



CENTRE FOR AIR POWER STUDIES (CAPS)

Forum for National Security Studies (FNSS)

INDO-PACIFIC NEWSLETTER



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

From the Editor's Desk

This month several summits took place as nations attempted to enhance their position in the Indo-Pacific region. Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida visited Seoul from May 7-8 to continue working on Japan-South Korea rapprochement and bolster Korea's Indo-Pacific strategy. Bangladesh also posted its new Indo-Pacific outlook, becoming the second Indian Ocean country after India to do so. The 42nd ASEAN Summit was held in Indonesia on May 10-11 to further make progress in building the Southeast Asian community.

The Hiroshima G7 Summit was held from May 19-21 which resulted in several meaningful outcomes, bilateral meetings between nations and nine vision documents/progress reports. The unity of the G7 on issues as diverse as the war in Ukraine, China's aggressive behaviour, economic security, the clean energy transition and responding to global challenges was remarkable. This could result in increased unilateralism even as the G7 talks of greater cooperation with the G20 and Global South. Moreover the Quad Summit too was held on the sidelines of the G7 Summit and was marked by a joint vision statement focussing widely on the Indian Ocean Rim Association in the Indo-Pacific. The third FIPIC Summit at Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea followed on May 22, strengthening India's engagement with the Pacific Island countries. Furthermore, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a bilateral visit to Sydney on May 23-24, eliciting a bipartisan welcome from Australian polity wherein, both countries discussed ways of bolstering their defence cooperation and focus on securing the Indo-Pacific vision.

This month we present specially selected opinions and cherry picks covering all this and more. Do check out our Social Media Corner for some engaging and insightful content, including debates, interviews and podcasts from eminent experts.

Jai Hind

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the-indo-pacific](https://www.diplomaticourier.com/posts/at-g7-japan-ushers-the-era-of-the-indo-pacific)

QUOTE

"India has always been of the opinion that any tension, any dispute should be resolved peacefully, through dialogue. And if a solution is found by law, it should be accepted"

- PM Narendra Modi

Opinions/Review/Expert View

Indo-Pacific: Scramble for Dominance and Role of Air Power

Source: Air Cmde SP Singh (Retd), Chanakya Forum

<https://chanakyaforum.com/indo-pacific-scramble-for-dominance-and-role-of-air-power/> 03 May 2023



Undoubtedly, In the New World Order, Indo-Pacific is emerging as a strategically integrated arena of competition and cooperation. The rise of China; beyond the South China Sea, across the Indian and Pacific Oceans, challenges the security umbrella strategically established at the end of Second World War. The Indo-Pacific, representing the new strategic reality of the twenty-first century, is emerging as a new geographic space, bringing together the Indian and the Pacific Oceans. Due to the strategic dominance of the area, there has been a steady increase in number of stake holders and their “push” for enlarging their area of influence through diplomatic, economic, and military means. In the recent years, the race for dominance between emerging power China and the established superpower United States has led to large number of new alliances of different stake holders to claim their regional control and share. India in Indian Ocean with Australia and Japan in Pacific Ocean being

The Indo-Pacific, representing the new strategic reality of the twenty-first century, is emerging as a new geographic space, bringing together the Indian and the Pacific Oceans.

the next three major stake holders, were the natural choice for the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or the QUAD with the US.

Developing Strategic Situation in Indo-Pacific Region

China’s continued ascendance in extending its maritime influence in the Indo-pacific region raised alarm for various nations affected; directly or indirectly, by the turn of events in this otherwise peaceful marine zone. India’s concern was mainly with incessant Chinese naval activities in the Indian Ocean coupled with territorial disputes with China and their growing nexus with Pakistan. Japan, on its part was concerned about China’s incursions into and around the disputed Senkaku islands along with militarisation of the South China Sea. Australia was anxious about Chinese influence increasing in the internal politics of their country, China making inroads into the capital market to buy Australian companies as well as China’s military build-up in the SCS. Washington, with singular dominance over the region, was becoming increasingly worried about the China’s expansion in Indo-Pacific region to challenge the regional balance; both economically and militarily. Since India is an important strategic partner, while Australia and Japan are treaty allies, working closely with these countries for strategic goals on a common platform like QUAD, was natural for the United States.

The strategic and economic significance of the Indo-Pacific cannot be emphasized enough in the current international relations.

The growing importance of the Indian Ocean as a geo-economic and geo-political nerve centre along with being the most significant trade corridor, where one-third of bulk cargo and almost two-thirds of global oil transit. China has significantly expanded its prowess in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) over the past three decades. It is raising fears among the strategists of US and India, that the growing naval presence of China along with its use of so-called “debt-trap diplomacy,” might give her an edge in the contested region. The strategic bottlenecks in the IOR have been monopolised by way of investing in geo-economically important ports from Sudan to Hong Kong.

