



日本

# Implementing the Indo-Pacific: Japan's region building initiatives

August 2019

**Editor:** Kyle Springer  
**Authors:** Tomoo Kikuchi,  
Kei Koga, Trissia Wijaya,  
Priya Chacko, Jagannath Panda,  
Tomohiko Satake, Sheila A. Smith



Perth USAsia Centre



The page features several decorative elements: a red line starting from the top left and zig-zagging down; a grey line starting from the top center and zig-zagging down; a teal line starting from the top center and zig-zagging down; and a teal line starting from the top center and running vertically down. At the bottom, there is a green line-art illustration of a city skyline with various buildings, a pagoda, a Ferris wheel, and a hot air balloon.

# Regionalising India-Japan Relations in the Indo-Pacific

## CHAPTER 4.

Dr Priya Chacko, Adelaide University

Dr Jagannath P. Panda, Institute for Defence  
Studies and Analyses

No two countries have been as ambitious as India and Japan in their efforts to transform their bilateral partnership into a regional partnership in the Indo-Pacific. In 2018, the Prime Ministers of Japan and India, Abe Shinzo and Narendra Modi, outlined a shared vision for “peace, stability and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific”<sup>122</sup>.

This shared vision encompassed a commitment to an Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)-centred regional architecture and a rules-based order that protects sovereignty and territorial integrity, upholds international law and prioritises peaceful conflict resolution and collaboration on connectivity and development initiatives in India, South Asia, Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean and Africa.

This chapter evaluates the undercurrents of India-Japan relations to evaluate how and why the two countries are seeking to shape regional order through this ambitious blueprint. It is argued that their shared vision aims to move the relationship beyond bilateralism to a regional framework of socio-economic and political integration that will serve the Indian and Japanese interests in the face of the expanding, and potentially dominating, influence of China in the region. The chapter traces the development of this vision and blueprint and identifies the major challenges it must overcome.

## Tracking the Partnership

The Indo-Pacific, as a geostrategic frame for the India-Japan relationship, has its roots in Mori Yoshiro’s visit to India in August 2000, which resulted in a pledge to build a “Global Partnership between Japan and India in the 21st Century”<sup>123</sup>. The partnership evolved to imbibe a global security character in 2004, when Japan and India undertook naval coordination with other countries in humanitarian relief operations following the Indian Ocean tsunami. The government of Abe Shinzo in 2006-07, and from 2012 onwards, in particular, advanced India-Japan relations further with an emphasis on building a more active security understanding for Japan.



India-Japan relations acquired a security dimension in late 2008 with the release of “Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation”. This institutionalised a closer defence and security relationship which would later be formalised in the ‘Strategic and Global Partnership’<sup>124</sup>. Prior to this, Abe’s historic speech in the Indian Parliament titled ‘Confluence of the Two Seas’ on August 22, 2007, had provided a new fillip to the evolving regional context to their strategic partnership with a focus on the region as “the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity”, essentially contextualising a new beginning to the narrative of Indo-Pacific. In this speech Abe declared that:

**Japanese diplomacy is now promoting various concepts in a host of different areas so that a region called “the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity” will be formed along the outer rim of the Eurasian continent.... By Japan and India coming together in this way, this “broader Asia” will evolve into an immense network spanning the entirety of the Pacific Ocean, incorporating the United States of America and Australia**<sup>125</sup>.

The Defence Cooperation Agreement was a significant development in Japan’s evolving security spectrum, especially outside the purview of its closer security pact with the United States and Australia. An adjustment in Japanese policy, positioning towards India, gathered momentum with the 2016 civil nuclear deal between the two sides, signalling the new wave of thinking in Japan about India as a global partner, despite India not being party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Various defence dialogues, a Coast Guard level dialogue and exercises between the three Services and Coast Guard units between India and Japan have since generated a new level of engagement. Japan’s involvement in the Malabar naval exercise with the United States and India, the Passage Exercises, counter-terrorism drills and the negotiation for the Acquisition, Cross-Servicing Agreement have all served to strengthen their security cooperation. Maritime domain awareness and mutual logistical support brings greater security assurance at present to their evolving Indo-Pacific partnership.

