (relating to the proliferation of missile technologies) and the Wassenaar Arrangement (aimed at non-proliferation of conventional arms and dual use goods). Australia is chair of the Australia Group and an active member of the other regimes. India is currently not a member of any of these groupings, which represents a significant anomaly in the international arms control system.

In 2010, President Barack Obama signalled US support for bringing India into the various export control regimes. Rory Medcalf of the Lowy Institute argues that Australia's role in the Australia Group can give it some leverage to assist India. The Australia Group may be a logical place to begin India's formal entry into the global export control network, because it is not connected to any residual sensitivities about nuclear issues. Given India's massive chemical industry and the growing biotechnology sector, the absence of India from the export control regime is unsustainable. Australian assistance in the Australia Group could also help to overcome any remaining

misperceptions in New Delhi that Australia does not trust India on non-proliferation.¹¹ But, as one report noted, building a consensus in favour of Indian membership in any of these regimes will take time.

The participation by India in such groups may also require changes in New Delhi's attitudes towards such regimes. India has long opposed the international nuclear non-proliferation system, which it argued unfairly discriminated against it. India also opposed other export control regimes based on the argument that they were part of a western policy of denying technology to India and other developing countries. India's current position, that it should be granted entry into all international export control regimes simultaneously, is likely to significantly delay any progress in this area, particularly in light of the large and varied membership of each of the groupings.

PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE CONSULTATIONS AND EXCHANGES

People-to-people networks will be an extremely important factor in developing the India-Australia security and defence relationship. The development of personal relationships and experiences of policy-makers, military officers, and civilians in the security community can provide sorely-needed glue in the bilateral relationship. It is in Australia's interests to encourage a better understanding of different strategic perspectives and political and bureaucratic processes, which are important drivers in what India does (or more frequently does not do) in its security relations.

Both the Indian and Australian armed forces (and in particular the navies) would, as a matter of principle, likely welcome initiatives that give greater access to training opportunities with their counterparts. However, creating such opportunities will require overcoming bureaucratic inertia, especially on the Indian side. As discussed, India allocates considerably less resources to defence cooperation than Australia, and it is overwhelmed by suitors that wish to engage with it.

There are currently regular exchanges of mid-level and senior officers between Indian and Australian military colleges. India offers one position each year for a mid-level Australian officer at its Defence Services Staff College, and most years it also offers one position for a senior Australian officer at the National Defence College (which is relatively significant given that only four positions are offered annually to western countries).

Currently, two positions are offered annually to Indian officers at the Australian Defence College (ADC): one at the Australian Command and

¹¹ Lisa Curtis, Walter Lohman, Rory Medcalf, Lydia Powell, Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan and Andrew Shearer, 'Shared Goals, Converging Interests: A Plan for U.S.-Australia-India Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific', The Heritage Foundation, Lowy Institute and Observer Research Foundation, 3 November 2011.

Staff College (out of forty-five positions for foreign officers) and one at the Centre for Defence and Strategic Studies (out of twenty-three positions offered to foreigners). However, there are no Indian officer cadets attending the Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA) (out of approximately forty foreign cadets). There are also no Indian instructors at the ADC or ADFA (out of around ten foreign instructors currently at those institutions). There is clearly significant room to expand the Indian presence at Australian military training institutions, but probably less scope in practice for the placement of more Australian officers at Indian institutions. Person-to-person contacts can also be encouraged through exchanges of technical instructors or the provision of small training teams.

Importantly, the building of personal relationships must occur on both the military and civilian sides in the security community. This can include exchanges of civilian analysts and commentators between quality civilian think tanks and academic institutions focusing on security-related issues. The objective would be to promote public discussion and analysis of the relationship as part of the policy-making process.

NAVAL EXERCISES AND TRAINING

The principal point of contact between the Indian and Australian armed forces is between the navies. This reflects their shared interests in maritime security in the Indian Ocean, as well as the physical fact that navies commonly operate far from their home territories, frequently in contact with other navies. The Indian Navy has been the most active of any of the Indian armed services in pursuing defence diplomacy throughout the Indo-Pacific region. It currently conducts regular exercises with the navies of the United States, United Kingdom, France, Russia, Singapore, South Africa, and Brazil, but not with the Royal Australian Navy.

