

## **Changing Dynamics of India-Japan Relations: Future Trends**

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### **Introduction**

Since the establishment of diplomatic ties between India and Japan in April 1952, their bilateral relationship showed the promise. While Japan was beginning to emerge from the war and engaged in rebuilding its economy, India was beginning to find its destiny as an independent country. The role of Indian Justice Radha Binod Pal in the International Military Tribunal for the Far East and the emergence of Jawaharlal Nehru as a leader in Asia raised hope for a better Asia. This hope soon dissipated after the world was divided into two camps based on ideology. Relations between India and Japan stagnated as ideological differences prevented the two from nurturing warm ties.

This began to change when Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao launched the Look East Policy in 1991 and started to liberalize the economy. The six-decades of virtual stagnation in bilateral relations looked as a part of history when Japan's Prime Minister Mori Yoshiro undertook an official visit to India in August 2000, thus heralding a new phase in the relationship. The entire contours of the bilateral partnership began to be redefined from the narrow prism of bilateral relationship towards developing a global partnership.

Bilateral ties were limited to economic matters, mainly on economic assistance and a small basket of commodities in trade. Today, this has widened to cover a wide range of subjects. While economic ties have substantially expanded by increased trade, joint ventures, technical collaboration, R & D cooperation, etc., both are also engaged in wider issues of regional and global importance such as nuclear disarmament, energy security, maritime security to secure maritime commerce, climate change, terrorism, piracy, UN reforms, building of regional institutional architecture and a host of other issues impacting the region and the world. When Japan signed the Declaration on Security Cooperation with India in October 2008, only the third country with which to have such a security relationship after the US and Australia, Japan signaled to the world that it is keen to build a partnership which goes beyond trade and commerce. The rise of China could be a factor in this realignment of power relations in the region. India figures now prominently in security discourses in Japan, which was unthinkable a decade ago. The time seems to be opportune for both to consolidate this economic and security convergences and play active roles in this unfolding dynamism of growth and prosperity.

## Background

When India was looking to develop economic partnerships with Asia after launching the Look East Policy<sup>1</sup> and looking to attract East and Southeast Asian capital and develop commercial links, the response from Japan was rather muted. In comparison, South Korean multinationals showed greater enthusiasm (Jaffrelot, 2003, p. 51). The US and the UK remained the main investors in India between August 1991 and October 1994, accounting for 34.5 and 10.3 per cent of foreign investment respectively, while Japan accounted for 6.3 per cent.<sup>2</sup> Though Japan has remained among the top fifteen investors, it did not show much enthusiasm to India's Look East policy initially. Barring Suzuki, Honda and Toyota in the automobile sector which benefited from India's liberalization policy, others like Sony, Fujitsu, Hitachi and Sanyo were late entrants into the Indian market. The presence of Japanese firms remained well below Indian expectations. Of the 4,299 Japanese firms that operated in Asia in 1991, only 110 were doing business in India. This jumped to 725 by October 2010. Indeed, between February 2007 and October 2010, the number of Japanese companies doing business in India doubled from 363 to 725 (Embassy, 2010). If the unregistered small companies doing business in India are added, the number would exceed 1,000 in total.

When the Cold War ended and the platform was laid out for deepening the partnership between India and Japan following India's liberalization policy, bilateral ties ran into serious difficulties when India conducted a nuclear test in May 1998. Japan responded by suspending its Official Development Assistance (ODA) to India and Japanese business houses withheld plans to invest in India. Both countries lost a golden opportunity to start a new partnership and this continued until August 2000 when Mori made his historic visit to India, heralding a new phase in the bilateral relationship that continues to this day. The years 1998 to 2000 were the worst period in their bilateral relationship since World War II. In India, Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryutaro's decision was perceived as too harsh. Japan was not content with its own stance; it mounted a campaign against India at several international fora and co-sponsored a resolution in the UN Security Council exhorting both India and Pakistan to stop the nuclear race and join the international regime for non-proliferation. Japan made its ODA conditional to India's compliance to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) and Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).

In taking such a strong position, Japan failed to appreciate the circumstance under which India had to conduct the nuclear test. Even while Japan remains under the US security umbrella, it remains sensitive to nuclear issues because of its past experience. India understands Japan's position. But what disappointed India was Japan's failure to appreciate India's security dilemma as the security environment in South Asia had deteriorated. It is possible that Hashimoto was under

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<sup>1</sup> For an objective assessment of India's Look East Policy, see Jaffrelot (2003).

