

Emerging Pillars of India-Japan Relations in the Indo-Pacific

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As India and Japan's bilateral relationship commemorates its seventieth anniversary in 2022, this paper traces and conceptualises the emergence and convergence of the Indo-Pacific vision in the India-Japan bilateral relationship. The outlook of India and Japan has been shaped by both domestic aspirations as well as global realities and convergence of the same. Overviewing the components of the bilateral relationship that was traditionally based upon aids, ODA, and trade, the paper locates that the India-Japan relationship in the IP region has been focused on three pillars – value-based, development focused and strategically pragmatic security interest-based. It argues that these pillars are based upon the convergence in their vision toward the Indo-Pacific region. Being the resident Indo-Pacific nations, the bilateral relationship has expanded and transcended, where India and Japan have been working together on several projects at the regional and global levels.

India and Japan's journey as natural partners have several facets and underpinnings. Culture and civilization played a huge role in the initiation of the relationship between the two countries that are guided by common traditions such as Buddhism, which has its origin in India. Buddhism has had its imprint on Japanese culture since the eighth century AD, when Bodhisena visited the country for the eye-opening ceremony of the Lord Buddha statue in Todaiji Temple in Nara. There has been a cerebral exchange of knowledge between the two countries as well, with stalwarts like Rabindra Nath Tagore, Swami Vivekanand, Justice Radhabinod Pal, and Subhash Chandra Bose having visited Japan. The mutual admiration for knowledge and culture continues between the sides to date.

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At the political level, both countries share a commitment to the ideals of a democratic, tolerant, and pluralistic society. However, it is at the regional and global levels, where a high degree of congruence is almost palpable. In the political, economic and strategic interests of the region and the world, the two sides view each other as partners that have responsibility for and are capable of responding to global and regional challenges.

The twenty-first century presented unique political, economic and strategic challenges at the global level. The domestic developments in both countries were accompanied and shaped by the regional developments in the Indo-Pacific. The deteriorating security landscape in Asia, ever-mounting nuclear threats from North Korea under Kim Jong Un, and Xi Jinping's foreign policies in the "new era", increasing instances of transnational terrorist activities in South Asia have been a regional concern for some time now. The worsening economic profiles of the countries due to sovereign debts, the trade war between the US and China, the Chinese increasing belligerence both politically and militarily threatening sovereignty and maritime right and claims of several IP nations have been adding to the existing security dynamics. Additionally, increasing environmental challenges and their related implications for human security became the reasons for global concern. The status of the Indo-Pacific region as a geopolitical hotspot is also challenged by these sensitive issues.

Great power ambitions, unilateral aggression of revisionist countries, disruptive trade and infrastructural practices, and weakening of multilateralism have also provided the countries to rethink and devise unique solutions to engage with others. Overcoming the post-Cold War world order, Indo-Pacific has emerged as a geopolitical construct enabling countries to re-engage with each other in a mutually productive manner.

Adding to the growing geopolitical complexities is the recent dimension of the Covid-19 pandemic that has made countries more vulnerable, exposing them to more threats. This has led to partnerships focused on building a resilient post-pandemic world to reinvigorate the economies, seeking equitable partnerships in growth and development, and establishing long-term sustainable practices at domestic, regional and global levels. It is in this framework, that the paper delineates the emerging components of the India-Japan relationship in the Indo-Pacific.

From Mutual Aid to Regional Partners

From the start, the relationship was mutual and reciprocal. Though India and Japan established their diplomatic relationship in 1952, the Japan-India

Association existed since 1903 as the oldest friendship body in Japan. But since the end of World War II, the two countries have gradually built up their relationship. Individual acts such as PM Jawaharlal Nehru gifting an Indian elephant to the Tokyo Zoo to bringing hope and joy in the lives of war-devastated Japanese people in 1949 to Japan extending the first yen loan to India in 1958 - have added to a solid relationship.

