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# Capacity Building for Military Diplomacy

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## Abstract

*India's military diplomacy objectives of capacity building are geared toward enhancing capacities in military inventories as well as honing capacities in the training and deployment of India's armed forces. In the pursuit of its military diplomacy, India has responded to the challenges posed by its two avowed adversaries (Pakistan and China) through interactive partnerships with its preferred strategic partners. The character of India's military diplomacy is "human-centric". It looks at the capacity of India's armed forces for achieving the tasks set for them, particularly when deployed to maintain international peace and security under the United Nations. This article carries out an assessment of the current status in this sphere to ascertain the extent to which India's core national interests are being assisted by military diplomacy.*

## Introduction

India's objectives of building capacity for its military diplomacy are conditioned by the ongoing process of transforming India into one of the major world powers during the 21st century, for which an external environment of peace and security is essential. As a developing country

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that is home to the largest and most diverse population in the world, the challenges facing India are *sui generis*. India must find its own path of using military diplomacy for responding to these challenges. India's Raksha Mantri, Shri Rajnath Singh, while addressing India's Defence Attaches in October 2022, emphasized that India's military diplomacy is tasked with "securing national interests in line with foreign policy, strengthening international cooperation and enhancing the capabilities and preparedness of the Armed Forces".<sup>1</sup>

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## **Background**

India's military diplomacy objectives of capacity building are geared toward enhancing capacities in military inventories as well as honing capacities in the training and deployment of India's armed forces. Both these aims must be self-sustaining. India's ability to achieve these goals is linked to India's commitment to the principles of sovereign equality, strategic autonomy, and self-reliance or *Atmanirbharta*.

The initial focus of newly independent India was on augmenting capacities in its land and air forces. This followed the outbreak of hostilities over India's borders with Pakistan (since 1947) and China (since 1962). A concentrated attempt to enhance India's maritime forces has been in place since March 2015, following the launch of India's Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) Indian Ocean policy.<sup>2</sup>

Two prisms can be used to assess India's progress in using international cooperation to build up the capacities of its armed forces. One prism is the initiative to create appropriate institutional frameworks to address capacities for the manufacture of military equipment, while broadening

international military cooperation with select strategic partners. A new synergised approach integrating defence and diplomacy has been introduced by India to make such institutional frameworks deliver results on the ground.

The other prism highlights the “human-centric” character of India’s military diplomacy. This looks at the capacity of India’s armed forces for achieving the tasks set for them, particularly when deployed to maintain international peace and security under the United Nations. The key factor for this assessment is the continued professionalism of India’s armed forces. A constant process of upgrading professional skills has resulted in the enhanced ability of the Indian armed forces to meet increasingly complex challenges at home and abroad.

In the pursuit of its military diplomacy, India has responded to the challenges posed by its two avowed adversaries (Pakistan and China) through interactive partnerships with its preferred strategic partners. The traditional method of capacity building using military diplomacy, which relied on exchanges of visits of military delegations, participation in military exercises, and military training programmes, is being gradually subsumed into India’s new framework through “defence and foreign affairs” (or 2+2) dialogues. Such frameworks for capacity building of the Indian armed forces are in place today with the United States, Japan, Australia, and Russia.

### **The 2+2 Dialogue Mechanism**

The objective of the 2+2 dialogues is to integrate capacity building in military diplomacy in a selective and prioritised manner, which will give specific results on the ground for securing India’s key strategic interests. A key element in the successful implementation of this initiative is the reciprocal support of India’s strategic partners, particularly when it comes to creating sustainable and equitable partnerships on the ground.

