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The Indo-Pacific Army Heads Meeting

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Abstract

The Indo-Pacific region conducts conferences and gatherings for army chiefs from many countries to promote peace, stability, and dialogue. These events attempt to foster mutual understanding among military officials and allow them to freely discuss regional concerns and possibilities. Indian Army Chief General Manoj Pande said that the Indo-Pacific region is not merely a collection of nations but a “web of interdependencies.”¹ This issue brief gives an account of a three-day event that ended in New Delhi from September 25th to 27th² with the Indo-Pacific Army Chiefs Conference (IPACC), the Indo-Pacific Army Management Seminar (IPAMS), and the Senior Enlisted Leaders Forum (SELF). The presence of Chiefs of Armies and representatives from numerous countries is highlighted in the brief, as is the key topic of “Together for Peace: Sustaining Peace and Stability in the Indo-Pacific Region.”³ It delves into the conference’s goals, such as the exchange of ideas, perspectives on security, and current challenges among the attending countries. The brief describes the event’s framework, which includes plenary sessions, roundtable talks, bilateral meetings, and special sessions for spouses, and discusses in detail the themes for the same. It also emphasises the need to develop collective responsibility, exchange best practices, and support open and continuous discussion to address difficulties in the Indo-Pacific region. Overall, this issue brief highlights the IPACC, IPAMS, and SELF’s beneficial outcomes in fostering peace, stability, and collaboration among member states.

Introduction

The Indo-Pacific Army Heads Meeting provides an important forum for land force commanders and delegations from more than 30 nations, as will be mentioned below, to meet and participate in constructive discourse on security and topical concerns. This conference intends to strengthen military cooperation and diplomacy among participating states to promote peace and stability in

¹ “Indo-Pacific Armies Chiefs Conference (IPACC),” Press Information Bureau, accessed November 5, 2023, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1961331>.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

the Indo-Pacific region. The event is intended to foster the exchange of ideas, the sharing of best practices, and the debate of difficulties to develop a shared vision for regional security and stability. The gathering brings together chiefs of several armies, such as General Prabhuram Sharma of the Nepal Army,⁴ Gen. Randy George, the Chief of Staff of the US Army,⁵ Gen. Morishta Yasunori of Japan,⁶ Gen. Simon Stuart of the Australian Army,⁷ Lt. Gen. Nguyen Doan Anh, Deputy Chief of General Staff of the Vietnam People's Army⁸ and so on, high-ranking commanders, and delegation heads from a wide variety of countries, to improve cooperation and mutual understanding among Indo-Pacific militaries. Fostering connections and understanding, establishing alliances, promoting interoperability, and addressing 21st-century security concerns such as cybercrime, cybersecurity, and nuclear proliferation are among the primary objectives of this significant gathering.⁹

A wide range of important subjects are covered at the Indo-Pacific Army Heads Meeting to foster peace and stability in the area. These include collaboration for long-term peace and security in the Indo-Pacific, cooperation to improve interoperability, humanitarian aid and disaster relief, leadership development, and the need for modern armies to be self-sufficient. This broad agenda represents the member countries' determination to collaborate and work towards common goals for the benefit of the whole region.

⁴ PTI, "Nepal Army Chief Leaves for Delhi to Attend Indo-Pacific Armies Chiefs' Conference - Times of India," The Times of India, accessed December 15, 2023, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/south-asia/nepal-army-chief-leaves-for-delhi-to-attend-indo-pacific-armies-chiefs-conference/articleshow/103911429.cms>.

⁵ "Indo-Pacific Armies Chiefs Conference (IPACC)," Press Information Bureau, accessed November 5, 2023, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1961331>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

History

USA: The Indo-Pacific Promise

The United States is a power in the Indo-Pacific region. From the Pacific coast to the Indian Ocean, the Indo-Pacific region is home to more than half of the world's population, over two-thirds of the world's GDP, and seven of the world's major military forces. More US military personnel are stationed in the region than anywhere else in the world.¹⁰ It sustains over three million American employees and attracts approximately \$900 billion in foreign direct investment¹¹ to the US. As the area drives up to two-thirds of global economic development¹² in the next few years, its influence will only rise, as will its significance to the United States.

The US has long seen the Indo-Pacific region as critical to its security and development. Their links were established two centuries ago when Americans arrived in the region in search of economic possibilities, and they have grown stronger with the entry of Asian immigrants to the United States.¹³ The Second World War informed the United States that “we could only be secure if Asia was secure as well.”¹⁴ As a result, in the postwar era, the United States strengthened its relations with the area by forging treaty alliances with Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea (ROK), the Philippines, and Thailand, laying the groundwork for regional democracies to develop. These connections grew as the US backed the region's leading organisations, notably the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), established tight commercial and investment

¹⁰ The White House, “Pacific Strategy- the White House.” INDO-PACIFIC STRATEGY OF THE UNITED STATES, accessed November 6, 2023. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

links, and pledged to respect international law and principles ranging from human rights to freedom of navigation.¹⁵