In many ways, military exercises are the 'pointy end' of defence cooperation. They provide an important forum for militaries to interact, learn from each other, and develop inter-operability, but they are also an important symbol of a broader strategic relationship.

Currently, the RAN and the Indian Navy conduct irregular passing exercises (or 'PASSEXes'), mostly while Australian ships are on passage to and from deployment to the Persian Gulf. Repeated requests by Australia for regular bilateral exercises have met with bureaucratic resistance in New Delhi, but during the June 2013 visit of Indian Defence Minister A. K. Antony to Australia, bilateral maritime exercises beginning in 2015 were announced.

The ability of the Indian Navy to engage in regular exercises with other navies is constrained by the Indian MoD, which has an unofficial policy against the Indian Navy's participation in multilateral exercises. This policy arose following Exercise *Malabar 07*, when the annual India-US naval exercises were expanded to include vessels from Australia, Japan, and

Singapore. The exercise caused significant political backlash from Indian nationalists and leftists, who claimed that it signified a military alliance with the United States and/or a containment policy against China. The avoidance of multilateral exercises means that the Indian Navy is stretched by the number of bilateral exercises it undertakes.

PASSEXes: Australia can certainly give more attention to the opportunities for PASSEXes, which have less impact on the Indian Navy's resources. PASSEXes—perhaps even including multiple vessels—represent a politically non-controversial way of increasing the frequency of interactions between Australian and Indian vessels. One senior serving Indian flag officer remarked that the RAN may not be taking full advantage of opportunities for more substantial PASSEXes while on passage to and from the Persian Gulf area. There was a perception that the RAN may be more interested in R&R or in getting home, than in exercising with the Indian Navy. However, it is more likely that the RAN vessels were time-constrained by their scheduled dates of return to Australia which are very difficult to change. Pushing for extended PASSEXes will therefore require a political decision in Canberra to reduce deployment time in the Persian Gulf area and spend more time in transit, including in visits to India.

Regular bilateral naval exercises: In June 2013, the Indian Defence Minister agreed to commence regular bilateral naval exercises by 2015. Holding such exercises alternatively in the Bay of Bengal and off Fremantle would facilitate the inclusion of an Anti-Submarine Warfare element in the exercises, which may be attractive to the Indian Navy. A possible alternative could be to hold exercises out of India's Andaman Islands, which may permit the Indian Navy to commit greater resources while also fitting with the RAN's regular visits to Singapore and Malaysia. It would also underline India's and Australia's common interests in ensuring freedom of navigation through the Strait of Malacca.

Multilateral naval exercises: Although the Indian Navy would, in principle, also welcome the opportunity for multilateral exercises involving the RAN, it may find it difficult to participate in the Australian-hosted Exercise *Kakadu*. A senior serving Indian flag officer commented that the Indian Navy had previously received in principle approval from the MoD to participate in *Kakadu* and had made preparations to do so, but at the last moment was blocked by the MoD apparently on the grounds of cost. This may change in coming years. In the longer term there may also be potential for trilateral naval exercises involving India, Australia, and other key Indian Ocean partners such as Indonesia, Singapore or South Africa, focusing on Humanitarian and Disaster Relief (HADR) and/or Search and Rescue (SAR). New Delhi may see the involvement of other non-western states in addition to Australia as easing potential political concerns.

Amphibious capabilities: Amphibious capabilities are currently a major focus for both India and Australia and could potentially provide an important area of specialisation in the India-Australia defence relationship. In the longer term, amphibious exercises focused on HADR and Non-combatant Evacuation Operations (NEOs) could become a focus in the naval relationship, as well as potentially creating opportunities for enhanced interaction between the respective armies and air forces.

Submarine escape training: Submarine escape training presents another opportunity. The RAN's Submarine Escape Training facility in Fremantle is one of only a handful of such facilities in the world. Australia has recently agreed to give the Indonesian Navy access to the facility and the RAN could also offer use of the facility to the Indian Navy. This would be an opportunity to develop closer ties between the Indian and Australian submarine forces, which are the largest and most advanced among Indian Ocean states.

