



India–Japan Security Cooperation: A New Era of Partnership in Asia

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The evolving relationship between India and Japan is a development of great strategic significance for the Asia-Pacific region. Both India and Japan are militarily strong nations that are opposed to notions of hegemony, yet face numerous security challenges. Each has territorial problems with China, whose maritime conflicts in the South China Sea have made nations in Southeast Asia extremely anxious. The emerging Sino-Indian competition along with eroding US influence in the Indian Ocean Region makes the situation more complex. In the rapidly evolving balance of power equations, the India–Japan strategic relationship could be a significant game changer.

Introduction

Japan and India are natural allies in Asia. They have no conflict of strategic interests, share common goals of stability, peace and seek an institutionalised security order in Asia. Neither has ambitions to dominate Asia and no regional country is threatened by their strong defence forces. At the same time, both countries are concerned about the hegemony of a neighbouring giant and seek to balance its growing power.

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For six decades, the United States has maintained a presence in the Asia-Pacific region. But its economic interdependence with China and an expanding domestic economic crisis has diminished its ability to guarantee security of its regional allies and partners in Asia. Encouraged by the recent shift in India–US relations, along with India’s economic strength and strategic profile, especially in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), Tokyo has in recent years began to consider India as a long-term strategic partner for larger global interest as well as for its maritime security in the IOR. The enhanced progress in this relationship is setting the stage for a new and potentially influential balance of power structure in Asia to counter a possible hegemony by a single power.

The paper argues that an effective India–Japan security cooperation will be able to restrain China seeking hegemonic dominance. An Atlantic-model cold war in Asia between China and the United States in Asia will not produce enduring peace and stability in the region. Rather a regional mechanism in which India–Japan security cooperation will create a balancing situation with the support of the small regional countries that can provide a stable security order in Asia.

Emerging Balance of Power in Asia

For the first time in post-war Asia, a real power transition is taking place. The pre-eminent power, the United States, is declining while another power is emerging in Asia. Historically, moments of power transition are prone to instability, but in the Asian security landscape the US-led alliance system keeps in check any potentially turbulent scenario. While the United States is the net security provider, two countries, China and India, are emerging simultaneously in Asia. However, US domestic economic problems and a shifting of strategic priorities from time to time creates uncertainty about what the future holds and whether Washington can continue to provide the same kind of security role in Asia.

While releasing the latest Defence Strategic Review in January 2012, American President Barack Obama announced that the United States “will be strengthening its presence in the Asia Pacific, and budget reductions will not come at the expense of that critical region”.¹ However, the key question is whether the United States will be able to maintain its dominant status in Asia, and guarantee its allies the same level of security as it had provided in the past. Washington plans defence cuts to the tune

of \$487 billion over the next decade by eliminating nearly 100,000 ground troops, mothballing ships and trimming air squadrons in a bid to create a smaller, agile force with a new strategic focus.² A diminishing military profile of the United States and the pre-dominant extra-regional balancer in the Asia-Pacific region and China's ascendancy to a great power status may cause uncertainty in the long term.

Meanwhile, China's defence budget has been steadily increasing. For the fiscal year 2012–2013, China is scheduled to spend around \$110 billion, an increase of 11.2%.³ According a study by IHS Global China's defence budget is expected to reach \$238.2 billion in 2015, marking a combined annual growth rate of 18.75% during the period.⁴

Although China is way behind the United States in terms of military technology and capability, it is now "pursuing a deliberate and focused course of military modernisation".⁵ "The Chinese are clearly developing a limited power projection capabilities to deal with a range of possible conflict scenarios along its periphery especially in maritime areas".⁶ Its naval capabilities are aimed at deterring a possible political independence of Taiwan, but will have an impact beyond the immediate neighbourhood, certainly into the Indian Ocean Region.

The People's Liberation Army's (PLA) current strategy is to neutralise key US positions in the Pacific and for that it is acquiring weapons such as anti-ship ballistic missiles (ASBM) and supersonic sea-skimming missiles that could target US aircraft carriers in the region, and enlarging the submarine fleet, including nuclear submarines, with the support of home-made satellite reconnaissance and communication capabilities, and has made incredible progress in anti-satellite and anti-ballistic missile interception.⁷ Chinese military modernisation in the pursuit of the Taiwan issue does have a significant repercussion on the Asian security landscape.