The passage of time has highlighted the strategic importance of the US playing a constant role. After the Cold War, the US examined but rejected the notion of reducing its military presence in the area, recognising that the region contained strategic worth that would only expand in the twenty-first century.¹⁶ Since then, both political parties, the Democratic Party and the Republican Party, have shared a commitment to the region. The George W. Bush Administration recognised Asia's rising significance and worked closely with the People's Republic of China (PRC), Japan, and India. The Barack Obama Administration increased American prioritisation of Asia by allocating more diplomatic, economic, and military resources to the region. Furthermore, the Donald Trump Administration acknowledged the Indo-Pacific as the world's centre of gravity.¹⁷

President Joe Biden prioritises the United States' long-term commitment to the Indo-Pacific area, which stretches from Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia to South Asia and Oceania, including the Pacific Islands. This approach is motivated by a developing geopolitical landscape and the expanding regional influence of the People's Republic of China (PRC). The PRC is harnessing its economic, political, military, and technological capabilities to construct an Indo-Pacific sphere of influence and emerge as a global force.¹⁸

The United States understands the problems created by the People's Republic of China, as seen by economic pressure on Australia, tensions along the Line of Actual Control with India, increased pressure on Taiwan, and assertive behaviour in the East and South China Seas. The United States, along with its friends and partners, seeks to resist the People's Republic of China's detrimental activities, which undermine human rights, international law, and the ideals that have historically delivered stability and prosperity to the Indo-Pacific.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

The United States' approach entails investing in domestic power, collaborating with allies, and battling with the People's Republic of China to defend shared interests and values. The goal is not to change the PRC but to create a strategic environment by fostering a balance of influence that benefits the US, its friends, partners, and shared values.¹⁹ Despite current bilateral tensions, the United States declares a commitment to responsible competition, seeking cooperation with the PRC on global issues such as climate change and non-proliferation. The overarching goal is to contribute to a stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific region while dealing with the obstacles posed by the PRC's objectives.²⁰

Indo-Pacific Army Heads Meeting

The Indo-Pacific Army Heads Meeting dates back to 1999, when it was established as a biennial convention.²¹ This significant event has provided a key venue for ground force commanders and delegates from more than 30 nations to participate in constructive discourse on security and topical concerns in the Indo-Pacific region.

IPACC brings together army commanders from the Indo-Pacific area to address problems of mutual concern. Recognising its significance, Indian Army Chief General Manoj Pande²² stated that “the Indo-Pacific region's geopolitical relevance and geoeconomics might be evident from the fact that the region accounted for 65% of the world's population, 63% of the world's GDP, 46% of

¹⁹ Lalit Kapur, Indo-Pacific Strategy - Delhi Policy Group, accessed December 16, 2023, <https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/publication/policy-briefs/the-new-us-indo-pacific-strategy.html>.

²⁰ The White House, “Pacific Strategy- the White House.” INDO-PACIFIC STRATEGY OF THE UNITED STATES, accessed November 6, 2023. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf>.

²¹ Dinakar Peri, “Indo-Pacific Region Is ‘a Web of Interdependencies’: Army Chief,” The Hindu, September 26, 2023, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/indias-vision-for-indo-pacific-emphasises-peaceful-resolution-of-disputes-army-chief/article67347856.ece>.

²² Ibid.

the world's merchandise market, and half of the world's maritime trade.”²³ The region's physical and economic importance naturally gave it a crucial position on the geostrategic map.

The Russia-Ukraine war, spanning over 660 days, remains a critical international conflict with significant geopolitical, humanitarian, and military implications. The most important learning from the Russia-Ukraine war, according to US Army Chief General Randy George,²⁴ “was the need of “long-range firepower” and partners and friends. He went on to say that “land power” was decisive and contributed to collective security. Military commanders believe that collaboration among littoral governments on security, connectivity, and economics is required in the Indo-Pacific area. While attempts are being made to ensure a free and peaceful Indo-Pacific area, the globe has witnessed inter-state contestation and competitiveness.”²⁵

According to General Pande, the issues transcended boundaries because the Indo-Pacific area was more than just a collection of states but a web of interdependencies. “We are connected by geography, and our fates are intertwined.” The security and prosperity of one country are inextricably tied to those of its neighbours and beyond. As a result, every one of us has a critical duty to perform,” he explained.²⁶

The IPACC has been a biennial convention since 1999, while IPAMS and SELF have been annual events since 1978 and 2013, respectively.²⁷

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Pradeep R Sagar, “After G20, India Draws Global Attention with Indo-Pacific Military Chiefs’ Conference,” India Today, September 27, 2023, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india-today-insight/story/after-g20-india-draws-global-attention-with-indo-pacific-military-chiefs-conference-2441173-2023-09-27>.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Dinakar Peri, “Indo-Pacific Region Is ‘a Web of Interdependencies’: Army Chief,” The Hindu, September 26, 2023, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/indias-vision-for-indo-pacific-emphasises-peaceful-resolution-of-disputes-army-chief/article67347856.ece>.

