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Issue Brief

India-Japan and 'Confluence of the Two Seas': Ten years on

Titli Basu

September 13, 2017

S*ummary*

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi welcomes Shinzo Abe in India for the annual bilateral summit, both leaders would be happy to showcase the report card of their 'action-oriented partnership' and the ever-expanding depth and scope of the bilateral relationship. Entry into force of the India-Japan civil nuclear agreement in July, launching of the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor, diversification of the defence cooperation, Japan's support towards India in the standoff in Doklam and terrorist attack in Pathankot, and coordination on the North Korean proliferation threat demonstrates the forward movement in India-Japan relations since the last summit meeting in November 2016.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is scheduled to visit Gujarat for the annual India-Japan bilateral summit meeting from September 13-14. The focus will primarily be on advancing the agenda pertaining to industrial clusters for investments and mega-infrastructure initiatives. The foundation stone for the multi-billion dollar flagship Mumbai-Ahmedabad high speed rail (HSR) *shinkansen* (bullet train) project will be laid. This is a significant success for Abe's signature Expanded Partnership for Quality Infrastructure (EPQI) initiative. The EPQI, which is critical to achieving Japan's national growth strategy and facilitating expansion to emerging Asian markets, intersects with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Make in India' initiative and 'Act East' policy.

Prime Minister Abe will be visiting India shouldering the responsibility of a 'top salesman'¹ whose objective is to facilitate further adoption of *shinkansen* technology as India pursues several HSR projects on different routes. China is also a contender on these projects. Last November, Prime Minister Narendra Modi got an opportunity to understand firsthand the value of Japanese technology when he, along with Abe, travelled to Kobe by *shinkansen* to visit a bullet-train plant of Kawasaki Heavy Industries Ltd. While the HSR project and mega-industrial corridors lay a strong foundation, the depth and scope of bilateral relations has been redefined with 'India-Japan Vision 2025' underscoring an 'action-oriented partnership', founded on the pillars of mutuality of interests, shared universal values and commonality of vision in the Indo-Pacific.

Shared Universal Values and Vision

2017 holds special significance since it marks a decade of Shinzo Abe's celebrated speech at the Indian Parliament— 'Confluence of the Two Seas', underscoring shared universal values and interests. Ten years down the line, India is envisioned as a critical strategic anchor in Abe's latest 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy'. India-Japan 'Special Strategic and Global Partnership', aimed at securing strategic stability and economic prosperity of the Indo-Pacific space, culminated into the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) this year.

India has increasingly featured as an important pole in Abe's idea of Asia as reflected in his book *Utsukushii kuni e*. As the rationale of value-oriented foreign policy (based on universal values like democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights and so on) gained traction, India has been accorded space in Japan's value-based foreign-policy

¹ 'Abe plans to visit India in September to promote *shinkansen* technology', *Kyodo*, June 29 2017 <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/06/29/national/politics-diplomacy/abe-preparing-september-visit-india-promote-bullet-train-tech/#.WbM7tNGRXIU> accessed on September 10, 2017

frameworks including Taro Aso's 'Arc of Freedom and Prosperity',² Abe's conceptualisation of 'Confluence of the Two Seas', 'Quadrilateral Initiative' and subsequently Asia's 'Democratic Security Diamond'.

India in the post-cold war years embraced a more pragmatic strategic posture. While East Asian miracle was a missed opportunity owing to its then protectionist policies, India engaged in course correction since the 1990s. As India's strategic thinking navigated through the policy discourse of 'Look East', 'Look East 2.0' which further culminated into 'Act East' policy, Japan graduated from a valuable friend to an indispensable partner and emerged as a 'key player in India's modernization'.³

Japan's attitude towards India has been shaped by a few important variables such as arrival of China as a major actor in international politics; decreasing US influence in the region; growing US interest vis-à-vis India; the need to secure trade and energy networks in critical maritime space; and tapping the emerging market potential. Meanwhile, India is cultivating Japan for investments in sustainable infrastructure; accessing civil nuclear technology in order to cater to the energy appetite of Indian economy; and securing supply of high-end defence technology.