<sup>2</sup> *Asia Newsletter*, December 1994, p. 2.

intense domestic pressure that led his government to overact at that time. Failure to resuscitate the country's economy from prolonged recession had led to his popularity to plummet. The banking system was hit by financial scandals, further putting pressure on the Hashimoto government. The ensuing election to the Upper House in July 1998 was also a factor in the position that Japan took on India's nuclear test. Besides adhering to Japan's 1992 ODA Charter that put 'conditionalities' – not to extend ODA to nuclear weapons states or to states whose policies may promote nuclear proliferation--, Hashimoto personally campaigned as a champion of global non-proliferation. India's nuclear weapon program was perceived as a threat to the stability to the global nuclear order that Japan wanted to champion and preserve.

The situation dramatically reversed following Mori's historic visit to India in August 2000. In redefining the contours of the bilateral partnership, Mori exhorted India to elevate bilateral relations and build a "Global Partnership" in consonance with the changing geopolitical situations of Asia. For the first time, the strategic dimension of the relationship began to be stressed. The factor that led Mori to build a global partnership with India was probably the simmering displeasure to US President Bill Clinton's bonhomie with China in the 1990s, building an opinion inside Japan to look for alternatives and not solely depend on the US alliance. The Asian financial crisis of 1997-98 and the US's rejection of its proposal to create an Asian Monetary Fund with a capital of \$10 billion to assist the affected countries disappointed Japan. It was around this time that Japan warmed up to the ASEAN to promote greater economic integration strategies by embracing the initiative of expanding ASEAN by including Japan, China and South Korea.

Indeed, the foundation of sculpting a defense partnership between India and Japan was laid in January 2000 when India's Defense Minister George Fernandes visited Tokyo to initiate defense dialogue. Following Mori's August 2000 visit, the first comprehensive bilateral security dialogue was held in Tokyo in July 2001 and was institutionalized as an annual event. Soon, military-to-military cooperation deepened. For example, Japan participated in the International Fleet Review in Mumbai in February 2001. This was followed by the visit of a Maritime Self Defense Force (MSDF) squadron to Chennai in May 2001. These kinds of mutual visits have been going on a continuing basis since then.

When Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee visited Japan in December 2001, Vajpayee and his counterpart Koizumi Junichiro issued a joint communiqué on 10 December 2001, which expressed mutual satisfaction with the bilateral Comprehensive Security Dialogue and military-to-military consultations (MFA Japan, 2001). It was also agreed to set up another mechanism on counter-terrorism within the bilateral security framework (MFA Japan, 2001). Japan's sincerity in building up of a strong security partnership was reiterated by Foreign Minister Kawaguchi Yoriko when she stated in January 2003 that "achieving ever closer cooperation on the security and defense front is crucial for Japan and India". The momentum was maintained when Japan's Director General of the Defense Agency Ishiba Shigeru and George Fernandes held talks

in New Delhi in May 2003, reflecting Japan's strong interest in building up a strategic partnership with India (Hindu, 2003).

When Koizumi visited India in April 2005, annual summit meetings of the two prime ministers was agreed upon. The Manmohan Singh-Koizumi Joint Statement issued on 28 April 2005 contained the 8-point initiatives giving a new direction to the bilateral relations. This laid a solid foundation to realize the strategic partnership by developing a well-structured framework for security dialogue and cooperation between the two. Both strove to achieve this at bilateral, regional and global levels. This demonstrated that bilateral ties had assumed a wider dimension and issues affecting both should be dealt with comprehensively (Joint Statement, 2005).

The second summit was held in Tokyo when Prime Minister Singh visited Tokyo in December 2006 and met his counterpart Abe Shinzo. The Joint Statement titled "Towards India-Japan Strategic and Global Partnership" laid a roadmap for building a multi-layered network of bilateral relations. It proposed, among others, (a) holding annual summit meetings between the top leaders of the two countries, (b) institutionalizing strategic dialogue at the level of foreign ministers, (c) pursuing negotiations for the conclusion of a bilateral economic partnership agreement, (d) establishing a business leaders forum, (e) cooperating in the fields of science and technology, (f) encouraging people-to-people exchange; (g) cooperating in multilateral forums like the UN, SAARC, EAS and ARF, and (h) cooperating in areas like energy, environment and global trade (Joint Statement, 2006). Further, the Abe-Singh statement of August 2007 in New Delhi laid the ground for the "Roadmap of New Dimensions to the Strategic and Global Partnership between India and Japan". In October 2008 when Prime Minister Singh visited Japan, the joint statement read as the "Advancement of the Strategic and Global Partnership between India and Japan".

The Abe-Singh Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation on 22 October 2008 was truly historic (Joint Declaration, 2008). It "embodies almost all the pledges and assurances made by them in various joint statements and other official meetings since 2001" (Kesavan, 2010, p. 14). What was significant in this declaration was that urgency was felt on policy coordination in regional affairs as well as cooperation in multilateral forums in Asia such as the EAS, ARF and ReCAPP. The objective was to broaden the framework that would help influence the emergence of security architecture in the region.