The September 2023 Conference

Army Heads Meeting

A three-day programme, IPACC, IPAMS, and SELF-2023, hosted by the Indian Army and co-hosted by the US Army, concluded in New Delhi on September 26, 2023. Thirty countries participated in the tournament. Chiefs of Armies from 18 nations were present, such as General Morishita Yasunori (Japan),²⁸ Lieutenant General Simon Stuart (Australia),²⁹ Lt General Nguyen Doan Anh (Vietnam),³⁰ Lt General Peter Mbogo Njiru (Kenya),³¹ Prasiddha Prabal Janesewashree General Prabhu Ram Sharma (Nepal),³² General Sheikh Md Shafiuddin Ahmed (Bangladesh),³³ Major General John Boswell (New Zealand),³⁴ General Sir Patrick Sanders (UK),³⁵ Lt General Mao Sophan (Cambodia),³⁶ General Jung Hwan Park (Republic of Korea),³⁷ General Pierre Schill (France),³⁸ General Datuk Muhammad Hafizuddeain Bin Jantan (Malaysia),³⁹ while Heads of Delegations from 12 countries were present. The event allowed delegates to exchange thoughts and perspectives on security and other contemporary problems of mutual interest, with the primary goal of promoting 'Peace and Stability' in the Indo-Pacific area. On September 25, 2023, General

²⁸ “Indo-Pacific Armies Chiefs Conference (IPACC),” Press Information Bureau, accessed November 5, 2023, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1961331>.

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Ibid

³² Ibid

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Ibid

Randy George, Chief of Staff (COS) of the United States Army, summoned General Manoj Pande, Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) of the Indian Army. Both chiefs addressed subjects of mutual interest and shared perspectives on current events.⁴⁰

On September 26, 2023, the Chiefs and Heads of Delegations laid a wreath at the National War Memorial to honour India's fallen heroes. This was followed by a joint press briefing by the COAS of the Indian Army and the COS of the United States Army. According to the COAS Indian Army, the area is not just a melting pot of cultures, history, resources, and possibilities but also a theatre of complexity and difficulties.⁴¹ The US Army COS emphasised the relevance of ground power, saying that it not only helps the region's shared security but is also a decisive force in dealing with emergencies.⁴² The Hon'ble Raksha Mantri, Rajnath Singh, delivered the Inaugural Address, emphasising the Indo-Pacific region's complexity and untapped potential and stating that the region needs united efforts for a successful, safe, and inclusive future.

"India stands for a free, open, inclusive, and rules-based Indo-Pacific," he added. He went on to say, "Our efforts to build robust military partnerships with friendly countries underscore our commitment to safeguard national interests and address global challenges."⁴³ In addition, the Hon'ble Raksha Mantri issued a commemorative journal.⁴⁴

A Chief's Round Table Conference on the topic "Together for Peace: Sustaining Peace and Stability in the Indo-Pacific Region" was conducted as part of the 13th IPACC. The Round Table

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ "India, Unity in Cultural Diversity," NCERT, accessed December 15, 2023, https://ncert.nic.in/pdf/publication/otherpublications/Unity_cultural.pdf.

⁴² "Indo-Pacific Armies Chiefs Conference (IPACC)," Press Information Bureau, accessed November 5, 2023, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1961331>.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Conference was moderated by Lieutenant General Raj Shukla (retired).⁴⁵ Lieutenant General Xavier T. Brunson of the United States Army spoke on "Enhancing Collaboration and Interoperability."⁴⁶ Major General Tan Cheng Kwee of Singapore spoke about the "Role of Military Diplomacy in Crisis Mitigation."⁴⁷ Lieutenant General Subrata Saha (retired) talked on "Importance of Self-Reliance in Modern Armies."⁴⁸ All the chiefs reiterated the subject and expressed the views of the nations in the area.⁴⁹ The Chiefs and Heads of Delegations held open and candid conversations about the importance of an open and inclusive Indo-Pacific region that adheres to a rules-based world order.⁵⁰ They emphasised the Indo-Pacific's diversity on many levels, and they all resolved to work together to address the region's difficulties.⁵¹

The COAS of the Indian Army also met with the chiefs of the armies of the participating countries in bilateral sessions. He met with General Morishita Yasunori of Japan, Lieutenant General Simon Stuart of Australia, Lieutenant General Nguyen Doan Anh of Vietnam, Lieutenant General Peter Mbogo Njiru of Kenya, Prasiddha Prabal Janesewashree of Nepal, General Sheikh Mohammad Shafiuddin Ahmed of Bangladesh, Major General John Boswell of New Zealand, General Sir Patrick Sanders of the United Kingdom, Lieutenant General Mao Sophan of Cambodia, and General Jung Hwan of the Republic of Korea. Lieutenant General MV Suchindra Kumar, Vice Chief of Army Staff, also met with delegation chiefs from Brazil, Singapore, Mongolia, and Thailand.⁵²