Force Induction and Military Balance in Indo-Pacific

As of 2021, heads of state of all four member nations of QUAD have stepped up their efforts to work on shared strategy on concerns about China’s increasingly assertiveness in the region and are more aligned to formulate a constructive plan of economic and military cooperation. The initial plan of maritime cooperation among the QUAD members, that began after the Boxer tsunami of 2004, has now widened its scope, covering far more issues, that include concerns in the field of security, economic growth, and health. These concerns have mostly emerged in the light of China’s expansion plans in SCS and post pandemic economic slowdown faced by most of the nations across the globe. The vision paper of the People’s Republic of China

The vision paper of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) on “China’s National Defence in the New Era”, published in July 2019, clearly indicated the intent of China in establishing its supremacy in SCS.

(PRC) on “China’s National Defence in the New Era”, published in July 2019, clearly indicated the intent of China in establishing its supremacy in SCS. In the vision document, China has, without any ambiguity, defined its objective that would safeguard its maritime rights, overseas interests as well as oppose and contain “Taiwan independence”. The struggle for control within the IOR is experiencing a notable change, as nations from outside the region have begun to establish a permanent presence in the zone. In the last decade, China has sharply escalated its maritime presence in the Indian Ocean, with activities like hydrographic surveys in the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ), increasing of submarines deployment, underwater drones and creation of establishment in Djibouti for overseas military activities. China, in early 2020, having built strong military capability in all domains including cyber, space and maritime since 2013, surged forward to meet the objectives of its vision document 2019, while the entire world was gripped by the unprecedented spread of Corona pandemic.

PLAN and PLAAF

People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) and People’s Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) are the arms of PLA that are being deployed across the SCS and parts of Indo-Pacific Maritime Zone (IPMZ) to assert and claim dominance in the region. To secure its claim on worldwide trade and create opportunity to exploit vital resources, Beijing is quickly building its military’s offensive and protective

powers within the Indo-Pacific environment and extending its blue water maritime capability. There has been a substantial increase in the number of submarines by China, for offensive patrolling and security of its Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs). In the current situation, PLAN has deployed multiple types of submarines of Shang I-class, attack submarines of Shang II-class as well as Jin-class. A large number of destroyers, frigates and corvette form the cohesive Carrier Battle Group (CBG) to undertake offensive patrolling and protect the aircraft carriers. The PLAAF also has dedicated a large portion of its strength of about 1600 combat worthy aircrafts that include primarily Su-27s and Su-30s with few J-11s. In the near future Su-35s are also likely to dominate the skies over SCS. However, there is a critical limitation of Chinese aircrafts lacking the much needed engine capability for long hours of continuous operations. This limitation, coupled with limited aircraft carriers and shortage of Flight Refuelling Aircrafts (FRAs), poses a serious challenge to PLAAF and PLAN towards achieving their dominance of skies against technologically advanced, carrier and shore based fighter jets of US and allied forces. It is estimated that PLA's strategic airlift requirement in the entire IPMZ could be as high as 130 to 150 heavy lift aircrafts. The shortage of FRA and heavy lift capability is likely to complicate the issue further. The H-6 family of strategic bombers even with recent upgrade to the H-6K, avionics and weapon carriage modernisation, are no match to the B-52 type strategic bomber on

The Indian Air Force (IAF) is formidable and highly capable force with more than 1800 aircraft, state of the art technology weapons, supported by a secure robust AD network.

the US inventory, that carry almost six times the payload of H-6K and have most modern avionics integrated with various defensive systems.

US Forces

Indo-Pacific region is looked after and dominated by United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) of the United States Armed Forces. It is the largest US strategic command with almost 2,000 aircraft, three CBGs; 200 plus ships and submarines operating at any time in the zone. Pacific Air Forces (PACAF), with a large number of fighters, Bombers and High Value Air Assets (HVAAs), constitute a vital portion of the command. With an unmatched fleet of about 12 operational aircraft carriers, nearly 300 battleworthy ships of destroyer, frigate class with compliment of huge tankers, amphibious ships and support ships, the US Navy can always boast itself to be a global strategic projection force. The US Navy also has about 75 submarines. PACAF has 334 fixed wing aircraft that include mainly fighters like F-15C/D Eagle, F-16CJ/DJ, heavy lift aircrafts, AWACS and FRAs. USAF inventory in PACAF also include F-35, F-22A Raptor, C-17 Globemaster III, C-130 among many others. B-52 bombers with long range and precision weapon delivery capability would continue to play the dominant role in the skies over the Indo-Pacific.