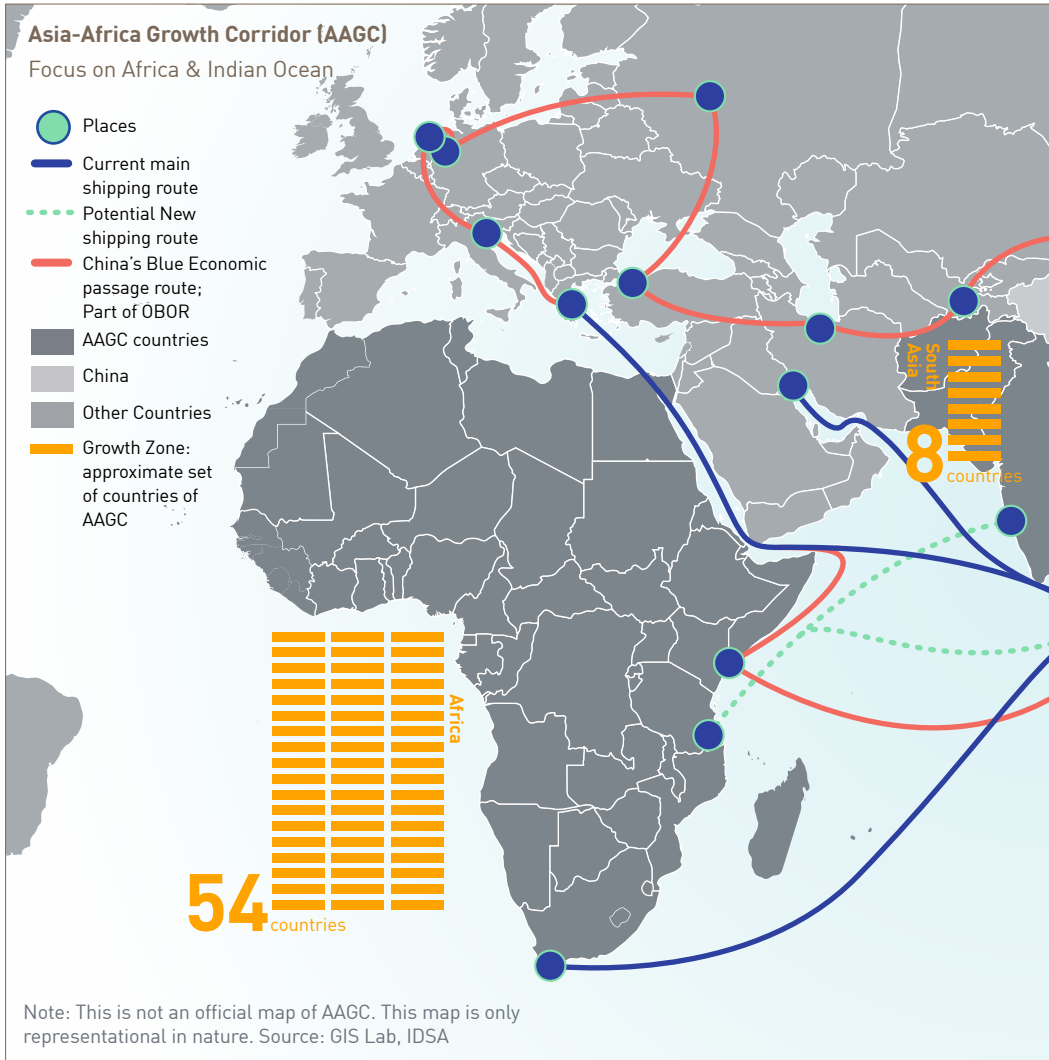


Their growing strategic depth in defence cooperation is strongly backed by an enabling framework to nurture a stronger defence equipment and technology cooperation<sup>126</sup>. India and Japan also have a stated intention to cooperate in areas such as robotics and artificial intelligence, including through collaboration with the Indian and Japanese private sectors<sup>127</sup>. Under Abe, Japan has shed its reluctance to export arms internationally, thereby opening a “new chapter” of India-Japan defence cooperation. For instance, Japan’s ShinMaya and India’s Mahindra Group recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the maintenance, repair and servicing of US-2 aircraft. This indicates a new phase in India-Japan cooperation, marking a departure from “low-key engagement” to a stronger and more substantial defence partnership in the Indo-Pacific<sup>128</sup>.

In the economic realm, although trade and investment ties between India and Japan have been historically weak, in recent years the pace of investment has increased and diversified. Investment in 2016-2017 for instance, rose to US\$4.7 billion from US\$2.6 billion in the previous year of 2015-2016<sup>129</sup>. Japanese investment has been particularly evident in the construction of industrial corridors and clusters, Japanese Yen loans have supported the building of subway systems in major Indian cities and a Japanese low interest loan financed India’s first bullet train<sup>130</sup>. In 2017, moreover, Japanese investment in Indian start-ups surpassed Chinese and American investment<sup>131</sup>.