HUMANITARIAN AND DISASTER RELIEF/SEARCH AND RESCUE

HADR and SAR operations are likely to play an ever more important part in naval operations, both as a response to domestic political expectations and as a function of soft power. As discussed below, many saw the Indian Navy's HADR response to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami as a game-changer in its thinking about the importance of amphibious capabilities as has India's more recent NEO operations in Lebanon and Libya.

HADR and SAR are commonly-cited areas for cooperation between navies and related services without the political controversy in India that often accompanies defence cooperation with western states. While HADR and SAR sit at the 'soft' end of the spectrum of security cooperation, they can be useful fields in which to develop personal relationships and inter-operability as well as providing an opportunity to generate significant goodwill.

India's work with Australia, the United States and Japan in the multilateral naval response effort to the 2004 Tsunami is often seen as a major turning point in Indian understanding of the potential benefits of cooperation with other maritime democracies in the Indo-Pacific. Cooperation between the four navies led directly to the 2007 proposals for a Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, discussed above. The episode was an important lesson in the potentially broader strategic consequences of cooperation in HADR.

There is potential for Australia, India and other Indian Ocean partners to work together in a number of ways. Australia and Indonesia have established a joint Facility for Disaster Reduction (AIFDR) and there is potential for India to be included in similar arrangements. India and Australia could also sponsor the development of a system for responding to natural disasters in the Indian Ocean region similar to the FRANZ trilateral

cooperation arrangement in the South Pacific.¹² Under the FRANZ arrangement, Australia, France, and New Zealand exchange information to ensure the best use of their assets and other resources for relief operations after cyclones and other natural disasters. The arrangement also provides for disaster relief coordination engaging aid and defence elements from all three countries. Overall, cooperation between India and Australia in disaster relief could yield considerable benefits for relatively little cost.

MARITIME PIRACY

In coming years, India and Australia will be expected to shoulder an increasing burden of responsibilities for Indian Ocean maritime security in relation to non-state actors. This includes responding to piracy, maritime terrorism, smuggling, people trafficking, and illegal fishing.

Piracy in and around the Strait of Malacca was previously a matter of concern but this is now much reduced. Concerns about piracy have largely shifted to the western Indian Ocean. Australia contributes to international efforts to fight piracy and maritime terrorism in the northwest Indian Ocean through participation in the Combined Military Forces in Combined Task Forces 150 and 151 and India undertakes anti-piracy operations in the region by itself. While there may be potential for the RAN and Indian Navy to coordinate their efforts in the northeast Indian Ocean, the Indian Navy appears to be content with its current efforts and sees no pressing need to change them. In any event, incidents of piracy in the northwest Indian Ocean have dropped considerably in recent times and feelings of 'crisis' have receded.

A more ambitious initiative could involve the promotion of a Memorandum of Understanding on Piracy among Indian Ocean littoral states and other interested states to set out agreed zones of responsibility in relation to piracy. This might make anti-piracy efforts more efficient, but would probably require a significant political commitment from New Delhi.

MARITIME BORDER PROTECTION AND MARITIME DOMAIN AWARENESS

The protection of India's maritime borders from terrorists and other illegal arrivals has become a major Indian security concern in recent years, particularly since the 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai when Pakistani-based terrorists infiltrated the city from the sea. Maritime border protection has also become a major security focus for Australia.

The distances across the Indian Ocean makes tracking of vessels and aircraft (both military and civil) in this space a very difficult task and currently

¹² 'Workshop Report: Strategic Objectives of the United States in the Indian Ocean Region', Future Directions International, 29 September 2011, <<http://www.futuredirections.org.au/publications/workshop-papers/248-strategic-objectives-of-the-united-states-in-the-indian-ocean-region.html>> [Accessed 14 March 2014].

beyond the resources of any single country. This makes maritime domain awareness a ripe area for cooperation and an opportunity to build ongoing relationships between the services. India has made major investments in its *maritime* intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities, in recent years. Australia already has considerable maritime ISR capabilities throughout the eastern Indian Ocean in areas that abut or overlap with areas of strategic interest to India, including operating AP-3C Orion aircraft through Malaysia's Butterworth Air Base. In coming years, both India and Australia will acquire Boeing P-8 maritime aircraft as the backbone of their maritime ISR capabilities; both are also considering acquiring Global Hawk UAVs or their maritime equivalents. These common platforms and sensors may create opportunities for cooperation in training and maintenance.

