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Providing Stability and Deterrence: The US Army in INDOPACOM

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ABSTRACT: Regaining the military advantage in the Indo-Pacific region requires renewed thinking about the US military footprint there, particularly the role of the US Army. The Army's deterrence and partnering capabilities will be best utilized by engaging its long-range and precision-strike capabilities in a regional "Ring of Fires" concept and further enhanced as part of a broader revitalization and expansion of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue.

The US Department of Defense and its Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) are grappling with how to regain military advantage in the region amid a global pandemic and looming defense budget cuts. The US Army's specific challenge centers on becoming a more effective enabler for the Joint Force, an aim the Army can best accomplish by combining its special deterrence and relationship-building capacities into a two-pronged action plan. Regarding the first prong, deterrence, the Army should leverage its long-range and precision-strike capabilities to form a Ring of Fires that could target China's critical land-based and maritime assets. Concerning the second prong, relationship-building, the Army should work toward augmenting and operationalizing the multidomain military capabilities of India and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue—a strategic-level forum comprised of the United States, Japan, Australia, and India—along with the support of key allies, the United Kingdom, and France: a "Quad Plus."

Introduction

Most experts agree the Indo-Pacific region is the fulcrum for the future global security order and thus of critical concern for the new US administration. As the *2018 National Defense Strategy* ominously warned, "China . . . seeks Indo-Pacific regional hegemony in the near-term and displacement of the United States to achieve global preeminence in the future."¹ But the Biden administration faces a revisionist China rapidly marching toward its intended goals (as outlined in President Xi Jinping's "Chinese Dream") of achieving hegemony in the region and the unification of Taiwan with China either through coercion or force.² Accordingly, US military planners must now provide

1. James N. Mattis, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), January 19, 2018), 2, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>.

2. "General Secretary Xi Jinping Explicates the 'Chinese Dream,'" *Chinese Law and Government* 48, no. 6 (November 2016).

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America's policymakers with bold, visionary strategic thinking and new operational concepts.

Moreover the United States should supplement its words of commitment to allies and partners with a plan of action that actively improves interoperability and military-to-military cooperation. This article offers just such a strategic and operational roadmap, one that takes better advantage of the Army's role in the Indo-Pacific to achieve greater stability by deterring aggressive activities. This roadmap assumes, optimistically, the threat posed by the People's Republic of China (PRC) will spur greater military cooperation among leading Indo-Pacific countries, the United States, and other key European countries. But this roadmap also recognizes the fragile and emergent characteristics of many of these relationships.

This article examines the threat posed by the PRC's aggressive military expansion from the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean and beyond as well as key PRC military weaknesses that INDOPACOM and the US Army Pacific Command (USARPAC) should exploit. The article then details the enabling role the US Army can play vis-à-vis the Joint Force through a new operational concept called Ring of Fires, which would see deterrence-oriented Army precision-strike and other missile capabilities deployed to key locations in the Indo-Pacific region in an effort to challenge China's economic survival. Finally, the article underscores the importance of further relationship building with India especially, and with the Quad countries, as well as the United Kingdom and France. Together, the combined military and economic capabilities of the United States and its allies and strategic partners can create a formidable security framework for the region.

China's Military Expansion

American military primacy and its capability to deter aggression and to maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific have declined. By contrast China has embarked upon construction of a new security architecture in the region through huge investments in counterintervention and power-projection capabilities. Evidence of this expansion includes the PRC's unilateral militarization and deployment of anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities to address a Taiwan contingency; its expanded naval operations in the western Pacific, into the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea; and the establishment of the first People's Liberation Army (PLA) base in Djibouti. Since 2008 the PLA Navy (PLAN) has dispatched 35 naval escort task forces into the Indian Ocean and Gulf of Aden.³

Beijing has buttressed its power-projection capabilities in the region with a military modernization program that is outpacing the United States in shipbuilding, land-based conventional ballistic and cruise

3. See James E. Fanell, "China's Global Navy Eyeing Sea Control by 2030, Superiority by 2049," Sunday Guardian Live, June 13, 2020, <https://www.sundayguardianlive.com/news/china-global-navy>.

missiles, and air defense systems.⁴ Xi's geostrategic Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), especially the Maritime Silk Road (also known as the String of Pearls), underpins this buildup of the PRC's power projection and expeditionary warfare capabilities. The Maritime Silk Road is a soft power means to build overseas basing and logistics infrastructures to project and sustain PLA ground force—as well as PLAN, Peoples Liberation Army Marine Corps, and Peoples Liberation Army Rocket Force—assets throughout the Indo-Pacific.