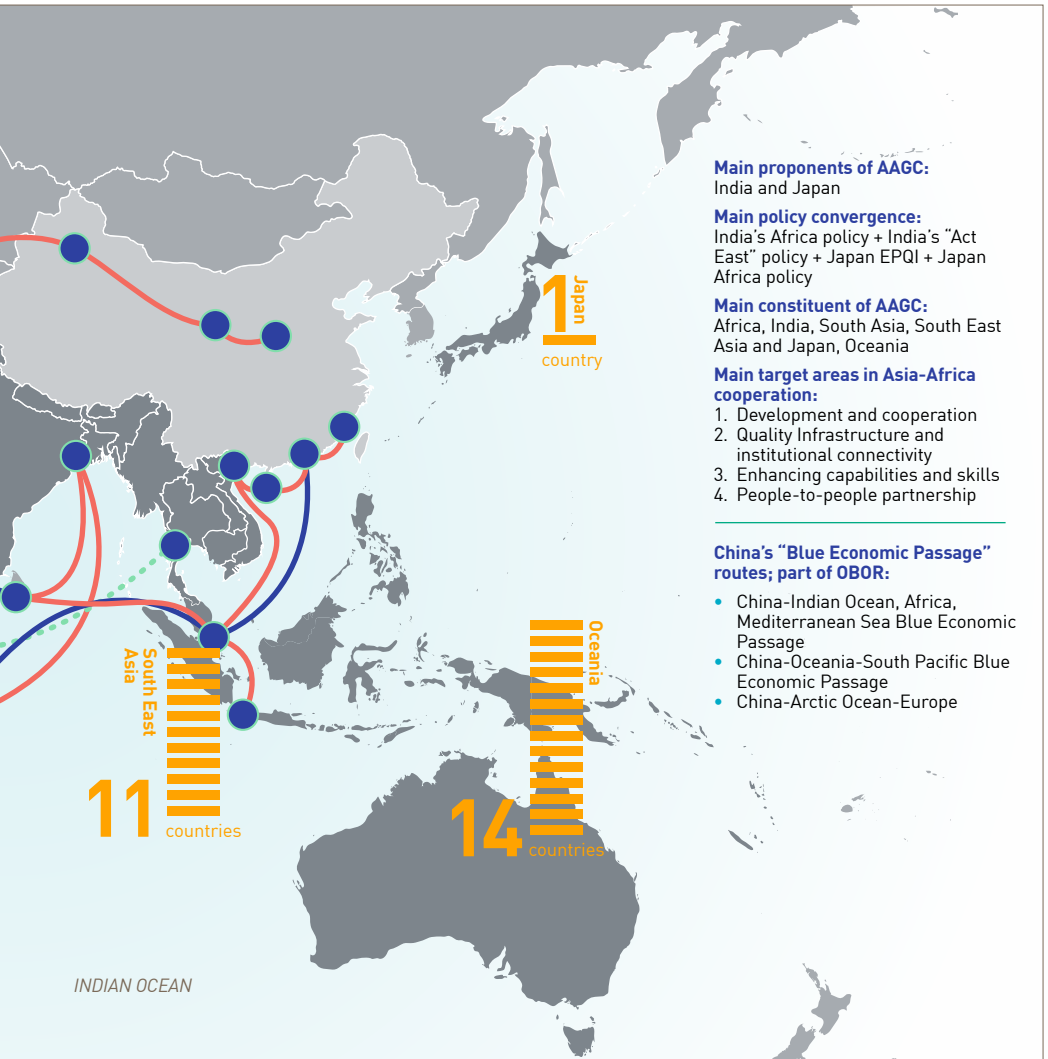
This economic cooperation took on a regionalised dimension since 2016, when Abe and Modi announced a desire to improve connectivity between Asia and Africa, building on Japan’s Expanded Partnership for Quality Infrastructure (EPQI) and India’s Act East Policy (AEP). This idea was later developed into a proposal for an Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) in an officially sanctioned vision document produced by Indian, Japanese and ASEAN think tanks. The AAGC involves development and cooperation projects, infrastructure and institutional connectivity, building capacities and skills and enhancing people-to-people contacts.





Further, in 2017, India and Japan established the Act East Forum which sought to synergise Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy, and India's Act East Policy to enhance connectivity and infrastructure development, forming industrial links and promoting people-to-people contacts between India's North-East region and neighbouring countries in Southeast Asia. This cooperation was also aimed at





stimulating the development of long moribund subregional initiatives, like the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), which involves India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Myanmar, and the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Forum for Regional Cooperation (BCIM).