The Indian Navy has expressed interest in working with Australia in shipping identification including the Australian Maritime Identification System. While both India and Australia already have access to shared information about so-called 'white' shipping (merchant vessels), it would be a significant step to extend information-sharing arrangements to so-called 'grey' or 'red' shipping. There are also opportunities for cooperation between India, Australia and key security partners in Southeast Asia (such as Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia) in enhancing maritime domain awareness in the eastern Indian Ocean, the Indonesian archipelago, and the South China Sea. It has, for example, been suggested that India and Australia could jointly sponsor a regional maritime domain partnership, which would involve collaboration with Southeast Asian states in intelligence sharing, maritime domain awareness and coordinated patrolling.¹³

COOPERATION BETWEEN OTHER MILITARY SERVICES

The potential for cooperation between the Indian and Australian air forces and armies are somewhat more limited than in the maritime space, although opportunities do exist.

For much of their history, the Indian Air Force (IAF) and RAAF used quite different equipment which, apart from political factors, has reduced the scope for cooperation. However, many common platforms are now being operated or are in the process of being acquired by the IAF and RAAF. This currently includes Hawk trainers (which are manufactured under licence in India), C-17 Globemaster and C-130 Hercules transport aircraft, and will soon also include P-8 Poseidon aircraft, A330 multi role tanker transports, and CH-47F Chinook heavy lift helicopters. These common platforms provide opportunities for shared training, maintenance, and in the longer term, even exercises. According to one Australian observer, Australia's and India's interests in operating common air force platforms might place the relationship on a different footing compared with some other defence

¹³ Commander Shishir Upadhyaya, 'India and Australia Relations: Scope for Naval Cooperation', *National Maritime Foundation*, 4 December 2009.

partners of India, who are sometimes seen as using cooperation as a way of showcasing potential equipment sales to India. Australia has no vested interests in this respect.

For its part, the RAAF sees considerable benefits from greater interaction with the IAF, including gaining the benefit of the IAF's perspectives on doctrine, war fighting and the operation of common platforms. This would provide the RAAF with access to different ways of thinking as compared with the United States. The RAAF may also be interested in the IAF's particular experience in areas such as high altitude flying (which the IAF frequently practises in the Himalayas) and flight safety. The RAAF has suggested implementing greater cooperation with the IAF through the establishment of 'sister' relationships between squadrons that operate common platforms. This could provide a structure for reciprocal visits and personal relationships.

There is potential for bilateral air exercises in the longer term. The IAF has previously provided observers to Exercise *Pitch Black*, which is Australia's leading multilateral air force exercise, involving participants such as the United States, Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia. In the future, there may be scope to expand the IAF's role to participate in the International Planning Group element in Exercise *Pitch Black*. Although bilateral exercises are not currently being considered, there may be long-term potential for bilateral exercises in the relatively non-controversial areas of HADR/SAR, with a focus on the shared maritime domain. In addition, given that India's maritime surveillance capabilities are largely operated through the Indian Naval Air Arm, it may make sense for the RAAF to give greater focus to developing a direct relationship with the Indian Navy.

Opportunities for cooperation between the Indian and Australian armies may be more limited. The two armies are quite different in some ways. The Australian Army is relatively small and largely structured as an expeditionary force, while the Indian Army is a large standing force focused on border defence and internal security. These differences in structure and missions may limit opportunities for exercises. Nevertheless, there may be opportunities for specialised cooperation, for example, in training for high altitude or amphibious operations.

Their shared histories of service can also be celebrated. Australian and Indian soldiers have fought alongside each other in numerous conflicts, including at Gallipoli (1915), in Palestine (1917-18), France (1914-18), North Africa (1940-42), Syria (1941), Malaya/Singapore (1941-42), and elsewhere in Southeast Asia (1941-45). These battle honours are an important reminder of the shared histories and traditions of the Indian and Australian armed forces, which can be a foundation for further cooperation.

