

Why Japan Needs India as a Security Provider? The View from the Current Asian Scenario*

Dr Satoru Nagao**

Introduction

When we think about Japan-India military relations as they stand today, we cannot forget one fact that Japan is located far away from India. For example, from Tokyo, Japanese must spend ten hours to visit New Delhi by air. However, if we want to visit Los Angeles in the USA, we spend same ten hours by air. The database of Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Japan points out that about 5,500 Japanese lived in India in 2011 but about 400,000 Japanese lived in USA, about 140,000 Japanese lived in China and about 12,000 Japanese lived in Indonesia. Compared with these numbers, there are relatively fewer Japanese in India¹. Geographical distance between Japan and India has been the primary reason for fewer military relations between the two countries historically.

However, further cooperation in military relations between Japan and India is more plausible now. Japan and India have already started a 2 + 2 dialogue (vice ministerial level) and an annual exercise called Japan-India Maritime Exercise (JIMEX). It was the first time in 2012 that Japan participated in the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS). It is important to bear in mind that Japan has not entered into any such deep security relationship with other countries except the US and Australia. Thus, military ties between Japan and India should be treated as very important and exceptional.

This paper attempts to analyse the context in which Japan-India military relations are gaining importance in Asia. From the viewpoint of the current power game in Asia. There are three important actors, i.e. the USA, ASEAN, and Japan.

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** Dr Satoru Nagao is a Research Fellow at Ocean Policy Research Foundation, Tokyo, Japan.

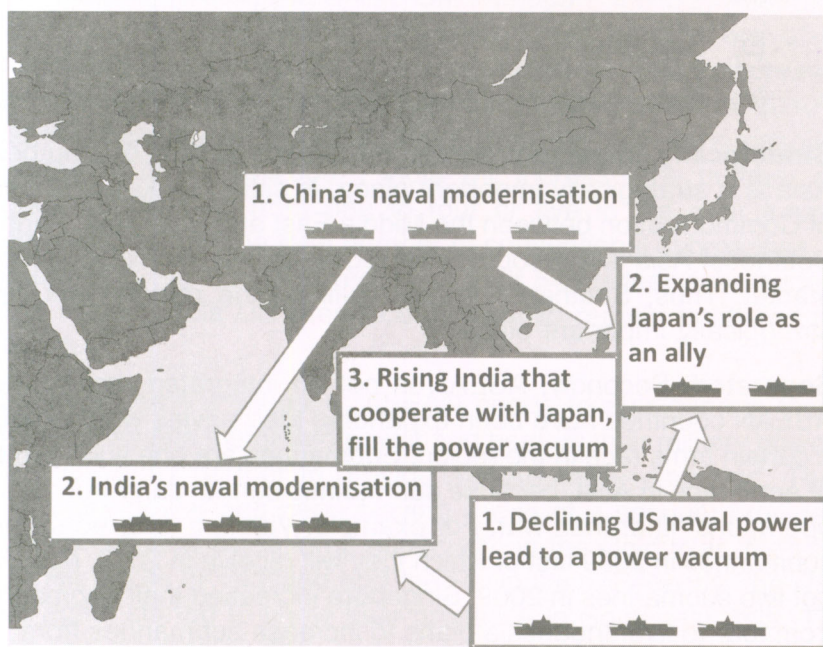
The US needs Japan - India Cooperation

Firstly, the US needs an "ally" to maintain military balance in Asia because their naval power is declining and China's naval power is rising. After the Cold War, US lost the reason to maintain large number of warships in their navy. In 1990, US Navy possessed 15 aircraft carriers, 230 "big surface combatants" which are more than 3000 tons of full load displacement and 127 submarines which included 126 nuclear submarines. However by 2012, the US Navy consisted only of 11 aircraft carriers, 110 "big surface combatants" and 72 nuclear submarines. And by 2013, US will decrease one aircraft carrier and nine "big surface combatants" with just an addition of one nuclear submarine. Despite what the US Secretary of Defence, Leon Panetta said at the annual Shangri-La Dialogue, "By 2020, the navy will reposture its forces from today's roughly 50-50 per cent split between the Pacific and the Atlantic to about a 60-40 split between those oceans²", the number of deployed warships in the Pacific will be nearly the same in 2020 because total number of warships are declining. This information means that US power has been declining for the last 23 years and in theory, declining power leads to a power vacuum.