## Changing Foreign Policy Aspirations of Japan and India

The significant advances in the India-Japan relationship from 2006 are often attributed to Abe's emphasis on building a more active security policy for Japan, and his 'neo-conservative' values which sought to promote democracy, a market economy and the rule of law in diplomacy with like-minded partners<sup>132</sup>. Among his reforms in the ensuing years were the establishment of a National Security Council, a National Security Strategy and the reinterpretation of Japan's Article 9 'peace clause' in its pacifist constitution to enhance the ability of its Self-Defense Forces (SDF) to participate in collective self-defence<sup>133</sup>.

This pro-active foreign relations strategy positioned India as a prospective partner in an evolving regional order. Abe's positioning of India's and Japan's growing interests in a framework of "broader Asia" was primarily based on four reasons. First, to enhance Japan's positioning in the maritime domain in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR); second, to enhance a leadership vision for Japan along with India in a regional and global framework, partnering with the USA and Australia; and third, to enhance Japan's bilateral security understanding with a host of countries outside its powerful alliance partner, the United States; and fourth, to search for new avenues of business and commerce, aiming to expand Japan's business interests in India.

Abe's pro-active foreign relations strategy gradually found strategic consonance with India and its diversifying foreign policy paradigm outside the framework of its alliance partners, such as the United States and Australia. Prior to Abe, Japan's search for alternative security and economic partners equally had encouraged New Delhi to visualise and strengthen the relationship with Japan. For instance, Manmohan Singh, India's previous Prime Minister from 2004-2014, promoted a values-driven developmental foreign policy in India that emphasised pluralism, secularism and liberal democracy, complementing Japan's changing foreign policy narratives. While this did not entail a neo-conservative agenda of promoting these values internationally, India was to lead by example, an endeavour that would be helped through cooperative relationships with other states<sup>134</sup>, including Japan. By prioritising foreign economic relations, and seeking great power status, the Manmohan Singh government sought to transform the international environment in ways that supported its developmental goals for India<sup>135</sup>. Japan's willingness to contribute to India's developmental goals, and to assist in creating an international environment conducive to these goals, made it an ideal partner.

The momentum in this relationship has been maintained by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government which was elected in 2014, and re-elected in 2019. The Modi government advanced the relationship with Japan to a 'Special Strategic and Global Partnership' in 2014 while asserting a






desire for India to be a leading power that shoulders greater global responsibilities<sup>136</sup>. Modi's nationalist and aspirational politics resonates with the ideology of the current Japanese government. The Japanese government's nationalist tendencies are reflected in their naming of Japan's new imperial era, the *Reiwa*, following the ascension of a new Japanese Emperor to the Chrysanthemum Throne. As a name derived from classical Japanese poetry, *Reiwa* breaks with the tradition of deriving the era name from classical Chinese literature, thus reflecting the Abe government's concern for national harmony, pride in tradition and "hopes for tomorrow"<sup>137</sup>.

## China's 'Going Global' 2.0 vis-à-vis India-Japan Ties

While Japan and India's changing foreign policy aspirations underpin their growing cooperation, the nature of the collaboration suggests that a key motivation for both countries is shared concerns about China's growing regional influence. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) launched by the Chinese President Xi Jinping, aims to link China's various regions to Africa, Southeast Asia, the Middle East and Central Asia and the Mediterranean. The scheme will further increase China's already sizable economic and strategic footprint in Asia and Africa, and will deepen its maritime presence in the Indian Ocean Region.

For Japan, the rapid rise of China has always been a strategic concern on two fronts. First, China's growing commercial footprint across the world has posed competition to Japan's commercial interests. In a departure from the ideological and self-reliant economic governance model that China pursued under Mao Zedong, its 'Going Global' strategy encouraged Chinese business firms to take advantage of the global trading opportunities<sup>138</sup>. In fact, one of the hallmarks of China's rise was its 'Going Global' strategy (now known as 'Going Global 1.0'), which had its inception in 1999-2000, and started posing a challenge to Japanese business enterprises globally. For instance, China has overtaken Japan as an influential economic actor and investor in Africa and Central Asia, particularly over the last two decades. Japan's constructive engagement with Africa dates back to 1993, with the launch of the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD). The growth of Japanese business interests has since lagged behind China. Likewise, China has taken over the 'Silk Road Diplomacy' in Central Asia that was once envisioned by the former Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto's in the 1990s. Second, due to its assertive stance over the East China Sea, China poses a maritime territorial and commercial threat in this contested zone. As a result, Japan have introduced new projects and policies to strengthen its maritime commercial outreach in Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). In addition to this, the U.S. President Donald Trump's capricious approach to regional security and its non-committal attitude to Japan's long-term security has compelled the Japanese government to search for new security partners. India have figured prominently as a partner of choice.