It is no surprise then that almost all countries in the Asia-Pacific region have, in recent years, spent significant amounts in raising their military profile. From 1999 to 2008, military expenditure in East Asia, including Southeast Asia, has grown by 56%; in South Asia it has grown at the rate of 41% compared with 14% for Europe.⁸ Since they find it hard to match China's military power individually, regional nations seek to balance it externally by activating bilateral strategic cooperation among themselves such as Japan's ties with India,⁹ Vietnam,¹⁰ the Philippines,¹¹ or India's relations with Vietnam¹² and Singapore.¹³

Strategic Bond Strengthening the India–Japan Relationship

The term “strategic” generally has two connotations. Firstly, it implies a long-term relationship with a common vision and shared interests and concerns. But also, in a strategic partnership, it alludes to the “national security” of each of the two partners forming an essential component of the bilateral relationship. In a strategic relationship between two countries, there must be some fundamental factors that drive both the countries to come closer and take policy decisions, particularly those related to matters of security. At the same time, strategic relationships are viewed rarely in accordance with a single theoretical perspective; rather it comes through by the choices of the decision-makers based on a multiplicity of lenses. When analysing the India–Japan security relationship, it can be seen that three major factors lead the relationship – ideational, regional and structural.

The Trajectory of Japan’s Foreign Policy

By the late 1990s, Japan shifted toward a greater degree of realism regarding national security and identity in the context of the decline of relative Japanese economic power assets and the rise of Chinese power in Asia.¹⁴ The longevity of Junichiro Koizumi as Prime Minister for five years, first after Yasuhiro Nakasone in the 1980s, provided a stable political order for Japan and he tried to give Japan a new identity in the international system. Indeed, Koizumi initiated a “normalisation” process in Japan’s security policy and sought to pursue an “active” foreign policy mechanism in its relationship with the outside world.¹⁵ He went ahead with making improved partnerships with fellow Asian countries aimed at regaining Japan’s old glory in Asia, but this time in politico-strategic terms, as against the politico-economic terms of the 1980s. Japan has since viewed Asia as a major arena for Japan’s foreign and security policy.

Today Japan seeks an Asian identity while keeping its alliance with America for security and serving as Asia’s breakwater against the chaos of Anglo-American capitalism and culture.¹⁶ Koizumi’s successors, especially the immediate one, Shinzo Abe, continued this policy and Abe’s first policy speech in Japan’s parliament declared that “Japan wants to deepen relations with India and Australia in order to widen the circle of free societies in Asia and the world”.¹⁷ Though Yoshiro Mori set the stage for a better India–Japan relationship, Koizumi’s premiership really

facilitated to strengthen India–Japan security cooperation, which eventually culminated in the form of strong security cooperation between the two by the end of the previous decade.

Japan's independent approach to security has been driven equally by developments in the region, viz. the nuclear crisis in the North Korean Peninsula (1993 and 1998), China's rapid military modernisation programme and relative strategic decline of the United States in the Asia-Pacific region, especially the Clinton administration's policy of "strategic engagement" with China.¹⁸ Tokyo feared that the diminishing US presence in East Asia would create a security vacuum in the region which might be filled by the regional bully China, or miscreant regimes like North Korea would create instability in the region.¹⁹ North Korea's launch of the *Taepodong-1* missile over Japan's airspace in August 1998 demonstrated that Japan is not insured against the vulnerability of a ballistic missile attack. In the *National Defence Program Guidelines for Fiscal 2005 and Beyond* published in December 2004, Tokyo specifically mentioned the threat posed by North Korea with its nuclear and ballistic missile programme.²⁰

India's Look East Policy

Importantly, during the same period, India was reshaping its foreign and economic policy after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and turned to Asian majors as a major constituency to help propel its economic and political profile. The Look-East Policy initiated by the Prime Minister Narasimha Rao in the early 1990s integrated India with the Asia-Pacific region economically as well as politically. One outcome was India's enhanced political involvement in the region, which had lately culminated in the form of its membership in various multilateral forums such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum (ARF), East Asia Summit (EAS), ASEAN Defence Ministers meeting (ADMM), etc. Initially, India focused more on economic benefits out of its relationship with the Asia-Pacific countries than strategic leverage. Of late, however, India is looking for a larger strategic space in shaping the security agenda of the region. Japan lifted economic sanctions three years after its imposition in the aftermath of the second nuclear test of 1998, without getting any assurance from India on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) or the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) regimes, two key issues of contention in their diplomatic relations.