Between the 1950s and 1990s, there was a series of high-level exchanges and intermittent visits from both the countries such as Japanese Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi's visit to India in 1957 and Prime Minister Nehru's return visit to Tokyo the same year and President Rajendra Prasad's visit in 1958. The visit of their Highnesses, the then Japanese Crown Prince Akihito and Crown Princess Michiko in the year 1960 became a high point in the bilateral relationship. After Prime Minister Hayato Ikeda visited India in 1961, the brief hiatus was broken by the next PM visit from Japan, Yasuhiro Nakasone in 1984. Similarly, Prime Ministerial visits from India including those of Smt. Indira Gandhi (1969 and 1982), Shri Rajiv Gandhi (1985 and 1987) and Shri P. V. Narasimha Rao (1992) demonstrated a continued momentum amongst the successive leaderships of the two countries.

Trade and investment remained a consistent feature of the bilateral relationship. While India's iron ore helped a great deal in Japan's recovery from the devastation after the World War II, Japan provided bail-out loans to India to overcome the balance of payment crisis in 1991. Similarly, the investment of Japanese automobile Company Suzuki Motor Corporation in India in the 1980s brought not only the much-needed economic push but also technological infusion in the country. India's growing market, availability of resources and quest for infrastructural development has remained the key reasons for Japan's continued engagement at the economic level.

Over the years, the economic relationship between Japan and India has steadily expanded but also became lopsided. India-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement that was signed in 2011 provided a tariff cut on 90 percent of the traded goods between the two. Nevertheless, India has since faced a rapidly expanding trade deficit with imports from Japan rising at a much faster pace as compared to its export to the latter. While Japan was the Twelfth largest trading partner for India in 2020, India was the eighteenth largest trading partner for Japan. Direct investment from Japan crossed USD 600 billion in 2019 (the year 2020 saw a dip to USD 204 billion during the pandemic). India is the largest recipient of Official Development Assistance (ODA) loans over the past years. Also, direct investment from Japan to India has increased, and Japan was the fourth largest investor in

India in FY2020. Japanese private sector's interest in India is rising, and, currently, about 1,455 Japanese companies have branches in India.

Analytical Model: Three Pillars of a Larger Indo-Pacific Vision

Despite cultural affinity, high-level visits exchange, trade and investment, the bilateral relationship was seeking the next step by finding more complementarities and expanding avenues of cooperation. The extant literature highlights that the India-Japan Strategic Partnership model in 2000 filled that need and became a key reason for expanding the bilateral relationship beyond economic complementarities in recent times. Scholars have located that the internal aspiration for strategic autonomy for India and finding trade and investments opportunities as a focus for Japan as reasons for expanding their strategic partnerships as domestic reasons. Similarly, other works have cited the Chinese aggressive ambitions and behaviour as a reason for India-Japan relationship taking the next stage at the regional level. Nonetheless, there is a lack of explanation on the expansion of the relationship to a normative level, where countries are merging their foreign policy vision and objectives to find larger cooperation beyond their quest for strategic autonomy, internal security and only trade-based relations. This paper adds to the discourse by arguing that in recent years, India-Japan relationship in the Indo-Pacific is based upon three pillars - *value-based underpinnings, development-oriented partnerships and a pragmatic security posture*.

While history, culture, economics and common challenges may provide the starting point of a successful bilateral relationship, it requires a converging vision at both the domestic level and global levels to solidify the relationship further. There has been such a convergence taking place between India and Japan since the 2000s in various avenues that can be broadly classified under three pillars in the Indo-Pacific framework. The paper explains the three pillars of this relationship as follows:

Value based Underpinnings

Finding convergence in the mutual values and norms in the relationship provides a strong pillar for bilateral engagement between countries. The values of democracy, equality, fairness, respect for international law, rules-based order, peaceful resolution of disputes, etc. were an extension of India and Japan's domestic approach towards the region that both countries found convergence in their values towards their Indo-Pacific vision in the recent years. This convergence also explains the reason for expansion in their

collaborative efforts beyond purely strategic and based on common threats and likely to continue even in the absence of any mutual threat.

Convergence of IPOI and FOIP

The governments in both Tokyo and Delhi were not only be seeking a revival of their economies but also larger participation in regional and global multilateralism. That needs a closer look into the imperatives for extending their domestic policies and connecting them with the regional level. It was in the early 2000s that the two Asian countries sharing commonalities and desires to deepen their relationship could find means to connect. In this regard, there were certain notable high points in the bilateral relationship that are worth mentioning. The year 2000 was a significant elevation for Indo-Japanese relations, where the relationship moved from bilateral to regional. Yoshiro Mori, Prime Minister of Japan visited India (apart from other South Asian countries) even when Tokyo had adopted economic measures against both India and Pakistan in retaliation for the nuclear tests of May 1998; and then, it was with Prime Minister Vajpayee's initiative that both India and Japan moved on to build newer, stronger ties and relations.

