



INDO-PACIFIC NEWSLETTER



A monthly Newsletter on Security and Strategic Issues on Indo-Pacific Region from Centre for Air Power Studies

From Editor's Desk

ASEAN–India Summit of end October, worked as a catalyst in the regional geopolitics dominating the month of November with Japan and India playing the lead role. India, while taking active part in the emergence of new alliances in the region continued strengthening its commitment towards Indo-Pacific by conducting the maiden India-US joint tri-services Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) exercise named ‘Tiger Triumph’ during the month. While the strategic partnership saw an upward swing in the region, certain diplomatic strains were observed emerging between France and partners of AUKUS. The emerging alliance of Middle East QUAD (MEQ) presents India with an unprecedented chance to strengthen its economic profile in West Asia. With the upcoming 2+2 Indo-Russia summit in December, listen to Amb PS Raghavan, former chairman NSAB in the video link section of SM Corner of the Newsletter along with ‘Cherry-picks of the Month’ section with select excellent articles for your reading pleasure.

Jai Hind

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QUOTE

“Vietnam is an important partner for Japan which will serve as the linchpin in our efforts to realize a free and open Indo-Pacific,”

*Fumio Kishida
Japanese Prime Minister*

Opinions/Review/Expert View

India in the Indo-Pacific: China, COVID-19, and the reconfigured regional order

Source: Harsh V Pant and Pratinashree Basu, ORF

<https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/india-in-the-indo-pacific/>. 03 Nov, 2021.



With a huge market and the busiest maritime shipping lanes, the Indo-Pacific houses aspiring economies alongside other countries outside the region who have a stake in the peace and stability of the Indo-Pacific. It is no wonder, therefore, that various combinations of bilateral, mini-lateral, and multi-lateral cooperation forums have sprung up in alignment with common interests and concerns. With this rose a demand for countries like Japan, Australia, and also India to assume a greater visibility and engagement and, in doing so, to also offer alternative sources of collaboration to countries who have remained heavily reliant on China. In this context, the evolving role of India—which had been steadily growing in recent years—calls for understanding and assessment as the pandemic has arguably accelerated the pace of India’s participation in the Indo-Pacific.

The decade beginning from 2020 was already

set to witness an intensification of the global systemic rivalry with the international rules-based system which administered global interactions in the post-World War II period coming under threat with the steady rise of China as hegemonic pole with influence and leverage across the length and breadth of the Asian continent and over the world at large. The arrival of arguably the most challenging global health crisis ever has pushed the world into unanticipated uncertainties while simultaneously accelerating and recalibrating global exchanges. Since the beginning of 2020, therefore, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated fault lines in an Indo-Pacific already fraught with competing as well as cooperative geopolitical equations with regional and global actors being called upon to reign in the ensuing disruptions and establish alternate response mechanisms.

As the Indo-Pacific construct gains momentum, India is augmenting its role in the region in the post-COVID period through enhanced interaction with neighbouring countries.

As the Indo-Pacific construct gains momentum, so has acknowledgment by New Delhi of investing in resources and policy frameworks that are geared towards expanding India’s engagement with the region. The country’s regional policy is, hence, now informed by a more constructive maritime policy and an augmented role assumed by the navy, together with the fostering of ties with partners of congruent interests. The disruptions caused by the pandemic and India’s response to the same have resulted in augmenting the country’s position and involvement in the Indo-Pacific region.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated fault lines in an Indo-Pacific already fraught with competing as well as cooperative geopolitical equations with regional and global

actors being called upon to reign in the ensuing disruptions and establish alternate response mechanisms.

China's efforts at building continental as well as maritime channels are aimed at binding countries around the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean closer with the Chinese economy and to establish trade routes allowing Beijing access to the Indo-Pacific, Europe, and Africa. While China has been carrying out its objectives, it is important to note that India too has been focusing on stimulating its engagements with the neighbourhood and strengthening networks with middle powers in the region like Japan and Australia alongside deepening its engagement with the US. India acknowledges that it cannot match China's deep pockets but it does have close civilisational and cultural ties with its neighbourhood which is an asset that China does not possess (Mullen and Poplin, 2015).

Nevertheless, the Indo-Pacific perhaps is an inevitability—a geo-economic reality providing a context within which China has been rising—but not an outcome of China's rise as it is often touted to be. Hence, collaborations and intensification of intra as well as extra-regional interdependencies are also natural consequences. While countries like Japan, Singapore, and Australia have been players—albeit with varying degrees of vigour—the expansion of India's capacity and intent to assume a more active role in many ways corresponds with the rise in prominence of the Indo-Pacific.