China's attempts at seeking great power status have driven India and Japan to work together and prompted thoughts of an Asian security architecture. Tokyo initially avoided confrontation with Beijing and allowed the United States to press China on all of the issues, but later Tokyo began to move out of the alliance system with matters related to China because of series of stalemates between Tokyo and Beijing over the Senkaku island dispute in the East China Sea.²¹ In the *National Defence Program Guidelines for Fiscal 2011 and Beyond*, it says apart from relying on the US alliance system, Japan "will also appropriately implement its own efforts, including ballistic missile defence and civil protection" from the threat emanating in the surrounding environment.²²

It may be misleading to contend that security competition will disappear from Asia altogether once China has established its hierarchical order in Asia; rather, the regional countries might seek to balance against China to keep it in check before it seeks to establish its hegemony. In this scenario, the combined strength of India and Japan can effectively counter China's possible pursuit of seeking hegemonic tendency. And for that it is not necessary for both countries to form military alliance, a shadow of a security partnership is sufficient to restrain China from seeking revisionist tendency in future.

India–Japan Security Cooperation

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori's visit to India in 2000, after a gap of 10 years of a Japanese Prime Minister visiting India, heralded new era in the India–Japan relationship. This visit was very significant because it was just two years after India's nuclear explosion of 1998, to which Japan reacted harshly by being a global advocate of "punishing" India for its defiance of the NPT regime in various international foras. As a staunch anti-nuclear state nuclear policy plays a predominant role in its foreign policy, so the visit indicates how Japan considered India in its view on larger Asian security.

The visit saw the signing of an agreement on "Japan–India Global Partnership in the 21st Century".²³ This agreement put Indo-Japanese relations back on track after a stormy phase following the nuclear test. Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee made a reciprocal visit to Japan in December 2001, in which both countries agreed to continue the Japan–India Comprehensive Security Dialogue and Japan–India

military-to-military consultation.²⁴ In the joint declaration issued after the summit, both Prime Ministers reaffirmed that it was important to continue such dialogues and to annually hold the Comprehensive Security Dialogue, covering the entire range of issues of mutual concern, including disarmament and non-proliferation, ensuring the safety and security of maritime traffic, and to foster defence exchanges.²⁵ A significant aspect of the visit was that both countries raised mutual concern about Asian security and sought to strengthen the cooperation in order to contribute towards the stability and prosperity of Asia and the world in the 21st century.²⁶

However, it was during Prime Minister Koizumi's visit to New Delhi in 2005 that the relationship received the much needed momentum. He signed the "Japan–India Partnership in a New Asian Era: Strategic Orientation of Japan–India Global Partnership", as well as an action plan called the "Eight-fold Initiative for Strengthening Japan–India Global Partnership" with his Indian counterpart Dr Manmohan Singh. The eight-fold initiative provided basic institutional mechanisms to develop strategic cooperation between the two countries.²⁷ An important component of the action plan was to stabilise the defence cooperation in a sustained manner. The action plan was to: (1) further develop dialogue as well as security and defence exchanges between the two countries, including through full utilisation of the Comprehensive Security Dialogue, Defence Policy Dialogue and military-to-military talks; (2) strengthen the defence establishments of the two countries including the mutual visits of service chiefs; (3) recognising the importance of ensuring the safety and security of international maritime traffic, the related agencies of both countries were to work together on a sustained basis, including the annual Japan Coast Guard–Indian Coast Guard talks, joint exercises against piracy as well as cooperation through means of information sharing and technical assistance; (4) the Maritime Self Defence Force of Japan and the Indian Navy to enhance their cooperation to ensure maritime security, including through exchange of views, friendship visits and other similar activities.²⁸

The relationship moved forward in 2007 when Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his Foreign Minister Taro Aso visited New Delhi. Abe, in particular, had a strong belief in the key role of India in Japan's future, claiming that the India–Japan relationship "will be the most important bilateral relationship [for Japan] in the world".²⁹ He emphasised the importance of coming together of the two maritime nations in his concept of "broader Asia", which takes shape at the "confluence of

the two seas” of the Indian and Pacific Oceans.³⁰ His Foreign Minister Aso had sought to provide an ideological basis for the relationship through his “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity” initiative, which he proposed in his address at the Japan Institute of International Affairs in November 2006.³¹ He emphasised that Japan should pursue “value oriented diplomacy”, justifying Japan’s closer cooperation with India along with other countries such as the United States, Australia and NATO states which hold “shared values” of democracy, freedom, human rights, the rule of law and the market economy.