India

Indian Navy (IN) presently has two aircraft carriers along with 137 ships and submarines, and 290 aircraft. IN also has a reasonable

strength of about 20 submarines. The Indian Air Force (IAF) is formidable and highly capable force with more than 1800 aircraft, state of the art technology weapons, supported by a secure robust AD network. IAF has a large inventory of fighters, that include Rafale, Su-30MKI, MiG-29UPG, Mirage 2000 and indigenous LCA. HVAAs like AWACs, AEW&C, IL-78 FRAs with heavy airlift aircrafts including C-17 Globemaster, C-130, IL-76 and Chinook helicopters give an envious capability to IAF in the IOR along with a large variety of helicopters like Mi-17, Mi-17 1V, Mi-17V 5, Light Combat Helicopters (LCH) and Rudra. Heron, Searcher UAVs with Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicle (UCAV) Harpy give an edge to IAF for search and strike capability.

Balance Rests on Air Power

The historical development of military power by each nation would play a crucial role in its ascendancy on the global map as a reckonable force. China, historically had been a land based military power with minimal naval forces on the Eastern province. However, with changing times, China gradually not only developed its military might in the domains of Air and Marine, but also rapidly altered its vision document to expand its prowess in cyber, space and nuclear domains also. There are a large number of factors that would decide the tilt of balance of Air power supremacy towards QUAD alliance and would serve as the decisive factor in this power struggle in the Indo-Pacific region.

The present reconnaissance capability of PLAAF is limited not only in terms of range but also in endurance and reach. US, on the other hand possesses a very high degree of capability in this domain.

Numerical Disparity

A huge disparity exists between the US and China, in terms of the number of fighters, heavy lift, AWACS, AAR aircraft as well as helicopters and UAVs along with reconnaissance aircraft. The disparity is not only in terms of shore-based assets but also in terms of carrier-based aircraft as operating surface in the ocean.

Technological Disparity

A large number of aircraft and other airborne systems with PLAAF are of older vintage compared to that of USAF or PACAF. The disparity of technology is not in terms of aircraft alone but exists in all associated systems; be it radars, air guided munitions or secure communication systems.

- **Airlift Capability.** China has very limited airlift capability compared to USAF; be it of fixed wing or helicopters. Lack of such capability, that acts as a force multiplier, can always prove critical in military engagements.
- **Long Range Reconnaissance.** In order to win the battle over sea, aerial reconnaissance plays a vital role in terms of providing timely and accurate early warning. The present reconnaissance capability of PLAAF is limited not only in terms of range but also in endurance and reach. US, on the other hand possesses a very high degree of capability in this domain.
- **Precision Weapons.** PLAN and PLAAF

have a very limited capability of Precision Guided Munitions (PGMs) as well as delivery platforms. Almost all US Navy carrier based aircraft have this capability. Such a disparity would put PLAN at a disadvantage vis-à-vis US Navy.

Conclusion

Indo-Pacific has emerged as one of the most volatile conflict zones of the world. China is focused on securing regional dominance through building a networked, precision-strike capability. Thus, while on one hand, China is exerting its dominance over key maritime sectors of IPMZ, on the other, Southeast Asian countries, Japan, India, Australia and the US are determined to ensure an inclusive, rule-based international order in the region that allows level playing field for equal, free and open trade opportunities for all the stakeholders.

In the quest for attaining avenues for economic growth, the power struggle between different ideologies is unavoidable. The increasing level of military presence both by US along with its allies and China is bound to lead to skirmishes at sea. Even with disproportionate naval assets, US and allies may find it difficult to establish clear supremacy of QUAD. The air power asymmetry would prove itself to be the winning factor in establishing stable international order in the region. The balance of air power in both, quantity and quality, is significantly in favour of the QUAD countries vis-à-vis China.

The US National Security Agency is working with Five Eyes partners in the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand to identify breaches.

China Accused of Hacking Microsoft System to Spy on US Military in Guam

Source: Sophia Yan | Techgraph

https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2023/05/25/china-blamed-microsoft-hacking-campaign-spy-us/?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email 25 May 2023



Guam is a strategic military base for the US
CREDIT: AP

A Chinese government-backed hacking group has been spying on critical US infrastructure organisations, including targeting the US island territory of Guam, home to strategic military presence.

Hackers managed to insert computer code that blended into Microsoft Windows systems, evading detection while maintaining access and gathering information, according to separate reports from Microsoft and Western intelligence agencies.