Action-oriented Partnership

In keeping with 'India-Japan Vision 2025', robust bilateral relations have laid the foundation to expand the scope of cooperation in the Indo-Pacific theatre.⁴ Prime Minister Modi articulated that 'strong India-strong Japan will not only enrich our two nations. It will also be a stabilising factor in Asia and the world.'⁵ Fluidity in regional geopolitics paved way for greater strategic coordination on a few specific regional issues in trilateral frameworks and regional forums, including terrorism and violent extremism, North Korean nuclear and ballistic missile program, and peaceful resolution of disputes in South China Sea in compliance with international law, including the UNCLOS. In addition, the latest US-Japan Security Consultative

² In 2006, Foreign Minister Taro Aso launched a new policy formulation, called the 'Arc of Freedom and Prosperity', laying emphasis on universal values such as freedom, democracy, fundamental human rights, the rule of law, and creating an Arc starting from Northern Europe and traversing the Baltic states, Central and South Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Caucasus, the Middle East, and the Indian subcontinent, crossing Southeast Asia and finally reaching Northeast Asia.

³ Speech by Foreign Secretary at Second Raisina Dialogue in New Delhi, *Ministry of External Affairs*, January 18, 2017, http://mea.gov.in/SpeechesStatements.htm?dtl/27949/Speech_by_Foreign_Secretary_at_Second_Raisina_Dialogue_in_New_Delhi_January_18_2017 accessed on September 10, 2017

⁴ 'Joint Statement on India and Japan Vision 2025: Special Strategic and Global Partnership Working Together for Peace and Prosperity of the Indo-Pacific Region and the World', *Ministry of External Affairs*, December 12, 2015, http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateraldocuments.htm?dtl/26176/Joint_Statement_on_India_and_Japan_Vision_2025_Special_Strategic_and_Global_Partnership_Working_Together_for_Peace_and_Prosperty_of_the_IndoPacific accessed on September 10, 2017

⁵ 'Speech by Prime Minister at CII-Keidanren Business Luncheon', *Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Prime Minister's Office*, November 11, 2016, <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=153500> accessed on September 10, 2017

Committee Meeting in August 2017 identified India, along with South Korea, Australia, and Southeast Asian countries, as one of the priorities while pressing the significance of advancing trilateral and multilateral security and defence cooperation in the region.⁶

The 2016 India-Japan Joint Statement underscores the importance of coordinating bilaterally and with other countries to develop better regional connectivity and facilitating industrial networks. Besides, the inaugural India-US-Japan ministerial dialogue in 2015 made the case for employing collective capabilities in supporting regional economic linkages which led to the institutionalization of experts-level group for identifying potential areas of collaboration that would augment regional connectivity.⁷ The second trilateral dialogue is likely to be hosted on the side-lines of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) later this month.⁸

Connectivity and Infrastructure

Regional connectivity both within India and infrastructure development in Southeast Asia, South Asia and adjoining region —for instance Iran and Afghanistan with specific reference to development of Chabahar, and collaborative projects in Africa, have been accorded priority. India and Japan conceived the AAGC with the objective of cultivating value chains, advancing economic networks and sustainable development, and inter-connectedness between and within the two growth poles of Asia and Africa. AAGC focuses on four priority areas relating to development projects, quality infrastructure and institutional connectivity, skill development and capacity building and people-to-people cooperation. It nicely fits within the broader framework of Abe's 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' and EPQI and India's development cooperation with Africa and 'Act East' policy.

While the footprint of Japanese overseas development assistance (ODA) is ever-expanding on India's mega-infrastructure initiatives, including on the flagship Mumbai-Ahmedabad *shinkansen* project with phased transfer of technology and 'Make in India', Tokyo is invested in developing strategically significant areas such as the northeast India and Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Improved infrastructure and inter and intra-regional connectivity in the northeast, often touted as the gateway to Southeast Asia, is a key determinant for the success of Modi's 'Act East' policy.