China has been modernising its navy for the last 23 years. The white paper of the Defense of Japan points out that the nominal size of China's announced national defense budget has more than doubled in size over the past five years, and has grown approximately 30-fold over the past 24 years.³ Further, the focus of China's military modernisation is Navy and Air Force. As a result, Chinese navy have been increasing their capability to a "blue water navy". In 1990, China possessed 55 surface combatants. 16 of those 55 are "big surface combatants". By 2012, the total number of surface combatants has grown from 55 to 78 and 37 of those 78 are "big surface combatants". Generally, a big ship can operate in a wider area than a small ship. As a "Blue Water Navy", the capability of Chinese navy has been improving considerably. Their submarine forces have modernised with the number of nuclear submarines going up from 5 to 10. It is of significance that China's first aircraft carrier 'Liaoning' was formally handed over to the PLA Navy and entered into service on 25 Sep 2012.

As a result, theoretically it can be inferred that China's

assertiveness in West Pacific and the Indian Ocean reflects this power shift in Asia. The US needs an ally or a friendly country to fill the power vacuum as against China. For example, Mr Richard L Armitage, former US Deputy Secretary of State pointed out that the US needs a 'strong Japan' when he published the report "US-Japan Alliance" written by him and Professor Joseph S Nye of the Harvard University.⁴ As a "Natural Ally"⁵ or a "Linchpin"⁶, the US needs a strong India too. Japan and India are candidates to fill the power vacuum in Asia. Hence, US wants to support the coalition of Japan and India. The above power equation is illustrated in **Map 1** below : –



Map 1 : US Needs Japan and India

ASEAN Needs Japan - India Cooperation

One of most important questions regarding the US - China Power Game is, to locate where exactly will "the theatre of the power game" be, in the worst case scenario. To understand this question, we need to know what takes for qualifying as a theatre of a power game. If Central Europe including Germany, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria and Hungary etc was the theatre of the power game in the Cold War, we can image three basic features as pertaining to this concept. Firstly, Central Europe is has been

the centre of world politics. Secondly, Central Europe stood separated as a major military power arena. Thirdly, Central Europe was surrounded by great powers like USSR, France, Britain and United States of America. Thus, it can be concluded that one of the most prominent features required for an area to become a theatre of the power game is that a lot of different groups in strategically important places are surrounded by great powers. In the case of Southeast Asia as well, three similarities with the Central Europe can be drawn. The essentials of this power game as under are examined in succeeding paragraphs.

- (a) Strategically Important Place
- (b) Separated
- (c) Surrounded by Great Powers

Strategically Important Place. Firstly, the region of Southeast Asia is a strategically important place, is sitting on key Sea Lines of Communication between the Middle East and East Asia. Further, Southeast Asia is a resource rich region and economically a good market. Thus, Southeast Asia is fulfilling the requirement as a strategically important place.

Separated. Secondly, ASEAN is not an integrated region. Most ASEAN countries have been expanding their navies which implies a certain arms race in the region. Submarines are one such symbol of arms race in Asia, because submarines cannot carry out military operations other than war. For example, Vietnam ordered six new submarines in 2009 first of which they will receive in 2013. Malaysia got two submarines in 2009. Singapore increased their submarines from four to five. Indonesia plans to increase submarines from two to twelve. The acquisition of submarines by the Philippines and Thailand is under consideration⁷.

The most important and obvious question that emerges from the above description is why these countries have started modernising their navies. According to an analysis done in a Jane's Defence Weekly article, these countries want to achieve sea denial capability to tackle China's naval modernisation. Because "sea denial only requires the perception of threat to cause unease in an opponent" and "small numbers of submarines have the potential to deny large areas of sea to an opponent"⁸, submarine is the most effective weapon to build sea denial capabilities. If the rationale of

this submarine modernisation is to tackle Chinese naval modernisation, it is not a problem because this modernisation will symbolise an integrated ASEAN.