The cyberattack approach is called “living off the land,” and sees hackers using “built-in network tools to evade our defences and leaving no trace behind,” said Rob Joyce, NSA cybersecurity director, in a statement. It’s unclear how widespread the attack was, and what information may have been gleaned, though this is potentially one of the largest-ever known cyber espionage campaigns against US infrastructure.

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The UK National Cyber Security Centre warned that “the same techniques could be applied worldwide.”

Microsoft said it “assesses with moderate confidence” that this campaign “is pursuing development of capabilities that could disrupt critical

communications infrastructure between the United States and Asia region during future crises.”

That makes the targeting of Guam of particular concern, as it would be a key part of any sort of American military response to conflict in the Indo-Pacific region.

Tensions are growing over Taiwan, an island nation with its own democratically-elected government that China claims as its territory.

Experts have highlighted that China could act on leader Xi Jinping’s repeated vows to annex Taiwan by leading an invasion or blockade.

Such scenarios have worried neighbouring countries, and as far afield as the US – conflict over Taiwan could be considered a proxy for worsening bilateral ties between Beijing and Washington.

In the region, China also lays claim to the South China Sea, disputed by many nations that share the resource-rich waters.

Over the last decade, China has built up and militarised rocky outposts. On Wednesday, China’s transport ministry said it had deployed three navigation beacons around a contested grouping of islands, the latest effort to stake its

claim to the area.

Earlier this month, the Philippines also placed navigational buoys within its exclusive economic zone in an effort to stand its ground.

The Philippines is one of the Southeast Asian nations that dispute China’s territorial claims.

Microsoft has released guidance on how to detect and protect against the hacks, though “detecting and mitigating this attack could be challenging” given the nature of how malicious code can be hidden within valid, existing network infrastructure.

The Chinese state-sponsored hacking group, dubbed ‘Volt Typhoon,’ is known to focus on espionage, and has been active since mid-2021.

ASEAN and the Quad Inch Closer Together

Source: Sharon Seah and Kei Koga, Foreign Policy

<https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/05/24/quad-asean-southeast-asia-china-geopolitics-indo-pacific/> 24 May 2023



Indonesian President Joko Widodo greets U.S. President Joe Biden at the G-20 summit in Bali, Indonesia, on Nov. 16, 2022. DITA ALANGKARA/POOL/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Australia was supposed to host the third in-person summit of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (or Quad) in Sydney on Wednesday, May 24, but plans hit a snag when debt-ceiling

shenanigans in the U.S. Congress forced President Joe Biden to cut his travels short. Instead, the leaders of Australia, India, Japan, and the United States met at the sidelines of the G-7 summit in Hiroshima, Japan, last Sunday. Despite the abrupt change of schedule, the Quad issued an unprecedentedly detailed joint statement on practical initiatives, such as the launch of the Quad Infrastructure Fellowship, the Quad Partnership for Cable Connectivity and Resilience, and the Quad Investors Network. The four leaders also emphasized cooperation with regional institutions, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

The Quad has had more than its share of fits and starts since it was launched in 2007 by the four countries to coordinate strategy and policies affecting the Indo-Pacific. In particular, the Quad long struggled to find acceptance in Southeast Asia, a region increasingly at the center of geopolitical competition. Some Southeast Asian countries can appreciate the Quad's humanitarian agenda, including vaccine cooperation, disaster relief, and other humanitarian assistance. But there has also been a healthy dose of skepticism and discomfort with the Quad's narrative of containing China. There are few geopolitical developments Southeast Asians fear more than their region getting caught in the maelstrom of superpower competition—and having to choose sides.

Lately, however, there seems to be a shift in attitudes, with Southeast Asia's policy community increasingly open to the Quad. According to the State of Southeast Asia 2023 survey published by the ASEAN Studies Centre

at the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, slightly more than half of Southeast Asian experts polled said that a stronger Quad will be a positive development for the region—with only 12 percent disagreeing. When asked what ASEAN-Quad cooperation would mean for the region, 69 percent view the Quad as beneficial for the region or complementing the ASEAN's own efforts to facilitate cooperation in Southeast Asia and beyond. Surprisingly, just 10 percent of respondents fear that engaging with the Quad will force ASEAN countries to choose sides, and not even 7 percent are afraid that ASEAN-Quad cooperation will provoke China.

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Why the shift in favor of the Quad in Southeast Asia?

Part of the answer is that today's version of the Quad is vastly different from its earlier iterations, when the group focused primarily on security strategy and countering China. Under the Biden administration, the Quad's emphasis has shifted to focus on delivering regional public goods and services that Indo-Pacific countries are keenly interested in, including global health care, climate policy, infrastructure, disaster response, and education. By inserting ASEAN-friendly language in its vision—for example, the phrase “free, open, prosperous, and inclusive”—the Quad has reframed its purpose from exclusively countering China to a broader vision that appears to support ASEAN countries.