Shinzo Abe mooted an idea of “Quadrilateral Initiative” for the stability of “broader Asia”, from the Pacific to the India Ocean comprising of the United States and Australia, Japan and India. The aim of the Quadrilateral Initiative was to cultivate a multilateral framework regarding security of Asia, in which Japan and the United States could engage in tandem with other regional countries such as India, Singapore and Australia. Japan participated in the annual India–US Malabar naval exercise and transformed it into a multilateral naval exercise by joining the Singaporean and Australian navies in the Bay of Bengal. In fact, the Quadrilateral Initiative was the right direction for a formal multilateral security mechanism in Asia, as it involved major democracies who follow liberal norms and values.³² However, the initiative had to be abandoned prematurely because it invited sharp criticism from China, as its officials dubbed it as a security alliance against China. Indeed, it was being touted as the “resurrection of Cold War mentality” in Asia and “the formation of small NATO to resist China”.³³

In May 2007, China issued diplomatic demarches to India, Japan, the United States and Australia, requesting explanations about the Quadrilateral Initiative, and in the following month, Chinese President Hu Jintao pressed home the point by seeking “clarification” of India’s position in a face-to-face meeting with the Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.³⁴ At the same time the Quadrilateral Initiative was not well received among the Southeast Asian elites, who perceived that if such a mechanism became an institutional one, then their voice would never be heard, and the security of Southeast Asia would become part of the major power game. Besides, both India and Japan faced domestic resistance to the initiative and since no country now wants to be seen as anti-China, a formal multilateral security relationship involving Japan, India and the United States appears to have been quietly shelved.

Change of leadership in Japan has also impacted on Indo-Japan security cooperation, but it has not died down. Few leaders have given priority to strengthening Japan–China relationship. Yasuo Fukudo, a pragmatist in many ways who came to power after the sudden resignation of Shinzo Abe in September 2007, followed a policy of proactive and constructive relations towards the region.³⁵ He sought to strengthen the relationship with China and South Korea and avoided visiting the Yasukuni Shrine as a courtesy to the people of China and the Korean Peninsula who suffered from the war crimes committed by the Japanese leaders who are entombed at the Shrine. He gave high priority to the mending of ties with China that had been adversely affected by the persistent visits of former Prime Minister Koizumi to the Shrine, alleged to have prompted Japanese nationalism, which, in turn, ignited anti-Japanese sentiments in China.

Fukudo sought a better cooperation with China and during his visit to China in December 2007 both countries agreed to work together for a “mutually beneficial relationship based on common strategic interests”.³⁶ In spite of the China–Japan relationship reaching new heights, the lack of leadership stability in Japan on the one hand, and China’s persistent claim over the sovereignty of the Senkaku/Diaoyu island territories in the east China Sea on the other, especially the announcement of China’s Foreign Ministry spokesman on 2 March 2009 that “China has indisputable sovereignty over the Diaoyu Islands and adjacent islets which have been China’s inalienable territory since ancient times”,³⁷ have made it impossible to find a better solution regarding the problem between the two countries.

The second visit of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to Japan in October 2008 activated the process of bilateral mechanism in the relationship. Dr Singh and his counterpart Taro Aso issued a landmark “Japan–India Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation”,³⁸ the third such document on bilateral defence cooperation Tokyo has signed with a foreign partner, apart from its alliance treaty with the United States and the 2007 agreement with Australia. The declaration emphasised bilateral defence cooperation. It envisaged annual strategic dialogue at the foreign and defence ministers’ level; regular consultations between the national security advisor (NSA) of India and his Japanese counterpart; regular reciprocal visits between service chiefs of both sides; periodic staff talks between the respective ground forces and navies; and an annual bilateral naval exercises to enhance cooperation and “core ability” for maritime operation and disaster relief. Although it does not give any

guidelines as to what kind of Asian security both countries visualise, the declaration provides a clear indication of the necessity of seeking a new security order in East Asia.