One significant thing that cannot be missed in all these joint declarations and statements is the repeated emphasis on the word "strategic", which Japan was keen to reiterate. On its part, India has responded enthusiastically to endorse the strategic component of the bilateral relationship.

When the LDP lost power to the DPJ and Hatoyama Yukio assumed office, there was a fear that India-Japan relations would suffer a setback as India was not even mentioned in the DPJ election manifesto. This fear soon dissipated when Hatoyama paid a visit in the closing days of

2009, thereby signaling that the policy of his predecessor governments towards India would continue. Though it was unusual for a prime minister to undertake a trip overseas so soon after coming to power after dethroning the long-ruling LDP and amidst domestic turbulence, this decision received wide domestic approval. An Action Plan to advance Security Cooperation based on the Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation of October 2008 was adopted. It identified nine areas where both countries can cooperate and work together. These are:

- Strengthening cooperation on issues of common strategic interests;
- Strategic cooperation mechanisms;
- Defense cooperation: regular meetings between the defense ministers;
- Exercises;
- Non-traditional security threats;
- Exchange/Seminars;
- Coast Guard cooperation;
- Safety of transport;
- Information exchange and cooperation in the fight against terrorism and other transnational crimes;
- Cooperation at the United Nations; and
- Disaster management.<sup>3</sup>

## **Assessment**

It thus transpired that the Declaration on Security Cooperation of October 2008 took shape following the Action Plan of December 2009. Thus bilateral ties acquired strategic depth. From Japan's perspective, engaging India in a security cooperation framework was indeed a strategic move as India-Japan maritime cooperation for maritime security in the Malacca Strait will prevent suspicion in the region that continues to retain bitter wartime memories. If Japanese ships start playing an active role in patrolling the Sea Lane of Communications (SLOCs), the specter of a Greater Asia Co-prosperity Sphere<sup>4</sup> in another form might lurk in the region. In contrast, there is no such reservation about Indian ships and, therefore, Japan's role will remain limited to extending assistance in the form of equipment, surveillance, capacity-building, etc. (Raman, 2009, p. 3)

Indeed, there exists a broad bilateral political consensus in Japan on the importance of Indo-Japanese cooperation to strengthen maritime security. A wide spectrum of Japanese people, ranging from political class to business class and shipping circles, see merit in strengthening India-Japan cooperation in the maritime domain as over 90 per cent of Japan's oil and gas imports as well as exports pass through the Gulf of Aden and adjoining seas and the Strait of Malacca. If there are major disruptions in supplies owing to either piracy or maritime terrorism, it would

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<sup>3</sup> Available at MFA Japan (2009).

<sup>4</sup> The Greater Asia Co-prosperity Sphere was Japan's World War II time empire building strategy in which Japanese military led Japan into disaster, culminating in its defeat.

adversely impact the Japanese economy.

As the Action Plan demonstrates, the prospect of joint initiatives for maritime security by the navies and coast guards of the two countries in the seas to the West of India is great. Because Somali pirates are very active in the Gulf of Aden and the nearby seas, Japan is very much concerned not only about the disruption of supplies of critical oil imports but also because of the number of attacks on Japan-related ships.<sup>5</sup> A number of ships have been hijacked and an undisclosed ransom amount has been paid to get the ships and crew released. Japan has legitimate concern about piracy as approximately 2,000 Japan-related ships pass through this area each year.<sup>6</sup>

As the balance of power swings one way or the other and is determined by events in the Indian Ocean rim, Japan looks at India to work together to promote peace and stability and help safeguard vital sea lanes. Devoid of any conflict of strategic interest, strengthening institutionalized cooperation and promoting stability in Asia with India seems to be high in Japan's strategic calculus. Whether Japan's long term goal is to redefine its alliance relationship with the US (e.g., the Futenma relocation controversy) by investing in closer economic and strategic bonds with India is open to debate. However, Asia is in transition and increasing power disequilibrium is altering the balance of power in Asia. Though Japan is a declining power economically, Asia seems to be collectively regaining its feet from two centuries of historical decline. This is helped by the ascendancy of India and China at the global stage.

If Japan wishes to shed its checkbook diplomacy image, how it intends to influence Asia's balance of power, if it wishes to, is also open to debate. China's rise and its military modernization have enhanced its power projection capability. The recent controversy over the South China Sea where some other Asian countries have contending claims, and the Sino-Japanese spat over the East China Sea is worrying. China's intent is not clear but it appears that it has a long term goal to emerge as the world's No. 1 power.

Japan is prompted by China's rise to strengthen its military alliance with the US, notwithstanding the Futenma base relocation controversy, thereby reaffirming its alliance relationship with the US. At the same time, it is prompted to debate internally the way to break out of its postwar pacifist cocoon.