ASEAN's long-standing suspicion of the Quad stemmed from the latter's genesis and initial development in the context of geopolitical competition. Linking the Indian and Pacific Oceans in a single strategic vision—and framing it as a grand struggle between democracy and

autocracy—did not go over well in Southeast Asian countries, few of which are Western-style liberal democracies.

While the original motive may have been to form a traditional security framework, the reality within the Quad is that its members often had diverging national interests. In 2008, for instance, then-Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd decided that his country should switch course, accommodate China, and disengage from the Quad. Several years of dormancy followed until geopolitical changes, including China's rising assertiveness in the region, led to the Quad's revival in the waning years of the Obama administration. Under the Trump administration, Washington's vision of the Indo-Pacific and the Quad was essentially security-oriented and targeted against Beijing.

The Quad's refocusing from security to delivering practical, tangible benefits has been much better received in Southeast Asia—especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the Quad first shifted its focus. In fact, it was largely the pandemic that catalyzed the Quad's shift to public health and other civilian policies, as the Biden administration worried China was successfully using vaccine diplomacy to enhance its ties in the global south. Meanwhile, Washington has pursued the security aspects of Indo-Pacific policy, including defense and containment, through the newly formed Australia-United Kingdom-United States pact (known as AUKUS) and various bilateral relationships, which has freed up the Quad for civilian objectives.

That said, there are limits to Southeast Asian

countries' willingness to engage with the Quad. Talk of Quad membership expansion to include countries in the region—such as the Philippines, a U.S. treaty ally that is expanding security ties with Japan—has been summarily dismissed. Such a step is widely seen as a threat to ASEAN unity and cohesion, and no member would risk stepping out of line.

What's more, the Quad's emphasis on political values, such as freedom and democracy, are difficult agendas for many Southeast Asian countries to fully support, given how few countries in the region are fully democratic. But the Quad's other core principles do resonate with ASEAN countries: respect for the rule of law, sovereignty and territorial integrity, peaceful settlement of disputes without resorting to threat or use of force, objection to unilateral attempts to change the status quo, and the freedom of navigation and overflight.

From the vantage point of ASEAN countries, cooperation with the Quad brings several strategic advantages. First, Quad resources can go a long way in building ASEAN members' capacity in dealing with crises and challenges, such as future pandemics. Second, institutional cooperation can help ASEAN influence the Quad's strategic thinking on the future of the Indo-Pacific. Third, ASEAN can help shape an institutional division of labor between itself and the Quad.

For the Quad, cooperation with ASEAN will raise the former's visibility in the Indo-Pacific region and give it more legitimacy to shape and nurture regional norms and rules. Perhaps most importantly at this stage of the Quad's

From the vantage point of ASEAN countries, cooperation with the Quad brings several strategic advantages.

development, such cooperation will counter suggestions that this grouping is merely a tool to contain China.

As ASEAN members work toward greater unity, cohesion, and policy coordination in the region—a goal the group calls “ASEAN centrality”—some of them worry that Quad policies could undermine their efforts at unity. Indonesia, the group’s rotating chair this year, has made it a top priority to implement the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, a guidance document outlining the group’s Indo-Pacific strategy. Indonesia plans to organize an ASEAN Indo-Pacific Forum that aims to strengthen collaboration with China, Quad countries, and other external partners in infrastructure, business investment, the digital economy, and other fields. This diplomatic momentum opens a window for greater cooperation with the Quad, to the benefit of both sides.

The main remaining issue is how to manage China’s perceptions of closer ASEAN-Quad relations. China remains wary that the United States’ preponderant role in the region will be further strengthened by ASEAN-Quad cooperation.

To make China feel less threatened, ASEAN can take an incremental approach to the Quad, selecting areas of cooperation that will promise benefits not only to Southeast Asia and the Quad countries, but also to China and other key partners, such as South Korea and the European Union. One such area could be to help manage technology supply chain issues, which have risen to the fore as an area of strategic

competition between Beijing and Washington. Here, Southeast Asia has the opportunity to buffer the impacts of sudden policy moves by either side.

An incremental approach to ASEAN-Quad relations also means experimenting with various levels of institutional cooperation. This could entail inviting ASEAN secretariat officials to Quad meetings, which would help facilitate an understanding of current and future Quad plans. This could be followed by informal ASEAN-Quad consultations in one or two policy areas of particular concern to ASEAN members, such as energy security. The development of functional cooperation that can produce tangible, practical

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benefits for the region will be viewed more favorably—including by China—than political statements of grand intent that only raise suspicions.

