

# India is a top-tier security partner, says Australia's new national defence strategy

Through the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, the Australian government is continuing to prioritise practical and tangible cooperation that directly contributes to Indo-Pacific stability

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Defence and strategic cooperation between India and Australia has been transformative in recent years. An Australian soldier is pictured in front of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at the Australian National War Memorial in Canberra. File | Photo Credit: REUTERS

India is a top-tier security partner for Australia, stated its new National Defence Strategy (NDS) 2024 released last week and through the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between Australia and India, the government is continuing to prioritise practical and tangible cooperation that directly contributes to Indo-Pacific stability.

“Australia will continue to support India’s key role in the region by increasing the depth and complexity of our defence cooperation. The government will continue to seek opportunities with India to drive practical bilateral and multilateral cooperation, defence industry cooperation and information sharing,” the NDS released on April 17 said.

The 2024 Integrated Investment Programme (IIP) was also released which sets out the specific defence capabilities Australia will invest in to give effect to the NDS. As per this, the Albanese government has allocated \$330 billion for the IIP over the decade to 2033-34. Adding other commitments announced, the defence funding as a proportion of Gross Domestic Product is projected to rise to around 2.4% by 2033-34 — up to 0.3% higher than the spending trajectory set by the former government, a statement from the Australian government said.

India is a “top tier” security partner for Australia, Australian envoy in India Philip Green said on social media ‘X’. “**Under the 2024 National Defence Strategy, Australia will support India’s role in our region and seek to drive practical bilateral and multilateral cooperation, defence industry opportunities and information sharing.**”

Australia will also invest in deepening our defence relationships with partners across Southeast Asia and the Pacific, as well as in the Indian Ocean and North Asia regions, the NDS said. “This includes continuing to expand our partnerships with Japan and India. Australia will also continue to work closely with like-minded partners outside the Indo-Pacific, including key European nations.”

On the broader geopolitical situation, the NDS noted that the risk of a crisis or conflict in the Taiwan Strait is increasing, as well as at other flashpoints, including disputes in the South and East China Seas and on the border with India. There is increasing competition for access and influence across the Indian Ocean, including efforts to secure dominance over sea lanes and strategic ports, it noted also adding, “Some of China’s initiatives in the Indo-Pacific also lack transparency around their purpose and scope.”

## **Terrorism threat**

“There remains potential for tension and miscommunication between India and Pakistan, and between India and China — with the risk of nuclear weapons use or proliferation a factor in each potential flashpoint,” it further said, noting, “The threat of terrorism from politically and religiously motivated extremist groups will endure, fuelled in part by ongoing violence and volatility in the Middle East.”

The Northeast Indian Ocean is central to Australia's security and sea lines of communication, the NDS declared and in addition to engagement with India, the government's defence engagement in the Indian Ocean region will focus on regularising the Australian defence forces' presence, including increasing deployments, training and exercises with Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Bangladesh.

Defence and strategic cooperation between India and Australia has been transformative in recent years with series of exchanges, high-level visits and exercises, both bilateral and multilateral. In addition, MDA, subsurface domain awareness and Anti-Submarine Warfare have been major focus areas for the Quad group of countries comprising India, Australia, Japan and the U.S. in the backdrop of rapid expansion of Chinese naval presence in the Indian Ocean Region.

Chief of Royal Australian Navy Vice Admiral Mark Hammond visited India earlier this month from April 2 to 6. His discussions with Navy Chief Admiral R. Hari Kumar focused on avenues to strengthen bilateral maritime cooperation, including increased operational engagements, training exchanges and information sharing, the Navy said.

The Australian Navy Chief also visited the Southern Naval Command at Kochi and went onboard India's indigenous aircraft carrier *INS Vikrant*. He had also visited the Western Naval Command at Mumbai as well as the defence shipyard Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited.

India and Australia signed a mutual logistics support agreement in 2020 and the two Navies had signed the 'Joint Guidance for the India – Australia Navy to Navy Relationship' document in August 2021. Australia also has a Liaison Officer at the Indian Navy's Information Fusion Centre for Indian Ocean Region (IOR). In addition, the two sides are in an advanced stage of discussion to conclude implementing arrangements on hydrography cooperation and cooperation for air-to-air refueling.