The strengthening of the India–US strategic partnership, for instance, mainly through defence

ties, acts as a strong counterweight to India's regional rivals. Enhanced engagement with the US has taken place in the backdrop of rising Chinese naval adventurism in the South China Sea and also in the Indian Ocean Region. Besides the maritime domain, India also began to step up its engagements with the larger Eastern and Southeast Asian region since 2014 under the aegis of the refurbished Act East Initiative and the Neighbourhood First Policy and SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region)

which has been more focused on the maritime domain. The country has signalled its interest and displayed its intent in enhancing its partnership with not only countries like Vietnam, Indonesia, Australia, and Japan but also with regional institutions like ASEAN with a renewed eastward focus. This has been a clear departure from its earlier diffidence and

inability to integrate itself with the larger Eastern neighbourhood.

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The close friendship shared between Tokyo and New Delhi and the congruence in their policy approaches towards the region have made both natural partners. Together, the two countries are not only members of regional intuitions, but have also expressed intent in and begun to collaborate for the development of infrastructure projects in third countries across the region. India has reciprocated Taipei's overtures under the latter's

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New Southbound Policy by signalling its intent to elevate relations with Taiwan in sectors like trade, investment, education, and tourism. Mention must also be made about the significant role played by Taipei, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, Korea's 'New Southern Policy' has distinct policy convergences with New Delhi's Act East Policy alongside common ground with the broad framework of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific. India's strategic role is further boosted under India–Australia relations, which were upgraded as part of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2020.

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In a similar vein, India has been making concerted efforts in the African continent too.

India has emerged not only as an active and willing player in the Indo-Pacific region but also as a responsible actor from ramping up its capacities in supplying pharmaceuticals to transforming its manufacturing base to cover key essentials required by the health sector to supplying medical aid to several countries. Alongside these, the Quad has turned out to be one of the key platforms which has witnessed the expansion of India's role in the Indo-Pacific during the ongoing pandemic. The positive role assumed by India sends a vital signal regarding its political intent to participate in the region in keeping with its capacities. In some ways, New Delhi's prompt and proactive approach is a culmination of the deepening of its strategic ties with the US, Japan, Australia, and ASEAN alongside the concurrent strengthening of the involvement of these countries within the region as well.

There are many lessons to be drawn from the pandemic, the most vital of which is possibly the

urgent need for concerted action and the merit in building resilience—across sectors, services and strategies. Indeed, longer term impacts of the pandemic will be determined to a large extent by the policy responses and adaptations undertaken by governments because while the pandemic is a global health crisis, its impacts encompass all walks of life and are set to constitute far-reaching consequences for years to come. In this context, India's position as a direct stakeholder in the region gives New Delhi the edge to initiate dialogues as well as assist in the creation of a balanced security architecture to deal with traditional and non-traditional security issues..

Why Did AUKUS Happen? Because the World Changed

Source: Michael Shoebridge, ICDS

<https://icds.ee/en/why-did-aukus-happen-because-the-world-changed/>. 24 NOV, 2021.



Australian Navy personnel look at the UK nuclear-powered attack submarine HMS Astute docked at HMAS Stirling Royal Australian Navy base in Perth, Western Australia.

What is AUKUS and what is it not? What does it mean for Europe, NATO and the Indo-Pacific?

The Australia-UK-US partnership announced by American President Joe Biden, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison on 15 September 2021 shows how much the world has changed in just five years.

Back in 2016, when Australia selected a French diesel electric design as the basis for its key deterrent weapon—its next generation submarine—a nuclear submarine was not in the options considered. That's

because Australian government and military leaders did not see Australia's strategic environment as warranting the difficulty and complexity of acquiring and operating nuclear submarines, and because neither the US nor

the UK governments would have been likely to agree to share nuclear submarine technologies with Australia if Australia had asked. Neither government has shared this technology with any other partner since they entered the US-UK nuclear partnership in 1958.

A single factor explains the shift in these three governments' positions between 2016 and 2021: the now manifest systemic challenge that a powerful, aggressive Chinese state under President Xi Jinping poses to security in the Indo-Pacific, and globally. President Xi has made what was unthinkable in 2016 necessary in 2021. AUKUS, therefore, is about one big thing: shifting the military balance in the Indo-Pacific away from China to raise the cost of Beijing using military power and intimidation to achieve its ends.

It is about reducing the likelihood of conflict in the region by strengthening credible deterrence. That's essential and urgent because President Xi has already shown a willingness to

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make big moves fast against others' interests when he thinks he can get away with it (as we have seen with China's militarisation of the South China Sea and occupation of disputed features and areas there, with Beijing's breach of the Sino-UK Treaty on Hong Kong, in aggressive moves by China on the India-China

border, in the East China Sea with Japan and in and around Taiwan). The Chinese government is continuing to push its defence sector and its technology sector to equip the Chinese military to fight and win wars. And Xi continues to

direct the PLA (People's Liberation Army) to be "be ready to strike at a moment's notice", with training and exercising showing the PLA is acting on this instruction.