Located along key global sea lines of communication (SLOCs) and choke points, Beijing has secured long-term, dual-use, deep-water port facilities in Australia, Bangladesh, Kenya, Malaysia, the Maldives, Mauritius, Myanmar, Pakistan, the Seychelles, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, and Thailand. Many of these ports are owned and operated under long-term lease agreements, often extracted to repay debts to the PRC. As former Secretary of Defense Mark Esper cautioned, China is “gaining strategic influence, access to key resources, and military footholds around the world” via the Belt and Road Initiative.⁵ Indeed the sum of these developments has led observers to lament the loss of American primacy in the region; in short, Washington has effectively “ceded [the] strategic initiative” to Beijing.⁶

Joint Force Enabler

In December 2020 during a major speech regarding the Pentagon's need to realign US defense spending more acutely to address the threat of Chinese expansion, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark A. Milley commented, “Look, I'm an Army guy. . . . And I love the Army . . . but the fundamental defense of the United States and the ability to project power forward will always be for America naval and air and space power.”⁷ As presaged by Milley's remarks, the Army has long endeavored to solve the conundrum of how to redefine its supporting role to the Joint Force in such a way as to regain the advantage in the Indo-Pacific region.

Successive policy and strategic documents have outlined a Joint all-domain strategy for the INDOPACOM area of responsibility. This strategy entails four lines of effort: increasing Joint Force lethality, strengthening alliances and partnerships, enhancing design and posture,

4. OSD, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China, Annual Report to Congress* (Washington, DC: OSD, 2020), vii.

5. Mark T. Esper, “Secretary of Defense Allies and Partners Remarks at Atlantic Council” (speech, Atlantic Council, Washington, DC, October 20, 2020), <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Speeches/Speech/Article/2388205/secretary-of-defense-allies-and-partners-remarks-at-atlantic-council/>.

6. Nathan Freier, John Schaus, and William Braun, *An Army Transformed: USINDOPACOM Hypercompetition and US Army Theater Design* (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College Press, 2020), 912, <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/monographs/912>.

7. Paul McLeary, “CJCS Milley Predicts DoD Budget ‘Bloodletting’ to Fund Navy,” *Breaking Defense*, December 3, 2020, <https://breakingdefense.com/2020/12/cjcs-milley-predicts-dod-bloodletting-to-fund-navy-priorities/>.

and exercises and experimentation.⁸ Within the Joint All-Domain strategy, the US Army/USARPAC has developed its own multi-domain operations concept (MDO) which emphasizes Army support to the Joint Force in the Indo-Pacific region through integrated air defense; operational maneuver and theater-wide logistics; sustainment, command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR); and long-range precision fires.

For the Army, retooling its capabilities and developing novel applications of land power, particularly in the “Indo” portion of the Indo-Pacific, while learning to flip the playbook from supporting to enabling missions, have been challenging tasks. For instance, recent analyses of US Army theater design in INDOPACOM highlighted fundamental weaknesses in the Army’s MDO strategy for the region.⁹ Key among these findings is the fact the Army and the Joint Force are essentially “out of position” because they are too heavily invested in northeast Asia. Additionally the Army’s MDO strategy needs tighter linkages to the broader Joint theater and to the operating concepts of its sister services.¹⁰

Moreover, five essential strategic partners (based on US mutual defense treaties) make up the focus of the INDOPACOM/USARPAC area of responsibility: Australia, Japan, the Philippines, South Korea, and Thailand. Conspicuously absent from the discussion, however, is India, a designated US Major Defense Partner and the country with the largest landmass in the Indian Ocean and the second largest army in the region after China.

