

# India-Japan Collaboration in the Indo-Pacific

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## Abstract

*India-Japan collaboration in the Indo-Pacific had its 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 articulated a holistic framework for the Indo-Pacific, defining it to include both the Indian and the Pacific Oceans. They have announced an integrated Indo-Pacific strategy in which the rule of international law, maritime security, technology, connectivity and the increased participation of Africa play a prominent role. The collaboration between India and Japan, two declared candidates for permanent membership of a reformed UN Security Council, in the Indo-Pacific will have significant consequences both for their bilateral relationship as well as the wider region.*

## Background

During his address to the Parliament of India in August 2007 Japan’s Prime Minister Shinzo Abe spoke on the theme of “the confluence of the two seas”, injecting the strategic concept of today’s Indo-Pacific framework into the highest political level of India-Japan bilateral relations. Quoting from the writing of Dara Shikoh in 1655, Prime Minister Abe anchored the philosophy behind this strategic framework in the words of Swami Vivekananda, “the different streams, having their sources in different places, all mingle their water in the sea”.<sup>1</sup>

More than a decade after this speech, the bilateral momentum for implementing such a holistic strategic framework of the Indo-Pacific appears to be on an upswing. In 2007, Prime Minister Abe had emphasized the spirit of tolerance, rather than confrontation, for the emergence of a “broader Asia”. The objective of this “arc

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of freedom and prosperity” would be an “open and transparent network” which would “allow people, goods, capital, and knowledge, to flow freely” in the “outer rim of the Eurasian continent”.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Indo-Pacific policy framework**

India’s Indian Ocean strategy was articulated during Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s official visit to Mauritius in March 2015, when he spoke of “Security and Growth for All in the Region” or SAGAR. The five pillars of SAGAR are: (i) to safeguard India’s interests and position; India as a net security provider in the region; (ii) to enable India’s contribution to the enhanced maritime security capabilities of the region; (iii) to advance peace and security through collective action and cooperation in the maritime domain; (iv) to bring about integrated sustainable development of the region, including Blue or Ocean Economy; and (v) to ensure that the primary responsibility for peace, stability and prosperity of the region lies on the countries of the region. The policy welcomed cooperation with external partners in meeting these objectives.<sup>3</sup>

India’s Indo-Pacific policy was outlined by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in June 2018. Speaking at the Shangri La Dialogue in Singapore, he defined the Indo-Pacific region as stretching “from the shores of Africa to that of the Americas”. India supported the establishment of a free, open and “inclusive” region, emphasizing the “ASEAN centrality” of the Indo-Pacific. The success of this objective is dependent on equal access to common spaces in the region, upholding a “rules-based order” to create an open, balanced and stable trade environment. Highlighting the critical importance of connectivity in the Indo-Pacific, the Prime Minister reiterated India’s position that “contests must not turn into conflicts”.<sup>4</sup>

Japan’s “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy” announced in 2017 as a “new foreign policy strategy”, carries forward the initiative taken by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007, and takes a “panoramic perspective” of the world. It is based on “the principle of international cooperation”. It combines the two continents of Asia and Africa and the two oceans, viz. the Pacific and Indian oceans, “envisioning the above as an overarching, comprehensive concept”. The objective of the policy is to “improve ‘connectivity’ between Asia and Africa through free and open Indo-Pacific and promote stability and prosperity of the region as a whole”.<sup>5</sup>

India and Japan have identified five principles to implement their common approach to the Indo-Pacific region. These were contained in their joint statement “Toward a Free, Open and Prosperous Indo-Pacific” issued after the visit of Prime Minister Abe to India for the Annual Summit in September 2017. They include respect for sovereignty and international law; resolution of disputes through dialogue; freedom of navigation and overflight for all countries, large or small; sustainable development; and a free, fair and open trade and investment system.<sup>6</sup> The Vision Statement issued after the October 2018 Summit reiterates the “unwavering commitment” between India and Japan “to working together towards a free and open Indo-Pacific.”<sup>7</sup> The statement specifies that “this synergy is embodied in collaborative projects between India and Japan in the Indo-Pacific region, including in Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Bangladesh as well as in Africa”.<sup>8</sup>

### **Areas of Cooperation**

India-Japan cooperation in the Indo-Pacific is currently focused on six areas. These are upholding the rule of applicable international law, especially for the freedom of navigation along sea lanes of communication; enhancing maritime security; operationalizing defence technology collaboration; creating connectivity; countering the threat from non-state actors; and integrating the eastern coast of Africa into the Indo-Pacific.