It was during this visit that a "Global Partnership" was proposed. A "Global Partnership Forum" was a platform for discussion and exchange of ideas and opinions between various sectors, particularly the development of world-class infrastructure, exchange of technical knowledge and quest for increased tourism.

The maritime domain provided spatial connection and upgradation from the bilateral to the regional level. PM Abe's 2006 visit to India provided a strong maritime imprint on the relationship for the first time. Japan under Prime Minister Abe's first leadership in 2006 had inherited a country riddled with deflation, debt and (ageing) demography. The policies suggested under him, also known as Abenomics suggested bolstering growth and structural reforms among others which connected its internal growth to Japan's regional presence. During PM Abe's 2007 visit to India, he articulated his vision to connect the Pacific and the Indian Ocean as a "zone of economic intercourse, institution and norm building, and a security agenda to ensure international laws are upheld for the sea lines of communication crucial for trade and development". Also known as the "Confluence of the two seas", the speech articulated Japan's vision for regional partnership and global rules-based order.

PM Abe's larger regional vision led him push for entry into the Trans-Pacific Partnership in 2013 as soon as he became the leader for the second time. Japan's commitment under Abe to the global order led to salvaging the

agreement even after America pulled out of the TPP in early 2017. This brought together several nations stretched across the Pacific Ocean in an economic multilateral forum. Japan also endorsed the China-led RCEP that is oriented towards developing countries, favouring more exceptions in tariff elimination duties in market access liberalisation and seeks few requirements to deregulate domestic economic systems. Against the earlier version of TPP that was based on *high standards*, the diluted measures of RCEP allowed the speed and level of liberalisation to be decided by developing countries such as India and China. This clause became a crucial reason for the US to pull out of TPP. India, too, did not sign the RCEP citing domestic reasons. On the other hand, though Japan has been seeking to work with the US allies under RCEP, it has repeatedly negotiated for high-quality, comprehensive deals in its subsequent talks.

India, too, was looking towards the maritime domain for its growth and development, both at domestic and regional level. Sagarmala Programme, which was initiated in 2015, is aimed at promoting port connectivity for easier access to new developing regions, leading to port-led industrialisation and coastal community development. It also can play a vital part in the development of deep-sea mining etc. and further deepen India's cooperation with the Indian Ocean Rim (IOR) region too. In the same year, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi extended the maritime domain-led development initiative to connect to its littoral neighbours in the Indian Ocean. He has spoken of SAGAR – translating ocean in Hindi – and is also an acronym for “security and growth for all in the region” as a value-based concept for using the maritime domain for the well-being and connectivity of all Indian Ocean littorals. There are several aspects to the SAGAR - in the economic domain avoiding disproportionate dependence on a single country; and ensuring prosperity for all stakeholders, greater collaboration in trade, tourism and investment; infrastructure development. Additionally, SAGAR became a medium for giving impetus to the maritime domain in a holistic manner - marine science and technology; sustainable fisheries; protection of the marine environment; and, overall development of the Ocean or Blue Economy have been a part of a larger strategy. Keeping the economic importance of free and open sea lines of communications in mind, securing supply chains in the maritime domain in the region became an added focus.

India solidified its bilateral relationship with the establishment of the Act East Forum in 2017 (the action-oriented successor of the 1991 Look East policy merging with Japan's “Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision”). India envisions a free, open, inclusive, Indo-Pacific built on a rules-based order

and with sustainable practices and transparent infrastructure investments. It further envisions the IP region to have freedom of navigation and over-flight, unimpeded lawful commerce, mutual respect for sovereignty, peaceful resolution of disputes, and equality amongst nations. India's vision of the Indo-Pacific sees inclusivity of all nations and stakeholders in the region and beyond. It further reiterated ASEAN centrality as an important element of the vision. The vision was laid out in the Prime Minister's famous speech at Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore in 2018. The vision was subsequently perfected in the East Asia Summit in Thailand in 2019 that enunciated the "*Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)*" listing in its seven pillars, namely - maritime security ecology and resources; capacity building; disaster risk reduction and management; S&T and academic cooperation; trade, connectivity and maritime transport. With this step, the maritime domain in the Indo-Pacific construct came to evolve as the vehicle of peace, prosperity and growth not only for India but for all the Indo-Pacific countries. That necessitated New Delhi to align its domestic aspirations to regional and global geopolitical realities based upon mutually accepted norms and values.