Although Japan produced one Prime Minister in almost every year after Koizumi, all of them contributed to strengthening its relationship with India. When the Democratic Party of Japan came to power in 2009, it followed the previous Liberal Democratic Party's policies towards India. The visit of Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama to India in December 2009 provided further impetus to the budding bilateral strategic ties between India and Japan. Both the Prime Ministers decided to elevate the security cooperation to a higher level by signing the "Action Plan to Advance Security Cooperation based on the Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation between Japan and India".³⁹ The action plan outlined concrete steps on security cooperation, including the establishment of a sub-cabinet/senior official 2+2 dialogue. It also envisages an annual strategic dialogue at the foreign and defence ministers' level; regular consultations between the national security advisor (NSA) of India and his Japanese counterpart; regular reciprocal visits between service chiefs of both sides; periodic staff talks between the respective ground forces and navies; and an annual bilateral naval exercises to enhance cooperation and "core ability" for maritime operation and disaster relief. The "2+2 dialogue" signifies the importance Tokyo has given to New Delhi for the joint management of the Asian security apparatus. As of now, the security cooperation between the two countries is mainly visible in two domains: nuclear energy and defence cooperation.

Nuclear Energy Cooperation

Today, cooperation in energy security has become a significant matter in the bilateral relations. Given the understanding of the Indo-US civilian nuclear deal and the Nuclear Suppliers Group's (NSG) approval for India to trade with other NPT countries in nuclear material, India can cooperate significantly with Japan in the peaceful use of nuclear energy. For India, Japanese cooperation is an important factor in the development of its nuclear industry. Japan has already facilitated India's participation in the International Thermonuclear Experimental Research (ITER) project situated in France. India is the only country outside the NPT regime to have become a part of ITER. When Dr Manmohan Singh visited Japan in 2010, it was

agreed in principle to cooperate with India in the civilian nuclear energy sector in accordance with “appropriate international safeguards”.⁴⁰ Japan is the third largest producer of nuclear energy after the United States and France and Japanese companies have proven technology in the field. The waiver provides Japanese companies immense business opportunities in India, which are planning to construct 18 to 20 more nuclear reactors, worth about US\$100 billion, over the next 15 years. Being a leading player in the global nuclear industry, Japanese companies like Hitachi, Toshiba and Mitsubishi are at the forefront in the use of advanced mixed oxide fuels and construction of light water reactors, advanced boiled water reactors, and fast breeder reactors, each of which India hopes to deploy.⁴¹

In nuclear energy cooperation, Japan has changed its earlier stance of India’s adherence to the NPT and is now proposing India sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. However, of late, Tokyo has in principle agreed India’s stance on the CTBT and accepted India’s commitment to a unilateral and voluntary moratorium on nuclear explosive testing in pursuance of universal nuclear disarmament. When former Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama visited India in December 2009, the issue of nuclear cooperation came up strongly. During the summit with his Indian counterpart, Hatoyama stressed the need for India to sign the CTBT and the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT). The Indian prime minister responded by saying that, should the United States and China sign the CTBT, a new situation would in fact emerge that would then induce non-signatory (NPT) nations to consider working globally towards the early entry into force of CTBT.⁴²

At the same time, it was reported that a coordinated international campaign by India and Japan to strengthen the international non-proliferation regime or to make progress in nuclear disarmament could possibly provide the Japanese government with sufficient domestic political cover to conclude a nuclear deal with India.⁴³ In fact, in June 2010, Japan and India started bureau-chief level talks aimed at reaching a bilateral nuclear cooperation pact, but negotiations stalled for a while following the tsunami and Fukushima nuclear crisis in March 2011. During the visit of Yoshihiko Noda in December 2011, both the Prime Ministers affirmed the importance of the civil nuclear cooperation between the two countries in furthering the security cooperation and directed their negotiators to exert further efforts towards a conclusion of the agreement at the earliest.⁴⁴