#### **1. Upholding International Law**

India and Japan place a strong emphasis on the application of international law in the Indo-Pacific region, using both United Nations General Assembly treaties like the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea or UNCLOS, as well as UN Security Council resolutions on maritime security. Given their public aspirations to become permanent members of a reformed UN Security Council, this emphasis assumes significance at a time when international law is being challenged through unilateral policies and measures, including in the Indo-Pacific.

India and Japan are state parties to UNCLOS, having ratified it in 1995 and 1996 respectively. This legal framework provides predictability and stability for India-Japan collaboration in the Indo-Pacific. The India-Japan Vision Statement of October 2018 unequivocally confirms the commitment to seek a “peaceful resolution of disputes with full respect for legal and diplomatic

processes in accordance with the universally recognized principles of international law, including those reflected in the UNCLOS, without resorting to threat or use of force”.<sup>9</sup>

## **2. Securing the Maritime Domain**

The security of the maritime domain of the Indo-Pacific is the primary pre-requisite for the successful implementation of the India-Japan Indo-Pacific strategy. In September 2014, the two countries had decided to elevate their relationship to a “Special Strategic and Global Partnership” at their Summit in Tokyo during Prime Minister Modi’s “first destination for a bilateral visit outside India’s immediate neighbourhood”.<sup>10</sup> The meeting prioritised the regularisation of “bilateral maritime exercises as well as to Japan’s continued participation in India-US Malabar series of exercises”. A dialogue mechanism and joint exercises between Indian and Japanese Coast Guards was agreed to. In September 2017, this cooperation was extended to “strengthening and enhancing exchanges in expanding maritime domain awareness (MDA) in the Indo-Pacific region.”<sup>11</sup>

## **3. Defence Technology Cooperation**

Within the Indo-Pacific framework, India and Japan are exploring the “transfer and collaborative projects in defence equipment and technology between the two countries.”<sup>12</sup> Japan’s sustained support for India’s entry into international dual-technology use regimes<sup>13</sup> has played an important role in conceptualising such cooperation. In September 2017, the two sides listed “surveillance and unmanned system technologies, and defence industry cooperation” as the areas which would be focused on for this purpose. Increased cooperation between the Indian Navy and Japan’s Maritime Self-Defence Force in the anti-submarine sphere, as well as Japan’s offer to “provide its state-of-the-art U2 amphibian aircraft” were identified for priority cooperation.

## **4. Connectivity**

Connectivity and keeping the sea lanes of communication (SLOC) open are critical dimensions of India-Japan convergence in the Indo-Pacific. In his 2007 address to India’s Parliament, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe had highlighted that “as maritime states, both India and Japan have vital interests in the security of sea lanes”.<sup>14</sup> The initial focus on the Pacific Ocean (South China Sea)

SLOC has been expanded to encompass other SLOCs across the entire Indo-Pacific. In their joint statement after the 2016 Summit, the two Prime Ministers had stressed that “improving connectivity between Asia and Africa, through realizing a free and open Indo-Pacific region, is vital to achieving prosperity of the entire region.”<sup>15</sup>

In addition to the Straits of Malacca and the South China Sea, the relevant SLOCs for both India and Japan include the Bab al-Mandab strait in the Red Sea, which connects the maritime traffic from the Mediterranean Sea to the Gulf of Aden in the western Indo-Pacific, and the Straits of Hormuz connecting the Gulf to the western Indo-Pacific. This is due to the critical role played by these two SLOCs for international trade, including energy products, for both India and Japan.