A potential focus for army-army cooperation can be the sharing of India's and Australia's knowledge and experience in peacekeeping operations.

Both countries have long been contributors to such operations. India has contributed to some forty United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations with more than 100,000 personnel, making it one of the largest contributors of any country in the world. Australia has contributed to more than 100 peace operations involving some 30,000 personnel. Enhanced cooperation in the training of peacekeepers can be an important opportunity to demonstrate India's and Australia's shared commitment to the UN and international stability. It can also be an important opportunity for Australia to learn from India's expertise in this area, while India might benefit from Australia's recent experience in stabilisation operations among Pacific island states.

India operates the Centre for United Nations Peacekeeping in New Delhi, which also provides the Secretariat of the International Association of Peacekeeping Training Centres. Australia's Peacekeeping Operations Training Centre is located in Newcastle. In the past Australia and India have exchanged students and instructors to their peacekeeping training centres on an *ad hoc* basis. More focused cooperation in peacekeeping training may be possible and in the longer term the potential for bilateral peacekeeping exercises can be explored. India currently conducts peacekeeping exercises with several regional states, while Australia conducts a biennial peacekeeping exercise with Thailand.

DEFENCE TECHNOLOGY COOPERATION

Some see defence technology as a potentially important focus in the relationship. India's need for defence technology has formed a key part of its relationships with the Soviet Union/Russia, France, Israel, and the United States, and increasingly also regional partners. In 2013, New Delhi announced that it was acquiring at least fifteen US-2 amphibious aircraft from Japan as part of an enhanced strategic partnership with Tokyo. The possibility of getting access to defence technology is something that gets New Delhi's attention.

But there are also reasons for caution in using defence exports by Australian companies as a means to enhance the bilateral relationship. The most significant is the parlous state of India's defence procurement system, which is Byzantine, dysfunctional, riddled with corruption, and as a consequence barely functioning. With few exceptions, defence acquisitions involving foreign private suppliers are at a virtual standstill, although major sales made on a government-to-government basis are moving ahead, if slowly. Australian defence suppliers are likely to be extremely hesitant about the risks of trying to do business in the Indian defence sector unless significant changes are made in the Indian defence procurement system. That seems many years away.

But Australian companies may have opportunities that do not necessarily involve exposure to the Indian defence procurement process. In naval shipbuilding, this could include programmes for the joint training of naval

engineers or, for example, exploiting the interests of third parties in the Indian and Australian defence industries. Private shipbuilders such as Pipavav Defence are becoming increasingly prominent in India and they could be potential partners with Australian companies. The huge paramilitary forces maintained by the Indian central and state governments are also major buyers, although this market tends to be keenly priced and unsuitable for high-end high-priced products.

Direct cooperation between the government defence research organisations, India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Australia's Defence Science and Technology Organisation (DSTO) is another opportunity. In theory at least there is considerable scope for cooperation and joint projects between the DRDO and DSTO in shared areas of interest. In recent years, India's DRDO has entered into technology-sharing agreements with its counterparts in countries such as South Korea and Singapore.

But Australia's DSTO may not currently consider India as a priority international partner and its current arrangements with key technology partners may constrain its ability to exchange information with the DRDO. The DRDO's role as both an R&D organisation and a manufacturer is also seen as a cause of potential complications. The caution of the DSTO in engaging with the DRDO may only change as part of a broader government approach of enhanced cooperation with India.

But some observers question the utility of trying to use defence technology cooperation—particularly technology procurement—as a means of developing a closer security relationship. India has, in the past, resisted attempts of several of its defence technology partners (such as the former Soviet Union and currently the United States) to leverage defence sales into a broader defence relationship. A Pentagon study found that senior Indian military officers tend to see defence technology procurement as quite separate from a broader defence relationship and are resistant to allowing equipment acquisitions to be used as a reason for operational cooperation.¹⁴ Experience has also demonstrated that a defence procurement relationship with India, even by major powers, can often be a cause of considerable disputes and political irritations in the bilateral relationship.

For these reasons, although there may be opportunities for defence technology cooperation in certain niche areas, both Canberra and New Delhi may be cautious about trying to focus on this area as a major aspect in developing the relationship.