India and Japan do not have identical perspectives on China. Yet their growing security concerns over China's maritime and military activism in the Pacific and Indian Oceans has undoubtedly fortified the desire for joint efforts toward "shared security" as outlined in their 2018 Joint Statement. Japan's indirect, yet explicit, support to India on the India-China Doklam border stand-off was one outcome of this commitment. Kenji Hiramatsu, the Japanese Ambassador to India, who also holds the Ambassadorship to Bhutan concurrently, stated that it is important for the "parties involved in the Doklam border tension to not resort to unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force". Offering India explicit support, he acknowledged India's stance by stating that "India is involved in this incident based on its bilateral agreement with Bhutan"<sup>139</sup>. Japan's stance on the Doklam stand-off mirrored its position on the attempt by Chinese maritime law enforcement agencies to change the 'status-quo' with respect to the Senkaku islands in the East China Sea and the South China Sea.

China's diplomacy witnessed a revision in 2004, with Hu Jintao strengthening the country's economic outreach through the 'Bring In' and 'Go Out' strategies, with a special focus on developing countries in Africa and Latin America<sup>140</sup>. This was the beginning of 'Going Global 1.0' where the focus was on the maritime zone, especially the Indian Ocean Region and Africa. Through two prominent initiatives – the BRI and capacity building development cooperation – China's 'Going Global 1.0' has turned into 'Going Global 2.0' with an ambition of becoming a 'free trading economy' globally, with an intent to turn China into an innovation-driven economy<sup>141</sup>.

The inclusion of the BRI into the Communist Party of China's (CPC) constitution in the 19th National Congress of the CPC was a major development guiding China's 'Going Global 2.0' strategy. With a proposed US\$ 900 billion investment<sup>142</sup>, the BRI is undoubtedly an initiative with global scope. Nevertheless, the inclusion of the BRI into the CPC constitution signified a long-term Chinese state strategy, exemplifying China's external engagement policy<sup>143</sup>. More than just an infrastructure-building connectivity scheme, the BRI is a regulatory project that entails the transnationalisation of Chinese regulatory standards and rules through investment and policy coordination<sup>144</sup>.

A focus on Africa has been a key part of this Chinese strategy and the second BRI Forum held in Beijing in April 2019, stressed China's growing linkages with African countries<sup>145</sup>. Chinese investments in the Indian Ocean region includes strategic ports, commercial points and naval bases. Many countries, including Japan and India, have recalibrated their foreign policy initiatives in light of this rising Chinese presence. The proposal for the AAGC is a clear reflection of this recalibration even though enhancing commercial interests and promoting a growth and development zone is the main intention behind this proposed corridor between Asia and Africa.



India has a long presence in Africa through trade, political engagement and the diaspora, and more recent efforts to source energy requirements and cultivate new markets for the Indian private sector. Resource constraints, however, have limited its engagement, which lags far behind that of China. Africa is also seen as a partner for India in its bid to fashion multilateral regimes and institutions in ways that benefit the interests of developing states. Though Japan has long been engaged in Africa through official development assistance (ODA), it has had a limited business and cultural presence. The Japanese private sector has, however, increasingly expressed interest in the growing African market including through the market expansion of Japanese-Indian manufacturing hubs<sup>146</sup>. Moreover, Japan views African states as potential allies in shaping a rapidly changing global order, in which China's political and economic ability to influence regulatory norms and institutions, in ways counter to Japan's interests, is increasing.

Further, the proposal for an Act East Forum also reflects the challenge posed by the BRI to India's dominant position in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region. China has fast emerged as a significant actor in South Asia through its stronger commercial engagement and political outreach. To promote a chance to balance the growing Chinese commercial and political outreach, India needs to better integrate its economy with the countries of South and South-East Asia. A partnership with a stronger economic actor such as Japan is always coming as a bonus to India.

In addition, India needs to better integrate its economy with the countries of South and South East Asia to be able to compete with China as an economic power. The countries of South Asia are crucial to the BRI and have been major recipients of BRI funding for the building of ports, roads and economic zones. Pakistan, for instance, has been the one of the biggest recipients of BRI funds due to the importance of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor which connects Xinjiang in China with Pakistani Provinces that provide access to the Gulf, Europe, Africa and Central Asia. Bangladesh has been another major recipient of BRI funds due to the access it offers to the Indian Ocean. Indeed, the BCIM economic corridor was initially envisaged as a key part of the BRI, connecting Kunming to Kolkata. India's refusal to participate in the BRI, has since led to the BCIM economic corridor being removed from China's list of BRI projects<sup>147</sup>, though it is still an integral part of China's BRI or Silk Road diplomacy. Other South Asian countries, like Sri Lanka, Nepal and the Maldives have also been the sites of major Chinese investments in ports, roads, economic zones and other infrastructure under the banner of the BRI.