The plenary sessions of the 47th IPAMS were held on three different subjects. "Partnering for Sustainable Peace and Security in the Indo-Pacific" was the inaugural topic. This can be achieved

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² Ibid

through multilateral cooperation, diplomatic initiatives, economic collaboration, and an emphasis on maritime security. The second subject was "Cooperation to Improve Interoperability." This involves collaborative military exercises, information and intelligence sharing, communication protocol standardisation, and defence capability alignment. Countries in the Indo-Pacific can increase their collective response to security threats, improve crisis management skills, and contribute to the region's overall peace and stability by encouraging interoperability. The third theme was "Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief (HADR) - Evolving Mechanisms for Crisis Response."⁵³ Preparing resources, forming fast reaction teams, and using technical breakthroughs for early warning systems are all part of this. Countries in the Indo-Pacific can better meet the immediate needs of impacted populations and reduce the effects of natural disasters by improving HADR capabilities and strengthening regional collaboration. Senior officers from Mongolia, Nepal, Japan, Australia, the Philippines, Tonga, the United States of America, and India talked about the themes and shared their perspectives with all attendees.⁵⁴ Lieutenant General PS Rajeshwar (retired), Lieutenant General Sunil Srivastava (retired), and Lieutenant General Arun Kumar Sahni (Retired) moderated the debates.⁵⁵ During the debates, it became clear that the nations needed to collaborate to improve their collective responses.⁵⁶

The 9th SELF was divided into three sessions: "Interoperability Among Indo-Pacific Armies," "Grooming Junior Leaders for Modern Battlefield," and "Beyond the Barracks- Addressing Senior Enlisted Leaders' Concerns."⁵⁷ It was a one-of-a-kind platform where functional junior leaders exchanged ideas and perspectives.⁵⁸ Promoting interoperability across Indo-Pacific forces is critical for regional security and an effective response to common issues. Standardising communication channels, conducting joint training exercises, and aligning military capabilities are all part of this. These armies can promote smooth coordination during operations, improve crisis

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ Ibid

⁵⁶ Ibid

⁵⁷ Ibid

⁵⁸ Ibid

response, and contribute to a safer and more stable Indo-Pacific region by improving interoperability. Preparing the armed forces for modern challenges necessitates the development of junior leaders for the modern battlefield. Comprehensive training programmes that include cutting-edge technology, emphasise adaptable leadership abilities, and inculcate a profound grasp of emerging security risks are required. Junior leaders can effectively negotiate the intricacies of the contemporary battlefield by developing critical thinking, strategic decision-making, and competency in emerging technologies, ensuring military preparedness and resilience in the face of dynamic and diversified security scenarios. Addressing the concerns of senior enlisted leaders extends beyond the barracks. This includes identifying and addressing issues relating to employee well-being, career growth, and family support. Armed forces may improve morale, retention, and overall operational preparedness by implementing comprehensive plans that prioritise the holistic requirements of senior enlisted leaders, such as professional development opportunities, mental health assistance, and work-life balance.

A Special Plenary for Spouses on the subject "Beyond the Barracks: Roles and Challenges in Fostering Military Communities and Sharing Best Practises" was also held. Mrs Archana Pande, President of the Army Wives Welfare Association (AWWA), and Mrs Patty George, spouse of the US Army COS, gave the opening remarks.⁵⁹ The wives also paid their respects at the National War Memorial. An AWWA exhibition exhibiting the business achievements of wives of Indian military personnel was also shown to the participants.⁶⁰ This was followed by a tour of 'AAHWAN,' which showcased several AWWA projects aimed at women's empowerment.⁶¹

During the event, the 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' Equipment Display demonstrated the Indian industry's potential to build world-class military equipment indigenously. The show featured 31 corporates, which sparked a lot of curiosity among attendees. Drones, counter-drone systems, modular firing

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ Ibid

⁶¹ Ibid

ranges, small arms, NAVIC-based gadgets, surveillance systems, protective gear, self-propelled artillery guns, military vehicles, and other highlights were on display.⁶²

All attendees were given a guided tour of the Gandhi Smriti. In addition, an evening dedicated to India's rich culture was planned. Under the theme 'Colours of India,' this included performances by the Indian Army's Symphony Band and dance forms displaying India's colourful traditions and art.⁶³

On September 27th, an all-encompassing event ended with the Closing Ceremony in Manekshaw Centre, Delhi Cantt.⁶⁴ The closing address was presented by Hon'ble Raksha Rajya Mantri Shri Ajay Bhatt, who thanked all attendees. The meeting concluded with a flag handover ceremony. The Indian Army handed over the IPACC and IPAMS flags to the US Army.⁶⁵

The rigorous conversations and interactions between the chiefs, heads of delegations, senior officers, junior leaders, and their wives contributed to strengthening the armies' relationships. The event allowed all attendees to hear from notable speakers and participate in discussions on a variety of topics. The event achieved the desired outcomes, including developing a shared vision for military cooperation, fostering a sense of collective responsibility, sharing best practices, appreciating areas and communities vulnerable to climate change, a synergizing approach to the HADR response, increasing military exchange efforts, progressing defence diplomacy initiatives, and reinforcing the importance of open and sustained dialogue to jointly address issues affecting the Indo-Pacific region.⁶⁶

