

**Submission to Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External
Territories**

Inquiry into the Strategic Importance of the Indian Ocean Territories

Title of Submission: P-8 Poseidon Operations for Australia and India

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Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories

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Dear Committee

P-8 Poseidon Operations for Australia and India – Cocos Island

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission to your inquiry into the strategic importance of Australia's Indian Ocean Territories. This submission examines the potential for Australia and India to forge closer diplomatic and military to military relations through greater cooperation in the Indian Ocean, and specifically through leveraging access rights for Indian Navy P-8I Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft operations to Cocos Islands. This could be matched with reciprocal access for RAAF P-8A into Port Blair in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands at a future date. It examines Chinese naval activities in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) as a key justification for seeking such an arrangement.

Background

The RAAF has just taken delivery of the first of fifteen P-8A Poseidon maritime surveillance aircraft, which will be based at RAAF Edinburgh in South Australia.



Source: <http://australianaviation.com.au/2016/05/first-flight-for-raafs-first-p-8-poseidon/>

These aircraft will replace the aging AP-3C Orion maritime patrol aircraft, and will operate alongside seven very advanced MQ-4C Triton High Altitude UAVs to provide a comprehensive Maritime Surveillance and Response capability for the ADF.¹ The P-8A Poseidon has an unrefuelled combat radius of over 7,500km, allowing it to survey Australia's maritime approaches deep into the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), as well as South China Sea and South Pacific, and Southern Ocean.

The Indian Navy is also operating twelve P-8 Poseidon (designated P-8I), and was the first international customer to buy the aircraft from the United States.² The P-8I is deemed a vital

¹ Department of Defence, 'Defence White Paper 2016', 4.37 – 4.39, accessed at <http://www.defence.gov.au/WhitePaper/Docs/2016-Defence-White-Paper.pdf>

² Vivek Raghuvanshi, 'India Awards \$1 Billion Contract to Boeing for Four P-8I Aircraft', in *Defense News*, 27th July, 2016, accessed at <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/air-space/2016/07/27/india-awards-1-billion-contract-boeing-four-p-8i-aircraft/87612320/>

capability for the Indian Navy given the vast maritime area of responsibility across the Indian Ocean, and the growing challenge posed by Chinese PLA Navy (PLAN) forces in the IOR.

The emerging Indian Ocean Strategic Context

The 2016 Defence White Paper notes that the Indian Ocean has become important in Australian strategic policy, principally for the vital trade and energy routes that traverse it, and upon which the free flows of energy, commodities and trade, Australia's economic well-being depends. It notes that 'half the world's container traffic and one-third of bulk cargo traverses the Indian Ocean' and 'over the next 20 years, the Indian Ocean will see a substantial increase in intra-regional maritime trade, including energy, food and other natural resources.'³ It also makes clear that 'the Indian Ocean region is also likely to become a more significant zone of competition among major powers, with China, India and the United States all increasing their level of military activity in this region.'⁴

This finding is borne out by China's growing naval activities in the IOR. PLA expeditionary capability development in particular is moving steadily towards an ability to undertake and sustain expeditionary operations into the IOR in coming years. Some key PLA capability developments in recent years include:

- a) Development of PLAN 'blue water' naval capabilities, together with operational experience gained during expeditionary deployments in support of international Indian Ocean counter-piracy operations off the coast of East Africa since 2006;⁵
- b) Increasing Indian Ocean naval deployments for surface naval combatants, and significantly, for PLAN submarines;⁶

³ Department of Defence, 'Defence White Paper 2016', 2.92 accessed at <http://www.defence.gov.au/WhitePaper/Docs/2016-Defence-White-Paper.pdf>

⁴ Department of Defence, *op cit.*

⁵ Andrew S. Erickson, Austin M. Strange, *Six Years at Sea...and Counting – Gulf of Aden Anti-Piracy and China's Maritime Commons Presence*, The Jamestown Foundation, June 2015.

