

United States, Australia, and Japan Strengthen Naval Logistics Ties

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In a major step to bolster security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, the United States, Australia, and Japan have signed a trilateral naval logistics agreement. The new pact is designed to streamline shared sustainment operations such as missile reloading and at-sea refuelling, reinforcing the three allies' readiness in the face of rising regional tensions.

The agreement was formalised aboard the United States Navy amphibious assault ship USS America (LHA-6) during a port call in Brisbane, Australia. Signing representatives included Vice Admiral Jeff Jablon, Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Installations and Logistics (OPNAV N4); Rear Admiral Naoya Hoshi, Director General of the Logistics Department, Japan Maritime Self Defense Force (JMSDF); and Commodore Catherine Rhodes, Director General Logistics of the Royal Australian Navy (RAN).

Although the United States Navy, Japan Maritime Self-Defence Force, and Royal Australian Navy have worked together bilaterally for years, this marks the first trilateral agreement of its kind focused on naval logistics under their strategic dialogue framework. It reflects a deliberate shift toward greater cooperation among trusted regional allies built on shared democratic values and mutual interest in preserving freedom of navigation and regional stability.

“This arrangement strengthens those commitments and allows us to more easily share information, technologies, and processes for greater logistics resiliency,” said Vice Admiral Jablon. He noted that “sustainment in depth” is a critical goal, ensuring forces are equipped and supplied for both day-to-day operations and emergency responses.

The agreement outlines cooperation on critical areas such as missile reloading, particularly using the MK-41 Vertical Launching System and at-sea refuelling. The United States Naval Sea Systems Command (NAVSEA) is developing new transfer systems compatible with partner vessels to enable efficient missile rearming even in high-sea conditions. Successful demonstrations of this capability took place in 2024, with more tests expected in 2025 and 2026.

At-sea refuelling is also a core focus, as it allows naval forces to remain deployed longer without returning to port. Since 2011, the United States Military Sealift Command (MSC) has modified leased commercial tankers with Consolidated Tanking (CONSOL) systems to refuel military oilers at sea. These tankers extend the reach and endurance of partner vessels. Since 2022, CONSOL-related training and exercises with Japan and Australia have ramped up significantly.

Rear Admiral Hoshi welcomed the agreement, stating, “Japan is excited about the chance to collaborate more closely with our U.S. and Australian partners. This new arrangement will allow us to broaden the scope and increase the efficiency of our interactions.”

Beyond logistics integration, the agreement emphasises the importance of embedding these sustainment operations into routine exercises. Scenarios such as missile offloading, ship repairs, and medical evacuations will be incorporated into training environments. Many of these capabilities will be on display during Exercise Talisman Sabre 2025, a multinational drill hosted by Australia.

“During Talisman Sabre and beyond, we have clear opportunities to work trilaterally with our U.S. and Japanese partners on logistics initiatives,” said Commodore Rhodes. “These efforts facilitate our speed of response for the full range of naval actions in the Indo-Pacific, from routine sustainment through crisis.”

In an increasingly contested maritime theatre, this trilateral move underscores the enduring value of reliable allies and logistics interoperability strengths that free nations must continue to cultivate if they are to deter aggression and uphold order across the Indo-Pacific.