For the US and the Biden Administration, AUKUS is an emphatic demonstration that the Afghanistan withdrawal was worth the pain because it is letting the US focus time and resources on the Indo-Pacific in a way neither Barack Obama nor Donald Trump did. It shows that Biden meant what he said during his presidential campaign—he has ended the US commitment to Afghanistan, he is seeking to rebuild the US economy through infrastructure, technology and investments that address climate change and generate economic and technological strength, and he is facing up to the challenge of China. AUKUS can give President Biden some of the momentum his administration needs.

It is, as Charles Edel has said, "a sea change in US strategic thinking towards empowering its allies, redistributing its forces around the Indo-Pacific, and better integrating its allies into its supply chains and industrial planning to deal with an increasingly aggressive China".

For the UK, AUKUS is an enormous injection into the substance of the UK's Indo-Pacific Tilt set out in its Integrated Review. It's a part of the Global Britain ambition post-Brexit. And AUKUS connects to UK strengths—in cyber and science and technology.

For Australia, AUKUS is a response to the government's description of Australia's deteriorating strategic environment, set out

in the July 2020 Defence Strategic Update, primarily because it is the vehicle for adding offensive power to Australia's military that raises the costs to others in the region of contemplating conflict involving Australia. Furthermore, it reinforces Australia's deep alliance and security partnerships with the US and the UK, again with a regional focus.

The Five Nots—What AUKUS is Not

AUKUS, though, is five 'Nots'. It is not just a pact about sharing nuclear submarine technology that leads to Australia acquiring and operating eight of these "peak predator" deterrent weapons.

Australia doesn't need a new alliance with the US—it already has the ANZUS Treaty—and the Australia-UK partnership is already deep, with mutual expectations of consultation and assistance if either were to face conflict or crisis.

It is not a military alliance that contains commitments to come to each other's aid in times of crisis and conflict. It is not a sidelining of the other key rising Indo-Pacific-focused minilateral—the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue involving India, the US, Japan and

Australia. It is not a signal that Australia seeks to be less engaged in existing regional multilateral architecture like the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the East Asia Summit. And it is not a substitute for the deep and successful Five Eyes intelligence partnership involving the US, Canada, the UK, New Zealand and Australia.

Taking each "Not" in turn: AUKUS has a clear agenda that includes the nuclear submarine program, but it goes beyond this into four essential areas of future but near-term military advantage: artificial intelligence, cyber, quantum technologies and undersea technologies (other than the submarines). These focus areas of AUKUS are critical for the three nations and for

security in the Indo-Pacific over the next 5, 10 and 20 years.

Australia doesn't need a new alliance with the US—it already has the ANZUS Treaty—and the Australia-UK partnership is already deep, with mutual expectations of consultation and assistance if either were to face conflict or crisis. The Five Eyes partnership is central here.

The Quad partnership between four of the major powerful democracies in the Indo-Pacific has a security and technology dimension, but it's central purpose is, as India's Prime Minister Modi has said, promotion of a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific region. This means that the Quad's agenda is as much about "public goods" that bind the region together and promote open and transparent values and behaviours as it is about hard-edged security cooperation aimed at deterring Beijing's leaders from using military force and intimidation to achieve their ends. To the extent that AUKUS increases the military power of the US, Australia and the UK and shifts the military balance away from China in the Indo-Pacific, it is deeply complementary to the Quad, and a foundational contribution to a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific. No doubt, this is why new Japanese Prime Minister Kishida has welcomed AUKUS.

Australia will continue to be an engaged member in the regional architectures for diplomacy and dialogue on security and economics in the Indo-Pacific, notably the ASEAN-centred architecture that includes the East Asia Summit and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). However,

AUKUS is equally a message that, as with the Quad, Australia and the US see a crucial need to add real weight to a balancing strategy. Dialogue and cooperation are essential, but without real deterrence and a serious balancing counterweight, dialogue will achieve little and genuine cooperation will have limits.

The Five Eyes intelligence partnership between the US, the UK, Australia, Canada and New Zealand has a healthy overlap with the technology focus areas of AUKUS. High end intelligence capabilities must involve an

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understanding and application of artificial intelligence, cyber and quantum technologies. However, the purpose of the Five Eyes partnership in these technology areas is an intelligence one, and much

of the cooperation is within highly classified boundaries. So, approaches inside this domain don't naturally bleed out to the militaries or national security communities of the Five Eye partners. With AUKUS, the US, UK and Australian leaders have recognised this and set out a path for faster progress for their militaries that does not depend on the intelligence community.