With a somewhat parallel approach, PM Abe had envisioned "high quality" infrastructure development within Asia based upon innovative and shared technologies as a part of its Partnership for Quality Infrastructure (PQI) funded by the Japan-led Asian Development Bank and Japan International Cooperation Agency in 2015. Even after expressing his conditional support for China's BRI for the first time in 2017 initially, he moved ahead with his infrastructure development vision with the announcement of *Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)*. The FOIP vision is based on the principles of rules-based institutions and frameworks for development assistance, infrastructure and connectivity, institution-building, and maritime security cooperation in the region centring on liberal norms and values agreed upon by all parties. He further championed the reinvigoration of ties with the Asian neighbours including India and Southeast ASEAN countries. PM Abe's visionary approach of "Broader Asia" that connected Asia with the Pacific countries and Australia allowing the free and transparent flow of people, goods, capital and knowledge under FOIP, TPP and PQI, became predominantly maritime in its approach. Scholars enumerated Abe's three main legacies as: a solidified Quad 2.0 for the Indo-Pacific; a reinvigorated boost to Japan's national security by reforming its pacifist constitution with a special focus on Article 9; and Expanded Partnership for Quality Infrastructure (EPQI) leading Asia on the road to a sustainable quality infrastructure narrative, that was guided by Abenomics. In other words, assisting regional neighbours with the development of good

quality infrastructural projects following high standards of systems and processes became the USP of the Japanese approach.

With the faltering global post Covid recovery process and challenges present by the “geopolitical developments”, India highlighted the necessity for deepening India-Japan partnership, not only at the regional level but also at the global issues with transnational impacts such as climate change, clean energy and implications of crisis such as in Myanmar and Ukraine. Japanese PM Kishida’s visit to India for the annual summit in March 2022 laid out a roadmap for deepening the Special Strategic and Global Partnership between the two countries in a post-COVID world, highlighting the growing areas of convergence and aspirations to work together between the two countries. This includes the establishment of a Joint Crediting Mechanism (JCM) for the “Clean Energy Partnership” between Japan and India. Furthermore, the two countries signed a Memorandum of Cooperation between the India-driven “International Solar Alliance (ISA)” and the Japanese Government and related organizations.

Development-oriented Partnerships

India and Japan’s focus on infrastructure and development-related projects in the Indo-Pacific region have emerged as the second pillar of their bilateral partnership. Japan with its technology expertise has extended its assistance to India in various areas of development but also the two countries have joined hands to work together in third countries, on request, for their infrastructure development. Some of the domestic as well as regional development partnerships are mentioned below:

India-Japan Civil Nuclear Agreement

India-Japan relations came a long way to maturity, where the issues were being seen in new contexts. The quest for constant energy resources and energy as the outcome of the peaceful use of nuclear energy has been mutual in both countries. To further clean energy commitments, the India-Japan Agreement for Cooperation in the Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy entered into force on July 20, 2017. This development highlighted that the two sides signed and overcame the initial hesitance of India’s 1998 peaceful nuclear tests to realise the importance of nuclear energy for the country despite its non-NPT status. The agreement promoted, “cooperation between the two countries in the development and uses of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes on a stable, reliable and predictable basis”. The focus on strengthening healthcare mechanisms, environment-friendly technologies, educational exchanges tourism, and sports have enlarged the areas of cooperation between

India and Japan beyond trade, investment, and infrastructure aid-based partnership in recent years. Besides, Japan extended assistance to India in nuclear waste management and is likely to undertake joint manufacture of nuclear power plant components under the Make in India initiative.

Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC): Economic and Infrastructure diplomacy has been a time-tested tool in Japanese foreign engagements. India has been a long-term benefactor of Japanese ODAs, investments and infrastructure development projects. India, on the other hand, has proved itself as a technology provider as well as a recognised hub for manpower hub. With their respective strengths, the two sides came together to collaborate under Asia Africa Growth Corridor in September 2017 during the visit of the Prime Minister of Japan to India in September 2017. AAGC aimed to explore the development of industrial corridors and industrial networks for the growth of Asia and Africa, which will benefit various stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific region including Africa. The countries expressed their strong commitment to work together to enhance connectivity in India and with other countries in the Indo-Pacific region including Africa, underlining the importance of all countries in ensuring the development and use of connectivity infrastructure in an open, transparent and non-exclusive manner based on international standards and responsible debt financing practices. However, as of 2022, there has been no commitment for spending the dedicated USD 10 billion under the Public Private Partnership, for the AAGC by the Government of India and the Government of Japan.

Additionally, Japan has demonstrated its interest in developing connectivity projects in India's neighbourhood such as has been involved in the construction of a Multimodal Transport Hub at Bangladesh's Biman Bandar and Kamalapur railway stations and developing the Dhaka Metro Rail as investment destinations. These connectivity projects sit complementary with India's aspirations to connect with Myanmar, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Thailand through its North East states and therefore, it marks a great potential for India and Japan to work together for third countries that seeking infrastructure development and connectivity projects. On the ground, some of these aspirations are seeing hiccups from sovereign nations, for example, the India-Japan MOU with Sri Lanka to develop the Eastern Container Terminal (ECT) that was signed in 2019 was scrapped in 2021 on the issues of sovereignty, only to be reissued a similar deal to develop another terminal, Western Container Terminal (WCT) at the same port a few weeks later. Further, the Sri Lankan government had stated that the WCT is not a strategic asset, unlike the ECT.

India-Japan-Australia Resilient Supply Chain Initiative (RSCI)

For market-dependent economies like India and Japan, robust supply chain mechanisms are a necessary condition for a successful trade and economic growth. The US-China trade war followed by the pandemic and the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war in the past few years has demonstrated the need to strengthen, expand and even diversify the supply chains for uninterrupted trade. Under the larger framework of Quad, India, Japan and Australia launched the Resilient Supply Chain Initiative (RSCI) in September 2021 is seen as a response to addressing supply chain vulnerabilities that were highlighted due to the pandemic. The RSCI aims to create a cycle of enhancing supply chain resilience to eventually attain strong, sustainable, balanced and inclusive growth in the region. It also aims to map knowledge gaps in supply chain structure and address the vulnerabilities of the existing system. This objective is to be achieved through twin approaches – sharing of best practices on supply chain resilience and providing opportunities for stakeholders to explore the possibility of diversification of their supply chains. Resilient supply chains can prove to be a crucial tool to safeguard lives, livelihoods and economies globally during future predicaments.

Quad’s Semiconductor Supply Chain Initiative

The common vision of India and Japan towards the Indo-Pacific region has been shared by the US and Australia under the Quad framework. India, Australia, Japan and the US have come together to secure supply chains in critical areas such as semiconductors and 5G telecom technologies, better known as “Quad’s Semiconductor Supply Chain Initiative” to foster an “open, accessible and secure technology ecosystem”. Similarly, the four countries have shown their commitments and cooperation on issues of transnational concerns including global health, mitigating climate change challenges, forming green shipping, clean hydrogen partnership, developing biotechnology scanning, developing high standards infrastructure in the region, bolstering cyber infrastructure against cyber threats, and space information sharing and cooperation to name a few. Cooperation and agenda shaping in issues of transnational interests, highlight that the India- Japan relationship has transcended the bilateral paradigm to foster cooperation with other countries at the regional and global level. As a result, India and Japan are moving toward participating with other like-minded countries in trilateral, and multilateral formats as detailed ahead.

Multilateral Quad-based Developmental Partnerships:

Quad partners are leaders in building “high quality” infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific region with their complementary approaches to leverage both public

and private resources to achieve maximum impact. Since 2015, Quad partners have reportedly provided more than US\$ 48 billion in official finance for infrastructure in the region. This represents thousands of projects, including capacity-building, across more than thirty countries in support of rural development, health infrastructure, water supply and sanitation, renewable power generation (e.g., wind, solar, and hydro), telecommunications, road transportation, and more.