Importantly the future deterrence and countervailing power in the region will rest on two unassailable strategic factors—geography and alliances. The US Army’s capabilities regarding geography have been underappreciated. The second factor, alliances, must focus more deliberately on India and the Quad Plus. Together these factors provide the essential foundation for a deterrence concept, a Ring of Fires that would employ Army precision, long-range strike capabilities to target PRC land and maritime assets and which, in the unlikely event of war, would cripple China’s economic means of survival.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, the tyranny of distance does not necessarily favor Chinese over US forces in the Indo-Pacific. In fact the PRC has significant disadvantages in the maritime domain due to its long and vulnerable SLOCs. Beijing’s energy, vital natural resources, manufacturing supply chains, and export trade must pass through the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Crucially, the PLAN and China’s merchant

8. See US Department of Defense (DoD), *The Department of Defense Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region* (Washington, DC: DoD, June 1, 2019); US Army Pacific (USARPAC), *USARPAC Strategic Guidance: Competing for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific* (Fort Shafter, HI: USARPAC, November 2018); and US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), *The U.S. Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028*, TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1 (Washington, DC: US Army TRADOC, 2018).

9. Nathan P. Freier and John H. Schaus, “INDOPACOM through 2030?” *Parameters* 50, no. 2 (Summer 2020): 27–34, <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters/vol50/iss2/5/>.

10. Freier, Schaus, and Braun, *Army Transformed*.

fleet must transit through the straits of the Indonesian archipelago, namely, the Malacca, Sunda, and Lombok Straits to the South China Sea (figure 1). These choke points are critical vulnerabilities, which the PRC recognizes as such.

When traversing from the Straits of Hormuz, the Gulf of Aden, and the Cape of Good Hope into the Indian Ocean, Chinese merchant ships and naval vessels, as well as their military port logistics bases along the Maritime Silk Road, would be vulnerable to kinetic forms of attack as well as cyber disruption. Vast geographical distances and extended SLOCs typically represent vulnerabilities that can be attacked if insufficiently protected, as witnessed by the campaigns to control the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans during the Second World War. These geography-based weaknesses, in combination with recent US Army modernization efforts and investments in long-range precision strike and hypersonic missile capabilities, afford the Joint Force a unique and as yet underutilized means of contributing to a Ring-of-Fires concept that would support INDOPACOM's Joint All-Domain operations.

A Ring of Fires

Long-range precision strike capability has traditionally resided with the US Navy and US Air Force. Yet both the US Army and US Marine Corps are adding these capabilities to their repertoire.¹¹ The Army increased its investment in the long-range maritime strike arena with plans to purchase the Navy's SM-6 (plus extended range variant) and Tomahawk, including the Maritime Strike version, and integration of the Precision Strike Missile (PrSM) long-range, surface-to-surface missile with a new maritime seeker.¹² Also, following its September 2020 exercise, Project Convergence, the Army announced its intention to include experiments linking Army command and control for coordinating strikes against maritime targets, as well as anti-ship missile tests, in its 2021 exercise.¹³

Similarly the US Navy and Marine Corps have initiated Project Overmatch to coordinate and link fires from multiple platforms using automation and artificial intelligence to streamline targeting cycles. A key issue for INDOPACOM is, how are these parallel precision strike efforts to be coordinated at the Joint level in the future? In particular, how can the US Army's potentially larger, more mobile, and

11. Jake Yeager, "Expeditionary Advanced Maritime Operations: How the Marine Corps Can Avoid Becoming a Second Land Army in the Pacific," *War on the Rocks*, December 26, 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2019/12/expeditionary-advanced-maritime-operations-how-the-marine-corps-can-avoid-becoming-a-second-land-army-in-the-pacific/>; and David B. Larter, "Are the US Army and US Marine Corps Competing for Missions in the Pacific?" *Defense News*, October 14, 2020, <https://www.defensenews.com/digital-show-dailies/ausa/2020/10/14/are-the-us-army-and-us-marine-corps-competing-for-missions-in-the-pacific/>.

12. See Sydney J. Freedberg Jr., "Army Picks Tomahawk & SM-6 for Mid-Range Missiles," *Breaking Defense*, November 6, 2020, <https://breakingdefense.com/2020/11/army-picks-tomahawk-sm-6-for-mid-range-missiles/>.

13. Steve Trimble and Lee Hudson, "U.S. Army Flexes New Land-Based, Anti-Ship Capabilities," *Aviation Week*, October 20, 2020, <https://aviationweek.com/defense-space/misile-defense-weapons/us-army-flexes-new-land-based-anti-ship-capabilities>.



Figure 1. Army Ring of Fires
(Map by Pete McPhail)

weapons-capable arrayed strike footprint be best deployed, and under what future operational construct by the Joint Force?