- **United States.** The India-United States “2+2” dialogue was initiated in September 2018 in New Delhi. It has built on the “enabling” agreements negotiated by India and the United States between 2002 and 2020, which include the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) in 2002, the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) in 2016, the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) in 2018 and the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) for Geospatial Intelligence in 2020.<sup>3</sup>

At its fourth meeting held in April 2022 in the United States, the 2+2 dialogue mechanism reiterated its objective to enable the militaries of India and the United States to “coordinate closely together across all domains”, including the “new defence” domains of space, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and cyber, with “enhanced Indian participation in advanced courses across these emerging domains”. Special emphasis has been placed on “equipping” the militaries of the two countries “to exchange information in real-time across domains” including by liaison officers in “each other’s military organisations”. In the area of joint manufacturing, the dialogue identified the bilateral Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) to “co-develop Air Launched UAVs”, while looking to use India’s existing naval shipyards and facilities for the “repair and maintenance of ships of the US Maritime Sealift Command (MSC) to support mid-voyage repair of US Naval Ships”.<sup>4</sup> The first use of India’s naval infrastructure by US naval ships under this dialogue mechanism took place in March 2023, when the US Naval dry cargo ship *Matthew Perry* successfully completed maintenance and repair work at the Larsen & Toubro shipyard near Chennai.<sup>5</sup>

Two policy issues regarding the use of capacities developed through the 2+2 dialogue mechanism between India and the United States will need monitoring. First, the impact of deepening engagement

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between a strategically autonomous India and the world's pre-eminent military power, which prefers to engage through its military alliances to project its strategic interests. India is the only participant of the Quad that is not bound by military alliance treaties with the United States, in contrast to both Japan<sup>6</sup> and Australia<sup>7</sup>.

In a broader framework, this is also visible in India's interaction with the United States as the driver of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), which has declared its aspiration to play a bigger role in India's strategic neighbourhood.<sup>8</sup> The US-led NATO's abrupt withdrawal from neighbouring Afghanistan in mid-August 2021, obliterated in one unanticipated stroke India's assiduously built-up strategic investments in Afghanistan. These included closing all 5 diplomatic representations of India in Afghanistan, and jettisoning India's US\$ 3 billion development assistance programme that prioritised healthcare and education for Afghanistan's women and children. The US-led NATO action will be a salutary point of reference for India in this context.<sup>9</sup>

In specific terms, the military alliance between the United States and Pakistan, initiated in 1955, has evolved into designating Pakistan as a "major non-NATO ally" under US domestic law.<sup>10</sup> This plays out on the ground in terms of the impact on India's military capacities developed in cooperation with the US, and their likely use against Pakistan. Complicating this is the fact that the US continues to pursue its strategic interests in Pakistan through the Pentagon's Central Command, and its strategic interests in India and China through the Pentagon's Indo-Pacific Command, throwing up a challenge that is invariably leveraged in favour of its Central Command.<sup>11</sup>

The second issue is US policy on restricting the export of technology to India, particularly “dual use” technologies that have both military and commercial applications. Bilateral diplomatic negotiations between India and the US addressed these restrictions, symbolised by the Indo-US Nuclear Deal of 2008, which ended “technology denial regimes against India that have been in place for three decades”.<sup>12</sup> India’s subsequent negotiation and membership of three major multilateral export control regimes have provided a framework for enhanced military cooperation with the United States, as well as the other 2+2 dialogue partners of India.<sup>13</sup>

The incremental forward movement to provide a new basis for technology transfers for defence cooperation has been registered since 2015, when the “New Framework for India-US Defence Cooperation” was renewed for 10 years. This was followed a year later by designating the bilateral relationship as a “Major Defence Partnership”. Since 2018, the US has allowed India to receive licence-free access to a wide range of military and dual-use technologies that are regulated by the US Department of Commerce. However, in a conflicting signal, the United States Trade Representative placed India on a select “Priority Watch List” of seven countries (including China and Russia) in April 2023 for failing to protect US intellectual property rights that anchor its technologies,<sup>14</sup> including dual-use technologies.

- **Japan.** The India-Japan 2+2 Dialogue, initiated in 2019, held its second meeting in Tokyo in September 2022. The meeting stressed the “vast potential for the two countries to expand bilateral cooperation in the areas of defence equipment and technology cooperation” and mentioned “ongoing cooperation in the areas of Unmanned Ground Vehicle (UGV)/Robotics”.<sup>15</sup>

The role of Japan in partnering with India to augment its capacities through military diplomacy is underpinned by Japan’s

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acknowledged technological capacities. The 2+2 dialogue mechanism is being built on bilateral agreements signed between India and Japan in 2015 on the “Transfer of Defence Equipment and Technology” and “Securing Measures for Protection of Classified Military Information”, along with the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement, signed in 2021.