However, in 2012, ASEAN could not conclude a Joint Communiqué at the 45th ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting because only Hanoi and Manila has proclaimed a strong stance against China's assertiveness. ASEAN is still not an integrated region.

Surrounded by Great Powers. Thirdly, Southeast Asia is surrounded by great powers like China, Japan, the US, Australia and India. Not only China, but other great powers are also modernising their navies. For example, Japan decided to increase their submarines from 18 to 24 (including 2 for training) in 2010⁹. Australia decided to increase theirs from six to twelve despite shortage of crews in 2009¹⁰. India will increase the number of nuclear submarines from one to four or five in the near future despite decreasing the total number of conventional submarines¹¹. And in 2011, the US deployed 31 of their 54 nuclear submarines in the Pacific. This US presence is likely to remain unaltered in near future¹².

Under such a situation, ASEAN needs to amalgamate their leadership as one integrated power and beef up their military power with trustworthy partner to provide ASEAN military support. The US military power has been playing a role of a security provider in Southeast Asia since long; especially, in the Cold War, the US had their bases in Thailand and the Philippines. Recently, the US have again started to show their presence in Southeast Asia. To cite a few examples : they have concentrated their naval and air power in Guam under Air-Sea battle concept, increased naval exercises, restarted naval assistance to the Philippines, enhanced defense relationship with Vietnam, set-up new base in Darwin in Australia and will deploy Littoral Combat Ships to Singapore. However, when compared with bases like Subic Bay in Philippines, which was set up by the US in the Cold War, new bases located in Darwin and Guam are farther away from China. It appears that China's military modernisation has somewhat pushed the US military bases further east.

Therefore, to correct military balance and ensure stability in Southeast Asia, not only the US and ASEAN countries, but also

allies of the US and other friendly countries including Japan, Australia and India should come together and negotiate with China. Since, both Japan and India face border issues with China; Japan - India relations are gaining significance in this region now.

Japan Needs 'Japan – India' Cooperation

Going by Japan's threat perception, China poses serious security concerns currently. Ministry of Defence in Japan has specially been concerned about China's military modernisation. As per the White Paper Defense of Japan "China's response has been criticised as assertive in regard to the issues on conflicting interests with its surrounding countries, including Japan. Thus, there is a concern over its future direction." "Furthermore, China has been expanding and intensifying its activities in its surrounding waters. These moves, together with the lack of transparency in its military affairs and security issues, are a matter of concern for the region and the international community, including Japan, which should require prudent analysis."¹³ These strong words in official documents indicate an increasing concern in Japan with respect to China's rising power.

Not only the ministry of defence, but most Japanese people too think of China as unfavourable. The Japan-China joint annual survey implemented by the Genron NPO and the China Daily in 2012, shows that, "the ratio of Japanese who had an unfavourable view of China climbed to its highest-ever level of 84.3 per cent". "The ratio of Chinese who had an unfavourable opinion of Japan slightly improved to 64.5 per cent from 65.9 per cent last year, but it remained above 60 per cent". "When asked about the possibility of a military dispute occurring mainly between Japan and China in the waters of the East China Sea, 50.2 per cent of the Chinese polled said, they foresee such an incident in the near future or in several years. This far surpassed a comparable percentage of 27.2 per cent for the Japanese pollees."¹⁴

Therefore, the argument and the need of the hour is 'to check the military balance in East Asia and the need to ponder over its feasibility'. In the words of James R Homes, Associate Professor at the Naval War College, "Despite Japan's latter-day image as a military pushover, a naval war would not be a rout for China. While the Japanese post war "peace" constitution "forever renounces war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of

force as means of settling international disputes.” The Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) has accumulated several pockets of material excellence, such as undersea warfare, since World War II.” ¹⁵(Refer **Table 1**)