- c) Increasing capability for PLA Air Force (PLAAF) long-range expeditionary airpower based around fourth and fifth generation long-range multirole combat aircraft (Su-35, J-16, J-20), the Y-20 airlifter airframe for airlift, refuelling and special missions, and eventually, the new H-20 long-range bomber that is likely to emerge in the early 2020s.⁷
- d) Supporting dual-role civil port infrastructure designed to support expeditionary PLAN deployments in Gwadar, Pakistan, Djibouti, Hambantota, Sri Lanka, with potential facilities emerging in the Seychelles and the Maldives.⁸
- e) Longer ranged anti-access and area denial (A2AD) capabilities, notably the new dual-role (i.e. conventional and nuclear) DF-26 intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM) with a 3000km range, and dual land-attack and anti-ship capability.⁹
- f) Expanding space capabilities, including *Beidou* navigation satellites, to support expeditionary operations.¹⁰

Two key issues are worth highlighting in relation to Chinese naval developments and their significance for the IOR. Firstly, the January 2014 ‘Christmas Cruise’ incident in which a Chinese PLAN surface action group, comprising two guided-missile destroyers and a naval support vessel, carried out a 23 day deployment into the Indian Ocean, catching the ADF by

⁶ P.K.Ghosh, ‘Chinese warships in the Indian Ocean: Are they a real threat?’, Observer Research Foundation, Delhi, May 24th 2016, accessed at <http://www.orfonline.org/research/chinese-warships-in-the-indian-ocean-are-they-a-real-threat/>

⁷ Richard D. Fisher, ‘China’s Y-20 transport aircraft may enter service in 2016’, *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, 1st March 2016, accessed at <http://www.janes.com/article/58397/china-s-y-20-transport-aircraft-may-enter-service-in-2016>; Zhang Tao, ‘Real Admiral: China’s development of H-20 bomber just in time’ in *ChinaMilitary*, December 8th, 2016, accessed at http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2016-12/07/content_7396601.htm

⁸ Christopher D. Yung, Ross Rustici, Scott Devary, Jenny Lin, ‘Not an Idea We Have to Shun: Chinese Overseas Basing Requirements in the 21st Century’, Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University, Washington DC, October 2014; see also, Christopher Yung, ‘Burying China’s ‘String of Pearls’, in *The Diplomat*, January 22nd, 2015, accessed at <http://thediplomat.com/2015/01/burying-chinas-string-of-pearls/>

⁹ Jesse Johnson, ‘China moves closer to fielding ‘Guam Killer’ ballistic missile: report’ in *The Japan Times*, accessed at <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/05/17/asia-pacific/china-moves-closer-fielding-guam-killer-ballistic-missile-report/#.WH7zCVN96Uk>

¹⁰ Kevin Pollpetter, Eric Anderson, Jordan Wilson, Fan Yang, *China Dream, Space Dream – China’s Progress in Space Technologies and implications for the United States*, US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, March 2nd, 2015, accessed at <http://www.uscc.gov/Research/china-dream-space-dream-chinas-progress-space-technologies-and-implications-united-states>

surprise, including as it operated off Australia's Christmas Island. This was a wake-up call to Australian defence planners.¹¹ This deployment made clear that Australia's maritime approaches off its north-west were no longer beyond the reach of Chinese military power and presence and sent a strong message to the region that China was intent on extending its naval reach beyond the notional 'First Island Chain' in the Western Pacific, as shown on the map below.¹²

This is an important development because it represents China breaking out of previously established strategic constraints largely imposed by the late PLAN Commander ADM Liu Huaqing, who oversaw the modernisation of the PLA Navy in the 1990s and 2000s. By proving an ability to undertake far-flung operations beyond the First Island Chain, China can adjust its thinking on sea power towards embracing a global maritime power role. This was clearly evident in the most recent Chinese Defence White Paper that shifted the role of the PLAN from 'offshore waters defense' (within the First Island Chain) to 'offshore waters defense' and 'open seas protection' (beyond the First Island Chain). It stated "The traditional mentality that land outweighs sea must be abandoned, and great importance has to be attached to managing the seas and oceans, and protecting maritime rights and interests."¹³ Such a policy shift is also consistent with China's 'One Belt and One Road' that includes the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road that traverses the IOR. This is a vital aspect of the 'China Dream', and will be secured if necessary by forward deployed PLAN forces.