⁶² Ibid

⁶³ Ibid

⁶⁴ Ibid

⁶⁵ Ibid

⁶⁶ Ibid

Significance

The IPACC's relevance stems from its capacity to bring together army commanders from the Indo-Pacific region to address problems of mutual concern. The conference serves as a forum for delegates to exchange thoughts and perspectives on security and other contemporary problems of mutual interest, with the primary goal of promoting 'Peace and Stability' in the Indo-Pacific area. The conference also allows participating countries to enhance their military alliances and establish confidence among themselves.⁶⁷ The conference also allows participating countries to enhance their military alliances and establish confidence among themselves. The meeting is a key step towards improving Indo-Pacific regional collaboration, military diplomacy, and interoperability.⁶⁸

Participating Countries

- Australia: Lieutenant General Simon Stuart attended IPACC. Australia, which is bounded to the west by the Indian Ocean, to the east by the Pacific Ocean, and to the north by members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), is classified as a central Indo-Pacific state. Since 2012, the Indo-Pacific concept has been used by Australian administrations to characterise the country's foreign and security policy priorities.⁶⁹ As one of the countries that attended the conference in Delhi, the Australian Defence Force and the United States Indo-Pacific Command co-hosted the 24th Indo-Pacific Chiefs of

⁶⁷ Huma Siddiqui, "Financialexpress," Defence News, September 26, 2023, <https://www.financialexpress.com/business/defence-fostering-peace-and-cooperation-the-significance-of-ipacc-in-the-indo-pacific-3255490/>.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ "Australia's Strategic View of the Indo Pacific: Think Tank: European Parliament," Think Tank | European Parliament, accessed December 15, 2023, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI\(2022\)698917](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2022)698917).

Defence (CHODs)⁷⁰ Conference, which culminated with discussions on a rules-based order. Senior military officials from 27 countries addressed climate change, modern technology, and Indo-Pacific wars, chaired by General Ki Yamazaki.⁷¹ The Chiefs of Defence pledged to expand the complexity of training exercises, improve information exchange, and promote diversity. The conference emphasised the need for regional collaboration, and General Angus Campbell reiterated Australia's commitment to a safe and inclusive Indo-Pacific.⁷²

- Brunei: Brunei is one of the members of ASEAN, implying its significance in the Indo-Pacific. China's control of the South China Sea is increasing, and therefore, Brunei seeks to achieve the promotion of peaceful dispute resolution and sovereignty while strengthening regional institutions and programmes through the Indo-Pacific strategy⁷³.
- Canada: Canadian Deputy Army Chief Major General Peter Scott attended the 13th biannual Indo-Pacific Armies Chiefs Conference (IPACC). "We're very grateful to be here as part of the Indo-Pacific Armies Chiefs Conference (IPAC), 2023. Canada continues to look for opportunities where we can participate in training or exercises with partners in the Indo-Pacific region,"⁷⁴ he said. Canada's ten-year Indo-Pacific plan, launched in November

⁷⁰"2022 Chiefs of Defense Conference Concludes," U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, July 27, 2022, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/3108051/2022-chiefs-of-defense-conference-concludes/>.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³Integrated country strategy brunei - U.S. department of State, accessed December 16, 2023, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/ICS_EAP_Brunei_Public.pdf.

⁷⁴ ANI, "'Here to Build Army to Army Relationship': Canada's Deputy Army Chief on India-Canada Row," Hindustan Times, September 26, 2023, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/here-to-build-army-to-army-relationship-canadas-deputy-army-chief-on-india-canada-row-101695707467926.html>.

2022, aims to fully enhance the country's participation in the region in the areas of peace and security, economic growth, and sustainable development.⁷⁵

- France: The Chief of the French Army, General Pierre Schill, attended the IPACC. He stated that “France, as a nation of Pacific is also concerned in free movements and open space in the Pacific and the fact that through the multilateral coordination between nations and also armies to have the right and the laws been forced and for a free access to Pacific.”⁷⁶ The French Indo-Pacific policy, launched in 2018, focuses on addressing strategic shifts in the area and emphasises France's participation through its overseas territories. With a sizable population and a huge exclusive economic zone in the Indo-Pacific, France intends to have a robust military presence in the region to preserve sovereignty and contribute to regional stability. The strategy is built around four pillars: security and defence, ensuring an open and inclusive Indo-Pacific with freedom of navigation; economic development, particularly in physical and digital infrastructure; effective multilateralism based on the rule of law; and a commitment to common goods, such as climate and biodiversity initiatives.⁷⁷ France also emphasises the Indo-Pacific as a priority on the European agenda, in line with the EU's regional cooperation plan.