If Australia getting nuclear subs is central to AUKUS, then won't stronger deterrence have to wait until the 2040s?

The obvious problem for AUKUS if it were mainly about nuclear submarines as the key to shifting the military balance in the Indo-Pacific is that eight additional nuclear attack submarines by themselves in the hands of the US and its close allies in the Indo-Pacific will not shift that balance enough. Furthermore, even

the contribution it will make to deterrence of conflict is some way off. Public statements from Australian naval officials since the AUKUS announcement state a goal of having at least one Australian nuclear submarine before 2040 and an ambition to have more than one by that time. The 19 years between now and then are almost certain to see continuing rapid growth in China's military power and deployment of novel weapons systems (an example being the developmental hypersonic glide vehicle launched from space in two tests earlier this year).

It's no coincidence, then, that AUKUS has a two-speed timetable. The slow speed program is about nuclear submarine cooperation. Whereas the rest of the AUKUS agenda relating to AI, cyber, quantum and undersea technologies other than the submarines is designed to shift the military balance over the 2020s and through the 2030s, with the nuclear submarine element adding further deterrent power after that.

There is little doubt that the leaders' direction to their defence organisations to accelerate getting applications of these technologies into the hands of their military personnel is a sign of frustration that this was not already happening at speed and scale.

What AUKUS is

AUKUS is a trilateral technology accelerator between the governments of the three signatory nations with a ruthless focus on increasing the military power of each nation by accelerating the development and application of key technologies

into the hands of their service men and women. It is a trilateral agreement that is bringing into being three other joined 'trilaterals' in each of the three nations: between the governments, the research organisations and the companies—including tech firms outside the traditional defence sector. AUKUS will succeed as a technology accelerator if it keeps its focus on the particular technology streams identified in the joint leaders' statement and if the three nations, their defence organisations and research and corporate sectors understand the imperative of delivering tangible capability advantage to the US, UK and Australian militaries.

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Success also requires not expecting existing institutional arrangements about force development contracting and procurement to deliver, because if they were doing so already, AUKUS would not have been required. So, AUKUS is a challenge to the "incumbents", including the defence organisations, their procurement arms and the

traditional defence firms in each nation.

What Does AUKUS Mean for NATO and the EU?

Most obviously, AUKUS is a powerful statement about the priority of the Indo-Pacific—and the systemic challenge of China for the three partners, reinforcing the assessments driving the Quad partners' increasingly deep cooperation. The tension AUKUS has provoked between each of the partners, most notably Australia, and France flowing from the loss by the French of a \$90 billion conventional submarine program has

been playing out in ugly, angry and personal ways between the leaders, including in the margins of the recent G-20 and Glasgow COP26 events.

In the short term, this tension has disrupted the growing cooperation on the China challenge between the AUKUS partners and France, and complicated EU and member state engagement also, despite the growing number of European nations with Indo-Pacific policies, strategies and guidelines and the recent EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. This is likely to be a less important disruption in the medium term, however, as the force driving convergence between the EU, individual European states and the AUKUS partners is a common assessment of the systemic challenge from China.

In the region, ASEAN members have expressed mixed views on the new partnership, with Indonesia and Malaysia expressing concern about the potential destabilisation that nuclear submarines might cause, while others are at least quietly welcoming the partnership, despite low key official statements. There is an underlying understanding of the value of balancing Chinese power, with this being done outside the existing dialogue and engagement architecture. This mindset will be equally applicable for European partners to appreciate as they implement their various Indo-Pacific directions.

AUKUS is also a new ‘minilateral’ that joins a small set of other Indo-Pacific-focused minilateral partnerships Australia works within. The Quad and the Australia-Japan-US trilateral are key examples.

These minilaterals have different purposes

and agendas but, managed well, are mutually reinforcing. They are a way of conducting “fast multilateralism”. They allow the particular groupings in each to pursue specific agendas where the partners have strong common interests and are willing to apply resources to advance these, with a sense of urgency. This means that the minilaterals can move faster and do more than wider multilateral groups. The UK’s deeper engagement and presence in the Indo-Pacific through its ‘Indo-Pacific Tilt’ set out in its recent Integrated Review makes it a welcome partner for these other non-AUKUS groupings.

The rise and increasing priority of these minilateral groupings is a challenge to existing broader groupings like NATO and the wider set of US allies, just as it is to the existing multilateral groupings in the Indo-Pacific.