It is difficult for India to compete economically with China's infrastructure investments in South and Southeast Asia, and it lacks a convincing track record on infrastructure building. By pairing with Japan to offer "reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructures" and "industrial networks and regional value chains with open, fair and transparent business environment in the region", however, it seeks to develop a viable alternative<sup>148</sup>. Together, Japan and India have sought to implicitly characterise Chinese infrastructure-building as promoting unsustainable debt burdens and poor-quality practices<sup>149</sup>. This seeks to reinforce Japan's efforts to counter China's growing economic and political influence in Southeast Asia by advancing its EPQI scheme.

## Regionalising Relations through the AAGC and the Act East Forum

The AAGC and the Act East Forum are strategic propositions that seek to bring India's and Japan's national and foreign policy strategies together in the Indo-Pacific region, as envisioned in the *Vision 2025* plan outlined in 2015.

The main thrust of *Vision 2025*, which was conceptualised by India and Japan in 2015, as part of their 'Special Strategic and Global Partnership' is to foresee "deep, broad-based and action-oriented partnership" in the Indo-Pacific region. Showing a commitment to a "peaceful, open, equitable, stable and rule-based order" in Indo-Pacific region, *Vision 2025* encourages principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity where the focus is on "open global trade regime" along with "freedom of navigation and overflight", among many other things. Further, it proposed the construction of "reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructures", aiming to enhance connectivity in the Indo-Pacific region. This not only complements India's Act East and Japan's EPQI policies, but also forms a strategic convergence between their security interests in the Indo-Pacific region. *Vision 2025* is designed to create a synergy of strategic understanding between India and Japan in the Indo-Pacific region against the backdrop of China's emergence as an influential power.

The multi-faceted AAGC, like the BRI, has an economic and developmentalist form with strategic implications. By stressing people-to-people, consultative and responsive aspects of the AAGC, Japan and India seek to gain an edge over the BRI, which is characterised as a 'unilateral' initiative. Moreover, by creating a regional, inter-continental framework of commercial and strategic cooperation between Asia and Africa, India and Japan seek to play a leadership role in building infrastructural development and fast-tracking investment. Both Asia and Africa suffer from extensive infrastructure gaps<sup>150</sup>. Working with multilateral banks and other states, India and Japan seek to address some of these infrastructural needs through the AAGC. Project-based cooperation between India and Japan has recently begun with the cooperation of third countries such as Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Africa.



Further, by promoting digital and institutional connectivity in and between Asia and Africa, the AAGC aims to amalgamate India's and Japan's bilateral and domestic investment priorities to their regional initiatives. Much Japanese investment in Indian start-ups is in the areas of the digital and platform economy, and both countries view these sectors as the drivers of future economic growth<sup>151</sup>. In the process, they seek to regionalise their preferred regulatory frameworks, such as public-private modes of participation that involve a consultative process between local, national and regional or international actors.

In addition, by leaving room for the participation of third countries in AAGC initiatives, Japan and India seek to further Indo-Pacific trilateral initiatives, like the US-India-Japan and India-Japan-Australia cooperative forums. Such trilateral initiatives can be used to shape the nature of regional order in the Indo-Pacific through forms of regional connectivity that promote a multilateral regional architecture and collective rules<sup>152</sup>.

Ministerial statements on trilateral US-India-Japan cooperation have also suggested joint efforts at building connectivity between South Asia and Southeast Asia<sup>153</sup>. As with the AAGC, this cooperation could build on the framework established by India and Japan in the Act East Forum. For India, the Act East Forum is aimed at spurring the development of its North-Eastern region, through its integration with the dynamic economies of Southeast Asia. Increasing economic growth in the North-East is seen as essential for stabilising an area riven with secessionist movements and discontent. The North-East is also seen as a springboard for Indian companies, more generally, into Southeast Asia. For Japan, India's willingness to involve it in developing the politically-sensitive North-East demonstrates trust and has the potentially attractive long-term benefit of linking Japan through India to Thailand where Japan has an established manufacturing base<sup>154</sup>.

Above all these, both the AAGC and the Act East Forum provide a practical way for India and Japan to materialise a trilateral framework of cooperation in Southeast Asia. For instance, an India-Japan-Vietnam trilateral has been a discussion point for some time among strategic experts from India and Japan and could become a reality in the future<sup>155</sup>. Equally, cooperation with Indonesia and Thailand in a trilateral format is also a possibility. Connectivity cooperation and infrastructure development could form the basis of these trilateral forums, thereby boosting a regional framework of cooperation in India-Japan relations.