¹¹Rory Medcalfe, 'China makes statement as it sends naval ships off Australia's maritime approaches', in *The Interpreter*, Lowy Institute, 7th February, 2014, accessed at <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/china-makes-statement-it-sends-naval-ships-australias-maritime-approaches>; see also US-China Economic and Security Review Commission Staff Report, 'China's Navy Extends its Combat Reach to the Indian Ocean', March 14th, 2014, Washington DC, accessed at <http://www.uscc.gov/Research/china%E2%80%99s-navy-extends-its-combat-reach-indian-ocean>

¹² Department of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress – Military Power of the People's Republic of China, 2008*, accessed at <https://fas.org/nuke/guide/china/dod-2008.pdf>

¹³ *China's Military Strategy*, May 2015, accessed at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-05/26/content_20820628_4.htm



Figure 3. The First and Second Island Chains. PRC military theorists conceive of two island “chains” as forming a geographic basis for China’s maritime defensive perimeter.

China is also demonstrating a growing interest and capability in undertaking long-range submarine operations through the South China Sea and into the Indian Ocean with several deployments of PLAN submarines to Pakistan & Sri Lanka from 2014 onwards.¹⁴ Indian defence analyst P.K.Ghosh states of Chinese submarine operations in the Indian Ocean that:

“Since both the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea have emerged as frequent hunting grounds of Chinese submarines depending on the scenario, they could well lie waiting at choke points or off Indian harbours to operate against the Indian Naval fleet. The Indian Navy strongly suspects that they have in all probability been carefully recording hydrological

¹⁴ Office of Secretary of Defense, Annual Report to Congress – Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2016, US Department of Defense, Washington DC, 2016, p. 22.

*data and type of sea bottom in the area since such information is considered vital for submarines that quietly wait at the bottom of the sea.”*¹⁵

Chinese submarine operations into the Indian Ocean are a significant challenge for both Australia and India.¹⁶ As Chinese submarine capabilities mature with the development of the more sophisticated Type 095 class nuclear-powered submarine (SSN), their ability to deliver both land-attack and anti-ship cruise missile weapons, as well as interdict vital sea lanes of communication (SLOCs) through which Australian maritime commerce flows, will increase.¹⁷ ¹⁸ India in particular feels threatened by forward deployed PLAN submarines. At a recent CSIS Conference in Washington DC, Indian Strategist Ms. Sylvia Mishra of the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) noted that India’s nuclear ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) bastion will extend deep into the Indian Ocean and will need to be defended from Chinese SSNs undertaking Strategic ASW (i.e. hunting Indian SSBNs).¹⁹ Mishra illustrated bastion on the map below.

¹⁵ P.K.Ghosh, ‘Chinese warships in the Indian Ocean: Are they a real threat?’, Observer Research Foundation, Delhi, May 24th 2016, accessed at <http://www.orfonline.org/research/chinese-warships-in-the-indian-ocean-are-they-a-real-threat/>

¹⁶ Abhijit Singh, ‘Deciphering China’s Submarine Deployments in the Indian Ocean Region’, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, Delhi, July 8th, 2015, accessed at http://www.idsa.in/idsacomments/DecipheringChinasSubmarineDeploymentsintheIndianOceanRegion_asingh_080715

¹⁷ Malcolm Davis, ‘Duterte: a bull in a China shop’, in *The Strategist*, 2nd November 2016, accessed at <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/duterte-bull-china-shop/>; see also

¹⁸ Jan. K. Gleiman, ‘Assessing Australian energy vulnerability’, in *The Strategist*, 27th February 2015, accessed at <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/assessing-australian-energy-vulnerability/>; see also John Blackburn, ‘Australia’s Liquid Fuel Security’, NRMA, 28th February 2013, accessed at http://www.mynrma.com.au/media/Fuel_Security_Report.pdf

¹⁹ Sylvia Mishra (ORF), ‘Examining the Dynamics of Nuclearisation of the Indian Ocean: Ramifications for South Asia and the United States’, CSIS PONI Conference, Washington DC., 2016, July 2016, accessed at https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/160705_MISHRA.pdf



India's SSBN force, based around the *Arihant* class SSBN, is still at a very early stage of development and were China to threaten India's ability to maintain an assured second strike capability based at sea, by building up a local submarine advantage, this would destabilise India's relations with China, and in a crisis raise the risk of rapid escalation.