⁷⁵ “Canada: Canada to Strengthen Ties with the Indo-Pacific Region and Beyond,” USDA Foreign Agricultural Service, December 14, 2023, <https://fas.usda.gov/data/canada-canada-strengthen-ties-indo-pacific-region-and-beyond#:~:text=Launched%20in%20November%202022%2C%20Canada's,economic%20growth%2C%20and%20sustainable%20development>.

⁷⁶ANI, “France Concerned about Indo-Pacific Safety, Says French Army Chief,” The Economic Times, accessed December 17, 2023, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/france-concerned-about-indo-pacific-safety-says-french-army-chief/articleshow/103987086.cms>.

⁷⁷ France’s Indo-Pacific strategy - France Diplomatie, accessed December 16, 2023, https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/en_dcp_a4_indopacifique_022022_v1-4_web_cle878143.pdf.

- India: India co-hosted the IPACC this year, 2023, along with the US. According to Raksha Mantri, Rajnath Singh, India does not believe in a world system in which a few are deemed superior to others; multilateralism is the best way to achieve shared prosperity.⁷⁸ India advocates for a free, open, and rules-based Indo-Pacific, which is critical for the region's and the global community's economic progress.⁷⁹

Geography of the Indo-Pacific Islands



- Japan: General Morishita Yasunori attended the IPACC. The "Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)" vision of Japan aims for world peace and prosperity via the establishment of an open order based on common principles. The Indo-Pacific region is critical, with more than half of the world's population, yet it faces complicated power dynamics. Japan's FOIP approach emphasises open security, economic development, multilateralism, and adherence to shared goods. Japan works with allies to advocate for freedom of passage, economic connectivity, and environmental responsibility and has received support from the Japan-EU Summit, Quad, and ASEAN-Japan Summit. The approach emphasises

⁷⁸ 1. "India Stands for Free & Rules-Based Indo-Pacific Crucial for Economic Development of the Region & Wider Global Community, Says Raksha Mantri at Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue in New Delhi," Press Information Bureau, accessed December 15, 2023, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1878750#:~:text=India%20does%20not%20believe%20in%20a%20to%20shared%20prosperity%3A%20RM&text=India%20stands%20for%20a%20free,also%20the%20wider%20global%20community.>

⁷⁹ Ibid.

inclusion, cooperation, and connection with democratic ideals, including active participation in infrastructure initiatives to realise the FOIP goal.⁸⁰

- Kenya: Lt General Peter Mbogo Njiru was in attendance at the IPACC. Kenya's strategy for the Indo-Pacific emphasises its position as the "Indo-Pacific gateway to Africa."⁸¹ Militarization, piracy, international crime, and maritime pollution are major threats. The strategic importance of the Western Indian Ocean has grown as major global and regional countries construct bases, changing regional geopolitics. Piracy, international crime, and maritime pollution provide both challenges and chances for collaboration. There was an emphasis on Kenya's efforts in marine security, the development of a coast guard, and collaboration with the EU and India. Kenya pursues "win-win solutions" and a "mutually beneficial relationship" with key Indo-Pacific countries, with an emphasis on shared prosperity, commerce, and investment.⁸²
- Malaysia: General Datuk Muhammad Hafizuddeain Bin Jantan attended the IPACC. Malaysia maintains its commitment to ASEAN centrality and sees ASEAN as an essential component of the Indo-Pacific regional architecture.⁸³
- Mongolia: Mongolia's Indo-Pacific policy necessitates a delicate balancing act. While it was included in the United States' Indo-Pacific Strategy, its geographical position and economic linkages make it less important than the major emphasis. The country's economic reliance on China and Russia impacts its foreign policy decisions. The policy places a

⁸⁰ Japan's vision on a "free and open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)," accessed December 16, 2023, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100056243.pdf>.

⁸¹ Sankalp Gurjar, "Indian Council of World Affairs," How Kenya Views the Indo-Pacific - Indian Council of World Affairs (Government of India), October 1, 2021, https://www.icwa.in/show_content.php?lang=1&level=3&ls_id=6424&lid=4415.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Faiz Abdullah, "Malaysia's Role in the Emerging Indo-Pacific Order," ISIS, June 19, 2023, <https://www.isis.org.my/2023/06/09/malysias-role-in-the-emerging-indo-pacific-order/>.

premium on sustaining the present level of security cooperation, which includes defence diplomacy, peacekeeping, and cybersecurity. Mongolia seeks to interact with major nations, develop connectivity, and contribute to regional stability while remaining neutral to avoid geopolitical entanglements.⁸⁴

- Nepal: Prasiddha Prabal Janesewashree General Prabhu Ram Sharma attended the IPACC. Nepal has cautiously shifted towards the Indo-Pacific strategy due to coercion from China, particularly due to the Millennium Challenge Corporation Grant. Nepal is now focusing on partnership with India and the United States.⁸⁵ During a visit to India, there was a brief discussion about the border dispute, with an emphasis on settlement through diplomacy. Despite complaints, the confirmation of the \$500 million Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) award underscores Nepal's commitment to a diplomatic partnership with the United States. This award will help Nepal integrate its energy market with India by constructing a high-voltage power transmission network.⁸⁶
- New Zealand: Major General John Boswell was in attendance at the IPACC. Aotearoa New Zealand is working with our partners in the Indo-Pacific region to develop a future-focused economic cooperation framework, covering a range of priority economic and trade issues.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ A Mongolian perspective of the US indo-pacific strategy - east-west center, accessed December 16, 2023, <https://www.eastwestcenter.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/APB%20648%20-%20A%20Mongolian%20Perspective%20of%20the%20US%20Indo-Pacific%20Strategy.pdf>.