Defence Cooperation

Cooperation in the defence sector was initiated largely to protect the sea lines of communication (SLOCs) and provide security for Japan-bound ships in the Indian Ocean, but lately it has become genuine bilateral defence cooperation with the aim of preserving Asian security per se. In 1999, a Japanese merchant ship *MV Alondra Rainbow* was hijacked in the Malacca Straits, which lately was recovered off the coast of Goa in a joint operation by the Indian Navy and the Coast Guard. This rescue operation was appreciated by the Japanese government, who stated that the Indian initiative in this regard underscored the importance of India in providing security for Japan-bound ships in the Indian Ocean Region.⁴⁵

In 2005, a Japanese tugboat was attacked by pirates in the Malacca Strait and three crew members were kidnapped for ransom.⁴⁶ Another such attempt was averted in 2006 in the Strait.⁴⁷ Since domestic constraints prohibit Japan from expediting the military option to protect its interests in this region, it has started to cooperate with regional countries to ensure the safety of its ships. It significantly manifested the importance of a closer coordination between the naval forces of Japan and India for ensuring maritime security in this part of the world. As a major power with considerable naval prowess, Japan understandably expects India to assume a high-profile role in patrolling and safeguarding the busiest sea lane in the Indian Ocean.

Japan faces constitutional as well as operational constraints regarding protecting its maritime assets and trade routes far from its shoreline. Its pacifist constitution prohibits the Self Defence Forces (SDFs) in participating in any combative operations beyond its territory. In this scenario, it requires other countries' support to protect its strategic assets as well as its personnel involved in humanitarian operations in different parts of the world. Similarly, although Japan does have an advanced naval force and has got considerable experience in international peacekeeping operations, its naval capabilities are not adequate enough to sustain operations independently for long in a far-away region. Its investment in the naval capability is by and large in frontline and offensive areas which include submarines, destroyers and frigates, while it lacks auxiliary ships to support frontline facilities.⁴⁸

The first defence ministerial-level event took place in 2001 when the then Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes visited Japan. This was followed by the first Japan–India Security Dialogue and the Japan–India Military-to-Military

Consultation held in the same year. The pursuit of security cooperation further blossomed with a May 2006 meeting in Tokyo between Indian Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee and Minister of State for Defence Fukushima Nukaga, which resulted in the release of a joint statement concerning bilateral defence cooperation. This statement set forth such objectives as: (i) defence exchanges to enhance mutual understanding and promote wide-ranging cooperation; (ii) service-to-service exchanges, including capacity-building, which could lead to cooperation in disaster relief, maritime security, or other areas of mutual interest; (iii) exchange of information and experiences in tackling regional and global issues, including international terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and their means of delivery, disaster relief and peace keeping operations; and (iv) cooperation in technical areas.⁴⁹

This defence cooperation initiative was significant in many ways, as it reflects genuinely a new phase in Indo-Japanese relations in the Asian security context. It earnestly symbolises Japan's recognition of India's strategic importance in Asia, particularly in matters relating to its political and military role. The December 2006 Joint Statement by the Prime Ministers underlined the commitment to strengthen defence cooperation as part of their overall endeavour towards political, defence, and security cooperation. After this, mutual visits have been held at ministerial levels as well as naval chief levels at regular intervals.⁵⁰

The 2008 Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation underscored the importance of regular and comprehensive meetings of the top ranking defence personnel of the two countries, including the vice-minister of defence for Japan and the defence secretary of India.⁵¹ Significantly, India's increasing role in the Asian strategic landscape has been well appreciated by Japan officially. Since 2007 Japan has begun to depict South Asia, predominantly India, in its annual white paper *Defence of Japan* published by the Ministry of Defence, showing the importance of India in the arch of Japan's strategic framework. In the 2011 issue of the *Defence of Japan*, it says because of its location, India is "extremely important country in a geopolitical sense for Japan."⁵²

The Trilateral Naval Exercise

In April 2007, the first-ever trilateral naval exercise was held between the United States, Japan, and India in the western Pacific. Taking the defence

cooperation a step further, the Japanese Maritime Self Defence Force (MSDF) participated along with the US, Australia and Singapore navies in a multilateral maritime exercise “Malabar 07-2”, hosted by India in the Bay of Bengal on September 4–9, 2007. The first ever PASSEX exercises conducted in Japanese waters near the Boso Peninsula in central Japan on April 16, 2007, saw the participation with four destroyers from Japan’s Maritime Self-Defence Force, and three warships from the Indian Navy. Subsequently, a similar kind of naval exercise was held in Mumbai on August 23–26, 2008, in which the MSDF Kashima Training Ship and *Asagiri* and *Umagiri*, two frontline guided missile destroyers, and one Delhi class and one Corvette class ships from Indian side also participated.⁵³ Apart from this, the Coast Guard of India and the Japanese MSDF conduct joint exercises, alternately in Indian and Japanese waters every year.