There is a strong case to be made that Cocos Island can serve as a vital forward operating base for RAAF P-8As tasked with undertaking ASW patrols in the IOR to monitor Chinese PLAN activities. Secondly, a case can be made for closer Australia-India cooperation in this vital task through joint access to Indian Ocean Territories. The use of Indian Ocean Territories such as Cocos Islands, together with closer defence cooperation with India, also contributes towards managing other risks, including non-traditional security challenges such as people smuggling along the Indian Ocean Littoral region into Southeast Asia, and subsequently, onto Australia.

Developing the Cocos Islands as a Defence asset

In 2012, the Defence Force Posture Review recommended that Defence should “upgrade the Cocos (Keeling) Islands airfield facilities to support unrestricted P-8 and UAV operations.”²⁰

The report also noted that the runway would need to be lengthened and strengthened to support the P-8.

The 2016 Defence White Paper noted that Government will “upgrade RAAF Bases Edinburgh, Darwin, Pearce and Townsville and the airfield at Cocos (Keeling) Island to support the introduction of the new P-8A Poseidon maritime surveillance and response aircraft.”²¹ This is also noted in the 2016 Integrated Investment Program (IIP), and a budget of between \$100m and \$200m is allocated over a period 2016 – 2021 for this purpose.²² It is therefore clear that the 2016 Defence White Paper is following through on the recommendations of the 2012 Force Posture Review, which was not adopted by government at the time of publication.

The principal advantage gained from operating the P-8 from the Cocos Islands is one of greater time on station over key focal areas of the Indian Ocean Region, Australia’s western maritime approaches, and the strategically important Straits of Malacca, Lombok-Makassar and Sunda. The Poseidon can operate at very long-range (approx. 7,500km unrefuelled) in a high altitude maritime patrol mission profile, and lesser range (over 2,000km unrefuelled) in a low-altitude ASW patrol focused mission profile.²³

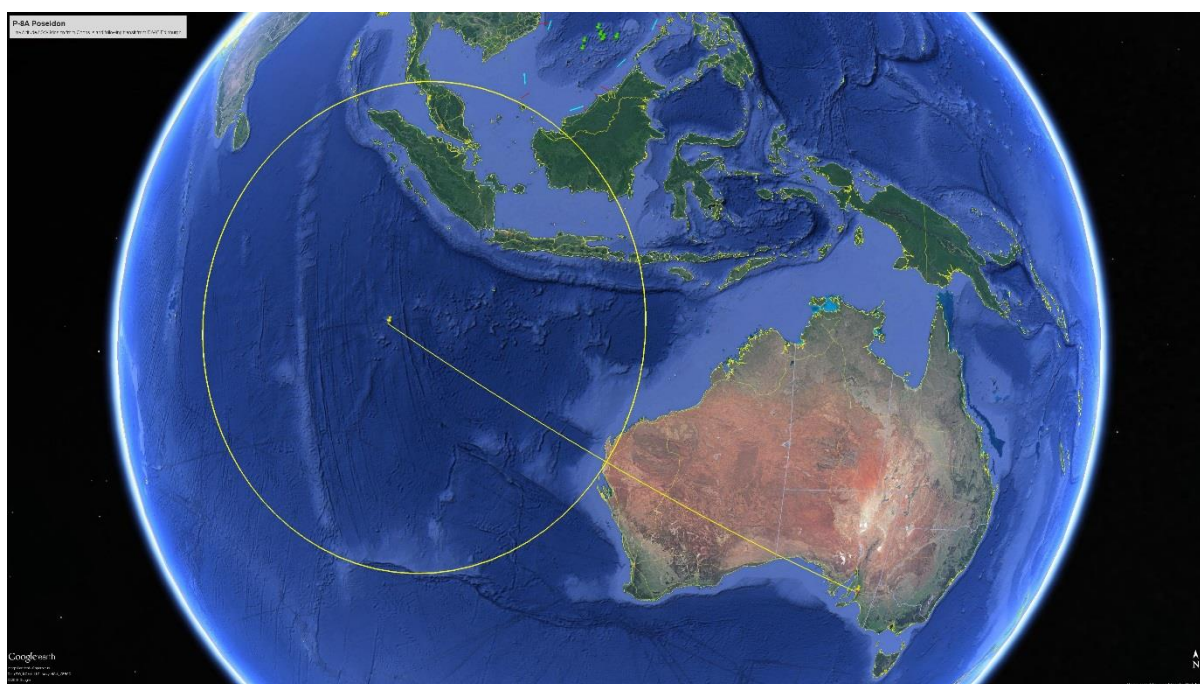
²⁰ Department of Defence, ‘Force Posture Review’, 2012, accessed at <http://www.defence.gov.au/Publications/Reviews/ADFPPosture/Docs/Report.pdf>