## Challenges Ahead

This chapter has argued that changing foreign policy aspirations and China's rise have been central drivers of the strengthening relationship between India and Japan. Indo-Pacific cooperation aims to deepen their mutual strategic interests, primarily Japan's established role in East Asia, and India's presence in Africa and the Indian Ocean region, while better integrating India with East Asia and Japan in Africa and the Indian Ocean region.



Narendra Modi and Shinzo Abe during a tea ceremony at Akasaka Palace

Progress in this regional cooperation, however, has been slow, and faces several significant challenges. The success of the AAGC depends significantly on the Japanese and Indian private sectors. Yet, despite greater interest by Japanese companies in the African market, their presence is small, and Asian and European markets remain preferred destinations. Even though Tokyo's outreach in Africa is quite old, Japanese private sector investment in Africa suffers from a lack of understanding of local practices, market demand, and laws. Difficulties finding local staff, reluctance by Japanese workers to reside in African countries, language barriers, and concerns



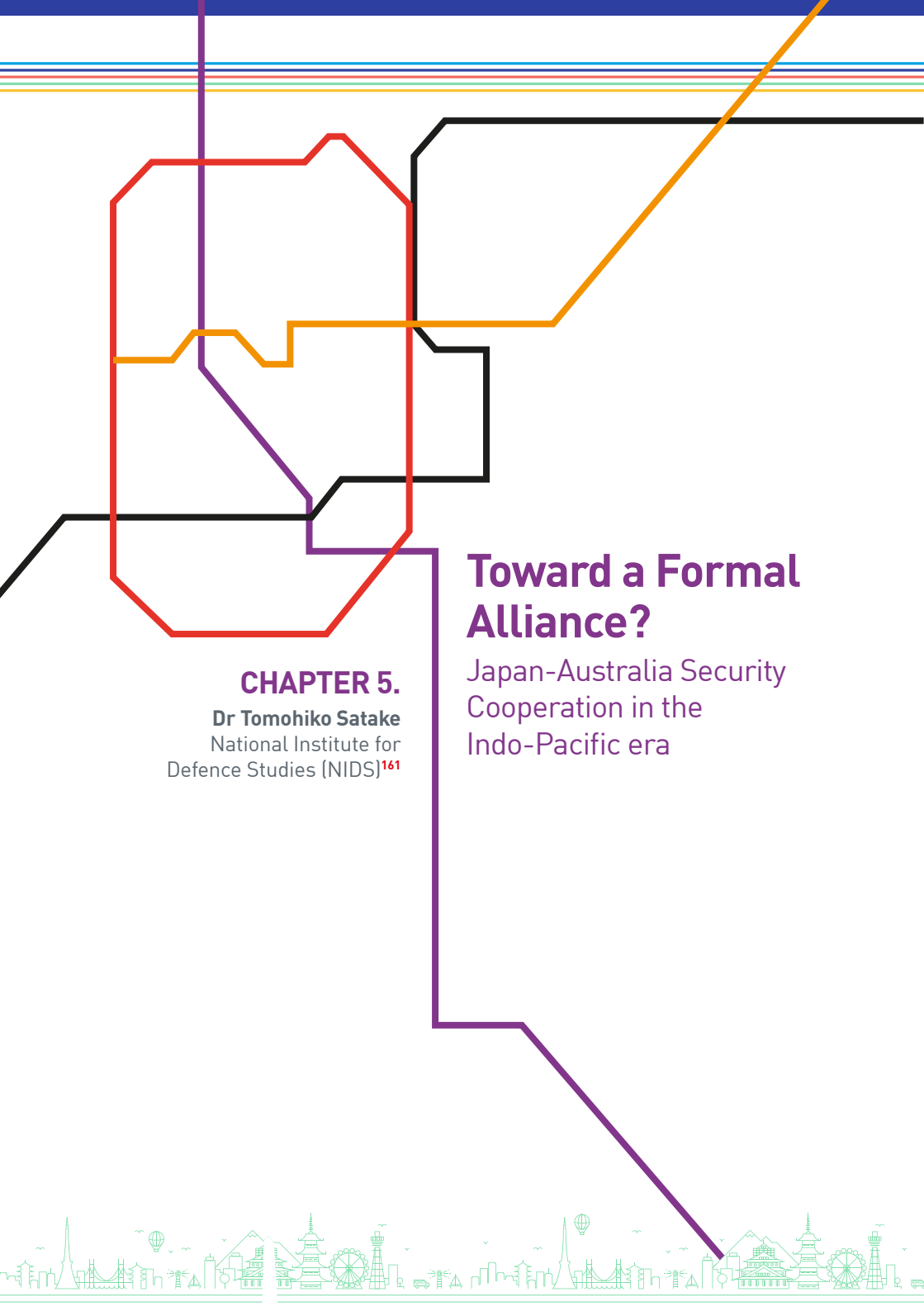
about political stability are also significant barriers<sup>156</sup>. Indian investment in Africa is dominated by a very few public and private sector firms. It is focused on large-scale investment in resources and mining by public firms and remains concentrated in Eastern Africa. While Indian private sector involvement is rising, in Africa it is dominated by a few large companies in sectors such as manufacturing and hotels, and is confined to one or two companies<sup>157</sup>. To succeed, the AAGC must provide institutional mechanisms to address these limitations.

