



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

There were five summit-level meetings in the month. On May 2, President Macron and the Prime Minister of Japan met in Paris during the OECD Ministerial Council Meeting. From May 6–7, China's President Xi Jinping traveled to France for his third state visit. Vladimir Putin, the president of Russia, was in Beijing on May 16–17. Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida met with Malaysia's Prime Minister Dato Seri Anwar bin Ibrahim in Tokyo on May 23. For their first trilateral summit in more than four years, Chinese Prime Minister Li Qiang and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida traveled to Seoul on May 26–27.

On May 1, Australia and South Korea's defense and foreign ministers convened in Melbourne for the Sixth Australia-ROK 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue. On May 02, the US, Japan, and Australia convened in Hawaii for the Trilateral Defence Ministers' Meeting. Following that, they were joined in Hawaii by the Defense Secretary of the Philippines for the Pacific Quad (also known as SQUAD) Defence Ministers' Meeting.

Australia announced a defense budget for 2024–2025 of about AUD 58 billion (around \$ 38.93 billion), or over 2.03% of GDP. Additionally, it stated that over a five-year period, this would increase to 2.3% of the GDP. Shangri-La Dialogue was held from May 31 in which the two biggest economies in the world offered different approaches to regional cooperation. The U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin persuaded nations in the Indo-Pacific region of America's vision of an expansive network of alliances.

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

Vol IV, No 01, 07 June 2024

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PEEP-IN

Grey horizons for Beijing's South China Sea strategy

Read more about it at :-

<https://eastasiaforum.org/2024/05/23/grey-horizons-for-beijings-south-china-sea-strategy/>

QUOTE

"India has a long and distinguished maritime tradition, whose civilisational imprint is still visible in this region. Today, our Act East policy and the Indo-Pacific Vision have given it a more contemporary form"

- Dr. S. Jaishankar

External Affairs Minister (India)

Opinions/Review/Expert View

China, Japan and South Korea Hold Regional Summit Overshadowed by U.S.

Source: Choe Sang-Hun | The New York Times

<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/27/world/asia/china-japan-korea-trilateral.html> 27 May 2024



President Yoon Suk Yeol of South Korea, center, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida of Japan, left, and Chinese Premier Li Qiang at a joint news conference in Seoul on Monday. Credit...Pool photo by Kim Hong-Ji

The leaders of South Korea and Japan on Monday sought to restore economic cooperation with China, their biggest trading partner, after years of souring relations, but their three-way talks were overshadowed by heightened tensions between China and the United States, Seoul and Tokyo's most important military ally.

The trilateral meeting — featuring President Yoon Suk Yeol of South Korea, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida of Japan and Premier Li Qiang, the second-highest official in China — was the first in four and a half years.

Talks focused mainly on areas where common ground could more easily be found,

such as protecting supply chains, promoting trade and cooperating on the challenges of aging populations and emerging infectious diseases. The leaders tiptoed around thorny regional security issues like Taiwan and North Korea.

“The three nations agreed to expand practical cooperation in a way their people can feel its benefits,” Mr. Yoon said during a joint news conference with Mr. Kishida and Mr. Li, announcing 2025 and 2026 as the “years of cultural exchanges” among the three nations.

But North Korea helped highlight the major differences among the three neighbors on Monday. Hours before their meeting began, it announced a plan to place a military spy satellite into orbit. It followed through after the summit ended, launching a long-range rocket carrying the satellite from its space station in northwestern North Korea.

The country is barred by United Nations Security Council resolutions from launching such rockets because they use the same technology needed to build intercontinental ballistic missiles.

In the first trilateral meeting since 2019, the neighbors sought common ground in trade and cultural exchange while tiptoeing around thorny security issues.

North Korea's increasingly aggressive military posture has deepened concerns in South Korea and Japan. The North has also expanded arms trade with Russia in defiance of U.N. sanctions, shipping artillery shells and missiles for Moscow's war effort in Ukraine, according to American and South Korean officials. In return, Moscow is accused of providing energy and technological assistance that could help North Korea's missile

program.