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They are a statement that the larger institutional groupings aren’t acting with the common purpose and speed that the current strategic and technological environment demands, just as the current institutional arrangements for capability development and delivery within the AUKUS partners has also not delivered what is now required. How NATO responds, and whether small partner groupings within NATO and the EU will likewise seek a ‘minilateral’ approach, while also working within the larger groupings, is probably the subject of analysis and perhaps decision to be made in various capitals.

There’s more to like about AUKUS than wondering about the utility of nuclear submarines.

Japan, India, Quad can play big role in Micronesia

Source: Cleo Paskal, Sunday Guardian

<https://www.sundayguardianlive.com/news/japan-india-quad-can-play-big-role-micronesia-dr-hayakawa>. 24 Nov, 2021.



This photo taken in 2000 in Hawaii shows, from left, Rieko Hayakawa, Prof. Tanaka, Prof. Kosuge from University of Electro-Communications, Mr Miyajima, director of Oceania division of MOFA, Japan, Hon Masao Ueda, Palau's Minister of Health, Mr Spensin James, President, College of Micronesia, Dr Okamura, PEACESAT, University of Hawaii, Mr Andrew Kuniyuki, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the CMI, Ms Higa, PEACESAT, University of Hawaii.

Alexandria, US: There is a lot going on in the Pacific Islands at the moment, including the unrest in the Solomon Islands and the fragmentation of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF).

The PIF issue is important. The PIF used to be the main political grouping for the Pacific islands, but recently five countries from the Micronesian geographic region announced their intention to leave the group because they concluded that their concerns were being ignored and their voices muted by larger members, including Australia and New Zealand. Together, the five countries—Palau, Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Kiribati and Nauru—cover an area larger than the continental US and

'Japan and US have had a relationship with the Micronesian region for over 100 years. Australia has also been providing patrol boats for the past nearly 30 years. India has just begun. It will be important to build a relationship first.'

India combined.

Apart from the five countries, the Micronesia region also includes some highly strategic locations, including the American territory of Guam, site of major military installations. As a result of dissatisfaction with the PIF, and wanting to make their concerns heard internationally without passing through the distortion of intermediaries, there is growing interest among Micronesian leaders to consolidate and work together more as a group.

Since the end of World War II, the main major power in the region has been the United States. There are American citizens on American soil in Guam and the Marianas, and three of the independent countries (Palau, RMI and FSM) have Compacts of Free Association (COFAs) with the US, giving Washington control and responsibility over their defence.

However, the COFAs are up for renewal in the next couple of years and, in spite of bipartisan support for a quick and fair resolution in the US Congress, the US administration is moving very slowly, including sending what are perceived as low-level negotiators to the meetings.

Other regional powers are concerned, including Micronesia's neighbour Japan. To get a better understanding of how the situation is viewed, in this edition of "Indo-Pacific: Behind the Headlines" we speak with deeply experienced academic and practitioner Dr Rieko Hayakawa, one of the founders of Japan's Indo-Pacific Study Group, who has spent decades working in, and with, the region.

Q: How long have there been interactions between Japan and the people and islands of Micronesia?

Answer: More than a million samurai suddenly lost their jobs after US Commodore Perry's cannonball diplomacy. In 1890, some samurai-turned-merchants began to sail to the islands of Micronesia and trade began. In 1914, under the terms of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, Japan entered World War I and occupied German-held Micronesia. After the Versailles Conference, Japan was granted a mandate for these islands, and in 1922 began a civilian government. By 1935, about 50,000 Japanese, the same number as the islanders, had settled in Micronesia, mainly from Okinawa. Okinawan fishermen began a pelagic fishing industry that continues today and has grown to export to the Japanese market. Many of the islanders married Japanese and still use their Japanese names, such as the late President Nakamura of Palau.

In 1914, under the terms of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, Japan entered World War I and occupied German-held Micronesia.

Currently, there are Japanese embassies in each country in the Micronesian region, which were established by Japanese Prime Minister Mori at the request of Palauan President Nakamura. Japan's support is extensive, but more permanent assistance is needed.

The COFA agreements with the FAS have hundreds of pages, unlike the few pages that New Zealand has with the Cook Islands and Niue.

Q: Can you describe the idea for a Japan-Palau Friendship treaty?

Answer: The Indo-Pacific Study Group of Japan has submitted a draft "Japan-Palau Friendship Treaty" to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Liberal Democratic Party and the Parliament

Union for PICs, in order to solve the persistent financial difficulties of the small island nation of Palau. This would be a permanent support aimed at strengthening the current system with the US. It would be an obligation for Japan to support Palau and a right for Palau. A similar agreement exists between New Zealand and Samoa.

It is not a matter of charity, but the stability of Palau and the Western Pacific region,

located in the second island chain, is important to the national interests of Japan and other countries. This might be an interesting model in the rest of the region. And could possibly involve the Quad in some aspects.