The repercussion of the pandemic provided another avenue for the two countries to promote practical cooperation in various fields to deliver concrete benefits to countries for strengthening healthcare infrastructure and building pandemic resilience systems. Based on the outcomes of the QUAD Vaccine Partnership, India and Japan signed the US\$ 100 million loan facility between the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) and the Export-Import (EXIM) Bank of India in May 2022.

Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF)

In another joint initiative toward regional architecture, India and Japan agreed to work together for the launch by the US in Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) in May 2022. The IPEF is based upon four pillars: connected trade with a focus on digitalisation; resilient supply chains; clean energy; corruption-free, anti-bribery, and anti-money laundering trade practices. Except for Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar, other Southeast Asian nations are a part of the IPEF, including the four Quad nations. It has been an attempt toward building an inclusive framework that will bring substantive benefits to the region. Even though it would be quite too soon to comment on the efficacy of IPEF that lacks qualities of a Free Trade Agreement such as negotiations on tariffs or an increase in market access, it provides an alternative economic component for the like-minded IP countries seeking fair and sustainable economic practices.

Technology partnership has gained another level of relevance in the post-Covid world. Digital economy, Fintech, Cyber security, Digital Health, Submarine cable systems, 5G telecom network, and Quantum communications are some of the areas in the long list of potential where the IT partnership holds importance. India has a pool of highly skilled IT professionals that can contribute to the ICT partners that converges India's Digital India and Japan's Society 5.0 flagship programs. The two countries signed India-Japan Digital Partnership in 2018 that which was recently expanded at the regional level in 2022. In their joint statement, they reaffirmed the commitment to strengthen the efforts so that the vision for technologies, guided by the Quad Principles

on Technology Design, Development, Governance, and its use, would be further shared by all like-minded nations.

Pragmatic Strategic Posture

Indo-Pacific as a region is crucial for both its resident as well as extra-regional stakeholders. It is home to sixty percent of the world's population and two-third of global economic output. Half of the global trade transits the region and ninety percent of the country's trade traverses its waters. With the shift in economic trajectory from the trans-Atlantic region to the Indo-Pacific region, security, stability, peace and prosperity are vital for the entire world. This overarching vision of the IP and its security also became the third pillar of their partnership.

The two countries - Japan and India - have large Exclusive Economic Zones and maritime interests, and therefore have demonstrated their intentions to work closely to enhance cooperation in capacity building, technical assistance and information sharing between their respective agencies and undertake anti-piracy measures. They share the view that Japan and India must cooperate closely to ensure the safety and security of international maritime traffic that are vital for their economic well-being as well as that of the region. Furthermore, the two countries endorsed regular exchanges between the two Coast Guards through meetings of heads of Coast Guards, mutual visits of Coast Guard ships and holding of combined exercises and a Memorandum of Cooperation was signed between the two. In addition to these, the annual Defence Ministerial Dialogue and Coast Guard-to-Coast Guard dialogue is held between the two sides to improve trust and interoperability amongst the militaries.

In furtherance to address the existing problem of piracy in the Indo-Pacific region, India and Japan welcomed the enforcement of the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP) in 2006. This 21-membered multilateral agreement that includes both India and Japan affirmed their intention to enhance cooperation in respect of anti-piracy counter measures under its framework. In other words, the regional security challenges that were harmful to the stability and growth of the countries as well as the economic opportunities provided by India became an important reason for the "Strategic and Global Partnership" between the like-minded nations.

Based upon various issues of mutual interest including the Indo-Pacific region, maritime security, and cooperation in HADR and SAR operations in the region, New Delhi and Tokyo held their first round of India-Japan Maritime

Security dialogue was held in 2013 in New Delhi. During the first round of dialogue, both the countries signed Acquisition and Cross Serving Agreement (ACSA). This agreement allows reciprocal access to each other's military bases for the provision of supplies and services that extends the maritime operability of the navies on the seas. Through this agreement, India has access to Japan's base in Djibouti and the Japanese Navy has access to Indian Naval base in Andaman and Nicobar Islands covering a vast area in the extended Indo-Pacific region. The two countries held their sixth Maritime Affairs Dialogue in September 2021 in a virtual format.

