

INSIGHT SOUTHEAST ASIA

Looking Eastwards From New Delhi



MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR
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Overview

June 2026 witnessed significant diplomatic and security developments across the Indo-Pacific region, reflecting growing strategic competition and deeper regional cooperation. The Russia–ASEAN Summit in Kazan reaffirmed Moscow's engagement with Southeast Asia, while the 41st ASEAN–Japan Forum in Singapore reinforced cooperation on maritime security, economic resilience, and regional connectivity. Marking the tenth anniversary of the South China Sea Arbitral Award, regional discussions renewed emphasis on international law and a rules-based maritime order amid continuing tensions. Meanwhile, Vietnamese President To Lam's visit to the Philippines highlighted increasing coordination between claimant states on maritime security and defence cooperation.

Security partnerships also continued to expand beyond Southeast Asia. The United States, Australia, and Japan commenced Exercise Southern Jackaroo 2026 to enhance interoperability and joint operational readiness. PM Narendra Modi is set to commence his three-nation Indo-Pacific tour, including his visit to Indonesia, Australia and New Zealand, to foster deeper bilateral partnerships in new and emerging avenues of cooperation. Australia further strengthened its regional security role by signing a security pact with Vanuatu focused on maritime security, disaster response, and policing cooperation. Complementing these developments, the Australia–Germany 2+2 Ministerial Meeting underscored Europe's growing strategic engagement in the Indo-Pacific

through enhanced cooperation on defence, cybersecurity, critical technologies, and support for a free, open, and rules-based regional order.

The Russia-ASEAN Summit held in Kazan

The Russia–ASEAN Summit, held in Kazan from June 17- 18, 2026, highlighted Moscow's continued commitment to strengthening its partnership with Southeast Asia despite an increasingly complex geopolitical environment. Leaders discussed expanding cooperation across trade, energy, food security, digital connectivity, and disaster management, while also exchanging views on regional and global security issues. Russia reiterated its support for ASEAN Centrality and a multipolar international order, positioning itself as a long-term partner in the Indo-Pacific.

For ASEAN, the summit reflected its balanced approach of engaging all major powers while preserving strategic autonomy and avoiding alignment amid intensifying great-power competition. The summit was also an attempt to reshape regional alignments and embed Russia into the Indo-Pacific's evolving landscape.

10 Years of the South China Sea Arbitral Ruling

July 2026 marks the tenth anniversary of the landmark 2016 South China Sea Arbitral Award, which invalidated China's expansive "nine-dash line" claims and reaffirmed the applicability of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in resolving maritime disputes. While the ruling remains a significant legal

milestone for the rules-based maritime order, Beijing continues to reject the tribunal's decision and has maintained its presence and activities in disputed waters.

The anniversary has renewed regional and international calls for adherence to international law, freedom of navigation, and the early conclusion of an effective and legally consistent Code of Conduct between ASEAN and China, even as tensions in the South China Sea persist. The award did not resolve sovereignty disputes, but it reshaped the legal and diplomatic landscape surrounding the contested maritime region. It also established a baseline against which future nations' behaviour would be judged.

The 41st ASEAN-Japan Forum held in Singapore

The 41st ASEAN–Japan Forum, held in Singapore, reaffirmed the enduring strategic partnership between Japan and ASEAN amid an increasingly complex Indo-Pacific security environment. Senior officials reviewed progress under the ASEAN–Japan Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and discussed cooperation across maritime security, economic resilience, digital transformation, connectivity, disaster management, and supply chain diversification. The forum also highlighted Japan's continued support for ASEAN Centrality and its commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific through capacity building, infrastructure development, and initiatives such as the Official Security Assistance (OSA) programme. The meeting underscored the shared objective of strengthening regional

stability, resilience, and a rules-based international order through practical and sustained cooperation.

Vietnamese President To Lam's Visit to Manila

Vietnamese President To Lam's state visit to Manila marked a significant milestone in Vietnam–Philippines relations, underscoring the growing strategic convergence between the two Southeast Asian nations amid persistent tensions in the South China Sea. During the visit, both leaders reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership by expanding cooperation in maritime security, defence, coast guard coordination, fisheries management, maritime domain awareness, and economic collaboration.

They also emphasised the importance of upholding international law, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), ensuring freedom of navigation, and supporting the peaceful resolution of maritime disputes. The visit highlighted the increasing willingness of ASEAN claimant states to deepen bilateral security cooperation while reinforcing ASEAN Centrality and contributing to a stable, rules-based Indo-Pacific.

U.S., Australia, Japan conducted Exercise Southern Jackaroo 2026

Exercise Southern Jackaroo 2026 was conducted from May 29–July 03. The exercise serves as a premier training venue to build a cohesive, multinational force capable of operating seamlessly across the Indo-Pacific's complex environments. Conducted in Australia, the multinational

exercise focused on joint land operations, combined planning, logistics, command and control, and tactical interoperability under realistic operational scenarios. Japan's participation reflects its expanding security role and deepening defence ties with key regional partners under its Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision.

The exercise also demonstrates the three countries' shared commitment to enhancing military readiness, deterrence, and their ability to respond collectively to regional security contingencies, reinforcing the growing network of like-minded security partnerships across the Indo-Pacific.

PM Narendra Modi's visit to Indonesia, Australia and New Zealand

PM Narendra Modi's visits to Indonesia, Australia and New Zealand in early July mark one of India's significant engagements in the Indo-Pacific in recent years. The visit reflects India's determination to consolidate its position as a leading Indo-Pacific stakeholder. During PM Modi's visit to Indonesia, the supply of BrahMos supersonic missiles to Indonesia was agreed upon, which is the major highlight of the visit, and both leaders discussed ways to elevate their Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and focused on maritime security, critical minerals and economic ties.

During PM Modi's visit to Australia, discussions are likely to revolve around defence and security ties and further enhancing economic security between the two countries. This visit by PM Modi to New Zealand would be the first visit by an

Indian PM in 40 years, and it holds significance in boosting economic ties between the two countries in line with the recently signed Free Trade Agreement between the two countries. To maximise the strategic outcomes of the tour, India should focus on translating political goodwill into institutionalised cooperation.

Australia and Germany held their 2+2 ministerial meeting

Australia and Germany held their 2+2 Foreign and Defence Ministers' Meeting on 8 June 2026, reaffirming their shared commitment to strengthening strategic cooperation amid an increasingly uncertain global security environment. The meeting was attended by Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles and Foreign Minister Penny Wong, alongside their German counterparts, Defence Minister Boris Pistorius and Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul.

The ministers discussed regional and international security challenges, with particular emphasis on the Indo-Pacific, support for Ukraine, cybersecurity, critical and emerging technologies, defence industrial cooperation, and supply chain resilience. Both countries reiterated their support for a free, open, and rules-based Indo-Pacific, underscoring the importance of international law, freedom of navigation, and regional stability. The meeting reflected Germany's sustained strategic engagement in the Indo-Pacific and Australia's efforts to broaden its network of security partnerships with like-minded European partners, highlighting the growing interconnection between European and Indo-Pacific security architectures.