South Korea and Japan have called on China, North Korea's biggest benefactor, to use its economic influence to help rein in Pyongyang's nuclear and missile programs. So far, Beijing has been reluctant to use that leverage, considering North Korea a buffer against the American military on the Korean Peninsula.

On Monday, both Mr. Yoon and Mr. Kishida vehemently criticized North Korea's satellite launch plan. But Mr. Li, who serves under Xi Jinping, China's top leader, did not denounce North Korea, only calling for all parties to "exercise restraint" and work for a "political settlement."

As the news conference was wrapping up in Seoul, 20 South Korean warplanes conducted an airstrike drill south of the inter-Korean border as a warning of "immediate and strong" retaliation against North Korean provocation.

China, Japan and South Korea had agreed to hold a trilateral meeting every year starting in 2008 to discuss regional cooperation. But the plan has often been disrupted by diplomatic spats and most recently by the pandemic. The meeting held in Seoul on Monday was the ninth such gathering and the first since December 2019.

During the yearslong gap, the strategic competition between Washington and Beijing has intensified, also souring relations between

China and the two United States allies. China has flexed its military muscle and expanded its territorial ambitions in the South and East China Seas, while the United States, Japan and South Korea have increased joint military drills and strengthened missile defense and other security cooperation.

China's ties with the two U.S. allies have become so testy in recent years that analysts observed that simply reviving the trilateral summit was an achievement. But common interests compelled Beijing and its two neighbors to revive it.

North Korea's increasingly aggressive military posture has deepened concerns in South Korea and Japan. The North has also expanded arms trade with Russia in defiance of U.N. sanctions, shipping artillery shells and missiles for Moscow's war effort in Ukraine, according to American and South Korean officials.

Mr. Yoon said on Monday that the three nations agreed to hold the summit meetings regularly.

The East Asian neighbors, which together account for more than one-fifth of global economic output, need regional stability and cooperation, especially in supply chains, to recover from their post-pandemic economic slowdown. Although Japan and South Korea consider the United States their most important ally, together hosting 80,000 American troops on their territories, their leaders have faced pressure at home from businesses vying to improve access to China.

China is betting that it can court Japan and South Korea by offering greater access to its market and diminish some of Washington's influence. To that end, China has agreed to restart talks on a free-trade agreement between the three neighbors, emphasizing

greater economic cooperation as a means to maintain regional peace and stability.

It has cast the United States as a meddler in Asian affairs that is pressuring Japan and South Korea to form a bloc to keep China's development in check. Washington has imposed a wall of restrictions to deny Beijing access to the latest semiconductors, and is urging allies like Japan and South Korea to cooperate.

On Monday, Mr. Li indirectly criticized Washington by calling for a "multipolar" world order and opposing any attempt to create "blocs" and to "politicize" trade issues.

In recent years, Japan and South Korean have grown closer, improving relations long strained by historical disputes. They have also expanded trilateral military cooperation with the United States to deter North Korea and China.

Japan and South Korea urged China to address their increasing difficulty in doing business in China. Mr. Kishida called for the early release of Japanese nationals detained in China on suspicion of espionage.

During bilateral talks on Sunday, South Korea and China agreed to start new channels to discuss security issues and cooperation in supply chains, said Kim Tae-hyo, a deputy national security director in Mr. Yoon's office.

Mr. Yoon's policy of aligning South Korea more closely with the United States has overlapped with a sharp drop in South

Korea's exports to China. The United States this year replaced China as South Korea's biggest export market for the first time in two decades, according to government data.

What does an Emerging Squad in the Indo-Pacific Mean for India?

Source: Harsh V. Pant and Don Mclain Gill | ORF

<https://www.orfonline.org/research/what-does-an-emerging-squad-in-the-indo-pacific-mean-for-india#:~:text=The%20Squad%20has%20become%20an.%2DJapan%2DSouth%20Korea%20trilateral>
24 May 2024



Earlier this month, US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin met his Australian, Filipino and Japanese counterparts to institutionalize and launch the 'Squad' as a new four-way security arrangement in the Indo-Pacific. The Squad has

Manila has broadened its alliance with the US and is currently negotiating a reciprocal access agreement (RAA) with Japan to enhance troop deployments between both countries.

become an essential addition to the series of security 'mini-lateral' groupings in the Indo-Pacific, such as the Quad, Aukus, the US-Philippines-Japan trilateral and the US-Japan-South Korea trilateral.

