

MP-IDSA *Commentary*

Japan and Australia Deepen Defence Cooperation

Simran Walia

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S*ummary*

Japan and Australia have strengthened their defence partnership, exemplified by the August 2025 US\$ 6 billion Mogami-class frigate deal.

Japan and Australia are strategically aligned countries with a deep commitment to democracy, a free society and open economies. Both countries have significantly deepened their defence ties in recent years, owing to their shared strategic concern about China’s rise and desire to maintain a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP). Driven by shared concerns over regional security dynamics, particularly China's growing assertiveness and being one of the closest allies of the US, the two countries have strengthened military cooperation. The Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA), signed in 2022, and the Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation (JDSC) have been significant milestones in bolstering defence cooperation between the two nations.¹ The RAA allows Japanese and Australian forces to train and operate more easily in each other’s countries. The JDSC, updated in 2022, reaffirmed its commitment to intelligence sharing, cybersecurity, space cooperation and maritime surveillance.

2+2 Foreign and Defence Ministerial Meeting

On 5 September 2025, the 12th Japan–Australia 2+2 Foreign and Defence Ministerial Meeting was held in Tokyo. The meeting underscored the security cooperation between the two nations as the central pillar of the coordination among like-minded countries.² Amid concerns about the ‘increasingly severe’ security environment in the Indo-Pacific region, the two nations' top diplomats and defence chiefs pledged to strengthen defence relations, both bilaterally and with their common ally, the United States, and to deepen collective deterrence.

Japan and Australia participate in regular military exercises, including Talisman Sabre (Australia’s largest joint exercise) and Bushido Guardian, an air force drill. Both countries are also active members of the Malabar naval exercise, alongside India and the US, under the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD). The growing military interoperability reflects broader Indo-Pacific defence coordination, often aligned with US strategic frameworks.

Japan and Australia also pledged to cooperate on cybersecurity, AI and defence technologies. The leaders stressed the importance of strengthening cooperation with like-minded countries such as India, the Philippines and South Korea. Tokyo plans to increase the number of nations participating in its Official Security Assistance (OSA) programme in fiscal 2025 to include countries such as Indonesia, Papua New

¹ Thomas Wilkins, [“Enhancing the ‘Special Strategic Partnership’: Australia and Japan Sign Reciprocal Access Agreement”](#), Sasakawa Peace Foundation, 21 February 2022.

² [“The 12th Japan-Australia 2+2 Foreign and Defence Ministerial Consultations \(‘2+2’\)”](#), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), Japan, 5 September 2025.

Guinea and Tonga. The OSA has so far been provided to four countries: the Philippines, Malaysia, Bangladesh and Fiji.³

Moreover, in a non-binding memorandum of understanding, Japan and Australia committed to working together to evacuate each other's citizens from a third country in an emergency or any other unforeseen circumstances.

Landmark Frigate Deal

The 2+2 meeting follows Canberra's announcement in August 2025 of a US\$ 6 billion agreement to purchase 11 cutting-edge warships manufactured by Japan's Mitsubishi Heavy Industries.⁴ The agreement on purchasing cutting-edge warships has been one of Japan's most significant defence export agreements since World War II. In contrast to Australia's present Anzac-class frigates, which have an operational range of roughly 6,000 nautical miles (11,112 km), the Mogami-class warships are sophisticated stealth frigates with the ability to deliver long-range missiles and an operational range of up to 10,000 nautical miles (18,520 km).⁵ Its offensive and defensive capabilities include minesweeping, advanced surveillance, and anti-surface, anti-air, and anti-submarine warfare capabilities. Both countries expect contract negotiations for the sale of the Mogami frigates early next year.⁶

The first vessel is anticipated to go into operation by 2030. Three of the eleven frigates will be built in Japan, while the other eight will be built at the Henderson Defence Precinct in Western Australia.⁷ With an emphasis on long-range attack capabilities to effectively counter China's naval might, Australia is undergoing a significant military reorganisation announced in 2023. Over the next ten years, it hopes to increase the number of its large warships from 11 to 26.

The contract for the frigates is Japan's most significant and crucial defence export agreement since it ended a decades-long prohibition on military exports in 2014. This is the second major export deal after it agreed to provide air defence radars to the Philippines in 2023. The 2014 Policy under former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe permitted Japan to export weapons and related technologies as long as it upheld

³ [“Japan Plans Military Aid for 4 Countries Under New Framework”](#), *The Yomiuri Shimbun*, 3 April 2023.

⁴ Satake Tomohiko, [“How Japan Won the Bid to Supply Australia’s Next-Generation Frigate”](#), *The Diplomat*, 3 September 2025.

⁵ Tom McIlroy, [“‘Absolutely the Best Ship’: Japan Wins \\$10bn Contract to Grow Australia’s War Fleet”](#), *The Guardian*, 5 August 2025.

⁶ Gabriel Dominguez, [“After China’s Military Parade, Japan and Australia Agree to Elevate Defense Ties”](#), *Japan Times*, 5 September 2025.

⁷ Ibid.

stringent safeguards to prevent retransferring to third parties, strengthening security cooperation with partner countries, and contributing to global peace and security.⁸ As Japan pursues a more assertive position in the region's security architecture and eliminates post-war restrictions on militarisation, this new agreement signifies a recalibration of Japan's strategic identity.

Japan's failure to bid for submarines for Australia in 2016 makes the warships agreement even more crucial. Japan's earlier hesitance or restrictions on transferring defence technology, permitting exports, or engaging in joint development were primarily due to constitutional limitations and stringent export control regulations. At a time when regional power dynamics are changing, the agreement strengthens Tokyo's security engagement outside its alliance with the US and forges a closer strategic collaboration with Australia. This deal will help Australia build domestic capability in shipbuilding and sustainment, and ensure greater sovereignty in maintenance and operations. It could also open doors to other export orders and strengthen the Japanese defence industry's global reach. In the future, friendly nations could tap Japan's strengths in shipbuilding, air, and missile defence to bolster their defence capabilities.

Conclusion

Australia's fleet modernisation, especially with an emphasis on long-range surface combatants, responds to the rising threat of Chinese assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific region. These frigates further extend Australia's reach and deterrence capability. The landmark frigate deal also fortifies the growing trilateral/multilateral security alignment as Japan, Australia and the US share overlapping strategic concerns in the Indo-Pacific, such as maritime security, freedom of navigation and monitoring of China's naval expansion.

Australia's increasing capabilities in surface operations now complement its expanding submarine and airpower strengths. As regional tensions persist, Japan and Australia are expected to continue strengthening their defence relationship. Their partnership could serve as a key pillar in shaping a balanced security architecture in the Indo-Pacific, based on rules, deterrence and mutual resilience.

⁸ K.V. Kesavan, “[Japan's New Arms Exports Policy: Move to Make Japan 'Normal Country'?](#)”, Observer Research Foundation, 11 April 2014.

About the Author



Ms. Simran Walia is Research Analyst at the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi.

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