Prospects for the effective use of capacities developed jointly between India and Japan in the Indo-Pacific are sustained by the notable fact that both India and

Japan define the Indo-Pacific region as encompassing the entire Indian and Pacific oceans. This contrasts with the policy of the US and Australia, which do not include the western Indian Ocean from the west coast of India to the eastern coast of Africa, including the crucial Gulf region, in their definition of the Indo-Pacific framework.

Japan looks to partner with India in developing capacities for the manufacture of “UAVs and anti-UAV systems, robotics, underwater communication, lithium-ion batteries and intelligence systems”.<sup>16</sup> This technology-driven capacity-building objective with India will be tested by the obligations of Japan under its bilateral defence treaty with the United States.

- **Australia.** The India-Australia 2+2 Dialogue was initiated in September 2021 in New Delhi, which prioritised “maritime domain awareness through information sharing and practical cooperation”. The area of cooperation in “defence industries including Unmanned Vehicles and other niche technologies” was identified for future action.<sup>17</sup>

India has built on its shared experience with Australia in joint Allied military operations during the two world wars of the past century. This includes the emotively significant battle for Australia of Gallipoli in 1915.<sup>18</sup> Despite the lack of a common definition of the scope of the “Indo-Pacific” a Mutual Logistical Support Agreement (MLSA) signed in 2020 has provided the basis for “more sophisticated operational cooperation enabling increasingly complex military engagement, and greater combined responsiveness to regional humanitarian disasters”.

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Capacities in interoperability in the area of naval deployments by the Indian Navy have been a focus of multilateral exercises such as the MALABAR naval exercise of 2020, and the bilateral AUSINDEX which has seen the deployment of Australian naval ships and personnel to India.<sup>19</sup> Future cooperation in military diplomacy with India will face the test of Australia’s obligations under its bilateral defence treaty with the US, as well as the obligations on technology transfers inherent in the new Australia-UK-US (AUKUS) military alliance.

- **Russia.** The first meeting of the India-Russia 2+2 Dialogue was held in New Delhi in December 2021. This coincided with the session of the India-Russia Inter-governmental Military Technical Commission (MTC), which has been meeting annually since 2001 under the annual India-Russia Summit. Since 2002, bilateral cooperation overseen by the MTC has resulted in India’s acquisition of equipment, including items that are being manufactured in India with transfers of technology from Russia. The most prominent of these are the T-90S main battle tank, the Su-30MKI fighter jet aircraft, the *Talwar*-class stealth technology guided missile frigates, and the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile. Each of these items made with modern technologies

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is in use today in India's terrestrial, air, and maritime domains, strengthening India's capacity to counter threats to its territorial integrity and sovereignty.

The joint statement issued after the India-Russia Summit of December 2021 confirmed that in response "to India's quest for self-sufficiency, the partnership is reorienting presently to joint research and development, co-development and joint production of advanced defence technology and systems", which would be implemented through a long-term cooperation agreement for 2021-2031.

It was agreed that India and Russia would undertake "joint manufacturing in India of spare parts, components, aggregates and other products for the maintenance of Russian origin arms and defence equipment under Make-in-India programme through a transfer of technology and setting up of joint ventures for meeting the needs of the Indian Armed Forces as well as subsequent export to mutually friendly third countries".<sup>20</sup>

Capacity building through military diplomacy with Russia in the 2+2 dialogue mechanism builds upon the work of the MTC, while creating space for the participation of the private sector in manufacturing. The first result of this is the manufacture by a joint venture in Amethi from January 2023 of AK-203 assault rifles for the Indian Army.<sup>21</sup>

The implementation of the objectives for Russia's participation in capacity building of India's military diplomacy could be impacted in the short term by the increasing unilateral sanctions being imposed

on Russia's military-industrial enterprises by NATO on account of the Ukraine conflict.<sup>22</sup>

## **United Nations PKOs**

Over 264,000 Indian troops have served since 1950 in 51 out of the 71 UN peacekeeping operations (PKOs),<sup>23</sup> symbolising India's commitment to use its military capacities for maintaining international peace and security. UN PKOs have been a two-way process for capacity building in India's military diplomacy.