The Philippines, Japan and Australia are not treaty allies; however, each of these countries shares a bilateral treaty alliance with the US.

Thus, the idea behind the Squad centres on the desire of all four democracies to deepen their level of integration beyond the hub-and-spokes format at a time when China has been militarizing the South China Sea at the expense of the rules-based order of the Indo-Pacific.

The seeds for the Squad's creation were already planted in 2023 through the efforts of the four countries to enhance their strategic collaboration in the South China Sea. Manila has broadened its alliance with the US and is currently negotiating a reciprocal access agreement (RAA) with Japan to enhance troop deployments between both countries. This also complements the existing Visiting Forces of Agreement (VFA) that the Philippines has with the US and the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) between Manila and Canberra. In June 2023, the defence chiefs of all four countries met for the first time on the sidelines of the Shangri La security dialogue in Singapore. Moreover, in April this year, the US, Japan, the Philippines and Australia conducted their first-ever multilateral maritime exercise in the Philippines' exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

Though the creation of the Squad may have seemed quite natural, due to the loose and informal nature of mini-laterals, their development relies on the convergence of political will and the intersection of shared interests and threat perceptions among its potential members. Consequently, the degree of collective participation among all four democracies only began to heighten in 2023.

In the past decade, the US, Philippines, Japan, and Australia lacked a collective and homogenous strategic vision vis-a-vis the region. While Washington was initially preoccupied with Europe and the Middle East during the latter years of the Obama administration, the Trump presidency sought to reconfigure US commitments towards its alliances based on a greater level of transactionalism. On the other hand, while Japan and Australia recognized the challenges posed by China in the South China Sea, there were still limitations in their abilities to project a more military and defence-driven approach in the geographic space. Moreover, the absence of a resident Southeast Asian anchor further constrained the ability of the US and its two treaty allies to play a more robust role in securing the South China Sea collectively.

While Japan and Australia recognized the challenges posed by China in the South China Sea, there were still limitations in their abilities to project a more military and defence-driven approach in the geographic space.

While the Philippines seemed like the most practical Southeast Asian partner then, given its treaty alliance with the US, its close strategic ties with Japan and its defence relations with Australia, the former administration of Rodrigo Duterte significantly reoriented Philippine foreign and security policy. In the hope of gaining economic concessions from Beijing by appeasement, Manila refrained from taking direct action against China through the US alliance network. This policy shift limited the Philippines' participation in security arrangements to secure the South China Sea.

However, this strategic dynamic significantly changed in 2022. While still heavily engaged in Europe and the Middle East, Washington recognized more clearly that China is the only major power with the material capacity and

ambition to dismantle the established rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific. Similarly, with China showing no sign of managing its expansionist and belligerent activities in the Western Pacific, Japan has

All four members of the Squad must consistently engage with one another and explore new means of collective capacity building.

recognized the need to play a more robust defence role in the Indo-Pacific. This reorientation has its roots in Tokyo's National Security Strategy (NSS) released on 16 December 2022, which encompasses several notable objectives, including expediting Japan's military modernization and enhancing its military forces based on the acute traditional security challenges in the region. Importantly, the NSS also highlights the need for Tokyo to enhance the capabilities of friendly regional countries to attain a genuinely free and open Indo-Pacific. Australia has also been showing greater interest in playing a more prominent role as a security and development partner in Southeast Asia.

Since Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr took office in June 2022, Manila has taken a more proactive role in safeguarding its EEZ against Chinese expansionism by strengthening its partnerships to improve its maritime security capabilities and ability to exercise its sovereignty. This shift opened doors for the Philippines to participate more actively in the emerging network of like-minded democracies of the Indo-Pacific. By playing the anchor's role in Southeast Asia, the country has positioned itself as the Squad's fulcrum.