²¹ Department of Defence, ‘Defence White Paper’, 2016, 4.66, accessed at <http://www.defence.gov.au/WhitePaper/Docs/2016-Defence-White-Paper.pdf>

²² Department of Defence, ‘Integrated Investment Program’, 2.29, accessed at <http://www.defence.gov.au/WhitePaper/Docs/2016-Defence-Integrated-Investment-Program.pdf>

²³ RAAF Fact Sheet, ‘P-8A Poseidon’, accessed at <http://www.airforce.gov.au/Technology/Aircraft/Boeing-P8-A-Poseidon/?RAAF-Z4PUOpGXH/eLtWmc6qxYl9xYycb+rKng>

Deploying the P-8A to the Cocos Islands dramatically extends operational flexibility of the aircraft, particularly to undertake ASW patrol missions in focal areas in the IOR, including along critical sea-lanes of communication (SLOCs) through which much of Australia's vital oil, LNG and other energy resources flow. By operating closer to operational focal areas from the Cocos Islands, the P-8A can exploit the long range of the platform to remain on station for a longer period - five hours on station over the Malacca Straits from Cocos vs ninety minutes from RAAF Edinburgh if unrefuelled (see map below – the yellow circle indicates unrefuelled ASW patrol radius for a Cocos-based P-8A). Airborne refuelling the P-8 from forward deployed RAAF KC-30A Multi-role Tanker Transport (MRTT) will extend range and thus time on station further. This will require deploying high-value assets like MRTT forward (and potentially at greater risk depending on the operational context), adding logistical complexity and cost. So Cocos Island acts like a proverbial 'unsinkable aircraft carrier' that if properly developed can accommodate the full range of aircraft currently operated by the RAAF today and into the near future. It allows some logistical challenges to be circumvented.



In order to provide a balanced analysis, it's important to look at potential disadvantages for operating from Cocos. Cocos is a long way from Australia, and whilst on the one hand this is an advantage given it acts as a forward operating base, at the same time that forward operating base will not be self-sufficient. Fuel, spare parts, munitions, and other logistical requirements need to be forward deployed, and sustained. Personnel need to be based there, which has recruitment implications. Re-supply by sea is likely to be slow, and the geography of Cocos Island's central lagoon means that dredging is necessary to accommodate large logistics vessels. Given the intense fuel requirements to support P-8A operations (approx... 34 tonnes per flight), this would require major facility updates to ensure adequate fuel storage for aviation fuel.²⁴ This, together with dredging the harbour, could generate some environmental impact.