⁸⁵ Aarthi Ratnam, "As Nepal Turns to the Indo-Pacific, China Worries," – The Diplomat, April 14, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/04/as-nepal-turns-to-the-indo-pacific-china-worries/>.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, "Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity," New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, accessed December 16, 2023, <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/en/trade/free-trade-agreements/free-trade-agreements-under-negotiation/indo-pacific-economic-framework-for-prosperity/#:~:text=Aotearoa%20New%20Zealand%20is%20working,priority%20economic%20and%20trade%20issues>.

- Papua New Guinea had previously hosted the biennial Indo-Pacific Army Chiefs Conference (IPACC) on September 14, 2021,⁸⁸ co-hosted by the United States Army. Army chiefs from the Indo-Pacific region gathered to discuss differences, establish trust, and find common ground. General Charles Flynn, Commanding General of the U.S. Army Pacific, highlighted the importance of connecting as leaders to foster alliances and partnerships.⁸⁹ The conference focused on the theme "Environmental Impacts on Land and Littoral Operations." Concurrently, the Senior Enlisted Leaders Forum addressed professional development for senior enlisted personnel from various countries. The event adhered to strict COVID mitigation protocols.
- Republic of Korea: General Jung Hwan Park. The South Korean Indo-Pacific Strategy aligns South Korea more closely with the United States and international principles while simultaneously emphasising an inclusive approach and providing a possibility for collaboration with China. This nuanced attitude demonstrates South Korea's intention to collaborate with all nations that follow established laws and principles, subject to China's actions. The strategy is crucial not just for managing regional dynamics but also for providing a diplomatic platform for South Korea, answering past concerns about limited participation in the Indo-Pacific area, and signalling a larger foreign policy vision beyond the Korean peninsula.

⁸⁸ "Papua New Guinea and US Hosts Regional Land Forces Seminar," www.army.mil, accessed December 16, 2023, https://www.army.mil/article/250441/papua_new_guinea_and_us_hosts_regional_land_forces_seminar.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

- Singapore: Major General Tan Cheng Kwee attended the IPACC, where he spoke about the “Role of Military Diplomacy in Mitigating Crises.”⁹⁰ Singapore's Indo-Pacific policy entails active regional participation, adherence to the rules-based system, and strategic autonomy. To emphasise ASEAN's relevance, the country participates in international peacekeeping, counter-piracy operations, and marine security. Singapore's strategy offers a model for tiny nations managing geopolitical complexity in the Indo-Pacific, boosting global status, and fostering regional stability, with an emphasis on economic diversification, transparent diplomacy, and a balanced defence posture.⁹¹
- Thailand: The 11th Indo-Pacific Armies Chiefs Conference (IPACC XI), the 43rd Pacific Armies Management Seminar (IPAMS XLIII), and the 5th Senior Enlisted Leaders Forum (SELF V) were held in Bangkok, Thailand, and brought together Gen. Kongsompong Apirat, commander-in-chief of the Royal Thai Army, and Gen. James C. McConville, Chief of Staff of the United States Army.⁹² The conferences, which were part of the Department of the Army and United States Army Pacific forums, sought to improve interpersonal ties, foster multilateral discourse, and promote collaboration among Indo-Pacific nations to solve current security problems in the region.⁹³



⁹⁰ “Indo-Pacific Armies Chiefs Conference (IPACC),” Press Information Bureau, accessed November 5, 2023, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1961331>.

⁹¹ “Observatory Indo Pacific,” Observatory, October 6, 2022, <https://www.sciencespo.fr/ceri/observatory-indo-pacific/>.

⁹² “US INDO PACIFIC COMMAND,” PACOM, accessed December 16, 2023, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/Photos/igphoto/2002181433/>.

⁹³ Ibid.

- United Kingdom: General Sir Patrick Sanders was in attendance. The United Kingdom's International Development Strategy (IDS) focuses on long-term relationships suited to the requirements of Indo-Pacific countries, going beyond aid to utilise the UK's economic, scientific, security, and diplomatic assets. Honest and dependable investment, encouraging freedom for women and girls, humanitarian activity, and tackling climate change, nature, and global health are among the top objectives. The Indo-Pacific region is critical to the UK's interests since it is home to more than half of the world's population and a big economic engine. However, issues such as poverty, climate vulnerability, and gender inequality continue to exist. Climate action, green infrastructure, trade and economic connections, women's empowerment, and humanitarian, health, and food security efforts are all part of the UK's development offer in the area.⁹⁴
- In Vietnam, Bangladesh, Cambodia, and so on, Lt General Nguyen Doan Anh, General Sheikh Md Shafiuddin Ahmed, and Lt General Mao Sophan, respectively, were in attendance.⁹⁵

US's Benefits Through Its Indo-Pacific Strategy

In the Indo-Pacific, the US will pursue five goals, each in collaboration with its allies and partners, as well as regional organisations.