Notionally the aim of the Ring-of-Fires concept is to target the China's SLOCs and choke points for energy and trade, its sea- and land-based logistics, and PRC resupply and sustainment capabilities. As depicted in figure 1, the critical Malacca, Lombok, and Sunda Straits could be controlled by US Army, Marine Corps, and allied missile batteries and other armaments. Missile capabilities could involve anti-air and surface maritime attack. These attack vectors are based primarily on Army precision strike weapons including future hypersonic missiles.

Using Multi-Domain task forces, the Army's targeting plan would be maritime attack against PRC surface warships and merchant shipping. The targeting plan is based on Army missile ranges and missile warheads for different functions. The ability to put at risk the PLAN and merchant fleets, to fire on the SLOCs that sustain overseas PLA expeditionary forces, and to do so while signaling the means to hold the Chinese economy hostage would credibly demonstrate US commitment, and that of its allies and strategic partners, to maintaining peace and stability in the region.

But the concept would require the Army to reposition to a broader range of firing and logistics positions than it currently occupies. This repositioning would include the deployment or redeployment of Army artillery and missile units on support ships or commercial vessels using a containerized, "guns in a box" approach or mobile missile bases at sea.¹⁴ Just as important, this concept would also require an alliance structure redesign for INDOPACOM. Strengthening relations with key allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific is essential to providing access, logistics support, pre-positioning of stocks, and sustainment activities.

Basing will also play a key role in the development of a Ring of Fires. New bases could be achieved either through new status of forces-type agreements that permit basing, training, joint exercises, interoperability, and joint unified command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and targeting (C4ISRT), or less formal, incremental capacity-building agreements such as those in place between the United States and India. Secure pre-positioned and mobile sites for the US Army are critical. These sites must be planned to ensure minimal detectability. Deception must figure prominently in this plan as well with constant updates based on intelligence assessments of PRC surveillance and reconnaissance.

Weapon logistics is another factor along with base survivability. Deception, camouflage, electronic and cyber warfare, and mobility will enhance survivability from PRC surprise or short-timeline attacks. Additionally Army security force assistance brigades could be deployed to build partner multidomain operations and strike capabilities in the

14. See Captain J. W. "Stretch" Phillips, US Navy (Retired), and Dr. Anthony Wells, "Put the Guns in a Box," *Proceedings*, June 2018, <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2018/june/put-guns-box>.

INDOPACOM region including in Australia, Brunei, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. While some of these countries may be unwilling to countervail China openly or militarily, the Biden administration must develop a cohesive political-military-economic framework for the region that includes all of them, should their inclusion become necessary at a later date.

Command and control for execution of the concept would require redundant facilities, some fixed, some mobile, and all interoperable. The NATO model, such as the Joint Warfare facility at Northwood, United Kingdom, may present initial baseline capabilities for interallied command, control, and communications. So too, future command and control solutions may arise from the Joint Staff Bold Quest initiative, which is examining allied connectivity for All-Domain command and control operations, as well as from the US Army's Fires Capabilities Development and Integration Directorate Battle Lab, which allows allies to "join and test the compatibility of their own command and control networks and capabilities with those of the US service and other allies."¹⁵

In sum the Ring-of-Fires concept provides the US Army with a crucial operational mission tied directly and firmly to enabling the Joint Force. Strategically it enables the United States to maintain a favorable military balance sufficient to deter China and to support a free and open Indo-Pacific theater. Nevertheless this concept cannot succeed without allies. As noted in the US Department of Defense's Indo-Pacific Strategy Report, "the challenges we face in the Indo-Pacific extend beyond what any single country can address alone."¹⁶

Alliances and Strategic Partnerships

While the current INDOPACOM alliance posture is already centered on five anchor relationships, one may well argue India is the most important anchor of all. Not only does India have unique geographic advantage and increasing military capabilities vis-à-vis its erstwhile adversary China, but India is also the epicenter of the Quad Plus. In the closing days of his tenure as US secretary of defense, Mark Esper reflected, "India will well be the most consequential partner for us, I think, in the Indo Pacific for sure in this century."¹⁷ The disconnection between this statement by a US defense secretary and the lack of a demonstrative focus on India in INDOPACOM and USARPAC strategy documents is striking.