Thus in a multi-polar world, Japan is seeking its own place. Though both India and China are emerging as two leading economic powerhouses, Japan's global economic influence must not be

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<sup>5</sup> Japanese-related ships mean Japanese-owned ships flying the Japanese or foreign flags.

<sup>6</sup> For example, information made available to the author by the Defence Attaché, Embassy of Japan, New Delhi, suggest that in August 2009, for example, there were four instances when the P-3 patrol aircraft dispatched for anti-piracy information provided information to other warships and commercial ships in four instances: 14, 16, 19, and 22 August 2009.

underestimated either. Despite its declining image, the fact that its GDP is under \$5 trillion (2008), and annual growth rate may be below 2 per cent, but translating to about \$100 billion in annual additional output (almost equal to the entire annual GDP of small economies like Singapore and the Philippines, for example) is a factor that cannot be overlooked (Chellaney, 2009a).

Forging strategic partnerships by a constellation of Asian states has emerged as a new phenomenon in Asia at a time when “major shifts in economic and political power are accentuating Asia’s security challenges” (Chellaney, 2009a). If the India-Japan security agreement was modeled on the March 2007 Japan-Australia defense accord (Masaki 2007), Indo-Australia security accord (Chellaney, 2009b) is modeled on the India-Japan security accord. India-South Korea defense engagement is moving in a similar direction as well (Panda, 2011).

Besides increasing the number of bilateral visits by top defense and military officials as a part of their “strategic and global partnership” of 2006, both are engaged in initiatives on maritime security, counterterrorism, counter-proliferation, disaster management and energy security. Mere agreements are not enough. A deeper commitment to the strategic partnership has to be worked out by the joint development of missile-defense systems, similar to the missile defense cooperation that India has with Israel. Both should also explore the prospects of cooperation in other technologies for mutual defense. Article 9 of Japan’s Constitution does not ban weapon exports as commonly interpreted; the ban on weapon exports is only a long-standing Cabinet decision. Further, the decision relates to the ban on weapons and not technologies. This too has been loosened and Japan has injected some elasticity to export weapons for peacekeeping operations, counterterrorism and anti-piracy.

## **The China Factor**

The Japan-Australia declaration was seen as part of efforts to implement a four-way “strategic dialogue” among Japan, the US, Australia and India which Abe proposed after assuming office. The strategic dimension of Abe’s India policy was interpreted as a move to counterbalance the growing influence of China in Asia. All three countries – India, Japan and Australia – however have taken pains to clarify that their strategic engagements and security pacts are not aimed at any country. Indeed, the security pacts are quite different in nature from the Japan-US and US-Australia alliances, which emphasize defense obligations. It is unlikely, however, if Beijing is convinced by such assurances. While then Australian Prime Minister John Howard declared after signing the document in March 2007 that “neither China nor any other country in the region should see this declaration as being antagonistic toward them”, Prime Minister Singh clarified that the “comprehensive security”<sup>7</sup> framework between India and Japan was not directed against China.

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<sup>7</sup> The late Prime Minister Ohira Masayoshi used the words “comprehensive security” for the first time in late 1970s. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh only clarified India’s position.

Singh further made it clear in October 2008 that the Declaration on Security Cooperation would not come “at the cost of any third country, least of all China”. Prime Minister Abe also made similar clarifications (Hindu 2008).

Though it is not disputed that China is a matter of concern both in India and Japan, their threat perceptions are not similar. Japan’s defense planners view China from three different angles: as a “considerable threat”, a “realistic threat” or a “potential threat”. In contrast, India’s threat perception of China does not see it as a “threat”. China’s rise and belligerence arouse concerns, but also afford opportunities. If Japan looks at India as a hedging strategy on its China policy, India may be unwilling to assume such a role. Yet, both India and Japan are in agreement in standing together to face an assertive China and make common efforts to see China emerge as a responsible stakeholder and a factor for Asian stability.

China may feel uncomfortable about the increasing defense cooperation between India and Japan, India and Australia, Japan and Australia and a stronger Japan-US security alliance. China is suspicious of possible US motives in overhauling its military’s global posture as a strategy of “soft containment” of China’s rapidly ascending military and economic power. China also views with suspicion the growing Indo-US bonhomie in recent years. However, the US has tried to assuage China’s feeling and clarified that its objective is only to encourage China to be a “responsible stakeholder” in the international system. So far as India and Japan are concerned, both do acknowledge that in any new reconfiguration of a regional order, China’s place will be integral to maintaining the peace and stability of Asia.<sup>8</sup> The degree of economic interdependence that has developed and the integration process so widespread and strong that each country’s stake would be high in case destabilization occurs. India and Japan can work together to maximize common goals that would consolidate this process of mutual prosperity.

