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# Cooperating with “Maritime India” in the Indo-Pacific context – A Japanese view

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## ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this article is to identify a common basis for Japan and India as maritime democracies to work together for the maintenance and enhancement of the rules-based liberal international order at sea in the face of a variety of challenges in the Indo-Pacific region, China’s maritime advancement in particular. As powerful maritime democracies in the Indo-Pacific, Japan and India will be able to engage in a wide variety of maritime security cooperation. The opinions of security experts of both countries should be mustered so that bilateral cooperation keeps up its momentum. Synergy of Tracks 1, 1.5 and 2 dialogues should be pursued for maritime security cooperation. In this bilateral effort, the US-centred alliance network, of which the Japan-US Alliance is the central portion, and India’s autonomous and multi-directional approach toward international security must be intertwined effectively. Also, security dialogues between the two countries and between the two navies should work out the division of labour between Japan and India to contribute to the Indo-Pacific regional maritime security more effectively.

## KEYWORDS

Indo-Pacific; maritime democracy; rules-based international order; security cooperation; Quad

## 1. Introduction – Rise of the Indo-Pacific concept

All the maritime space on this planet is connected. In other words, the sea is one as seafarers have kept saying.<sup>1</sup> From this view-point, the term “Indo-Pacific”, hyphenating the world’s largest and third largest oceans, is not brand new. The notion may be natural for Australia, which geographically faces both oceans, but does not sound affected for others, either.

Today, this concept has become more natural, rapidly replacing the decade-old term “Asia-Pacific”. The rise of this notion reflects a number of realities as follows:

First, rise of India. India’s population as of 2018 was more than 1.1 billion, 10 times larger than Japan’s. According to a forecast of the UN, the population of India will continue to grow to exceed that of China in the first half of the 2020s, and will reach a peak of more than 1.6 billion as late as around 2060. India’s nominal GDP was US\$ 2.6 trillion in 2017, sixth in the world ranking, following on the heels of the UK. The growth of India is amazing. Also, the UN forecasts that a population bonus in India will continue until around 2040. Compared with other countries at the same development stage, India is

expected to be in a better environment to utilise the population bonus. Accordingly, there is high possibility that India will keep developing toward the mid- and long-term future.<sup>2</sup>

Based on this background, India is increasingly proactive to maintain maritime order in the Indian Ocean and regional order in South East Asia, emphasising the connectivity of the Indian and Pacific Oceans in economic and security terms. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "Act East" policy aims towards enhanced connectivity with ASEAN countries.<sup>3</sup>

Second, China's advancement to the Indian Ocean, the Middle East and Africa. China has been agitating the maritime order in East Asia, operating against the established norms of international law. As China became more assertive in the South China Sea in the recent past, there emerged a prediction that their long-term objective would be an advancement in the Indian Ocean and beyond. Today, China's PLA Navy is operating in the Indian Ocean for the purpose of "open seas protection". It has started its first-ever overseas station in Djibouti since 2017. China funded the development of sea port facilities around the Indian Ocean as part of its Belt and Road Initiative, and obtained a 99-year lease on the port of Hambantota of Sri Lanka, which had got into default. China will use these port facilities as its military bases. In addition, Chinese submarines will operate in the Indian Ocean more frequently.<sup>4</sup>

Third and finally, the change in Africa. While poverty still remains there, and the natural resource boom is over, putting an end to the rapid economic growth, the growing population may create a promising market. Investors' capabilities are improving, and not only China but also a number of countries including India have increased their trade investment in Africa.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. India as a maritime democracy

Maritime transit occupies a far larger portion than land and air transit in the entire world trade. Underwater cables are more important than satellites in telecommunication. Thus, all countries in today's world, land-locked and littoral, are connected by maritime space. In addition, the ocean plays a dominant role in global carbon storage. So, survival and prosperity of all the people and countries depends a great deal on maritime space.

All states, however, are not maritime. Then, what makes India maritime? First, the importance of the Indian Ocean as the major trade route connecting Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Europe; and second, expansion of China to the Indian Ocean and its larger presence over there and beyond. India is a maritime nation located in the southern flank of China. Similarly, Japan sits in the eastern flank of China. This geographical fact matters a great deal in terms of power balancing of the entire Indo-Pacific region vis-à-vis China.

Both Japan and India are maritime democracies. This political similarity is also important in the maintenance of the rules-based liberal international order in the Indo-Pacific.

The rules-based order at sea is wavering largely because of China's increasingly assertive activities at sea, particularly in the East and South China Seas, but is not the only cause. Brutal authoritarian capitalism represented by China is thriving. It is exporting its digital authoritarianism to developing countries. China proposes an idea to build a new model of international order as the counter-concept of the rules-based liberal international order. It is what China calls "a community with share future for mankind". The idea is full of abstract expression such as

We will uphold justice while pursuing shared interests, and will foster new thinking on common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security. We will pursue open, innovative, and inclusive development that benefits everyone; boost cross-cultural exchanges characterized by harmony within diversity, inclusiveness, and mutual learning; and cultivate ecosystems based on respect for nature and green development<sup>6</sup>

however its real meaning is not clear. It is difficult to believe what China says in good faith because China's deeds are often different from its words. China's damaging the ecosystem of the South China Sea is a good example of the difference. However, China is not the only cause.

The rules-based international order is originally a western idea. It is the reflection of the American political system in particular. Today, however, US President Donald Trump is against the America's long-held strategy which identifies the US as the indispensable nation responsible for defending and spreading the traditional liberal principles of individual freedom, democratic governance and a market-based economy. In his mind, the US does not have to be an attractive political and economic model for other societies. He does not think that the expansion of the liberal order is essential for US security and prosperity.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, the US seems less attractive and less reliable than before. As this is the case, the rules-based liberal international order is becoming unstable from within.