¹⁴ Juli A. Macdonald, 'Indo-U.S. Military Relationship: Expectations and Perceptions', Report by Booz Allen Hamilton for the Director, Net Assessment, Office of the Secretary of Defense, October 2002.

COOPERATION IN ANTARCTIC RESEARCH

A further area of potential cooperation is in Antarctic research. While not directly security related, this area relates to the shared oceanic domain and can potentially create goodwill and a feeling of oceanic partnership. Australia's efforts in the Antarctic are conducted through the Australian Antarctic Division (AAD) based in Tasmania, while India's are conducted through the National Centre for Antarctic and Oceanic Research (NCAOR), based in Goa, which reports to the Ministry of Earth Sciences. Both organisations are wholly devoted to scientific research.

Australia has had a permanent presence in the Antarctic since 1954 and now operates four permanent bases. Australia claims more than 40 per cent of the continent as Australian territory. Although India has had a permanent presence since 1984, there has been relatively little interaction between the two countries. India's Maitri Station is on the other side of the continent from the Australian bases. However, the opening in 2013 of a new Indian base, called Bharati Station, which is some 120 km from Australia's Davis base, opens considerable opportunities for cooperation in logistics and scientific research.

Currently, all of India's air logistics to the Antarctic are channelled through South Africa using the Russian-sponsored DROMLAN consortium. This makes sense for the supply of India's Maitri Station (which is located south of Cape Town), but less so for Bharati Station. Supplies for Bharati are now taken to Maitri Station and then airlifted a further 4,000 km across the middle of Antarctica, including a refuelling stop at a Japanese base.

Bharati could potentially use the Australian logistical supply system operating through Tasmania, which is used to supply Davis Station. Similarly, it may make sense to share maritime supply arrangements. Currently, a vessel chartered by the NCAOR must make a fifty-day triangular run between Cape Town, Maitri Station and Bharati Station, severely restricting its abilities to make deliveries to Bharati. The potential for exchange of scientific personnel between the AAD and NCAOR is also unrealised.

3. Prospects for a Security and Defence Partnership

Where does that leave the prospects for security and defence cooperation between India and Australia? Although there are numerous shared interests and opportunities for cooperation, a closer relationship will require sustained political will in both Canberra and New Delhi to overcome the differences in strategic culture and perspective.

Australia recognises India as an important new security partner in the Indo-Pacific, but India is only beginning to see Australia as a useful partner. For India, in some ways, Australia represents a difficult case. India has no direct

security interests in our immediate area and Australia's close relationship with the United States sometimes creates political unease in New Delhi.

For several reasons, moves towards greater security and defence cooperation will need to be initiated by Australia, which has significantly more focus, resources, and experience in defence cooperation than India. But if Australia wishes to be successful in its objectives of promoting greater cooperation with India, it will have to consider the following:

- Australia must convince India that it can better achieve its strategic objectives in the Indo-Pacific in cooperation with Australia than by acting alone.
- Australia will have to demonstrate that there are practical security problems that must be addressed in a cooperative manner.
- While mutual concerns about China are an important underlying element, China should not be elevated as the moving cause of the relationship.
- Australia will have to move in a consistent and sustained manner with a time horizon considerably longer than it is generally used to.
- Australia must also move past any immediate expectations of the reciprocity that would be expected in developing security partnerships with most countries. India simply does not have the institutional capability to act in a reciprocal manner, as do other countries.

In short, if Australia wishes to enhance its security and defence relationship with India, it must be prepared to act outside its comfort zone. Australia has considerable experience in defence cooperation with the United States and its allies and partners in the Asia Pacific. This has often focused on providing assistance, but the emphasis is now moving towards strategic partnerships. As a recent report on Australia's defence diplomacy programme commented:

As regional defence forces expand and modernise and we lose our technological advantage, engagement becomes more about strategic partnerships and less about aid and assistance. This requires a significant change in mindset.¹⁵

In many ways, India represents a *sui generis* case in Australia's regional relationships, certainly in the degree of caution it exhibits in relation to security and defence cooperation with other countries. This represents a

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 9.

considerable challenge for Australia in developing an effective model for engagement with India.

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