Another disadvantage of Cocos Islands is future vulnerability to adversary threats. Basing P-8s and MQ-4Cs from Cocos means that they would need to be defended against a range of threats including land-attack cruise missiles (LACMs) fired from adversary combat aircraft, surface combatants and submarines, as well as the potential threat from adversary special forces to such an exposed location.²⁵ It also raises the issue of force structure development, given the ADF's current lack of medium range ground-based air defence capability that are effective against ballistic and cruise missile threats. Carlo Kopp states: "...the Cocos Islands are within 600 nautical miles of Sumatra and Java, and thus within easy reach of tactical

²⁴ Department of Defence, 'Force Posture Review', 2012, 5.1 – 5.5, p. 26, accessed at <http://www.defence.gov.au/Publications/Reviews/ADFPostructure/Docs/Report.pdf>

²⁵ For information on emerging Chinese land-attack missile capabilities, see Dennis M. Gormley, Andrew S. Erickson, Jingdong Yuan, 'A Potent Vector: Assessing Chinese Cruise Missile Developments', *Joint Force Quarterly*, No. 75, September 30th, 2014, accessed at <http://ndupress.ndu.edu/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/577568/jfq-75-a-potent-vector-assessing-chinese-cruise-missile-developments/>

fighters, or air/sea launched cruise missiles.”²⁶ Kopp correctly argues that any expansion of the air base facilities on Cocos Islands would demand “...significant base hardening and concrete shelters if the basis is to viable for use in wartime.”²⁷

The Indian Ocean Territories and India-Australia defence relations

The 2016 Defence White Paper emphasizes that Australia has a shared interest with India in Indian Ocean maritime security, regional stability and countering terrorism, and sees India as a key security partner in the Indian Ocean under the 2014 Framework for Security Cooperation.²⁸ The Framework for Security Cooperation will form the basis for attempts by Government to build a more mature defence relationship with India in coming years, including through bilateral training and exercise opportunities, and strengthening cooperation in maritime security, counter-terrorism, capability acquisition, and defence science and technology. The White Paper also stressed the importance of India’s ‘Act East’ policy for opportunities towards greater bilateral and multilateral cooperation within the Indo-Pacific, and the importance of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONDS) and the Indian Ocean Rim Association.

So how might the issue of P-8A basing fit in with this policy framework that underpins Australia-India defence relations? The case for RAAF P-8A operations from Cocos is already very clearly stated in the 2016 Defence White Paper and that operational reality is being established. The Department of Defence has made very clear that this is where their interest currently lies and that they are not considering further steps.²⁹

²⁶ Carlo Kopp, ‘Strategic potential of the Cocos Islands and Christmas Island’, in *Defence Today*, March 2012, accessed at <http://www.ausairpower.net/PDF-A/DT-Cocos-Christmas-Mar-2012.pdf>

²⁷ Carlo Copp, *op cit.*

²⁸ Department of Defence, *2016 Defence White Paper*, 5.68 – 5.71.

²⁹ Phone discussion with Department of Defence officials, Strategic Policy Division, 20th January 2017.

However, from an external observer's perspective, however it is always a good idea to think about future policy options. One possible approach to building closer defence relations with India would be to consider the role of Cocos Islands as an 'operations hub' for both the RAAF's P-8A and the Indian Navy's P-8I Poseidon fleets. This could involve opening a dialogue with India on granting access to Cocos Island for Indian Navy P-8Is. Indian Navy P-8Is and RAAF P-8As operating from Cocos Island could monitor the critical Lombok-Makassar Straits and the approaches into the Bay of Bengal to detect PLAN SSNs that would have as their task hunting Indian Navy *Arihant* class SSBNs or threatening land bases with land-attack cruise missiles. Cocos-based P-8s could also be supported by RAAF P-8As operating from RAAF Tindal or RAAF Darwin, and if necessary from RMAF Butterworth, or potentially the United States' base on Diego Garcia (with US agreement). Another possibility worth exploring in the future is RAAF P-8As gaining access to India's Port Blair in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands alongside Indian Navy P-8Is, with that base acting as a backup for RMAF Butterworth.