1. **Promoting Freedom and Openness:** The United States has fought to keep the Indo-Pacific free and open by strengthening democratic institutions, maintaining the rule of law, and supporting civil society. Initiatives like the Summit for Democracy Year of Action and

⁹⁴ Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office, "UK–Indo-Pacific Region Development Partnership Summary, July 2023," GOV.UK, accessed December 16, 2023, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-indo-pacific-region-development-partnership-summary/uk-indo-pacific-region-development-partnership-summary-july-2023#:~:text=As%20set%20out%20in%20the,50%25%20of%20the%20world's%20population>.

⁹⁵ "Indo-Pacific Armies Chiefs Conference (IPACC)," Press Information Bureau, accessed November 5, 2023, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1961331>.

the implementation of the United States Strategy to Combat Corruption demonstrate this dedication.⁹⁶

2. **Regional Architecture Strengthening:** Efforts have been made to improve connections within and beyond the region, fostering a robust regional architecture. Initiatives include launching partners in the Blue Pacific to support the priorities of the Pacific Islands, elevating the US-ASEAN relationship to a comprehensive strategic partnership, and fostering cooperation through established relationships and new dialogues such as the Quad and the US-EU Indo-Pacific Consultations.⁹⁷
3. **Driving Economic Prosperity:** The United States has started several initiatives to promote economic cooperation in the region, including the U.S.-Taiwan Initiative on 21st Century Trade and the U.S.-Taiwan Technology Trade and Investment Collaboration (TTIC) framework.⁹⁸ It has also hosted the APEC summit and launched the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity with 13 regional partners. Additionally, the Quad has been used to advance economic objectives; as a result, Just Energy Transition Partnerships have been formed with Vietnam and Indonesia.⁹⁹
4. **Increasing Regional Security:** The United States has concentrated on increasing regional security by fortifying security alliances and collaborations. This entails expanding joint military drills as well as initiatives to strengthen cybersecurity and maritime security capabilities. In this context, the Australia-United Kingdom-United States (AUKUS) partnership's formation is noteworthy.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ OFFICE OF THE SPOKESPERSON, “Marking One Year since the Release of the Administration’s Indo-Pacific Strategy - United States Department of State,” U.S. Department of State, February 14, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/marking-one-year-since-the-release-of-the-administrations-indo-pacific-strategy/>.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

5. **Increasing Regional Resilience to Transnational Threats:** Efforts have been made to increase regional resilience to transnational threats in the twenty-first century. This entails supplying the Indo-Pacific area with more than 267 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, enhancing the region's ability to respond more effectively to health emergencies in the future, and raising a sizable amount of money for initiatives aimed at promoting clean energy, clean air, and climate resilience.¹⁰¹

Growth of IPACCS, IPAMS, and SELF

IPAMS membership has expanded from nine countries at the inaugural conference in Honolulu, Hawaii, in 1977 to 31 countries in Seoul, Korea, in 2017.¹⁰² IPACC is currently held every two years and is co-hosted by the US Army and the country that is hosting it. IPAMS is the longest-running annual land forces conference. According to the US Embassy announcement, SELF was introduced in 2014 to allow senior enlisted personnel to enjoy the same fellowship, conversation, and sharing opportunities as junior enlisted members but from a different viewpoint.¹⁰³

Conclusion

To sum up, the Indo-Pacific Army Heads Meeting is an essential forum for senior military officials in the area to convene and discuss critical security issues. This biennial conference fosters understanding, forges partnerships, and improves interoperability among participating nations by endorsing peace, stability, and cooperation. The meetings cover a wide range of topics, including protecting the global rules-based order, dealing with cybersecurity threats, and adapting to natural disasters and climate change. The conference shows the participating nations' dedication to cooperating, exchanging ideas, and working towards an Indo-Pacific region that is free and secure

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² ANI ANI / Updated: Sep 26, "Partnership between US, India Vital for Stability in Indo-Pacific: US Army Chief Gen Randy George: India News - Times of India," The Times of India, accessed November 7, 2023, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/partnership-between-us-india-vital-for-stability-in-indo-pacific-us-army-chief-gen-randy-george/articleshow/103949769.cms?from=mdr>.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

through these talks. With a long history of fostering communication, grooming leaders, and addressing new security dynamics, the Indo-Pacific Army Heads Meeting has made a substantial contribution to regional peace and stability. It is evidence of how determined nations are to cooperate to create a prosperous and peaceful future for all people living in the Indo-Pacific region.

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