The Strategic and Global Partnership Vision 2025 that was signed in 2015 was another landmark moment in the bilateral relationship that not only recognised avenues for deepening and broadening the action-based partnership but also recognised the close cooperation between India and Japan for peace, stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region. Both the countries expressed their commitment to safeguarding global commons including maritime, space and cyber domains. Addressing the maritime challenges in the IP region through enhanced HADR and mitigation capabilities as well as joint naval and coast guard dialogue and exchange for enhanced interoperability amongst services was one of the outcomes of the partnership at the bilateral level. On the multilateral level, too, there were synergies between India and Japan on several regional security issues including denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula, terrorism and UN reforms. With a common understanding towards the critical importance of the Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs), both countries underlined for earliest implementation of the ASEAN Code of Conduct with China and also, decided to hold regular close consultations on the issues related to maritime safety and security of sea lanes of communication. The annual India-Japan summits are held highlighting the importance of the bilateral relationship for the leadership of both countries.

The converging visions of India and Japan towards long-term political, economic and strategic interests, aspirations and concerns underpinned by a common commitment to democracy, rule of law, and free market economy was reiterated in PM Manmohan Singh's visit to Japan in 2016. The Joint Statement released thereafter, further highlighted each other's contributions to promoting peace, stability and development in Asia and beyond, unencumbered by any historical differences. Amongst other crucial issues of bilateral engagement such as trade and investment, science and technology collaboration, people-to-people exchange, etc. the security of SLOCs, maritime rights, addressing regional non-traditional maritime security threats, as well as regional and multilateral cooperation, made its prominence in the joint statement.

The shared commitment led to the evolution of various frameworks of security and defence dialogue between Japan and India including the Foreign and Defence Ministerial Meeting (“2+2” meeting). In November 2019, the first India-Japan “2+2” meeting was held in New Delhi. The foreign and defence ministerial-level meeting is aimed at enhancing the strategic depth of bilateral security and defence cooperation. The engagement is built upon the 2008 Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation and the 2009 Action Plan to advance Security Cooperation between India and Japan. This cooperation expanded at the regional level owing to the growing acknowledgement of the emerging security challenges. There was an emergence of common appreciation for a “shared vision of a free, open, inclusive and rules-based Indo-Pacific region in which the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity are ensured, and all countries enjoy the freedom of navigation and over-flight” understated the need for bilateral cooperation as well as “furthering the cause of the peace, security and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region” for these meetings.

Therefore, since 2006, there has been gradual and incremental development of cooperation between India and Japan towards securing the Indo-Pacific region for larger peace and stability in the region.

Conclusion

The paper analyses India-Japan relations in the Indo-Pacific that had their origins more than a decade ago in the concept of the “confluence of the two seas” proposed by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan in India’s Parliament in 2007. Since then, the two countries have jointly articulated a holistic framework for the Indo-Pacific, defining it to include both the Indian and the Pacific Oceans. The paper views the bilateral relationship beyond the factors of Strategic Autonomy, the China factor and the domestic policy paradigms, that appear to be inadequate to explain the level of engagement the two countries have undertaken in recent years. As the two sides are coordinating their respective Act East, IPOI and FOIP policies in the Indo-Pacific region, the paper conceptualises the emerging pillars of this partnership. In addition to the broadening areas of cooperation between the two countries, the collaboration between India and Japan, two declared candidates for permanent membership of a reformed UN Security Council from the Indo-Pacific region are likely to have significant consequences both for their bilateral relationship as well as the wider region in the coming times.

Bilateral relationships and partnerships take trajectories that are far from smooth. It has been rightly argued that major progress on reworking the

Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), signed in 2011, has remained elusive even after a decade. While there have been an easing of trade restrictions on certain goods and bilateral trade has increased, overall, a comprehensive review of the agreement is yet to take place as it has expanded India's trade deficit with Japan. This challenge can be rectified by broadening the economic relationship based upon respective areas of strength. At the regional level, the two countries are facing challenges while working together in a third country. However, such difficult times are only expected, and it is these abovementioned pillars of the bilateral relationship that help sustain and grow their partnership. In the past seventy years, the past two decades have marked a shift with the broadening of relations, stronger government-to-government relations and deepening of economic partnerships in newer avenues. Most importantly, liberal norms and values have come to underline the bilateral relationship as well as their joint global approach in recent years. Based on these pillars, India and Japan seek common interests than common threats as the basis of the bilateral relationship and also provide a blueprint for more such partnerships at the bilateral and multilateral levels.

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