China’s rise, both militarily and economically, has been one of the significant factors that has shaped Japan’s Asia policy in general and India in particular. Indeed, China’s ascendancy at the global stage has engaged scholars to examine the changing contours of power relations among Asian countries (Jain, 2007; Pant, 2008; Emmot, 2008). In particular, Japanese elites do not hesitate to articulate the argument that the role of China as a factor is driving Japan’s India strategy. Even the Japanese officials in its mission in New Delhi do not hesitate openly to voice their opinion that China is a factor in the crafting of Japan’s India policy, though adopting a confrontationist posture is not in the calculation, and therefore Japan has to manage its relationship with China carefully. Even Aso Taro, when he was Foreign Minister, admitted that India can serve a useful function in balancing against China (Hirose, 2008, p. 59). But since Sino-Japanese tensions have a long history and both carry strong historical baggage, it is difficult to attribute China as the sole factor in crafting Japan’s India policy.

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<sup>8</sup> For a lucid analysis of this issue, see Chellaney (2008).



## **Why India is important for Japan**

The economic growth of India has caught the world's attention and Japan is no exception. When India concluded the nuclear deal with the US in August 2007, it was a dramatic transformation of India's global image. Obtaining the NSG waiver without being a signatory to the NPT enhanced India's status in the nuclear field. "If the Beijing Olympics was China's coming-out party, the NSG waiver was India's" (Economist, 2008). It was interpreted as US President George W. Bush's "Richard Nixon moment" (Emmot, 2008). India joined the 'nuclear club' alongside countries like France, the UK, and China (Kagan, 2008, p. 41). The sustained economic growth that India has been registering for over a decade has catapulted India to the global stage and its power to flex diplomatic muscle has been considerably enhanced. The 'power of the argument' that focused more on the promotion of democracy and human rights has lost precedence over the now acquired 'argument of power' (Kagan, 2008, p. 41). Despite being enmeshed in the whirlpool of regional politics, India has acquired the ability to influence, if not shape, events in the region with its 'great power status'. India is no longer willing to be treated as anything less than an absolute equal.

This does not mean that India is willing to join any coalition against a third country to maximize its strategic influence. Instead, India would prefer to work together in a cooperative spirit to achieve peace and stability in the region. The centrality of Japan in shaping the evolving Asia-Pacific security architecture is a key variable in India's Japan strategy and therefore the strengthening of security and economic ties between India and Japan is aimed to be achieved (Pant, 2008).

Seen from the Japanese perspective, though India is important as a strategic partner, the weak realization in Japan about security issues has hindered the strategic dimension of the relationship until recently. The rethinking started surfacing when it dawned on Japan that its reliance on the US for its security cannot be guaranteed for ever. Though the DPJ government led by Hatoyama did try to review Japan-US ties somewhat, it transpired that the security alliance will remain at the core of Japan's security for quite some time (Packard, 2010). Japan finds itself at a crossroads: whether to discard its postwar pacifist military posture and become a 'normal' state to prepare itself to face the perceived China 'threat' or review its US policy with a view not to put all its eggs in one basket while at the same time working for consensus for an appropriate response to build relationships with the rest of Asia. "Amidst this discord about Japan's strategic posture, Japanese thinking about the substance of a relationship with India remains relatively underdeveloped" (Brewster, 2010, p. 101).

Japan's security dilemma continues with various strands of thoughts, with none in a position to influence policy change. There are advocates in Japan who say that Japan should be a 'normal' state; there are revisionists, new autonomists, realists, globalists, middle-power internationalists,

Asianists and pacifists and this has resulted in a failure to reach a consensus about the direction of Japan's future security policy (Samuels, 2007; Suh, et al., 2008, pp. 3-4). The rigidity and inflexibility of Japanese culture has prevented consensus building in such an important issue of the country's security. Japan's political culture and institutional structure retains a bias against a forceful articulation of military security objectives and this inhibits significant change in policy direction (Katzenstein and Okawara, 2008). Despite such contestations on security policy, the India-Japan relationship has assumed robustness and is seen as a positive development in the analysis of Japanese strategic thinking. Though this focus in Japan may not necessarily replicate the existing strategic thought, Japan sees that its forging of a strategic partnership with India could serve some, if not all, of its external policy objectives.

Though Japan's alliance relationship with the US has met its security needs since the 1950s, the relative decline of US power and the relative rise of China's power raise uncomfortable questions among strategic thinkers in Japan. Japan is wary of China's rise, especially after China's assertive posture in the South China Sea<sup>9</sup> and spat over the East China Sea. China too carries historical baggage that defines its relations with Japan whenever it suits it.<sup>10</sup> Japan's fears increased when US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton commented in 2008 that America's relationship with China "will be the most important bilateral relationship in the world this century". Referring to North Korea's nuclear issue, she said that China's support in reaching a multilateral deal to disable North Korea's nuclear facilities was too important and that the US "should build on this framework to establish a northeast Asian security regime" (Telegraph, 2008). Thus, it appears attractive for Japan, which is declining, to build a partnership with India, whose relative power is rising and this may help Japan to come out from its security dilemma. As both share common values and common visions for the future, the common democratic foundations in both provide the right background to build a future cooperative partnership.