The safety of merchant shipping through the Gulf of Aden is one of the urgent and critical issues for Japan.<sup>16</sup> In 2016, as much as 85 per cent of the 1.23 billion barrels of crude oil and 20 per cent of the 83 million tons of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) imported by Japan, were transported using the SLOC through the Straits of Hormuz from the Gulf.<sup>17</sup>

India relies on the SLOCs of the western Indo-Pacific for the transportation of her merchandise trade. The United Arab Emirates, located inside the Gulf and accessible mainly through the Straits of Hormuz, is India’s biggest trading partner in the region, with two-way trade totalling \$52 billion in 2016-17.<sup>18</sup> Most Indian ports for energy imports are located along India’s coast facing the western Indo-Pacific, with 53 per cent of India’s crude oil imports coming from the Gulf region alone in 2015. India is the 7<sup>th</sup> largest importer of LNG in the world. 62 per cent of India’s total imports of LNG were sourced from Qatar in the Gulf in 2015.<sup>19</sup> The major sea lanes of communication using the Bab al Mandab route in the western Indo-Pacific transport a significant volume of India’s foreign trade with the European Union, valued at over 85 billion Euros in 2017,<sup>20</sup> as well as with Russia and North America.

For both India and Japan, the security of the SLOCs in the western Indo-Pacific is dependent on the stability of this region. For India, an additional imperative is the presence of about eight million Indian nationals working as migrants in the Gulf, a number larger than most of the national populations of the Gulf region,<sup>21</sup> except Saudi Arabia, who remit almost \$45 billion annually into

India's household economy, and whose presence is vital to the stability and prosperity of the Gulf economies.

The inclusion of "infrastructure and connectivity for Chabahar", the Iranian port that would promote "peace and prosperity in South Asia and neighbouring region, such as Iran and Afghanistan, through both bilateral and trilateral cooperation". The 2016 India-Japan Summit joint statement<sup>22</sup> significantly broadens their Indo-Pacific cooperation to integrate the littoral hinterland of the north-western Indo-Pacific.

### **5. Countering threats from Non-state Actors**

Countering the threat to the Indo-Pacific from non-state actors such as terrorists and pirates makes India-Japan cooperation of great value bilaterally as well for the littoral states of the Indian Ocean Region. Terrorism launched from the western Indo-Pacific had targeted Mumbai in November 2008. In their Vision 2025 Statement on Special Strategic and Global Partnership, India and Japan "affirmed the importance of bringing the perpetrators of terrorist attacks including those of November 2008 terrorist attack in Mumbai to justice."<sup>23</sup>

The commitment of Japan to countering terrorism which has its links in the western Indo-Pacific hinterland had been highlighted earlier in Prime Minister Abe's statement on 1 February 2015 after the killing of Japanese hostages by terrorists in Syria. He said "I am infuriated by these inhumane and despicable acts of terrorism, and resolutely condemn these impermissible and outrageous acts. I will never forgive these terrorists. I will work with the international community to hold them responsible for their deplorable acts. Japan will never give in to terrorism."<sup>24</sup>

A second visible threat to the security of the western Indo-Pacific is from piracy, targeting the SLOC through the Gulf of Aden. India and Japan have participated actively in ensuring the effectiveness of the Contact Group on Piracy off the coast of Somalia (CGPS), established by the UN Security Council Resolution 1851 in December 2008.<sup>25</sup> Japan has deployed two ships and reconnaissance P-3C aircraft as part of its contribution to the CGPS. Since commencing duties in June 2009, "the aircraft have flown 1,951 missions as of 31 December 2017 and their flying hours total 14,910 hours. Approximately 162,000 ships have been identified and information has been provided to vessels



navigating the area and other countries engaging in counter-piracy operations on around 13,160 occasions.”<sup>26</sup>

India has similarly deployed its naval ships to secure the sea lane of communication through the Gulf of Aden. The Indian Navy began its patrols in the Gulf of Aden from 23 October 2008, escorting merchant ships across the 490 nautical mile long and 20 nautical mile wide corridor. As many as 25 Indian Navy ships had been deployed for this purpose till 2016.<sup>27</sup>

## **6. Cooperation in Africa**

The focus on Africa as an integral part of bilateral collaboration between India and Japan in the Indo-Pacific is of immense significance, as it seeks to create the infrastructure and capabilities on the western rim of the Indo-Pacific to sustain the vision of the two countries. The broad framework for collaboration with Africa is contained in the India-Africa Framework for Strategic Cooperation announced in October 2015<sup>28</sup>, and the Nairobi Declaration of Japan’s Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD VI) issued in August 2016.<sup>29</sup>

