

## **Indian and Australian Armies Partnership is Emerging As the Backbone of their Strategic Alignment**

Going back in history both the Indian and Australian Armies first fought together on the beaches of Gallipoli in World War I. Joan Baez, American singer-songwriter and musician, in her song 'And the Band Played Waltzing Matilda' writes about the intensity of the battle when she said how the Australian troops 'Were butchered like lambs at the slaughter' and the pain endured 'Never knew there was worse things than dying'. In Nov 2014, Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi presented a silver replica of the statue of the Indian soldier of the 14 Ferozpur Sikhs to his host the-then PM Tony Abbot of Australia.<sup>1</sup> Gallipoli is, of course, but one of many examples, however, it is an important example of Indian global military footprint in the modern era. Indian troops again fought alongside Australia in World War II and in fact 18 CAVALRY, the regiment the author belongs to, was part of the Siege of Tobruk alongside the 9 Australian Division. Fought in the vast and unforgiving landscapes of the North African desert, the battle remains a symbol of resilience, courage, and strategic importance during World War II. Many years later, soon after the 1962 war, Australia was part of the-then famous Exercise Shiksha, conducted in 1963 to evaluate Indian air defence systems.<sup>2</sup>

Australian Army Chief, Lieutenant General Simon Stuart's visit to India between 10 and 14 Aug 2025 now marks a pivotal moment in the growing military partnership between India and Australia. This visit underlines that deepening army-to-army ties is crucial to strategic stability in the Indo-Pacific, as the relationship moves from symbolic engagement to a central pillar of regional security strategy. This also follows the visit of the Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan to Australia in March 2025 which underscored the growing engagement between the two nations under the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, emphasising shared commitment towards regional security and military collaboration.<sup>3</sup>

As both countries seek to maintain a free and rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific amid increasing regional volatility, the army-to-army partnership is quietly emerging as the backbone of strategic alignment, where concrete cooperation on the ground translates into broader regional influence.

## **The Land Domain in an Indo-Pacific Context**

While conversations about Indo-Pacific security often sail on maritime currents—focusing on sea lines of communication, port diplomacy, and naval deployment, it is important to recognise the vital role land forces play in deterrence, humanitarian relief, grey-zone stability, and counter-terrorism.

India and Australia, as continental powers recognise that regional security relies on land-centric capability, cooperation, and command-level trust. Hence, the evolving army-to-army partnership exemplifies this recognition as the two armies engage across the spectrum from combat drills to command trust.

### **AUSTRAHIND: From Tactical Learning to Operational Readiness**

At the operational level, Exercise AUSTRAHIND is the cornerstone of bilateral land force engagement.<sup>4</sup> Launched in 2016, this exercise has steadily grown from a counter-terrorism drill to a full-spectrum, close-quarter battle and tactical interoperability exercise between the Indian Army and Australia's 1st Brigade.

The next edition, scheduled for Australia in November this year, will immerse troops in simulated battles across jungles, in urban sprawls and contested grey zones. These exercises develop new tactics and joint plans in real-time.

This focus on confronting modern threats emphasise a central takeaway: real-time tactical collaboration directly addressing the evolving security context both countries face.

### **Institutionalised Dialogue: From Meetings to Mission Planning**

The Army-to-Army Staff Talks, initiated in 2010 and held annually since 2016, have matured into a reliable mechanism for strategic alignment, doctrinal exchange, and capability planning. These talks are not bureaucratic placeholders; rather, they serve as platforms for forward-looking cooperation in areas such as Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) readiness, counter-terrorism doctrine, peacekeeping deployments, and the sharing of knowledge on jungle warfare.

This complements broader frameworks, such as the 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue (last held in Nov 2023 in New Delhi) and the Defence Policy Talks (held in Jul 2023 in Australia). Importantly, these platforms provide an agile space for the two countries to synchronise not just bilateral priorities but regional responses from post-cyclone logistics to capacity-building in Southeast Asia.