As a close ally of the US in the Far East, the US has also encouraged Japan to build strategic ties with India. When the Abe government initiated the Quadrilateral Initiative, which had its root in the Track 1.5 Japan-India-US Trilateral Strategic Dialogue held in June 2006 (CSIS, 2007) and later supported by the Second Armitage-Nye Report of February 2007<sup>11</sup> and further pressed by Vice President Dick Cheney during his visit to Japan in March 2007, it raised eyebrows in China and died in its infancy (Shanahan, 2007). Yet, when India and Japan declared the Security Cooperation in 2008, the US supported the move as it endowed both India and Japan greater regional security roles.

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<sup>9</sup> For a succinct analysis on the recent China's policy towards the South China Sea, see Panda and Khan (2010).

<sup>10</sup> Japan's views on the Chinese threat have been described as "something approaching panic". See Mulgan (2008, p. 60).

<sup>11</sup> Richard Armitage and Joseph S. Nye (2007) asserted the importance of cooperation by Japan with Australia and India founded on "common values".

Both India and Japan have realized the importance of networking and the idea of a trilateral relationship between India, Japan and the US needs to be seen from this perspective. International relations in the current phase of globalization need not be seen from a hubs-and-spokes kind of relationship. That is what has been the Japanese foreign policy strategy as of late. Therefore, Japan proposed a Japan-US-China trilateral relationship and is keen to promote a Japan-US-India and a Japan-US-Indonesia trilateral relationship. Japan's foreign policy strategy of networking is aimed to realize and strengthen weak bilateral linkages. From Track 1.5 level, the India-Japan-US trilateral relationship is likely to be elevated soon to Track II government-to-government Additional Secretary level. The objective is to engage in rule-making of international standards.

The staunch supporters in Japan for a close strategic partnership with India are those who belong to the "Pan-Asianist" school of thought. They are strong nationalists and revisionists who aspire to regain Asian glory snatched away by the West. This calls for close relations with Asia over an exclusive alliance with the US. There are two views on this premise: one as undermining the alliance with the US and the other as strengthening it. But the Asian romanticism that was articulated by Tenshin Okakura and Rabindranath Tagore in the early 1900s was negated by the militaristic approach of Japan during the World War I. Though after the War, Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke<sup>12</sup> and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru revived the concept of Asia, ideological factors prevented its progress. After the end of the Cold War, the same idea resurfaced in new form and economic development furthered the idea. However, it remained confined to Japan, China, the two Koreas and Vietnam but now has started to embrace South Asia as well. Kishi's grandson, Abe tried to revive the sentimental journey and strengthen the India-Japan bond by visiting Kolkata and the home of Subash Chandra Bose who had collaborated with the Japanese Army to fight the British during the Pacific War. Abe also met the family of Radhabinod Pal, an Indian judge who had given the dissenting judgment in the International Military Tribunal for the Far East in 1949. By doing so, Abe was driving home the salience of Pan Asianism. It transpires, therefore, both in the LDP and DPJ, there are similar views, sans militaristic, about Asian regionalism with key emphasis on building up a relationship as a counterpoint to Japan's relationship with the US (Brewster, 2010, n. 33).

However, there is a different twist to this story. The revisionists who want a strong security relationship with India are nationalists or rightists and want an assertive, militarily strong and independent Japan and identify China as the key threat. They see Japan's alliance relationship as humiliating and question the government's position to bear the cost of the US bases in Okinawa. As an alliance on equal terms does not seem likely as was demonstrated by Hatoyama's disastrous moves, building up a strong alliance with India seems to be an option to downscale the overdependence on the US for its security. David Brewster comments: "In neorealist terms,

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<sup>12</sup> Kishi was armament minister in Japan's wartime cabinet but was released from prison by the Americans in 1948 in somewhat obscure circumstances.

nationalists are attracted to a relationship with India in terms of finding common cause in forming a military-balancing coalition against the perceived China threat and an opportunity for Japan to partially hedge against the perceived risk of the United States abandoning Japan in its relations with China. Nationalists are likely to identify India as a particularly important security partner of a future Japan shorn of its current legal and political constraints on the projection of military power and having the ability to act outside the US security umbrella” (Brewster, 2010, p. 103).