Q: What has the relationship between the US and Micronesia been like since the end of World War II?

Answer: It is widely known that for about 15 years after the war, until the John F. Kennedy administration came into power [Kennedy fought in the Pacific during World War II and his life was saved by two Solomon Islanders], the Micronesian region was "benign neglected"—but even US scholars are not sure that this is an appropriate description. The US not only neglected the region, but also conducted nuclear tests under a strict security regime. It was a report by a UN field inspection committee that revealed the terrible condition of US trusteeship. The Kennedy administration then launched a massive budgetary effort and Peace Corps deployment to redeem the Trusteeship.

The US military has always had an interest in Micronesia, which it calls a "strategic area". In

the 1970s, independence negotiations between the countries in the region and the United States continued. In the 1980s, the United States signed Compacts of Free Association (COFAs) with three countries in Micronesia, Palau, Marshall Islands and the Federated States of Micronesia. They are known as the Freely Associated States (FAS).

The COFA agreements with the FAS have hundreds of pages, unlike the few pages that New Zealand has with the Cook Islands and Niue. The COFAs aimed at ensuring US security, not the security of the people of Micronesia.

Some Micronesia high officials said, “Micronesia are not satisfied with the US level of involvement as well as terms. US calls it aid, but it’s not aid, it’s a partnership.”

And with the end of the Cold War, the United States suddenly disappeared from the region, just as they did in Afghanistan. When I started working on the Pacific island countries in 1991, there were many projects left that the US had lost interest in. One of them, PEACESAT, used a satellite provided free of charge by the US government, and operated by the University of Hawaii, for education and welfare, covering the entire PICs. The University of the South Pacific also used the same satellite, USPNet, to connect its 12-member island countries. In the 1990s, international communications were still limited and expensive. I was able to make USPNet an ODA project for the first Pacific Island Leaders Summit hosted by the Japanese government in 1997.

The Pacific Islands Forum (originally known as the South Pacific Forum) is a regional organisation established in 1971 with Fiji taking the initiative and the former British colonies as core members.

Q: Can you please give us a bit of background to the relationship between the countries of the Micronesian region and the Pacific Islands Forum—and the role played by Australia and New Zealand?

Answer: The Pacific Islands Forum (originally known as the South Pacific Forum) is a regional organisation established in 1971 with Fiji taking the initiative and the former British colonies as core members. Australia and New Zealand have been full members of the Forum since its establishment. As a result, there is a strong British colonial culture in the organization.

On the other hand, the current Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and Palau, which are located north of the Equator and were colonies of Germany and Japan, as well as under US administration, were late to join the PIF.

Palau was concerned about the strong influence of Australia and New Zealand in the Forum, and during its chairmanship in 1999, then-President Nakamura removed the “South” from the organization’s name. I happened to be in Palau and was told by President Nakamura that Helen Clark and John Howard were stubborn and fought strongly against this change.

When the Micronesia Presidential Summit (MPS) began in 2001, reform of the PIF was on the agenda. The establishment of a new organization composed entirely of Pacific island countries, excluding Australia and New Zealand, was also being considered. In other words, the current move by the Micronesian countries to leave the PIF has been in the works for 20 years.

Q: What is going on with the COFAs? What needs to be done?

Answer: In my 30 years of experience, I have rarely met a US government official who had knowledge and passion for this region. One of them told me at a cocktail party that the US government, especially Congress, wanted to return the FAS states to Japan. It was half in jest, half in earnest. After Secretary Clinton's island-hopping tour with Kurt Campbell, the US paid a bit more attention to the region, but not much changed.

Another item on the MPS agenda was the COFA negotiations with the US government. The Micronesian countries wanted to work together to save time and money from having to hire expensive lobbyists and lawyers in Washington DC. China, on the other hand, has made it clear that it is prepared to offer enormous aid without the effort. It told Palau's President Whipps, "the sky is the limit".

Just as the Indian government, through the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), provided \$1.5 million to improve community health centers in Palau, the Quad should support the Micronesian region.

The US Congress, like Ed Case from Hawaii, has done a great job for the FAS. He should be proud of the many US citizens who have dedicated their lives to Micronesia. For example, Fr. Francis Hezel, who founded the Micronesia Seminar, which provides educational support for 60 years, the gem of the region.

There needs to be a high-level effort to quickly

resolve the COFAs, something that will also be good for the US and the aspirations of the Micronesian region—with its varied and unique relationships to the US—to come together as a group should be respected, honoured and facilitated.

Q: Palau has set up a Palau National Security Coordinator (PNSC) position. Can you please explain why, what the challenges are, and if this might be a good idea for other Pacific Island Countries?