And yet, the principles bolstering the rules-based liberal international order remain universal. Liberal values themselves are not under siege as yet. Trump's words and the US policy are not the same. These two should not be mixed up. As distribution of power remains working in the US political system, Trump or the executive branch of the US Government is not the only representative of the US. Although the rules-based liberal international order is fragile in nature just like democracy, it does not mean that this order is not dependable, but it is worth strengthening.

Now that the US has difficulty in exercising its leadership, other like-minded democracies have to act in concert, assuming larger roles and responsibilities together to maintain the rules-based liberal international order.

Here is the importance of India as the world's most populous maritime democracy. As powerful maritime democracies in this diverse region, Japan and India will be able to engage in a wide range of maritime security cooperation to stabilise the rules-based liberal order.

### **3. Japan's expectation in security cooperation with India**

Japan hopes that India will assume greater roles in maintaining the balance of power in the Indian Ocean region by various means, including the leading role for capacity building of the island nations in the western part of the Indian Ocean and stronger partnership with ASEAN countries in the eastern part of the Indian Ocean.<sup>8</sup> Japan also hopes that India will continue to enhance its presence in the Indian Ocean region, countering China's expansion in the region. Japan also desires that India will be able to manage its relationship with Pakistan. India's commitment to the stability and security of the Indian Ocean might be fragile if India were occupied with its relationship with Pakistan.

Japan expects India to be more cooperative with the US and its allies, particularly Japan and Australia as all these four countries are major maritime democracies having large stakes in the Indo-Pacific. Japan is fully aware that India will remain autonomous, but closer partnership with the alliance network will be possible and desirable. Japan believes

that the US-centred regional alliance network will remain the bedrock institution of the Indo-Pacific regional security, of which the Japan-US Alliance will continue to be the central part, but the alliance network is not inclusive, and thus there is a limit in what the alliance network can do for regional security. Intertwining the alliance network with other tools of international security in the region including ASEAN-based frameworks and generating a larger network for security must be explored. Japan and India will be able to find new ways for mutual cooperation in this context.

At the same time, Japan hopes that India will not majorly engage with revisionist powers such as Russia and China. In today's connected world, all states, even adversaries, have to and can cooperate with each other as long as their national interests overlap, and indeed their national interests may overlap, particularly in non-traditional agenda such as HA/DR. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that democracies and authoritarians have different world views from each other. The choice to take is clear. Commitment to the cause of the rules-based liberal international order determines the choice.

I believe that Japan and India should promote maritime security cooperation with the above mentioned points in mind. Bilateral cooperation is growing steadily. While priority of security cooperation with India in Japan's defence policy was largely upgraded in the National Defence Program Guidelines (NDPG), which the Government of Japan established in December 2018, compared with that in NDPG of December 2013. Now, India is prioritised next only to the US and Australia.<sup>9</sup>

In particular, the Maritime Self-Defence Force (MSDF) has strengthened its cooperative relationship with the Indian Navy through Japan-US-India joint exercise Malabar, Japan-India bilateral exercise JIMEX and other initiatives. In recent years the scope of cooperation has been expanding to include port calls of MSDF P-1 patrol aircraft to India for a joint anti-submarine exercise. In light of this situation, the two countries signed the Implementing Arrangement for Deeper Cooperation between the MSDF and the Indian Navy in order to further promote maritime security cooperation when the Japan-India Summit Meeting was held in October 2018. The MSDF and the Indian Navy are expected to further strengthen their cooperative relationship under this agreement.<sup>10</sup>

The overall security cooperation, however, has much room for developing. The minds of security experts of both countries should be mobilised so that the bilateral cooperation keeps up its momentum. Synergy of Tracks 1, 1.5 and 2 should be pursued in maritime security dialogues. Such multi-layered dialogues should be institutionalised and regularised. Collaboration to develop maritime domain awareness including air space awareness should be also explored as the basis for sharing common views in the diverse regions. It is also valuable and practical to address non-traditional maritime threats, and for this reason HA/DR, SAR and counter-piracy cooperation should also be enhanced.

In the meanwhile, both India and Japan should be careful of divergence. The Japan-US relationship is alliance. Japan is the most dependable ally of the US in the entire Indo-Pacific, hosting more than 50 thousand US troops on its soil and sharing much of its threat perception with the US. Japan will continue to put more efforts to strengthen the US-centred alliance network. In contrast, the India-US global strategic partnership is not an alliance. India's foreign and security policy will remain autonomous and multi-directional. Although the quadrilateral coordination process of the US, Japan, Australia and India, or the Quad, will be increasingly valuable for generating synergy of the four countries' respective visions for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, and Japan and India will be able to work extensively

together in the Quad framework, the difference of positions of the two countries toward the US must be correctly recognised. If both countries are successful in generating synergy of these two approaches, it will benefit the Indo-Pacific and global peace and stability.

Collaboration of Japan and India will include division of labour based on mutual understanding and careful coordination. India's geographic scope of the Indo-Pacific is probably wider than Japan's, but India will be able to focus on the "primary areas of maritime interest", surrounded by the western coastal lines of Southeast Asian countries, the Asian continent's coastal lines, the Arabian Peninsula, the east coast of Africa and the line connecting the Cape of Good Hope and the Strait of Lombok,<sup>11</sup> while Japan will be able to focus on the Pacific Ocean and the South China Sea regions. Such bilateral coordination for division of labour will require more frequent, candid, intensive and extensive dialogues between the two countries and between the two navies.

## Notes

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