During the Korean War (1950-1953) Indian troops of the 60<sup>th</sup> Parachute Field Ambulance Unit tended to about 195,000 cases, while General Thimayya of India chaired the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission that handled the 200,000 prisoners of war who had to be repatriated to their home countries.<sup>24</sup> The bravery of Indian troops under Captain Gurbachan Singh Salaria of 3/1 Gurkha Rifles, the only Indian soldier to have been awarded the Param Vir Chakra (posthumously) while on duty in the UN PKO in the Congo in 1961<sup>25</sup> is legendary. Indian women peacekeepers deployed in the UN PKO in Liberia between 2007-2016, the first-ever all-women's unit deployed in PKOs by any UN member-state,<sup>26</sup> became "role-models" for their role in catalysing the empowerment of local women in Liberia. Indian troops currently deployed in the ongoing civil war in South Sudan,<sup>27</sup> have won plaudits for their professionalism and compassion.

The existing capacities of India's armed forces, hallmarked by their high professionalism, have contributed to the effectiveness of the PKOs deployed in exceptionally volatile environments, such as the major crises in Africa. At the same time, participation in PKOs in such unstable environments has added to the capacities of India's armed forces to operate in extremely challenging conditions, while keeping the "human-centric" protection of civilians foremost in their operations. The background of India's professional troops, many of them from rural communities who

have sought to mitigate conflicts on the ground using traditional non-doctrinaire methods, has generated empathy for India in conflict-afflicted countries where they have been deployed. This has enhanced international support for India's military diplomacy in the cause of peace, security, and development <sup>28</sup> stretching back more than seven decades.

### **Maritime capacity building**

In 2009, UN Security Council Resolution 1851 mandated an international response to the threat posed by piracy for the sea lanes of communication in the western Indian Ocean. The resolution established a Contact Group on Piracy off the coast of Somalia (CGPCS). Between 2009 and 2017, India contributed 65 Indian Naval ships to participate in the CGPCS, the bulk of which were made in India. Adding to their effectiveness were two "stealth" frigates, the *INS Tarkash* and *INS Trishul* (built in Russia in 2010 and 2000 respectively for Indian specifications). The number of attacks came down from 117 in 2009 to one in 2016, through the coordinated actions of the navies of 25 countries. No ship escorted by the Indian Navy was hijacked. In strategic terms, the success of the CGPCS ensured the shifting of the Piracy High Risk Area closer to the Somali coast from the Central Arabian Sea thereby saving substantial insurance costs for all the merchant ships and reducing the costs of India's international trade and shipping.<sup>29</sup>

This experience provided the basis for India's ambitious capacity-building initiative in setting up a maritime domain awareness international centre in India. In December 2018, India established an Information Fusion Centre—Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) near New Delhi. The objective of the IFC-IOR is to promote real-time collaboration for maritime safety and security in view of the region's importance with respect to world trade and security. The Centre provides a hub for sharing maritime security information in the region. Since its inception, the

Centre has established working-level linkages with more than 50 nations and multinational/maritime security centres.<sup>30</sup>

On August 9, 2021, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi chaired a special UN Security Council session devoted to maritime security. The session was attended by President Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya and President Vladimir Putin of Russia at the head-of-state level, and Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh of Vietnam. Prime Minister Modi elaborated on the objectives contained in India's SAGAR policy, emphasising India's support for an inclusive, cooperative approach to partnerships in military diplomacy.<sup>31</sup>

## Conclusion

India's calibrated approach to capacity building in its armed forces using military diplomacy deserves greater recognition. The outcome of current trends will have an impact on both the effectiveness of India's armed forces in an increasingly turbulent international environment, as well as on strengthening the increased participation of India's skilled workforce in a national endeavour to secure India's core national security interests.

## Notes

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