Is it a long-term Japanese strategy to enact revolutionary changes in its foreign policy in response to the new strategic environment in Asia and a generational change in Japan’s leadership that is looking for alternatives? If this is so, Japan may sooner or later completely abandon the Yoshida doctrine and drift away from sole reliance on the US alliance and towards building ties in Asia and promote multilateral institutions in Asia where it can compete with China either alone or in partnership with India for influence (Pyle, 2006, 2007). The Action Plan for implementation of the 2008 Security Declaration may be seen in this light. The DPJ’s foreign policy has taken therefore a more regionalist approach and building up a partnership with India on a bilateral basis has been the priority rather than as part of a US-led coalition. Not surprisingly, therefore, Hatoyama’s East Asian Community intended to include India and not the US.

There is a lack of consensus in Japan, however, on how Japan’s relationship with India should develop in future in practice, though there is conceptual support in many quarters in Japan for the same. Japan is unprepared at this stage, and it is looking to India as an alternative to its alliance relationship with the US. Because of its constitutional constraints, Japan’s military cooperation remains limited to joint naval and coast guard exercises, anti-piracy operations, joint disaster management and multilayered consultation as provided in the security consultation.

The key areas in which both India and Japan can have constructive engagement in the near term is on regional forums such as the EAS with a view to redistribute power allowing India to play a politically balancing role in relation to China. Another area in which India and Japan can play important roles is in maritime security. Indeed, India-Japan relations are identified in some quarters in Japan as a maritime coalition as the Indian Navy can play a critical role in securing the safety of maritime commerce. India has the ability to provide maritime security to Japan in the Indian Ocean in combination with, or potentially, as a partial alternative to Japan’s reliance on the US in that region. Japan does maintain some naval presence in the Indian Ocean, but it is a mere tokenism. While at the Indo-Japan Dialogue on Ocean Security in October 2006, the former chairman of the Joint Staff of the Japanese Defense Agency, Admiral Natsukawa Kazuya commented, “Only India has the capability and intention for security cooperation in [the Indian Ocean], this huge sea area, the west side of the Malacca Strait” (Natsukawa, 2006, p. 53). As a major power in the region, India plays a key role in the security of the Indian Ocean. The National Institute for Defense Studies in its 2008 Review referred to India as “the sole dominant power” in the Indian Ocean (National Institute, 2008, p. 219). This is an indication that Japan may be

contemplating partially reducing its reliance on the US and shifting some of it to India. It is a different matter that the US may feel uncomfortable if Japan accords the Indian navy a significant role to protect its maritime interests in the Indian Ocean area.

The questions that would remain unanswered, however, is whether India is prepared to substantially upgrade coordination with the US in the maritime domain. In its own interests, India is unlikely to get embroiled in any hedging strategy in whatever form against either the US or China but would prefer coordination in a multilateral framework to address regional issues impinging on more than one state. This does suggest that the India-Japan strategic partnership will be weakened. On the contrary, a greater understanding between the two will help achieve better coordination for mutual gains (Panda, 2010).

Historically or otherwise, India has no problem with Japan and understands Japan's strategic limitations that prevent it to start nuclear commerce. Japan's limitation is also its strength as Japan willingly accords India a great power status, particularly in the Indian Ocean region. True, the Indo-US nuclear deal triggered improvement in India-Japan ties. India would prefer to deal with both Japan and China bilaterally or even at a trilateral level involving the US but would not like to be a surrogate or junior partner to the US. Neither would it like to join any coalition against China but deal on its own when bilateral issues are involved. However, it is open to join a multilateral approach while dealing with regional or global issues. India could protect its strategic autonomy in dealing with other major regional powers. There is widespread acceptance among the strategic community in India that its security relationship is consistent with its stand on strategic autonomy and sees no friction with Japan.

The security declaration is also consistent with its Look East policy which, apart from engaging economically, allows forging security relationships. India, therefore, has bilateral security relationships with not only Japan but also with Vietnam, Singapore and deepening talks with South Korea. Its ties with Taiwan are also likely to be substantially upgraded soon. Skeptics see India's strategic engagement with Asian states as a well-crafted Indian strategy to forge an undefined alliance which is an India-centered constellation of Asian states linked by strategic cooperation with a view to counterbalance China. Others view the development of the India-Japan strategic partnership as laying the foundation of an India-Japan-Russia trilateral relationship with a view to counterbalance China. Still others see that Japan will eventually abandon its alliance relationship with the US and join with India, and both together will create a new power centre which China will be incapable of stopping and therefore will be forced to accord their own "strategic space". In this scenario, India's role in any future security architecture will be vital for peace and stability in the region.