The proliferation of informal strategic arrangements suggests that Indo-Pacific security will be underpinned by flexible, area-specific and practical elements of cooperation, rather than traditional and rigid alliances. At the heart of these

developments lie concerns of a potential challenge posed by China to the stability of the established regional order. All four members of the Squad must consistently engage with one another and explore new

means of collective capacity building. Moreover, the Squad needs to coordinate with other existing mini-laterals (like the Quad) to achieve a more robust network-based cooperative framework of like-minded countries in the Indo-Pacific.

It is in the very nature of the Indo-Pacific that mini-laterals will proliferate and the nature of security threats in the region demand that they coordinate their actions closely.

Australia Unveils Record \$37 Billion Defense Budget

Source: Gordon Arthur | Defensenews

<https://www.defensenews.com/global/asia-pacific/2024/05/15/australia-unveils-record-37-billion-defense-budget/> 15 May 2024



The Royal Australian Navy submarine HMAS Sheean, a Collins-class boat, arrives in Hobart, Australia, on April 1, 2021. (LSIS Leo Baumgartner/Australian Defence Force via Getty Images)

CHRISTCHURCH, New Zealand — Australia will spend a record AU\$55.7 billion

(U.S. \$36.8 billion) on defense during the next fiscal year, according to budget documents unveiled May 14.

The figure equates to 2.02% of gross domestic product and represents a 6.3% increase from last year.

Australia's national defense strategy released last month, promised a significant increase in spending, but that does not start until 2027-2028, when defense expenditure is slated to reach about AU\$67.4 billion.

Beyond that, the government still has a ways to go to hit its defense spending goal of AU\$100 billion by 2033-2034, which would be 2.3% of GDP.

In this latest budget release for the 2024-2025 time frame, the government has set aside AU\$16.7 billion for equipment acquisitions in the coming fiscal year, plus another AU\$17.2 billion to sustain existing assets.

The Navy receives a significant allocation of AU\$10.7 billion. Nuclear-powered submarines are starting to consume an enormous portion of the budget as the trilateral AUKUS agreement progresses.

Notably, spending on nuclear submarines will snowball from last year's AU\$475 million to AU\$2.8 billion in the coming year, eventually reaching AU\$4.97 billion in 2027-2028.

By comparison, six Hunter-class frigates and six Arafura-class offshore patrol vessels are to receive AU\$813 million and AU\$587 million, respectively.

The budget makes no reference to 11 new general-purpose frigates, which the government is expected to select next year.

The Army is promised AU\$11.8 billion as it procures expensive assets such as Boxer armored vehicles, Redback infantry fighting vehicles, Huntsman self-propelled howitzers, High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, M1A2 Abrams tanks, National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems, and UH-60M Black Hawk and AH-64E Apache helicopters.

The Air Force will receive AU\$9.5 billion, with F-35A fighter jets being its single-most expensive acquisition; nine of 72 fighters remain undelivered.

Budget figures also revealed that the arrival of four MC-55A Peregrine electronic warfare aircraft is running two years behind schedule.

The Navy receives a significant allocation of AU\$10.7 billion. Nuclear-powered submarines are starting to consume an enormous portion of the budget as the trilateral AUKUS agreement progresses.

The Australian Signals Directorate, which conducts foreign signals intelligence, cybersecurity and offensive cyber operations, will receive AU\$2.7 billion. A further AU\$1 billion is allocated to defense intelligence.

Australian military procurements are handled by the Capability Acquisition and Sustainment Group. The government in 2021 formed the Guided Weapons and Explosive Ordnance enterprise to promote the sovereign production of missiles and munitions. Together, they will receive AU\$1.3 billion in the next fiscal year.

For its part, Ukraine garnered AU\$144.3 million in military aid for the year ahead, as it continues its fight against a Russian invasion.