⁶ 'Joint Statement of the Security Consultative Committee', *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Japan*, August 17, 2017 http://www.mofa.go.jp/na/st/page4e_000649.html accessed on September 10, 2017

⁷ 'Inaugural U.S.-India-Japan Trilateral Ministerial Dialogue in New York', *Ministry of External Affairs*, September 30, 2015, <http://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/25868> accessed on September 10, 2017

⁸ Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, 'Sushma Swaraj may meet US and Japanese counterparts', *Economic Times*, August 28, 2017, <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/sushma-swaraj-may-meet-us-and-japanese-counterparts/articleshow/60250020.cms> accessed on September 10, 2017

Japan is increasingly emerging as a 'natural partner for development of northeast.'⁹ India-Japan Coordination Forum on Development of Northeast was instituted in August 2017. Northeast is the space where Abe's 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy' and Modi's 'Act East' policy 'converge' as it is situated at an 'important juncture between India and Southeast Asia as well as within Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) countries'. Japanese ODA loan is supporting Phase I of the North East Road Network Connectivity Improvement Project with special focus on National Highways 51 and 54 in Meghalaya and Mizoram.¹⁰

Securing the Maritime Commons

As maritime democracies, both nations have argued for rules-based international order, freedom of navigation and over flight, unimpeded lawful commerce, and peaceful settlement of disputes. Where there is an alignment of interests, India has invested in strengthening relations with likeminded countries. Further, India, US and Japan conducted the annual Malabar Exercise in the Bay of Bengal in July 2017 aimed at enhancing interoperability between the navies of the three democracies and strengthening trilateral cooperation in the Indo-pacific region. Next year, Japan is likely to step up its involvement by sending state-of-the-art assets including P-1 maritime patrol aircraft in the Malabar exercise. Besides, with the aim of augmenting cooperation, both India and Japan are considering incorporation of Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) training and exchanges by ASW aviation units such as P-3C in addition to mine-counter measures (MCM) training.

The 'shared responsibility' in securing the regional SLOCs as a 'public good'¹¹ reinforces India-Japan maritime cooperation. Japan desires India's cooperation in guarding the Indian Ocean SLOCs since it is critical for its energy shipments. With dependence on imports for 94 per cent of its primary energy supply, Japan is severely dependent on Middle Eastern oil imports, and the Indian Ocean is, therefore, vital for Japanese energy imports from the region. While Japan has depended on the US Navy for safeguarding critical SLOCs, it is increasingly cognisant of India's capabilities in playing a productive role in defending the regional sea lanes. Besides protecting energy interests, SLOCs, particularly the Malacca Strait, are exposed to the dangers of piracy and terror incidents. India extended cooperation during the 1999 M/V Alondra Rainbow piracy incident which subsequently led to confidence-building and a robust framework of cooperation has been nurtured between the coast

⁹ 'Address by Ambassador Hiramatsu at the Inauguration Session of Japan-India Coordination Forum on Development of Northeast', *Embassy of Japan in India*, August 3, 2017, <http://www.in.emb-japan.go.jp/files/000278221.pdf> accessed on September 10, 2017

¹⁰ 'Signing of Japanese ODA Loan Agreements with India: Comprehensive support for further socioeconomic development in India over a wide range of fields', *JICA*, April 3, 2017, https://www.jica.go.jp/english/news/press/2017/170403_01.html accessed on September 11, 2017

¹¹ Marie Izuyama, 'India, Japan and Maritime Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific', in Takenori Horimoto and Lalima Varma (eds), *India-Japan Relations in Emerging Asia*, p. 195

guards and navies of both the countries. Besides, at the India-Japan shipping policy forum, launched in 2010, both countries focus on cooperation in maritime sector such as development of ship recycling facilities, ports and inland water transport, ship building and repair, and cooperation on International Maritime Organisation (IMO) issues.

Both countries are working towards institutionalising a Maritime Strategic Dialogue involving the defence ministers. Meanwhile, there is India-Japan Maritime Affairs Dialogue since 2013 where maritime security including non-traditional security threats, prospects of cooperation in shipping, marine sciences and technology, marine bio-diversity are discussed. There is a 2+2 dialogue framework between the Foreign and Defence Secretaries of both countries since 2010, as mandated by the Action Plan to Advance Security Cooperation concluded in December 2009.