In the dramatic transformation of evolving new power equations, several unpredictable scenarios can be drawn. No country's strategic future is clearly defined and may change focus depending upon how other countries are crafting their strategic policies. Some conjecture may,

however, be made. One is India is unlikely to be the sole sponsor of any initiative to redesign a security system for Asia but a joint initiative with Japan could be a possibility. Still another is if two poles emerge led by China on the one hand and US-led allies on the other - as it seems likely to be the case in the near future -, India is unlikely to get sucked into either of the two poles but is likely to consolidate friendships with Japan and Russia, while maintaining its strategic autonomy fiercely (Rajagopalan and Sahni, 2008). India is likely to take a principled stand on specific issues and support either group if those do not conflict with its own national interests. The construction of an India-Japan partnership will be such that it will not alienate China but would allow both to “create a new magnet in Asia, not a wall of separation” (Mohan, 2007).

How does a partnership with Japan independent of the US, China or Russia serve India’s own interests? In a globalizing world and integration of economies in the Asia Pacific region, India is keen to craft a foreign economic policy strategy that would facilitate it to maintain its current growth momentum and this consideration will shape its strategic thinking. Therefore, maintaining good relationships with key players in the region in a cooperative spirit to strategize its foreign policy goals would be the priority. Entry into the EAS with Japan’s support despite China’s opposition is one such example. India is still excluded from other regional groupings such as the APEC and Asia-Europe Meeting. Japan has recognized India’s importance and assiduously supported India’s candidature in the existing regional grouping from which it is excluded at present and in any future grouping that is being discussed. India has never thought that a bilateral security relationship with Japan would negate its strategic autonomy.

From Japan’s side, India’s role in maritime security seems to be the main driver for building a strategic partnership as Japan does not have any direct interest in the security matters of South Asia, limiting its interests to fostering economic ties through trade, investment, joint venture, technical collaborations, etc. Same could be said about India whose strategic interests do not go beyond Southeast Asia, though it wants peace and stability to continue in the Northeast Asian region as disturbance in the Korean peninsula would indirectly and adversely affect all stakeholders in the region, India included. But India would rejoice in obtaining Japan’s support in legitimizing its dominant naval preeminence in the Indian Ocean and thereby further its great power ambitions.

There are advocates in the Indian strategic community who take the view that it is time for India to enhance its naval space beyond the Malacca Straits and towards the South China Sea.<sup>13</sup> There seemed to be some political views on this as well. For example, in 2000 Defence Minister George Fernandes envisioned India’s naval presence in the South China Sea “... to see that the sea lanes are not disturbed and that conflict situations are contained” (Chanda, 2000). India also might

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<sup>13</sup> For the development of India’s “Southern Forwarding Strategy”, see an objective assessment in Yann-Huei Song (2003).

consider an increased naval presence in the South China Sea to counter China's increased naval incursions into the Indian Ocean (Karnad, 2005). Because Japan has serious constitutional constraints to project its own power, it will be convenient for Japan to encourage India to increase its naval profile to check China. Such a strategy will be mutually convenient.

## **Conclusion**

In view of the evolving power relations in the Asia Pacific region, both India and Japan are poised to play an important role in designing the future security architecture of Asia in a cooperative framework. In this endeavor, other Asian countries such as Singapore, South Korea, Vietnam and others are expected to render support to this joint effort. In view of the favorable historical factors and the current convergence of interests between the two, there is universal endorsement in both countries for moving bilateral relationships further to mutual advantage. The China factor and perceived threat will propel both to seek common grounds to coordinate their policies. While Japan's security alliance with the US is likely to continue, if it becomes weak in the event of either Japan reviewing the nature of its relationship with the US or the US retreating from the Asian theatre, the India-Japan security relationship may assume robustness. If that happens, Japan's interest in getting India's support for maritime security would be fulfilled. This will also enable India to enhance its influence in the region which is becoming multi-polar.

As India's maritime power increases, Japan's support to legitimize India's maritime role would also increase. If China's assertive stance continues, Japan will want a greater Indian presence. In order to achieve this objective, greater political coordination and developing structures that would promote economic integration are a priority. In view of the prolonged recession and Japan's inability to come out of it, Japan will be put under pressure, both by the US and its domestic industry, to review its strict nuclear technology export control regime to NPT non-signatory countries such as India. If that happens, nuclear commerce with India will help resuscitate Japan's ailing economy by unfolding huge business prospects in its market. The challenge is before Japan to enact policy change and India has the patience to wait for a policy reversal in Japan. If Japan takes too much time, it runs the risk of losing the Indian market as India has already started civil nuclear cooperation negotiations with other countries. South Korea is already in the race to take a larger piece of the nuclear pie in the Indian market.

Both India and Japan need not be paranoid about China's rise. Overstressing a 'China threat' would make China uncomfortable. The rise of China represents both a challenge and an opportunity and both India and Japan, despite their bilateral problems with China, have a huge responsibility to engage China constructively in political, security and economic matters. 'The Joint Statement issued on 29 December 2009 envisioned to take the India-Japan bilateral relationship to the "New Stage". The coming years will see how both steer their bilateral

relationship forward, which accommodates the US, China and other stakeholders politically, economically and in the security realm.

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