In a strategic environment increasingly marked by intensified Sino-U.S. competition, ASEAN has a key role to play to alleviate tensions. The Quad, for its part, has indicated the importance to “ensure all nations, large and small, continue to have a voice.” As views across Southeast Asia shift toward a more positive take on the Quad, now is the time for both blocs to seize the opportunity and move toward closer ASEAN-Quad cooperation.

Papua New Guinea: A Tale of Two Visits

Source: Ian Kemish, ORF

<https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/papua-new-guinea-a-tale-of-two-visits/> 26 May 2023



Papua New Guinea (PNG) has been in the international spotlight over the last week, and the highlight for the people of that country has undoubtedly been the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who received a hugely enthusiastic welcome on Monday, 22 May, when he arrived to conduct the first visit to the country by an Indian head of government.

The images of PNG Prime Minister James Marape joyfully stooping to touch Modi's feet sent a clear and deliberate message of personal respect for his visitor, whom Marape described, "the leader of the Global South". In his formal comments, Marape enjoined him "to offer a third big voice in the face of the global north".

The warmth of the welcome pointed to the special "value-add" that India, as a former colony and developing country, offers the region and its democratic partners as they work to demonstrate the value of engaging with them rather than an increasingly assertive China. The Modi visit provided the clearest signal yet

of India's intention to support these efforts, and its willingness to extend its strategic outreach beyond the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asian regions—an inclination first shown when Modi hosted the first summit in Fiji in 2014.

With what the Pacific sees as its inspirational development narrative, its major power status and cultural links to the region, India could play a very important role in the region if it follows up with substantive collaboration with regional countries on climate change, security, and sustainable development. And Modi certainly indicated that this was his intention at the third summit of the Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC III), which he convened during the PNG visit.

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Fourteen leaders of the Pacific Island Forum (PIF) countries and territories attended the summit, where Modi told them that India was proud to be their development partner and was committed to a "free, open and inclusive" Indo Pacific. He spoke of specific Indian development projects such as a convention Centre in Palau, waste management programmes in Nauru, agricultural programmes in Fiji, and solar lights in Kiribati. He also highlighted the Sustainable Coastal and Ocean Research Institute at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji, which aims to leverage India's experiences in sustainable development for collaboration with Pacific Island countries. Modi expressed India's willingness to offer further support in areas such as digital and space technology, health and food security, climate change, and environmental conservation.

India's decision not to invite certain PIF members to the formal summit—namely Australia, New Zealand and the French Pacific territories—has led some to question what this says about India's commitment to working with regional institutions. But the New Zealand Prime Minister and Senator Conroy of Australia—in the country to participate in the parallel US-convened summit (below)—were invited to the lunch session with the group, and their non-inclusion in the full meeting might actually have been tactically useful on this occasion from everyone's perspective. If the region's "traditional" partners are keen to encourage India to step forward into a substantive and positive regional role, then it probably helps that the symbolism of the India-Pacific meeting was not diluted by the sound of them detailing their own familiar cooperative efforts with the region.

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PNG and Fiji both took the opportunity of Modi's presence to confer on him their nations' highest civilian honours. The Governor-General awarded him the Grand Companion of the Order of Logohu, whose recipients are entitled "Chief", and visiting Fiji prime minister Sitiveni Rambuka bestowed on his Indian counterpart the Companion of the Order of Fiji.

Modi's visit overlapped with that of United States (US) Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken, who was standing in for President Biden whose much-anticipated stopover in the country was cancelled, along with his planned subsequent visit to Australia, because of the crisis in the US Congress over the federal debt ceiling. Blinken

and PNG counterparts signed an updated Defence Cooperation Agreement and an Agreement Concerning Counter Illicit Transnational Maritime Activity Operations.

For Marape, the Modi visit must have offered the perfect political balance to the signing of these US agreements, which prompted some student demonstrations about their perceived lack of transparency, and concerns that they compromised the country's independence by bringing it more firmly into the US sphere of control. Some opposition political figures also spoke of the risk of angering China and, thus, inviting potentially harmful repercussions for PNG's economic security. Marape and his government stood their ground, with the prime minister arguing that the agreement had "nothing to do with China", and that PNG's

sovereignty remained intact. He also pointed to his government's "healthy" relationship with Beijing and China's status as an important trading partner for PNG.

While Chinese investment and development support for PNG actually remains very limited compared to that of Australia—PNG's largest partner in economic, development, and security terms—it looms large as a trading partner and Chinese state-owned enterprises are now heavily engaged in PNG, particularly its construction sector.