Meanwhile, the Defence Department wants 63,597 uniformed personnel and 19,127 civilian employees in the year ahead. The Australian Defence Force, or ADF, is currently made up of about 58,600 uniformed personnel. The department is made up of about 18,000 civilian employees.

“[The Department of] Defence is forecasting to be below the required ADF fulltime workforce for 2024-25 due to high separation rates and lower than expected achievement of recruitment targets over recent years,” the budget document stated.

The new budget also noted that last year’s spending on personnel costs surpassed estimates by AU\$1 billion because of increased living costs. About AU\$16.7 billion is to be spent on the workforce this coming fiscal year.

Approximately AU\$6.6 billion will go toward maintaining the security and condition of Defence Department property. Before the budget was announced, Defence Industry Minister Pat Conroy promised between AU\$14 billion and AU\$18 billion would go to upgrading and hardening military bases in northern Australia over the next decade.

“The Northern Territory is critical to the defense of the nation, not just in defending Australia, but projecting power out into our region against any potential adversary,” Conroy said.

The 2024 National Defence Strategy, released last month, cited “increasing strategic competition” between China and Australian ally the United States, adding that the former seeks

“to change the current regional balance in its favor.”

“China has employed coercive tactics in pursuit of its strategic objectives, including forceful handling of territorial disputes and unsafe intercepts of vessels and aircraft operating in international waters and airspace,” the document stated.

Jennifer Parker, an expert associate at the Australian National University, warned that

The Air Force will receive AU\$9.5 billion, with F-35A fighter jets being its single-most expensive acquisition; nine of 72 fighters remain undelivered.

despite promised increases in defense spending, there is “a significant gap in ADF capability over the next 10, maybe 15 years. This gap coincides with the most strategically unstable geopolitical situation since [World War II].”

China Coast Guard Again Fires Water Cannons at Philippine Vessels Near Disputed Shoal

Source: Sebastian Strangio | The Diplomat

<https://thediplomat.com/2024/05/china-coast-guard-again-fires-water-cannons-at-philippine-vessels-near-disputed-shoal/>

01 May 2024



In this image made from video provided by the Philippine Coast Guard, Philippine Coast Guard vessel, BRP Bagacay is water cannoned by Chinese Coast Guards as it tried to approach the waters near Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea, April 30, 2024. Credit: Philippine Coast Guard via AP

Chinese coast guard ships have again fired high-pressure water cannons at two Philippine patrol vessels near the disputed Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea, the Philippine government said yesterday, in the latest in a long line of incidents.

Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) spokesperson Jay Tarriela said in a statement that the PCG vessel BRP Bagacay and fishery patrol ship BRP Bankaw were carrying out “a legitimate maritime patrol” in the waters near Scarborough Shoal when they “encountered dangerous maneuvers and obstruction from four China Coast Guard [CCG] vessels and six Chinese maritime militia vessels.”

Chinese vessels fired water cannons at the BRP Bankaw first, damaging its electrical, navigation,

and radio systems, and afterwards at the BRP Bagacay, damaging part of its deck railing and a canopy, he said. A video shot by reporters on board the BRP Bankaw appears to show the ship colliding with a CCG vessel, which proceeds to fire its water cannon at the ship’s radar navigation system from close range.

In a separate statement, the country’s National Task Force for the West Philippine Sea described the Chinese behavior as “illegal and irresponsible,” and said that it “highlights its egregious disregard for the Philippines’ lawful exercise of its rights and entitlements in our own Exclusive Economic Zone,” or EEZ.

Scarborough Shoal, known to Manila as Baja de Masinloc, lies around 198 kilometers due west of Luzon island, well within the Philippines’ EEZ. But the triangular shoal fell under China’s control after a 10-week stand-off with the Philippines in 2012 and the CCG has maintained a permanent presence there ever since.

The incident near Chinese-occupied Scarborough Shoal caused damage to two vessels, the Philippine government said.

While the Chinese authorities had for a time permitted Filipino fishermen to visit the shoal, it has moved to restrict this access over the past 18 months, as the two nations have engaged in intense stand-offs across the South China Sea.

