

## Defence and Security Synergy Between India and Australia

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The relations between India and Australia are embedded in history. As part of the British, the Armies of both countries shared the trenches as part of World War-I in Gallipoli and along the Western Front; since then, India and Australia have maintained positive relations. In 2006 Memorandum on Defence Cooperation was signed between the two, and in 2009 a joint declaration on Security Cooperation reinforced ties further. In 2014, with the signing of an agreement on a bilateral Framework for Security Cooperation, the defence relationship grew to embrace a range of strategic dialogue and regular interactions between the Armed Forces of the two countries through senior officials' visits and staff talks and training exchanges.<sup>[i]</sup>

On 4 Jun 2020, India and Australia upgraded their strategic partnership to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership based on a shared perception, trust, mutual interests, common values of democracy and the rule of law. The pillars of the deep cooperation involved maritime ties for an open and inclusive Indo-Pacific, defence cooperation, and a promise to inspire peace, security, steadiness and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>[ii]</sup>

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence of Australia, Richard Marles, visited India from June 20-23, 2022. The visit was the first high-level visit to New Delhi after Anthony Albanese took over as the Prime Minister of Australia on 23 May 2022. An early bilateral visit by Defence Minister Marles was a clear sign that defence and security cooperation are the key focus areas of the overall Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP). He said that Australia is steadfast in firming up its defence and security collaboration with India and is ready to work closely with India to support an open, inclusive and resilient Indo-Pacific region.<sup>[iii]</sup>

Hon'ble Prime Minister of Australia, Anthony Albanese, visited India from 8 to 11 Mar 2023. Both Prime Ministers appreciated the India-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership's enduring pillars (defence & security). Considering the uncertain global security environment, they pledged to strengthen these relations further to address common challenges and work towards an open, inclusive, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific.

Both agreed that they must continue to explore carrying out aircraft dispositions from each other's territories to shape operational familiarity and enhance maritime domain awareness in future.

Australia would host Exercise MALABAR in 2023 for the first time; India appreciated this move and said it would further reinforce interoperability between participating navies. They also underscored the benefit of regular exchanges between defence forces to increase interoperability. They welcomed the beginning of the opening breakthrough General Rawat India-Australia Young Officer Defence Exchange Programme from 1 Mar 2023. The 15-day programme, with the participation of 15 young officers, is currently underway in India, and Australia will follow such interaction in 2024.

They strongly condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and emphasised the need for global collaboration to counter terrorism comprehensively and sustainably. They urged to slam those who inspire, support and finance terrorism. They appealed to all countries to try to root out terrorist safe harbours, disrupt terrorist networks and their financing channels, and stop using terrorist proxies and the cross-border drive of terrorists.<sup>[iv]</sup>

The India-Australia defence relationship now encompasses almost every major function of the military sphere: strategic dialogues, coordination, and information exchanges; military exercises involving ground, air and maritime forces; exchanges and training; and defence scientific and technological cooperation.

**Security Issues and Strategic Challenges for India and Australia.** As the centre of world economic activities shifts to Asia. India and Australia face three main challenges; terrorism, China's expansionism and revisionism and connection and coordination among the countries of the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>[v]</sup> The two countries now share many security concerns, including the growing impact of China on the strategic environment. Australia has recognised India as an important new strategic partner. India, too is beginning to see Australia as one of several new security partners in the Indo-Pacific. But despite all these, India and Australia face various defence and security challenges, individually and in partnership. Some of the critical difficulties could be summarised as under:

1. **Terrorism:** India and Australia have experienced terrorist attacks and face ongoing threats from terrorist groups. The two countries have been working together to strengthen cooperation in counter-terrorism efforts, including sharing intelligence and information.
2. **Cybersecurity:** With the increasing use of technology in all aspects of life, India and Australia face growing cyber-attack threats. The two countries have been working to strengthen their cybersecurity capabilities and cooperation, including through joint exercises and information sharing.
3. **Maritime security:** As both India and Australia are maritime nations, they face various security challenges in the Indian-Pacific region and beyond. These include piracy, illegal fishing, drug trafficking, smuggling, etc. The two countries have been working to enhance their maritime security cooperation through joint patrols and exercises.
4. **Border security:** India and Australia share borders with countries facing instability and conflict, leading to challenges regarding illegal immigration, smuggling, and terrorism. The two countries have been working to enhance their border security cooperation through joint training and intelligence sharing.
5. **Regional security:** India and Australia are key players in the Asia-Pacific region and face security challenges related to regional geopolitics, including China's growing assertiveness and North Korea's nuclear program. The two countries have been working to strengthen their strategic partnership and coordinate their responses to regional security challenges.
6. **Defence modernisation:** India and Australia are modernising their defence forces to meet the evolving security challenges of the 21st century. The two countries have been exploring opportunities for collaboration in defence technology and equipment, including joint research and development and joint production of defence equipment.

India and Australia face various defence and security challenges, but they also have significant opportunities for cooperation and partnership to address these challenges. Strengthening their strategic partnership and enhancing their cooperation in defence and security will be critical for promoting regional stability and security in the Asia-Pacific region.

**Way forward for India and Australia.** India and Australia have made significant strides in their defence and security cooperation in recent years, and there are several ways that they can continue to deepen their partnership in the future also. Here are some potential areas of focus:

1. Maritime security: India and Australia have significant coastlines and are interested in ensuring maritime security and freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific region. The two countries have conducted joint naval exercises and can continue to enhance their cooperation in this area.

2. Counter-terrorism: India and Australia have both faced significant threats from terrorism in the past, and there is potential for increased cooperation in the areas of intelligence sharing, law enforcement, and counter-terrorism operations.

3. Cybersecurity: As both countries continue developing their digital infrastructure, they must work together to address the growing cyber-attack threat. This could include sharing information on threats and vulnerabilities and developing joint strategies for defence.

4. Defence technology: India and Australia have invested heavily in defence technology and have significant capabilities in missile defence, unmanned systems, and space technology. There is potential for increased collaboration in research and development, joint production, and technology transfer.

5. Regional stability: India and Australia share a common interest in maintaining regional peace and promoting economic growth in the Indo-Pacific region. The two countries can work together to address common challenges, such as China's assertiveness in the South China Sea and the threat of North Korea's nuclear program.

**Conclusion:** India and Australia have a strong foundation for defence and security cooperation, and there is significant potential for further collaboration. Continued engagement at the highest levels of government and military leadership and increased people-to-people ties can help deepen the partnership and enhance mutual trust and understanding.

The positive developments in bilateral relations between India and Australia in recent years have shown that there are now multiple alignments in their strategic interests, as compared to the past. Both countries appear ready to actively restructure the regional balance of power for a *stable multipolar and rebalanced order with space for plurilateral*. The defence and security ties are progressing; there is much potential for the two countries. They are also willing to explore the prospect of defence-industrial collaboration further as they move forward.

Amidst the current geopolitical scenarios, both countries with a shared vision for the Indo-Pacific region, growing trade, closer security and defence cooperation and engagement with like-minded regional players will play a substantial role in defining the regional balance of power, reinforced by mutual respect, prosperity and stability.

India and Australia desire an Indo-Pacific region that is peaceful, prosperous, and where sovereignty is respected. Both countries have reiterated their perseverance in following converging strategic objectives in the Indo-Pacific region by enduring collaboration on defence and security.

## End Notes

[i] Australian High Commission - Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, <https://india.highcommission.gov.au/>

[ii] India and Australia: Partners for Indo-Pacific Security and Stability <https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/publication/policy-briefs/india-and-australia-partners-for-indo-pacific-security-and-stability.html>

[iii] Indian Council of World Affairs <https://www.icwa.in/>

[iv] Joint Statement - 1st Australia-India Annual Summit

<https://www.pm.gov.au/media/joint-statement-1st-australia-india-annual-summit> Accessed on 21 Mar 2023

[v] Delhi Policy Group <https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/>

Accessed on 22 Mar 2023

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