The updated US-PNG defence relationship, combined with a now-established pattern of senior US-Pacific political dialogue, recent growth in regional US development support, and

the upgrading of its regional diplomatic network, provides some corroboration that a long-promised American recommitment to the Pacific is finally underway. Biden's planned visit would have sealed this message symbolically—it would have been the first ever to a Pacific Island country—and its cancellation was undoubtedly a setback.

These two overlapping visits were major steps in a broader, substantial uptick in PNG's external engagement: British Foreign Secretary James Cleverly also visited the country in April, signing a defence framework agreement, and Indonesian President Jokowi will be there in June. France has also recently signed a status of forces agreement with PNG, and Australia is negotiating a security treaty that is expected to substantially upgrade its longstanding defence cooperation agreement.

All this activity reflects the increasing importance of the Pacific Island countries in the strategic calculations of the democratic powers amidst growing Chinese influence and heightened US-China tensions in the region. This is particularly true of PNG—the largest nation in the region by far—located only a few kilometres from Australia near the intersection point between Asia and the Pacific. It is also clear that Australia's partners have come to understand that they cannot leave it to Australia alone to carry the democratic standard in the Pacific.

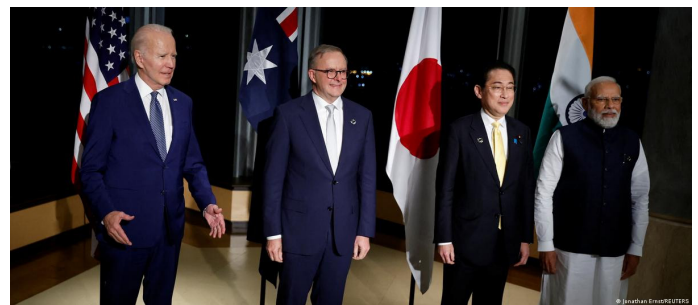
PNG will remain committed to its “friends to all, enemies to none” foreign policy approach. In recent years, its leaders have joined others from the Pacific in expressing impatience with the strategic rivalry between their external partners

and alarm at signs of greater militarisation in the region. India's independent stance on global issues will be seen by many in the region as a model.

At G7, Japan Quietly Strengthens Alliances

Source: William Yang | dw.com

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US President Joe Biden, Japanese PM Fumio Kishida, Australian PM Anthony Albanese and Indian PM Narendra Modi held a quad meeting at the sidelines of the G7 summit

As leaders from the Group of Seven (G7) major industrial countries meet in Japan, the host nation is using the three-day summit to highlight pressing security challenges in the Indo-Pacific region while asserting itself as a key player on the international stage.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida is "leveraging" Japan's G7 presidency to draw the world's attention to the challenging security situation in the region, said Jeff Kingston, director of Asian Studies at Temple University Japan.

Security issues in the Indo-Pacific region include China's ongoing efforts to expand and modernize its nuclear forces and technologies, its

All this activity reflects the increasing importance of the Pacific Island countries in the strategic calculations of the democratic powers amidst growing Chinese influence and heightened US-China tensions in the region.

potential invasion of Taiwan and North Korea's continuation of its military nuclear weapons program.

Three countries in Japan's vicinity, North Korea, China and Russia, possess nuclear weapons capabilities. As such, holding the G7 summit in Hiroshima, one of two Japanese cities devastated by atomic bombs dropped by the United States in the last days of World War II, has an enormous symbolism.

Prior to the start of the summit, Kishida said he believes the first step toward any nuclear disarmament effort is to provide "a first-hand experience of the consequences of the atomic bombing and to firmly convey the reality."

Promoting nuclear disarmament, which may include getting North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles program, is a "personal mission for Kishida," said Japan expert Kingston, "and it's a distant goal."

Beyond the Indo-Pacific

In his attempt to achieve that goal, Kishida has expanded Japan's diplomatic efforts beyond its traditional allies in the Indo-Pacific. The prime minister was quick to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine last year and impose sanctions on Russian entities while offering aid and military assistance worth millions of dollars. In March, he made an unannounced visit to Kyiv.

According to Christopher B. Johnstone and Nicholas Szechenyi from the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a US think tank, Kishida's Ukraine visit wasn't just about symbolic support. It also showed "Japan's own determination to support Ukraine and oppose Russia's attempt to change the status quo by force — a universal principle that Tokyo sees as vital to

uphold in the face of Chinese coercion in Asia," they wrote in an analysis.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has also been invited to address the G7 summit in person on Sunday.

Expanding traditional alliances

Kishida has also invited leaders from several Global South nations to attend the meeting as observers, including Indonesia, India, Vietnam, and Brazil.