Answer: The PNSC is responsible for developing the national security strategy, serving as the President's primary security advisor, and as the primary point of contact with foreign military officials and all security information.

The PNSC was established by presidential executive order in March 2021 and is currently operating with a limited staff. This security capability is very important, but it requires the support of the United States, Australia, Japan, and Taiwan.

This NSC capability is also important for other PICs, but it is meaningless without financial and human support from trusted countries. In particular, security issues are changing rapidly, and human resources support for small island nations is essential.

Palau, like any other island nation, is a paradise for tourists, but it is also a paradise for all kinds of transnational crime. In the past few years, nearly 1,000 Chinese mafia members have entered Palau and stayed illegally to conduct online casinos, including cybercrime. A major mafia boss made

The US Congress, like Ed Case from Hawaii, has done a great job for the FAS. He should be proud of the many US citizens who have dedicated their lives to Micronesia. For example, Fr. Francis Hezel, who founded the Micronesia Seminar, which provides educational support for 60 years, the gem of the region.

a contract with former President Remengesau of Palau to obtain a casino license and for leasing the island of Angaur for the casino resort.

In addition, due to Palau's strategic location and the aggressive approach from China, the same former President Remengesau wrote a letter to former US Secretary of Defense Esper requesting the presence of US military in August 2020.

Q: Is there a role for the Quad in Micronesia? If so, where does India fit in?

Answer: Japan and the United States have had a relationship with the Micronesian region for over 100 years. Australia has also been providing patrol boats for the past nearly 30 years. India has just begun, for example, the UNOPS project in Palau mentioned earlier. It will be important to build a relationship first.

Currently, Japan, US, and Australia have deployed advisors on the ground and are conducting joint maritime surveillance. In September 2021, three JMSDF ships entered Palau for the first time after WWII to conduct joint exercises with the Palau Maritime Law Enforcement. Next year, joint exercises with the US are expected. The Western Pacific is vast and security is under the jurisdiction of the United States. How about the Indian Navy joining in here?

The Micronesian countries have no universities, only colleges. A scholarship to an Indian university in the same English-speaking region would be a great opportunity for them. Especially medical scholarships to India. India has very good health systems and the best doctors. Or even setting up a medical school in the region.

All the Pacific countries have large youth populations, and they have problems with unemployment, drugs, violence, and suicide. They

need opportunities.

If I could add one last thing, I am convinced that India's ICT capacity has supported the IT development in Pacific Island countries. The backbone submarine cables are being laid with the cooperation of Japan, the US and Australia, but Micronesia need various technical and institutional support to prepare for cyber security.

Maldives: India first or India out?

Source: David Brewster, *The Interpreter*

<https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/maldives-india-first-or-india-out>. 24 Nov, 2021.



Male, Maldives, one of the world's lowest-lying countries and strategically located astride the main sea lanes of the Indian Ocean (Carl Court/Getty Images)

Recent protests in Maldives against India's influence in the country calling for "Indian military out" has led the Maldives government to respond by reiterating its "India First" policy. This has highlighted the difficulties that both countries face in building a stable strategic partnership while also addressing popular sensitivities. It's not something that India has been good at elsewhere in the neighbourhood.

Maldives is a small island state located right in the centre of the Indian Ocean. Despite a population of only 500,000, its location, astride the main sea lanes of the Indian Ocean, gives it considerable strategic significance. For centuries big powers have sought to build influence there and deny its use to rivals.

Maldives has come to international attention in recent years as part of growing rivalry between India and China. The former president Abdulla Yameen, who was seen by many as dangerously close to China, was ousted in an electoral landslide in 2018. The new government under President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih proclaimed an "India First" policy, which is now being tested as he seeks to reconcile India's growing presence against a

tradition in Maldives of fierce independence.

The "India out" protests last month in the capital Malé shouldn't be taken too seriously in themselves. They involved the usual crowd of Yameen supporters that regularly demonstrate in the streets for the release of the former president from house arrest (he was convicted of money laundering in 2019). The Maldives government responded sharply by describing India as the country's "closest ally and trusted neighbour". But protests also reflect widespread sensitivities among the Maldives community that do need to be addressed.

If nothing else, Solih's "India First" policy reflects simple geographic reality. India has long been Maldives' closest friend and protector. Indeed, many Indian analysts effectively see Maldives as part of an Indian sphere of influence in South Asia where rivals should not tread. More recently, India has taken a somewhat more positive approach in demonstrating its role as a "net security provider", emphasising the benefits that it can provide to smaller countries.