Although not without its limits for the time being, a strategic convergence of sorts is emerging between the United States and India, due largely to the increasing threat environment created by China. That

15. Theresa Hitchens, " 'Bold Quest' to Demo Allied Connectivity for All-Domain Ops," *Breaking Defense*, August, 24, 2020, <https://breakingdefense.com/2020/08/bold-quest-to-demo-allied-connectivity-for-all-domain-ops/>.

16. DoD, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report*, 16.

17. "India Will Be Most Consequential Partner for U.S. in Indo-Pacific This Century: Esper," *Hindu*, October 21, 2020, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-will-be-most-consequential-partner-for-us-in-indo-pacific-this-century-esper/article32905679.ece>.

threat environment includes the ongoing Sino-Indo conflict along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh; the PRC's military support of neighboring Pakistan, which has launched successive terrorist attacks against India; the encirclement of India on land and at sea via the BRI China-Pakistan Economic Corridor; and the use of Maritime Silk Road infrastructure investments to usurp India's role as a regional net provider with smaller Indian Ocean neighbors.¹⁸ These geostrategic vectors, along with a more proactive foreign policy approach by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, make it realistic to discuss ways to strengthen the US-Indo bilateral relationship and leverage the multilateral capabilities of the Quad Plus.

In fact the burgeoning US-India defense relationship is the product of four cornerstones.¹⁹ The first cornerstone consists of policy pronouncements, such as the designation in 2016 of India as a Major Defense Partner (a status unique to India and commensurate with the relationships shared with only the closest of American allies) and high-level 2+2 ministerial meetings.²⁰ The second cornerstone is the major defense logistics and tactical intelligence-sharing protocols between the United States and India, including the 2002 General Security of Military Information Agreement, the 2016 Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement, the 2018 Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement, the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geospatial Intelligence, and the Maritime Information Sharing Technical Agreement, the latter two of which were signed in October 2020.²¹

The third cornerstone consists of defense sales and trade and technology cooperation, especially the recent sale of Poseidon P-8I aircraft and expected exports of armed Predator-B UAVs. The fourth cornerstone—or foundation stone—lies in the military relationship that exists between the two countries. Evidence for this relationship can be found in training exercises such as the annual Malabar naval exercise, Army and Special Forces exercises Yudh Abhyas and Vajra Prahar, respectively, and the first tri-service Tiger Triumph amphibious exercise.

To be sure military cooperation between the United States and India has been more robust between the two navies. That cooperation has centered on augmenting India's maritime domain awareness and anti-submarine warfare capabilities to help countervail the PLAN's growing expeditionary and undersea presence in the Indo-Pacific. By

18. See Darshana M. Baruah, "India in the Indo-Pacific: New Delhi's Theater of Opportunity" (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2020).

19. See Sumit Ganguly and M. Chris Mason, *An Unnatural Partnership? The Future of U.S.-India Strategic Cooperation* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College Press, May 2019), <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/monographs/924/.pdf>.

20. Joint Statement, "The United States and India: Enduring Global Partners in the 21st Century," White House (website), June 7, 2016, <http://go.usa.gov/x8EFV>.

21. Santosh Chaubey, "BECA, MITSA Deals between India-US Will Strengthen Strategic Alliance, Challenge China's Growing Military Ambitions," News 18 India, October 27, 2020, <https://www.news18.com/news/india/beca-mitsa-deals-between-india-us-will-strengthen-strategic-alliance-challenge-chinas-growing-military-ambitions-3011390.html>.

contrast cooperation between the US Army and the Indian Army has experienced impediments. Some analysts have pointed to the Indian Army's posture which is focused on insurgency, counterterrorism, and border protection rather than force projection; others have suggested bilateral army exercises are too small and narrowly structured to be an effective means of relationship and capacity building; and still other analysts have noted the lack of interoperability is not helped by an overreliance on Russian weapon supplies.²²

Still, as signaled by the Indian Army vice chief's visit to INDOPACOM and USARPAC in fall 2020, there are avenues to enhance further operational and strategic level collaboration between the two armies.²³ Some immediate opportunities include intelligence sharing related to border security and counterterrorism, as well as Special Forces training and professional military education (PME).²⁴ Each of these areas deserves their own deliberative Army-to-Army formal assessment, but for brevity's sake, some key cooperative prospects are highlighted.