The India-Japan Summit in November 2016 synergized the objectives of both countries to connect Africa with Asia as an integral part of the Indo-Pacific framework. In the joint statement issued after the Summit, both sides “stressed that improving connectivity between Asia and Africa, through realising a free and open Indo-Pacific region, is vital to achieving prosperity of the entire region.” Specifically, the two Prime Ministers underlined “the potential that the collaboration of India and Japan in realizing prosperous Indo-Pacific region in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. They decided to draw on the strength of shared values, convergent interests and complementary skills and resources, to promote economic and social development, capacity building, connectivity and infrastructure in the region”, including through Japanese Official Development Assistance (ODA) projects.<sup>30</sup>

In this context, the “Platform for Japan-India Business Cooperation in the Asia-Africa Region”<sup>31</sup> and idea of an Asia-Africa Growth Corridor proposed in 2017<sup>32</sup> stand out.

Djibouti, located at the mouth of the SLOC connecting the Suez Canal to the Gulf of Aden, and home to military bases from the United States, France, Japan and China,<sup>33</sup> has emerged as a

major focal point for India-Japan collaboration in the western Indo-Pacific. The Indian Navy used Djibouti for operational tasking during anti-piracy operations under the CGPS. Djibouti was also the launch pad for India's "Operation Rahat", which involved the use of Indian warships and Air Force to assist in the evacuation of 4000 Indian nationals, as well as nationals of 35 different nationalities, stranded by the outbreak of civil war in Yemen in March 2015. This was highlighted during the historic first-ever visit of the President of India Shri Ram Nath Kovind to Djibouti in October 2017.<sup>34</sup> Japan's integration of Djibouti into its Indo-Pacific strategy was publicly stated during the visit of Japan's Foreign Minister Taro Kono to Djibouti in August 2018, when he conveyed that Djibouti was "an important partner for Japan to implement its Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy".<sup>35</sup>

### Conclusion

The visible contours of India-Japan collaboration in the Indo-Pacific have already demonstrated a positive impact, carrying into the region a strong advocacy for international cooperation for mutual benefit. Based on this reality, it is possible to envision the rapid expansion of this collaboration to transform the region, especially the western Indo-Pacific which revolves around the centrality of the Indian Ocean.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> "Confluence of the Two Seas", Speech by H.E. Mr Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan at the Parliament of the Republic of India, 22 August 2007. Available at <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmv0708/speech-2.html>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Text of the PM's Remarks on the Commissioning of the Coast Ship Barracuda, 12 March 2015. Available at <https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-the-pms-remarks-on-the-commissioning-of-coast-ship-barracuda-2954>

<sup>4</sup> Prime Minister's Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue, 1 June 2018. Available at <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/29943/Prime+Ministers+Keynote+Address+at+Shangri+La+Dialogue+June+01+2018>

<sup>5</sup> "Priority Policy for Development Cooperation FY2017", p. 9, International Cooperation Bureau, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. Available at <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000259285.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> India-Japan Joint Statement "Toward a Free, Open and Prosperous Indo-Pacific", 14 September 2017, Gandhinagar. Available at <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/28946/IndiaJapan>



<sup>7</sup> India-Japan Vision Statement, 29 October 2018. Available at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=184458>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Tokyo Declaration for India-Japan Special Strategic and Global Partnership, 1 September 2014. Available at <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/23965/Tokyo+Declaration+for+India++Japan+Special+Strategic+and+Global+Partnership>

<sup>11</sup> See note 6 above.

<sup>12</sup> See note 10 above.

<sup>13</sup> Japan is part of the four main international regimes that regulate trade and transfer of dual-use technology. Of these four, India has joined three during the past two years. India joined the Missile Control Technology Regime or MTCR on 27 June 2016, facilitating access to technologies for her ambitious space launch programme. On 8 December 2017, India joined the Wassenaar Arrangement, which harmonizes export controls on dual-use technologies and munitions. India announced on 19 January 2018 that she had joined the Australia Group, in order to contribute to international security and non-proliferation objectives. Japan is a strong supporter of India's application to join the Nuclear Suppliers Group, the only one of the four regimes of which China is a member, and where China has held up India's application so far.