Although it has become customary to invite leaders from non-G7 nations in recent years, Japan is making efficient use of the G7 to expand traditional alliances, says Japan security expert Robert Ward, amid growing concern about the potential Chinese invasion of Taiwan.

Japan needs "a network as densely as it can be and in as many areas related to security as it can be," said Ward, Japan chair and senior fellow with the UK-based International Institute for Strategic Studies, "because Japan's needs go beyond the traditional US-Japan security relationship."

To further strengthen Japan's security cooperation with key regional allies, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese are also present in Hiroshima.

Japan's diplomatic efforts in Europe and closer to home are paying off, said Eleanor Hughes, a non-resident fellow at the Chicago-based think tank EconVue.

She points to Japan signing of a landmark agreement with the United Kingdom on the eve of the summit. A UK government press release hailed "Japan's pivotal role in the Indo-Pacific and their centrality to the UK's security and

prosperity."

Other signs of Japan's diplomatic success, according to Hughes, include a reciprocal access agreement with Australia, its advancement of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (commonly known as the Quad) between India, Australia, Japan and the United States and increasing engagement with African countries and the Global South.

New Defense Posture

Japan's efforts to present itself as a major player in international politics are coupled with the dramatic transformation of its defense posture. Last December, Japan announced the plan to double its defense budget and acquire counterstrike capabilities.

Additionally, Kishida has also strengthened bilateral exchanges with South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and Filipino President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. During a meeting between Japanese and Filipino Foreign Ministers in Tokyo on May 16, both countries agree to deepen security cooperation, citing China's growing maritime assertiveness as a mutual concern.

Despite major changes to its security posture in recent months, the Japanese public seems somewhat ambivalent to the government's new direction.

According to a recent poll from the Japanese newspaper Asahi Shimbun, 80% of Japanese respondents express concern about the likelihood that Japan would be dragged into the potential military conflict across the Taiwan Strait.

Kishida is "constrained by the deep pacifism among the Japanese people," said Kingston from TUJ. "It's a difficult situation."

This means Kishida needs to balance Japan's emboldened foreign policy ambitions with his people's reservations.

International relations expert Kyoko Hatakeyama is among those analysts who think Japan can still maximize its diplomatic influence during the year of its G7 presidency.

"If the G7 summit is successful, it will boost Japan's diplomatic status," said Hatakeyama, a professor at the University of Niigata Prefecture in Japan. "And if Japan takes a more active role in maintaining regional order, the Indo-Pacific region can also benefit from these efforts."

Cherry-Picks of the Month

1. *US Rejects F-35 Stealth Fighters For China's 'Strategic Ally' In Indo-Pacific; Offers F-15, F-16 Instead: Reports* - <https://eurasianimes.com/us-rejects-f-35-stealth-fighters-for-chinas-strategic-ally-in-indo-pacific-offers-f-15-f-16-instead-reports/>
2. *Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi Cheered by 20,000 Fans at Sydney Stadium* - <https://thediplomat.com/2023/05/indian-prime-minister-narendra-modi-cheered-by-20000-fans-at-sydney-stadium/>
3. *The Quad needs to raise the game in the Indian Ocean* - <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/the-quad-needs-to-raise-the-game-in-the-indian-ocean/>
4. *'Quad' urges Indo-Pacific 'free of coercion' as it unveils new measures* - <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2023/05/21/national/politics-diplomacy/g7-quad-summit-hiroshima/>
5. *The Quad needs to talk security for subsea cables* - <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/quad-needs-talk-security-subsea-cables>
6. *At Hiroshima, Japan's moment to reinforce partnerships* - <https://www.orfonline.org/research/at-hiroshima-japans-moment-to-reinforce-partnerships/>

CAPS Experts-InFocus

1. Japan's Dilemma over the Taiwan Strait Crisis - <https://capsindia.org/japans-dilemma-over-the-taiwan-strait-crisis/>

Debates/Panel Discussions

1. Why Pacific Nations want India's help? PM Modi's Indo-Pacific tour - <https://www.firstpost.com/vantage/why-pacific-nations-want-indias-help-pm-modis-indo-pacific-tour-vantage-with-palki-sharma-9932>

2. Hand-Off: The Evolution of U.S. Policy in Asia - <https://www.linkedin.com/events/hand-off-theevolutionofu-s-poli7065411806726348800/comments/>

3. Toward a Successful G7 Hiroshima Summit, For a Better Future for Japan and the World - <https://www.g7hiroshima.go.jp/en/summit/message/>

4. The EU at the G7 Summit in Japan - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zy8jaA1wOtY>



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