Table 1 : Naval Balance of Four Countries

	Japan	India	China	USA
Aircraft Carrier	0	1(+2)	0(+2)	11
(Anti-submarine)Helicopter Carrier	<u>2(+2)</u>	0	0	0
Destroyer, Frigate, Corvette	46(-2)	46	<u>78</u>	110
Submarine	16(+6)	15	<u>71</u>	72
Anti-submarinePatrol Aircraft	<u>80</u>	9	4	147
Anti-submarine Helicopters	<u>88</u>	54	28	255

***Source:** International Institute for Strategic Studies Military Balance 2012

To further elaborate on this point, let me substantiate with some examples. Japan possesses two anti-submarine helicopter carriers, 46 anti-submarine destroyers and frigates, 80 P-3C anti-submarine aircrafts and 88 anti-submarine helicopters. Compared to India and China, the number of these anti-submarine forces is large. Compared with US Navy, Japan’s anti-submarine forces are relatively big despite Japan being significantly smaller than the US. The bottom-line of this elaboration was to point out that Japan has world class anti-submarine capabilities.

However, there is another issue involved. To operate these anti-submarine forces except submarines, Japan needs air supremacy too. Japan’s 278 fourth generation fighter aircraft will not be enough to tackle China’s 522 fourth generation fighters in the near future¹⁶. Compared to Japan, China’s defence budget has been increasing considerably.

In addition, the problematic point is that the US military budget itself has been declining – despite the Japanese needs for additional airpower from the US. Thus, in *The National Military Strategy of United States of America 2011: Redifining America’s Military Leadership*, the US abandoned its “Two major Regional Conflict Strategy” which implied US keep the capabilities to defeat enemy when the US faces two major regional conflicts occurring nearly

simultaneously¹⁷. Japan is apprehensive of a situation wherein the US may not provide Japan enough military support, if the US is faced with other conflicts in places like Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean, Middle East, Africa etc.. To tackle such a contingency, if friendly countries fill the power vacuum as a security provider in Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean, Japan can get full support from the US to maintain the military balance.

Therefore, *National Defense Guideline Program* which decides the direction of Japan's defence policy made in 2010 points out that "Japan will enhance cooperation with India"¹⁸.

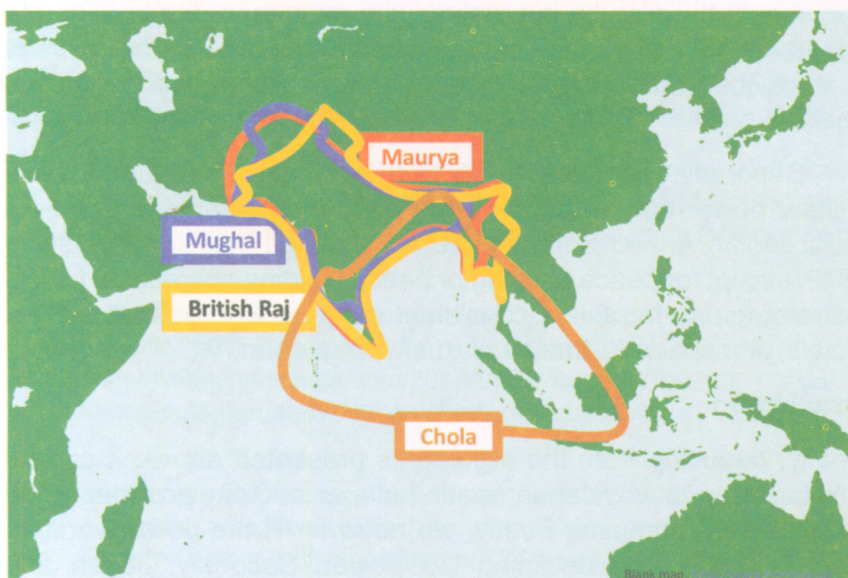
India's Importance as a Security Provider

Above all, the US, ASEAN and Japan need India as a stabilising force. There are three factors in favour of India to prove their claim of becoming a trustworthy security provider in Asia.