Intelligence Sharing

The PLA military incursions along the Sino-Indian border LAC in May 2020 revealed many intelligence deficiencies for the Indian Army, including lack of indications and warning over PLA intentions, insufficient military satellite coverage, and other C4ISR weaknesses.²⁵ Taken together they highlight enormous potential for increased US-Indian Army intelligence cooperation and assistance. For example the US Army's National Ground Intelligence Center in Charlottesville, Virginia, and US Special Operations Command Intelligence Division could work with their Indian counterparts to assist in border protection and counterterrorist intelligence operations. The US Army could provide technical know-how to develop a C4ISRT system designed to meet India's specific needs along the borders.

A common operating picture would enable an intelligence-based, real-time indications and warning system. This C4ISRT system could alert to threats pertaining to border incursions, terrorist plans and movements, and any major nuclear posture changes or actions by either China or Pakistan, or both, that may threaten Indian and US interests

22. See C. Christine Fair, "US-Indian Army-to-Army Relations: Prospects for Future Coalition Operations," *Asian Security* 1, no. 2 (April 2005): 157–73; and M. Chris Mason, "Less Than Meets the Eye: A Critical Assessment of the Military-to-Military Dimension of the U.S.-India Security Partnership," in *The Future of U.S.-India Security Cooperation*, ed. Sumit Ganguly and M. Chris Mason (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, forthcoming).

23. Huma Siddiqui, "Deeper Military Cooperation between India and the US: Vice Chief of Indian Army Visiting America," *Financial Express*, October 16, 2020, <https://www.financialexpress.com/lifestyle/health/deeper-military-cooperation-between-india-and-the-us-vice-chief-of-indian-army-visiting-america/2107121/>.

24. See Carol V. Evans, "A Vision for Future U.S.-India Intelligence Cooperation," in *The Future of U.S.-India Security Cooperation*, ed. Sumit Ganguly and M. Chris Mason (Manchester, UK: University of Manchester Press, forthcoming).

25. Sameer Lalwani, "Revelations and Opportunities: What the United States Can Learn from the Sino-Indian Crisis," *War on the Rocks*, July 10, 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/07/revelations-and-opportunities-what-the-united-states-can-learn-from-the-sino-indian-crisis/>; and Evans, "Vision for Future."

and stability in the region. Additionally the United States could assist India by supplementing the current Poseidon P-8I surveillance mission with deployments of, for example, Joint Stars, Rivet Joint aircraft, or Global Hawk UAVs.²⁶

Training and Professional Military Education

The Indian military has identified the need to improve its special forces.²⁷ These forces remain limited in number and are not considered intelligence collection assets in ways that the US Special Forces operate. In this regard US Army Special Operations Forces can assist with training, data exchanges, and operational planning support with Indian forces, in concert with regular exercises and personnel exchanges in both the United States and India. Part of this process can include special penetration and exfiltration operations, deception, counterterrorism training, network penetration, and psychological warfare. The US Army, through US Special Operations Command and with the assistance of INDOPACOM, can help create a similar integrated special operations command initially designated for Indian border protection, counterterrorism, and infiltration missions.

With regard to US-Indian PME engagement, the current footprint is too small and could be greatly expanded. India's own professional military education establishment has come under fire for its military insularity, lack of civilian participation, and emphasis on training over education.²⁸ Critics have suggested India's PME system needs to be revamped along the US and UK models.²⁹ These factors and a lack of jointness within the Indian military establishment point to areas for US-Indian PME cooperation, especially given China's recent restructuring of the PLA into a force capable of managing and conducting joint operations. In the near-term, the US Army's professional military education institutions could collaborate more, for example, with India's relatively new National Defense University.

Quad Plus

With the US military posture weighted in the western Pacific, Washington has increasingly leaned on New Delhi to be the countervailing power in the Indo-Pacific, leading to high expectations and pressures on the bilateral relationship on the part of the United States. Fortunately the Quad has been resurrected from its somewhat

26. Mansij Asthana, "What Is US' Deadliest Submarine Killer – The P-8 Poseidon Doing at 15,000 Feet on India-China Border?" *Eurasian Times*, November 27, 2020, <https://eurasianimes.com/what-is-us-most-lethal-submarine-killer-the-p-8-poseidon-doing-on-india-china-border-at-15000-feet/>.

27. Saikat Datta, "India Tries and Fails to Improve Its Special Operations Forces," *Asia Times*, May 31, 2019, <https://www.asiatimes.com/2019/05/article/india-tries-to-improve-its-special-ops-capability/>.