Since 2008, when Indian Naval Chief Admiral Sureesh Mehta visited Japan, much has been done to boost the defence cooperation between the Japan and India. In 2009, the Indian Air Force Chief conducted a visit to Japan, and the first army-to-army talks were held, making Japan the 9th country with which India has had a bilateral military dialogue.⁵⁴ But the landmark visit was that of the Indian Defence Minister A.K. Antony to Tokyo in November 2011, when it was decided that a formal bilateral naval exercise would be conducted in the Indian Ocean in 2012.⁵⁵

Towards a Bilateral Security Arrangement

If the relationship is to be progressed to the next level then it requires trade in defence technology as this is very important. Without economic benefit for the participating countries, security cooperation will not be sustained for long. Security cooperation must have supplementary economic benefit. Unfortunately, the economic motive still lacks in the security cooperation of India and Japan as Japan’s technology control regimes produces impediments for such a relationship,⁵⁶ in spite of mutuality of interest in policy terms. Japan is one of the leading producers of advanced military technologies in the world which does not supply arms and equipment to India. It necessarily requires arms transfers, sale of defence technologies and joint development of military hardware. Thus, a strong defence cooperation supported by economic motives would be beneficial not just for both the countries, but the region as a whole.

Although the security relationship is a recent development in the overall relationship between India and Japan over the period of 60 years, it seems likely to endure and develop further. A bilateral security relationship has strong conceptual support within several constituencies in both Japan and India and has the potential to fulfil multiple strategic goals for each constituency. The relationship would help the region in an inclusive way of security as both countries have no ambition for dominance in Asia. Similarly, when it comes to defence cooperation, both countries must focus on bilateral rather than multilateral relations. A formal multilateral defence mechanism comprising India, Japan, the United States, and Australia will lead to another Cold War situation in Asia between China and some reclusive governments on the one hand, and the so called coalitions under the United States on the other, which no regional country would like to see in Asia.

Conclusion

The Indo-Japan strategic relationship has grown phenomenally in recent times. This relationship can be seen as one of the most successful diplomatic initiatives in the Asian continent in the recent past. Earlier, the relationship was limited due to a variety of issues such as nuclear non-proliferation, the alliance system, economic disparities and psychological distance. However, the changing dynamics of Asia's security order, especially the emergence of China as a potential economic and military super power in Asia, and the search for a just and equitable world order, including the expansion of the UN Security Council, have brought both countries together in managing regional and international issues.

A strong India–Japan security cooperation will create a stable order in Asia. The economic benefit of the relationship can also be transcended to other regional countries, particularly Southeast Asia if India and Japan involve in the mutual production of military hardware. In a way, a regional defence integration comprising India, Japan and Southeast Asian countries can be emerged which will help in stabilising the region. Unlike in the past, Southeast Asian countries appear supportive of the idea of India and Japan taking a larger role in regional security matters. Today countries like the Philippines and Vietnam have made bilateral strategic relationship with Japan in the pursuit of resisting China's aggressive tendency in the South China Sea.

For enduring peace and stability in the entire Asia-Pacific region, it is important that China be restrained from seeking hegemony in Asia. Whatever the costs of the intervention, a Cold War-like situation between the United States and China should be avoided. In this, the evolving India–Japan security cooperation can be an effective deterrent for China’s assertive posturing possible. The United States needs to provide generous support to such kind of bilateral security cooperation in the region without directly indulging in regional issues. In this regard, a balance of the power mechanism, though slowly but surely, emerging in Asia and the India–Japan security cooperation is the most important one.

Notes

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- Defense Minister, Mr Mukherjee (May 2006), Admiral Suresh Mehta, Chief of Naval Staff (August 2008), National Security Adviser M.K. Narayanan (2009), Defense Minister Mr A.K. Antony (2009, 2010, 2011) visited Japan.
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