Geographical Potential as a Security Provider. Phase refer to **Map 2**. First factor is the geographical location. Historically, three centres of power have dominated the sub-continent, the Mauryan Empire, the Mughal Empire and the British Raj. These three Empires could not project their land power far beyond South Asia because India is surrounded by high mountains. However, as a naval power, the influential area of the Chola Empire could extend to Southeast Asia. The history of Chola Empire has indicated that strategic connection between India and Southeast Asia existed since ancient times. This means that India has the potential as a security provider in Southeast Asia for geo-strategic reasons.

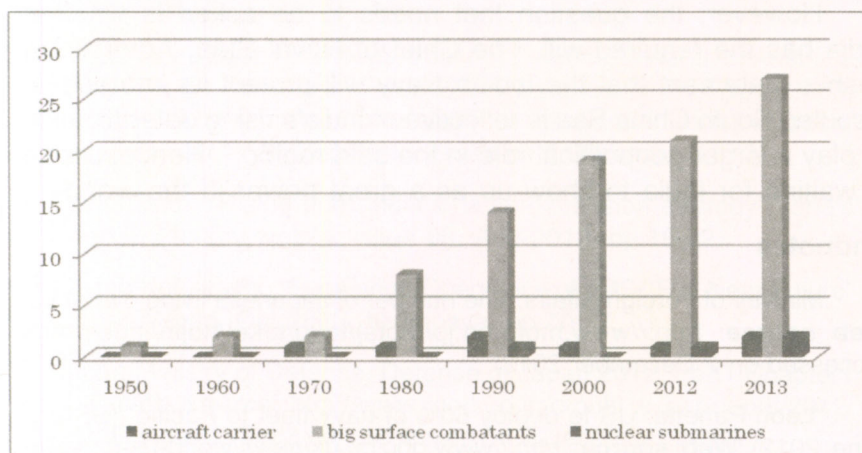
Possessing Enough Naval Power as a Security Provider. Secondly, India will possess enough naval capability to be projected as a strong naval power in the future. For example, the number of "big surface combatants" whose full load displacement is more than 3000 tons had been increasing rapidly in the Indian Navy. In 2012, the Indian Navy has a total of 21 "big surface combatants", up from 14 in 1990. And in 2013, the number will increase to 26. Generally, big ships can operate in a wider area than smaller ones. As a "Blue Water Navy", the capability of Indian Navy is improving rapidly. The above concept is illustrated in **Table 2**.

Trustworthy Partners. There are two reasons, as to why India is perceived as a trustworthy partner by most countries, except China



Map 2 : Geographical Potential of India

Table 2 : The number of warships in the Indian Navy



*The load displacement is more than 3000 tons in the Indian Navy

and Pakistan. When we try to understand military strategy of other countries, we collect information by not only reading official documents but also by interacting with experts in and outside the governments. Freedom of expression in India enables the experts to voice their opinions about government policies and institutions freely.

Secondly, because India has exercised restraint to use military power as a strategy in the past, most countries can trust India. Indian Armed Forces have not crossed their borders since 1972, except for peace keeping or peace building operations. India's restraint to use force is a consistent strategy. For most countries, India's perception is that of a trustworthy country.

Conclusion

Finally, deducing from the arguments presented above, it can be concluded as to why Japan needs India as security provider in the current Asian scenario. Firstly, we need to fill the power vacuum created due to the declining US power. Secondly, Japan and ASEAN alone do not have enough power to fill the power vacuum. Thirdly, India has the potential to become a trustworthy security provider. Thus, to maintain the military balance in Asia, India's implementation of a rapid military modernisation is important for Japan. Hence, Japan and India need to cooperate with the US, Australia and ASEAN to come together to stabilise Asia.

However, the question that needs to be asked is whether India has the required will. The Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral DK Joshi's statement that the Indian Navy will protect its interests in disputed South China Sea is reflective of India's rising determination to play a larger geopolitical role in the said region¹⁹. Hence, Japan is waiting for India to show up as a great power in the world.

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