Tarriela added that the China Coast Guard had “once again installed a 380-meter floating barrier that covers the entire entrance of the shoal, effectively restricting access to the area.” Chinese authorities last year installed a similar barrier, which was subsequently removed by the PCG.

He added that despite the “harassment and provocative actions,” the Philippine vessels completed the patrol. “They were not deterred

and will persist in carrying out their legitimate operations to support Filipino fishermen and ensure their safety,” he said.

China’s state media confirmed yesterday that Chinese ships had expelled two Philippine vessels that “intruded into the waters adjacent to Huangyan Dao,” as Beijing refers to the shoal.

A spokesperson for the CCG China also confirmed the incident, defending its actions as “professional, standardized, and legal,” Radio Free Asia reported. The spokesperson added that the Philippines’ actions “infringe on China’s sovereignty and seriously violate international law and basic norms of international relations.”

This use of force by the CCG has become routine in the South China Sea, as Beijing has become more forceful about enforcing its expansive “nine-dash line” claims, particularly against the Philippines. Along with Scarborough Shoal, the other major flashpoint has been Second Thomas Shoal in the Spratly Islands, some 630 kilometers to the south, where the Philippines maintains an outpost in a grounded World War II-era warship. The past 18 months have seen repeated confrontations between CCG and Philippine vessels in the waters around the shoal, in which Chinese vessels have rammed and fired water cannons at PCG patrol boats and civilian supply vessels, in a bid to prevent them from resupplying the Philippine marines stationed on the shoal.

At the moment, it remains unclear whether this pattern of escalation will end. Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has pledged not to cede “an inch” of Philippine territory to China,

while Beijing continues to treat Manila and its claims with haughty disdain.

While the current Chinese actions are calibrated to fall short of acts of war, they have now repeatedly resulted in substantial material damage to Philippine vessels, the prospect that one of these incidents could prompt a more

China’s state media confirmed yesterday that Chinese ships had expelled two Philippine vessels that “intruded into the waters adjacent to Huangyan Dao,” as Beijing refers to the shoal.

significant clash cannot be discounted. The United States government has affirmed on numerous occasions that any armed Chinese attack on Philippine territory, vessels, or personnel in the South China Sea will oblige it to come to the

Philippines’ aid under the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty.

To an extent, of course, the distinction between acts of “enforcement” and acts of war is a semantic one – a high-pressure water cannon is in many functional senses a weapon – but with diplomatic efforts to resolve the stand-off seemingly stalled, this question could determine whether or not the South China Sea disputes ultimately escalate into an armed conflict.

Cherry-Picks of the Month

1. Korea, Australia Discuss AUKUS Participation: Defense Minister - https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2024/05/113_373837.html
2. China's premier hails 'new beginning' with US-allied South Korea, Japan - <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/chinas-premier-hold-rare-summit-with-us-allied-south-korea-japan-2024-05-26/>
3. The "Squad" is a Welcome Spin-Off, but the Quad is the Main Game - <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/squad-welcome-spin-quad-main-game>
4. Australia Plans Major Spending Boost for Indo-Pacific Defense - <https://ipdefenseforum.com/2024/06/australia-plans-major-spending-boost-for-indo-pacific-defense/#:~:text=To%20bolster%20its%20defense%20capabilities,2.4%25%20of%20gross%20domestic%20product.>

CAPS Experts- Infocus

1. Japan's outreach to the Pacific Island Countries in the Indo-Pacific - <https://capsindia.org/japans-outreach-to-the-pacific-island-countries-in-the-indo-pacific/>
2. Australia's National Defence Strategy: Implications for India and its Defence Cooperation with Australia - <https://capsindia.org/australias-national-defence-strategy-implications-for-india-and-its-defence-cooperation-with-australia/>

Debates/ Podcasts

1. Exploring India-South Korea Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific (Podcast) - <https://www.ipcircle.org/podcast/episode/3b68e963/ep46-exploring-india-south-korea-strategic-cooperation-in-the-indo-pacific>
2. China, Japan and South Korea Hold First Trilateral Summit in Nearly Five Years - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rUJlhZhWia0>



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