28. Prakash Menon, "Military Education in India: Missing the Forest for the Trees," *Journal of Defence Studies* 9, no. 4 (October–December 2015): 49–69, https://idsa.in/system/files/jds/jds_9_4_2015_MilitaryEducationIndia.pdf.

29. See Anit Mukherjee, *The Absent Dialogue: Politicians, Bureaucrats, and the Military in India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

moribund state due to members' converging concerns regarding China's increasingly assertive and coercive military and economic behavior in the region.³⁰ The Quad foreign ministers' in-person meeting in Tokyo in October 2020 and Australia's participation for the first time since 2007 in the November 2020 Quad-based, Indian-hosted Malabar exercise were important signaling measures demonstrating the potential countervailing capabilities of these strategic partners against China. That RIMPAC-like exercise was conducted in November 2020 with the four Quad navies (US Navy, Japan Maritime Self Defense Force, Royal Australian Navy, and Indian Navy) conducting joint operations centered on the Indian *Vikramaditya* carrier battle group and the US *Nimitz* carrier strike group.³¹

The two "Plus" regional players are the United Kingdom and France. The United Kingdom provides the geostrategic base in Diego Garcia and has just deployed the HMS *Queen Elizabeth* aircraft carrier (on its maiden voyage) and its carrier strike group to the Indian Ocean and South China Sea. France's naval bases in Djibouti and the Reunion Islands already provide logistical support for India's mission-based deployments in the Indian Ocean, Gulf of Aden, and the Persian Gulf.

Furthermore expanding the Quad into a Quad Plus would leverage the capacities of individual members to mount and conduct joint operations but without engaging in a formal military alliance structure such as NATO. Accordingly INDOPACOM and USARPAC could work to expand the current focus of the Quad, which is maritime/ naval-centric, to assist in building multidomain, interoperable military competencies across the land, air, space, and cyber domains. This expansion can be achieved through greater intelligence sharing and collaboration, including those of the "Five Eyes" alliance. Intelligence sharing is an essential step in operationalizing the Quad alliance.

Additionally the numerous bilateral logistical agreements among the Quad Plus members could be networked to provide the grid for launching a larger allied Ring of Fires for basing and pre-positioning of supplies and other logistics support for distributed All-Domain operations. Refocusing INDOPACOM's exercises and those among the Quad Plus members on the environment for allied multidomain interoperability and joint operations is another component as well. Just as we have seen the establishment of combined Joint task forces in the Horn of Africa and in the Middle East, task forces could be established in the Indo-Pacific as a further means of providing the persistent forward presence necessary to deter and moderate PRC behavior, and, if necessary, defeat any Chinese aggression across all domains of warfare.

30. Tanvi Madan, "The Rise, Fall, and Rebirth of the 'Quad,'" War on the Rocks, November 16, 2017, <https://warontherocks.com/2017/11/rise-fall-rebirth-quad/>.

31. Express News Service, "Malabar Exercise Concludes in Arabian Sea," Indian Express, November 21, 2020, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/malabar-exercise-concludes-in-arabian-sea-7059693/>.

Concluding Recommendations

Regaining and maintaining US strategic advantages in the Indo-Pacific will be vital for protecting American interests in the region. America's window of vulnerability is open, but that window also offers opportunities to recast US military strategies, capabilities, and alliances. With a forward-looking roadmap the US Army can become an even more important enabler to the Joint Force in INDOPACOM. At the core of its efforts to do so should be an emphasis on leveraging its investments in precision strike capabilities to operationalize the Ring-of-Fires concept and strengthening its relations with the Indian Army and the Quad Plus militaries.

As an immediate first step, INDOPACOM must develop a proof of concept for the Ring of Fires with Australia, India, and Japan. Using war games and discrete military exercises among these Quad stakeholders, the Ring of Fires could be tested, refined, and operationalized. Second, INDOPACOM must focus on incremental alliance building with smaller states and in support of India's many regional initiatives. Finally, INDOPACOM must also coordinate with the Department of State and other interagency players, such as the Commerce and Treasury Departments, to bring to bear the full panoply of US diplomatic, political, and economic instruments to demonstrate a renewed US commitment to the region, a commitment aimed not only at countering the inroads China has made via the Belt and Road Initiative but also building the foundation for continued peace and stability.