Defence and Security Cooperation

In the run up to Prime Minister Abe's visit to India, the annual Defence Ministerial Dialogue was hosted in Tokyo on September 5-6. There is a shared recognition that a stronger bilateral strategic partnership entails wider cooperation while responding to global and regional challenges and jointly contributing to the stability of the Indo-Pacific region. While regional concerns such as the security challenges emanating from Pyongyang and the proliferation network including North Korea-Pakistan nexus featured as a top priority, bilaterally furthering defence technology cooperation under the framework of the 'Special Strategic and Global Partnership' was underscored during the annual dialogue. Both defence ministers stressed the value of deepening interaction between the respective governments and defence industries with the aim of enabling collaboration in defence and dual-use technologies. There is an agreement to initiate the technical discussions for research collaboration in the areas of Unmanned Ground Vehicles and Robotics.¹²

The difficult negotiation over cost and technology transfer with regard to the US-2 amphibious aircraft has not restricted the two countries from exploring and identifying specific items and future areas for cooperation. Building on the 'Special Strategic and Global Partnership', in July this year, Indian navy has issued Request for Information (RFI) to six overseas manufacturers including Japanese Mitsubishi Heavy Industries and Kawasaki Heavy Industries to build six advanced submarines with air-independent propulsion (AIP) technology under the Project 75 (I) initiative.

Modi's Make in India campaign intersects with the transition in Japan's post-war security attitude and the relaxation of the self-imposed arms export ban. Two agreements signed in December 2015 — 'Agreement Concerning Transfer of Defence Equipment and Technology Cooperation' and 'Agreement Concerning Security

¹² 'Joint Press Statement on The India-Japan Annual Defence Ministerial Dialogue', Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Ministry of Defence, September 6, 2017, <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=170560> accessed on September 8, 2017

Measures for the Protection of Classified Military Information', marked a new beginning in bilateral defence cooperation. There is a robust framework of engagement at different levels including the national security advisors, service-chiefs and between the services, and Acquisition, Technology and Logistics Agency (ATLA) and Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).

The Way Ahead

India-Japan relations are witnessing the most productive period in history. Mutuality of interest in each other has become irreversible. As Prime Minister Modi welcomes Shinzo Abe in India for the annual bilateral summit, both leaders would be happy to showcase the report card of their 'action-oriented partnership' and the ever-expanding depth and scope of the bilateral relationship, which is touted to have the 'greatest potential'. Entry into force of the India-Japan civil nuclear agreement in July, launching of the AAGC, diversification of the defence cooperation, Japan's support towards India in the latest standoff in Doklam and terrorist attack in Pathankot, coordination on North Korean proliferation threat demonstrates the forward movement in India-Japan relations since the last summit meeting in November 2016.

Prime Minister Modi and his Japanese counterpart have unveiled an era of high-powered diplomacy. Bilateral and regional ambitions in the Indo-Pacific have been clearly laid out in 'India-Japan Vision 2025'. However, history will judge this 'special' partnership based on how the political will translates into tangible deliverables. Synergizing their resources and capabilities, and most importantly ensuring the efficient implementation of joint projects will be critical. As the Indo-Pacific construct assumes greater space in policy designs given its geo-political and strategic dimensions, it is imperative for both India and Japan to engage in forward thinking to accomplish the full potential of this 'Special Strategic and Global Partnership'.

Japan has demonstrated its will to shoulder responsibilities in the Indian Ocean region under Abe's vision for Japan as a 'Proactive Contributor to Peace'. India and Japan must coordinate and cooperate on connectivity projects in South Asian neighbourhood including Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and even Myanmar. Besides, India and Japan will benefit by exploring the potential for joint projects in Africa, including in countries like Nigeria, Mozambique, and Angola and elsewhere, given common energy interests. As Southeast Asia is a common theatre for both Abe's 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy' and Modi's 'Act East' policy, India and Japan will do well to enhance cooperation and design new trilateral frameworks with like-minded countries like Vietnam for greater coordination on specific issues of common interest. For securing the global commons and realizing a stable Indo-Pacific, India and Japan both have to work individually, bilaterally and at a regional level in order to guarantee a rules-based order in accordance with international law.

About the Authors



Dr. Titli Basu is Associate Fellow at the Institute for Defence Studies & Analyses, New Delhi.

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