Through establishing such a network of bilateral basing access arrangements, Australia and India could strengthen their ability to work together and build common maritime domain awareness (MDA) networks that support a Theatre ASW (TASW) capability.³⁰ TASW represents the next step beyond fleet or 'task-force' ASW that seeks to identify and prosecute submarine threats in a local area. In contrast, TASW would produce a 'common operating picture' of submarine activity across vast swathes of the Indian Ocean, in the same way that the ADF's Jindalee Over the Horizon Radar (JORN) allows a comprehensive common operating air picture over Australia and deep into airspace above Southeast Asia. In developing a TASW capability, Australia, India and other key allies would be able to share

³⁰ Malcolm Davis, 'Seeing the dragon on our doorstep (part 1)', in *The Strategist*, 21st March 2016, accessed at <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/seeing-the-dragon-on-our-doorstep-part-1/>

operational knowledge, and coordinate their forces more effectively both tactically and operationally. Of key importance would be ensuring that such a system also connected into existing US information networks that track the movement of Chinese submarines in the Indian Ocean.³¹

Strengthening Australia-India cooperation to monitor submarine activities in this manner would be a strategically prudent move. It would boost Australian-Indian military to military cooperation in a manner that could lead to greater Australian involvement in future naval exercises, of key importance being the possibility of future participation in the Malabar Exercise (in which we last participated in 2007), and building on Ex Milan (2012) as well as build on the experience of AUSINDEX (2015). It would be a sensible response to the growing challenge posed by Chinese PLAN submarine deployments, which could include advanced SSNs equipped with land-attack cruise missiles that could threaten Australian base facilities, as well as hunt Indian Ocean based SSBNs. Sharing a common operating picture also contributes to broader Maritime Domain Awareness objectives such as monitoring shipping, deterring illegal fishing, and responding to the challenge posed by Maritime terrorism and piracy, as well as criminal activities such as people smuggling.

Recommendations

In addressing Parliament on November 14th 2014, Prime Minister Modi stated “We should collaborate more on maintaining maritime security. We should work together on the seas and collaborate in international forums.”³² Building maritime domain awareness centred on the

³¹ Sushant Singh, ‘US, Indian navies sharing information on Chinese subs, says Pacific Command chief’, in *The Indian Express*, January 19th, 2017, accessed at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/us-indian-navies-sharing-information-on-chinese-subs-says-pacific-command-chief-admiral-harry-b-harris-4480900/>

³² Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Address to the Joint Session of the Australian Parliament, 18th November 2014, accessed at <http://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches->

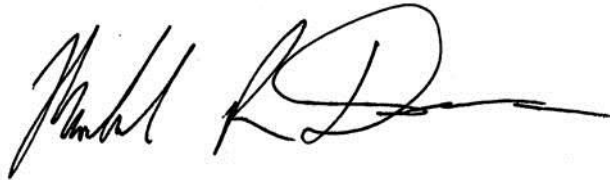
Cocos Islands as an operations hub for Australian and Indian maritime patrol aircraft builds on existing cooperation in exactly the way Prime Minister Modi suggests. Such a step would be undertaken within the Framework for Security Cooperation between India and Australia (2014). Establishing a network of forward bases to support maritime patrol activities, starting at RAAF Tindal or RAAF Darwin, and extending across the Indian Ocean, including Cocos Islands and even extending to Port Blair in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, would better allow the ADF, alongside the Indian Navy, to monitor Chinese submarine activity in the IOR. It would allow Australia to play a more substantial role alongside India and the United States and open up possibilities for Australian involvement in key exercises like MALABAR in the future.

It seems worthwhile therefore that:

- 1) Australia and India consider the prospect of closer operational cooperation and practices based around Cocos Islands to a) gain experience with a complex new platform (the P-8); b) strengthen defence cooperation between Delhi and Canberra, and c) enhance operational capability for ASW and MDA for both countries in the face of growing Chinese submarine capability;
- 2) both states will need to undertake cost-benefit analysis of the potential risks and opportunities presented by such a step.

As a preliminary step Australia should take the lead diplomatically in engaging with the Indian Defence Forces to ascertain whether indeed there is an interest on their side in such an arrangement.

Thank you,



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Monday 23rd January 2017.