<sup>15</sup> India-Japan Joint Statement during the visit of Prime Minister to Japan, 11 November 2016, Tokyo. Available at [https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/27599/IndiaJapan\\_Joint\\_Statement\\_during\\_the\\_visit\\_of\\_Prime\\_Minister\\_to\\_Japan](https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/27599/IndiaJapan_Joint_Statement_during_the_visit_of_Prime_Minister_to_Japan)

<sup>16</sup> Annual Report 2017, Japan's actions against Piracy off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden", p.2, The Cabinet Secretariat, Government of Japan, March 2018. Available at <https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/gaiyou/jimu/pdf/siryou2/counter-piracy2017.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Japan's Energy 2017, p.3, Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry of Japan. Available at [http://www.enecho.meti.go.jp/en/category/brochures/pdf/japan\\_energy\\_2017.pdf](http://www.enecho.meti.go.jp/en/category/brochures/pdf/japan_energy_2017.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> India-UAE relations, Ministry of External Affairs, India. November 2017. Available at [https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/12\\_UAE\\_Nov\\_2017.pdf](https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/12_UAE_Nov_2017.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Country Analysis Brief: India, U.S. Energy Information Administration, 14 June 2016. Available at [http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Internacional/2016/EIA\\_Country\\_Analysis\\_Brief\\_India\\_14jun2016.pdf](http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Internacional/2016/EIA_Country_Analysis_Brief_India_14jun2016.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> India Fact Sheet, Directorate-General for Trade, European Commission, 17 April 2018. Available at [http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/september/tradoc\\_111515.pdf](http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/september/tradoc_111515.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> Gulf Labour Markets and Migration, Migration Policy Centre, 20 April 2016. Available at <http://gulfmigration.org/gcc-total-population-percentage-nationals-foreign-nationals-gcc-countries-national-statistics-2010-2016-numbers/>

<sup>22</sup> See note 15 above.

<sup>23</sup> Japan and India Vision 2025 Special Strategic and Global Partnership, 12 December 2015, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. Available at [https://www.mofa.go.jp/s\\_sa/sw/in/page3e\\_000432.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/s_sa/sw/in/page3e_000432.html)

<sup>25</sup> UN Press Release No. SC/9541, 16 December 2008. Available at <https://www.un.org/press/en/2008/sc9541.doc.htm>

<sup>26</sup> Annual Report 2017 “Japan’s Actions against Piracy off the Coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden”, March 2018, The Cabinet Secretariat, Government of Japan. Available at <https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/gaiyou/jimu/pdf/siryou2/counter-piracy2017.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> “India becomes co-chair of Working Group on Maritime Situational Awareness under Contact Group on Piracy off the coast of Somalia”, Press Information Bureau, 4 June 2016. Available at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=145976>

<sup>28</sup> India-Africa Framework for Strategic Cooperation, 29 October 2015, New Delhi, para. 48. Available at [http://www.mea.gov.in/Uploads/PublicationDocs/25981\\_framework.pdf](http://www.mea.gov.in/Uploads/PublicationDocs/25981_framework.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> TICAD VI Nairobi Declaration, 28 August 2016, para. 3.3.4. Available at [https://www.mofa.go.jp/af/af1/page3e\\_000543.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/af/af1/page3e_000543.html)

<sup>30</sup> See note 15.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Asia-Africa Growth Corridor, African Development Bank Meeting, Ahmedabad, India, 22-26 May 2017. Available at <http://www.eria.org/Asia-Africa-Growth-Corridor-Documents.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> Djibouti Country Profile, BBC, 8 May 2018. Available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13231761>

<sup>34</sup> President of India accorded ceremonial welcome, holds talks with President of Djibouti, Press Information Bureau, 4 October 2017. Available at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=171389>

<sup>35</sup> Japan-Djibouti Foreign Ministers’ Meeting and Working Lunch, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 30 August 2018. Available at [https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press1e\\_000082.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press1e_000082.html)