### **A Doctrinal and Tactical Learning Ecosystem**

Indian and Australian officers are embedded across each other's premier institutions — from the National Defence College and Defence Services Staff College in India, to Australia's Army Command and Staff Course and Strategic Studies Programme. These exchanges have allowed both armies to develop not only shared operational language but a shared strategic grammar.

The Instructor Exchange Programme at India's Counter-Insurgency and Jungle Warfare School in Vairengte (India) is particularly noteworthy. It signals not just a transfer of tactical expertise, but a willingness to learn from each other's combat experiences from Kashmir and the Northeast to the South Pacific and Timor-Leste.

The Subject Matter Expert Exchanges and the Alumni Connect programme ('Dosti and Mateship in Defence', March 2024) serve to institutionalise continuity across generations of officers.

### **Future Leadership: An Investment in Strategic Trust**

Perhaps one of the most forward-looking initiatives is the India–Australia Young Officers Exchange Programme, conceptualised by the late General Bipin Rawat and formally launched during the 2022 virtual summit between PMs Modi and Albanese.<sup>5</sup> By embedding junior officers in each other's units and training environments, the two armies are investing in a cadre of leaders who won't just be tactically interoperable but will be strategically synchronised.

In future multinational operations — be it HADR, United Nations (UN) peacekeeping, or coalition deterrence posturing — this kind of relational trust will be far more valuable than any single agreement or joint communiqué.

### **Industry Engagement: From Transactions to Collaboration**

Defence cooperation is not limited to uniforms and drills alone. Indian defence companies have begun exporting tactical intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance platforms, as well as protected mobility vehicles and battlefield systems, to Australia. Collaborative development between the India's Army Design Bureau and Australia's Digger Works is also being explored, with an eye on cost-effective, combat-proven battlefield technologies.

This model cooperation between land forces and co-development between industry partners could serve as the template for Indo-Pacific defence industrial alignment. It also demonstrates the Indian Army's rising profile in the indigenous research and development and export ecosystem.<sup>6</sup>

## Conclusion

Lieutenant General Stuart's visit marks a step forward in operational synergy as both nations embark on deeper engagement and highlights the deepening army-to-army relationship and demonstrates that cooperation between land forces is critical to Indo-Pacific security. In an era of elusive threats and shifting alliances, robust Army ties anchor and advance bilateral and regional stability.

This relationship, built on realism, respect, and operational trust, reflects the Indian Army's emergence not just as a force of deterrence but as a partner of consequence. For the Indo-Pacific to remain free, stable, and multipolar, such bilateral military compacts, grounded in land and rooted in trust, will matter more than ever.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Hindu. "Modi Presents Man Singh Trophy to Abbott," November 18, 2014. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/Modi-presents-Man-Singh-Trophy-to-Abbott/article60318448.ece>.

<sup>2</sup> Gupta, Anchit. "Diffidence to Strength: Multinational Air Exercises in Indian Skies." #IAFHistory, August 3, 2024. <https://iafhistory.in/2024/08/03/diffidence-to-strength-multinational-air-exercises-in-indian-skies/>.

<sup>3</sup> Pib.gov.in. "CDS Gen Anil Chauhan Concludes Official Visit to Australia," 2025. <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2109464>.

<sup>4</sup> Pib.gov.in. "CDS Gen Anil Chauhan Concludes Official Visit to Australia," 2025. <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2109464>.

<sup>5</sup> Mea.gov.in. "JOINT STATEMENT : INDIA-AUSTRALIA VIRTUAL SUMMIT," March 21, 2022. <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/35008/JOINT+STATEMENT++INDIAAUSTRALIA+VIRTUAL+SUMMIT>.

---

<sup>6</sup> Pib.gov.in. "Make in India Powers Defence Growth," 2025.  
<https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaselframePage.aspx?PRID=2114546>.

**Major General Jagatbir Singh, VSM (Retd)** is a Distinguished Fellow at the USI of India. Commissioned in 1981 into the 18 Cavalry, he has held various important command and Staff appointments including command of an Armoured Division.

**Uploaded on 26-08-2025**

**Disclaimer:** The article was written before the US' attack on Iran. The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the organization that he/she belongs to or of the USI of India