

# INDIA MILITARY ACCELERATES HISTORIC OVERHAUL TO COUNTER CHINA

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

A long-delayed plan to integrate India's armed forces would allow for greater cooperation with the US and its allies

India's long-delayed plans to overhaul its military are getting a new life as Prime Minister [Narendra Modi's](#) government moves closer to the U.S. and its allies, which are strengthening defense cooperation against China.

Modi, who will attend a meeting of Quad leaders at the White House Friday along with Australia's Scott Morrison and Japan's Yoshihide Suga, is taking steps to undertake the biggest reorganization of India's military since independence in 1947. The moves to integrate the army, air force and navy -- which now operate with little coordination -- come as the U.S. and U.K. work with Australia to put more nuclear-powered submarines in Asia-Pacific waters.

Last month, a newly created Department of Military Affairs ordered the Indian Army unit overseeing the Pakistan border to draw up a plan for integrating with the navy and air force, according to officials aware of the developments. That model will be replicated throughout the country so the entire military is under a new operating structure by 2024, said the officials, who asked not to be identified due to rules for speaking to the media.

A more unified Indian armed forces would make it easier for the country to link up with militaries from the U.S. and its allies in the event of a conflict. A key aspect of the AUKUS partnership announced last week by the U.S., Australia and U.K. involves interoperability in a range of defense areas -- something India currently lacks within its own forces.

"The Quad partners have previously found that they can only exercise with one Indian service at a time -- for example, the navy but no air force, or air force but not navy," said David Brewster, senior research fellow at the National Security College of the Australian National University who wrote the book "India as an Asia Pacific Power." "This severely hampers cooperation when many if not most operations will be joint."

On Thursday in the U.S., Modi met separately with Morrison, Suga and U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris ahead of the Quad meeting at the White House. In a tweet, his office noted India's "shared values" with the U.S. and said cooperation was "gradually increasing."

Over the decades, Indian leaders kept military command and control divided to avoid coups that were once common in the neighborhood. While bureaucrats and military officials have resisted proposals for unification that have been around since the 1990s, mostly due to turf wars, the current structure is proving a disadvantage in countering China, which moved to a similar model as the U.S. and Australia in 2016.

"The modernization of the Indian military is underway to meet the regional challenges and technological changes," A. Bharat Bhushan Babu, a Defense Ministry spokesperson, said without providing more details on the plan. The Indian Navy, Army and Air Force didn't comment immediately.

The reorganization would create at least four theater commands: One in the west looking at Pakistan, another in the east focused on China, a maritime command for the Indian Ocean region and an air defense command, the officials said. The restive northern section of Jammu and Kashmir will remain untouched for now, they added.

The move is designed to allow India's military to operate seamlessly across land, sea, and air. The theater commands would pool warships, patrol craft, soldiers and fighter jets, and work with other missile and gun regiments that have a network of ground radars to handle threats along its disputed borders with China and Pakistan, the officials said.

While China has the largest standing army in the world, with more than 2.1 million troops, India is second with a bloated ground force of 1.2 million regular soldiers and 960,000 reserves whose pay and pensions absorb most of the defense budget. The Indian Army estimates that organizing along theaters will yield economies of scale, cutting expenditure by about one-third while concentrating power in a single office: the Chairman of the Joint Staff Committee.

"India's siloed approach to training, planning and operations created a dissonance when working with other more 'modern' militaries," said Anit Mukherjee, associate professor at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore. "Over the last five years, the challenges to the Indian military have grown manifold and it is an open question whether they have been able to match those challenges."

The Indian Air Force in particular has opposed the concept of multiple theaters, arguing that its scarce resources will be spread too thin if they aren't able to respond to threats in different parts of the country, officials said.

The three services still don't have a common secure communication network, which was evident in 2019 when Indian Air Force jets fired missiles into Pakistan to destroy an alleged terror training camp in response to a suicide attack in Jammu and Kashmir that left 40 soldiers dead. Indian Army units were put on alert but they weren't told why or what to expect, according to a senior officer who asked not to be identified.

While India's military answers to elected representatives, a tradition of political non-interference has also allowed feuds between the three main services to flourish. That has also strengthened the army, which commands more than 60% of total military spending, leading to a greater focus on land borders over building the capacity to become a force in Indo-Pacific waters. "The problem with India's reorganization so far is the tendency to reinforce army dominance of the defense force and reinforce a narrow focus on continental defense," said Brewster from the Australian National University. "This may mean a reduced capability of Indian armed forces to project power around the Indo-Pacific region in cooperation with the Quad partners."

Never miss a story! Stay connected and informed with Mint. [Download](#) our App Now!!

Log in to our website to save your bookmarks. It'll just take a moment.

Oops! Looks like you have exceeded the limit to bookmark the image. Remove some to bookmark this image.

Your session has expired, please login again.

You are now subscribed to our newsletters. In case you can't find any email from our side,

please check the spam folder.

**END**

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com

crackIAS.com