But the relationship between one of the largest countries in the world and one of the smallest also inevitably brings sensitivities. India's fragile ties with neighbours such as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal show that these concerns are not always well handled.

Maldives people are realistic about their place in the world, but they are also proud of their independence and their centuries-long history as a country. Unlike much larger countries around the region, including India, they were never colonised by Britain. Instead, in 1887, Maldives Sultan Muhammad Mueenuddin II saw the writing on the wall and offered a protectorate agreement with Britain in which Maldives could

retain full political autonomy while deferring to London on foreign affairs.

This pragmatic decision meant that no British flag ever flew over Malé and no British governor or resident was ever installed in the capital. But in response to the Japanese threat in 1941, Britain was permitted to establish naval and air base at Addu Atoll in the far south of the archipelago.

Maldives' pragmatism in working with big powers while also guarding its autonomy is key to understanding its approach to the world.

The failure to celebrate the help that the Indian military provides to Maldives communities may be a lost opportunity.

Since 2018, India has significantly stepped up its aid to Maldives in response to concerns about China's growing influence under the previous government. This has included considerable fiscal support to help Maldives deal with its huge debts to China. A massive Indian-funded infrastructure project has been announced that would include new bridges linking the crowded capital to three neighbouring islands. There are also plans for India to help construct a new coast guard base near Malé.

New Delhi is also developing its presence in Addu in the south, including constructing a new police academy and plans to open an Indian consulate there.

One of the most controversial elements of India's role involves contingents from the Indian Navy and Coast Guard in Addu as well as on islands in the centre and north of the country. They are there to maintain and operate a Dornier twin-engined aircraft and two helicopters, all under the direction Maldives National Defence Force, which does not operate its own aircraft.

Opposition leaders say that the presence of a foreign military undermines Maldives' sovereignty. Indeed, in the last months of his rule in 2018, Yameen's government tried to whip up nationalist sentiment by expelling the Indian contingents. They declined requests to leave.

Both the Maldives and Indian governments are tight-lipped about the arrangement out of concerns about nationalist sentiments. But this has created an information gap. Indeed, few Maldivians are aware of what they actually do.

It is in fact a good news story. The main role of the Indian-operated aircraft is to undertake medical evacuations from isolated communities on some 200 inhabited islands, most of which lack access to proper medical facilities – in some ways like Australia's Flying Doctor Service. The aircraft are also tasked to patrol the waters of Maldives' huge exclusive economic zone against foreign illegal fishing boats, a major political issue for a country that eats tuna for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

The failure to celebrate the help that the Indian military provides to Maldives communities may be a lost opportunity. Indeed, with the Indian presence in Maldives only likely to grow in coming years, a more active approach will be needed. History demonstrates that Maldives people can be pragmatic about the need to partner with big powers. But they also need to understand the benefits they get.

Social Media Corner

Cherry-picks of the Month

1. New Quad may bolster India's Gulf presence - <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/comment/new-quad-may-bolster-indias-gulf-presence-342426>
2. Behind the facade of civility, the reality of the US-China dialogue - <https://www.orfonline.org/research/behind-the-facade-of-civility/>
3. Australia says China's actions at odds with rhetoric of peace - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/26/australia-says-chinas-actions-at-odds-with-rhetoric-of-peace>
4. Why China is genuinely worried about AUKUS - <https://supchina.com/2021/11/29/why-china-is-genuinely-worried-about-aukus/>
5. India, Maldives and Sri Lanka hold conclave to enhance maritime security - <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/india-maldives-and-sri-lanka-hold-conclave-to-enhance-maritime-security-11638098183084.html>

Interviews / View Points

1. Biden-Xi Summit in Review and the Future of U.S.-China Relations - <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/video/biden-xi-summit-review-and-future-us-china-relations>
2. In Conversation: White House Indo-Pacific Coordinator Kurt Campbell speaks with Michael Fullilove - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c8ED9UhTstw>
3. Battlegrounds with H.R. McMaster | Australia: Peace & Prosperity Across the Indo-Pacific and Beyond - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-X5L4QFkEM>

Debates

1. Indo-Pacific Future - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zZ2qXDA0SU4>
2. The Indo-Pacific Operating System: Power, Order and Rules for the 21st Century - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=II0IRGxWOAI>

Podcasts

1. What's all the RAUKUS About? A Focus on France - <https://rusi.org/podcasts/bridging-the-oceans/episode-26-whats-all-raukus-about-focus-france>
2. Quad Tech Network – Biotech in the Indo-Pacific - <https://www.policyforum.net/national-security-podcast-biotech-in-the-indo-pacific/>

Video Links

1. President Putin understands India's stand on Indo-Pacific: Ex-Indian envoy P S Raghavan - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IWMYrkKHRBE>



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