With respect to the Act East Forum, Japan's involvement in India's North-East region faces a number of security challenges. In particular, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) sees insurgencies, objections from China, which claims the Indian sovereign state of Arunachal Pradesh, and jihadist militancy from Bangladesh as potential problems<sup>158</sup>. In this context, attracting private sector involvement in the region will be difficult. India's sub-regional initiatives in the North-East region have long suffered from a lack of consistent political attention and resource commitments, as well as "over-centralisation" with no adequate devolution of power from the top down, and no responsibility given to local governments and actors<sup>159</sup>. This trend has continued under the Modi government, despite its claims to be promoting 'cooperative federalism'.

More broadly, the extent to which India and Japan endorse a U.S.-led order will invariably influence the regionalisation of their relationship. While Japan, as a military alliance partner would subscribe to a U.S.-led regional order, this may not necessarily be the case with India. Even though it might find strategic complementarity in pursuing 'issue-based' alliances with U.S.-sponsored Indo-Pacific schemes, India's desire to maintain its strategic autonomy through simultaneous issue-based alliances with China in various multilateral forums could pose a strategic impediment to regionalising India-Japan relations. Besides, India and Japan do not necessarily share strategic complementarity on a range of issues that are key to Japanese and American interests. India not signing the Osaka declaration on cross-border data flow at the recently concluded G-20 summit comes as a strong reference to this effect.

Finally, India and Japan's promotion of an ASEAN-centred regional architecture for a regionalised Indo-Pacific may be hampered by lingering suspicions within ASEAN that the Indo-Pacific concept will pit China against the United States and its allies, thereby diminishing the role of South East Asian countries and undermining ASEAN's emphasis on incrementalism, dialogue and consensus. Nonetheless, with Indonesia now championing the Indo-Pacific as a "single geo-strategic theatre" and promoting "concrete collaboration among stakeholders in the region in the areas of maritime cooperation; infrastructure and connectivity; and sustainable development goals", India and Japan have an opportunity to turn their ASEAN-centred vision for regionalisation in the Indo-Pacific into reality<sup>160</sup>.





# Toward a Formal Alliance?

Japan-Australia Security Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific era

## CHAPTER 5.

**Dr Tomohiko Satake**  
National Institute for  
Defence Studies (NIDS)<sup>161</sup>





## The Evolving “Quasi-alliance”

In March 2007, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Australian Prime Minister John Howard signed “Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation” in Tokyo. Although the declaration itself contained no new initiative or substance, it created an impetus for the two countries to upgrade their security cooperation to the level of what some analysts describe as the “quasi-alliance”.

Following the first Foreign and Defence Ministers’ meeting (“2 plus 2”) in June 2007, the two countries announced the action plan to implement the joint declaration, which outlined a number of detailed initiatives in areas like peacekeeping, Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Reliefs (HA/DR), and maritime security. Japan, Australia, and the United States in April 2008, also launched Security and Defence Cooperation Forum (SDCF)—a trilateral consultation mechanism consisting of regular meetings of defence and foreign affairs officials. They also concluded the Acquisition and Cross-Services Agreement (ACSA) in May 2010, to enable reciprocal support of food, fuel, transportation, ammunition, and equipment between the Self Defense Forces (SDF) and Australian Defence Force (ADF), and Information Security Agreement (ISA) in May 2012, to share highly classified information. In April 2014, Japan and Australia upgraded their security cooperation to a “special strategic partnership”.

Meanwhile, both countries have increased the number of bilateral and trilateral military exercises, not only in non-traditional security fields but also in more conventional security areas like amphibious operations, anti-submarine warfare and jet fighter trainings/exercises. Japan and Australia hold the bilateral naval training exercise, *Nichigo Trident*, on an almost annual basis since 2009. In 2011, Australian forces joined the U.S.-Japan air exercise *Cope North Guam*. In 2013, forces from all three initiated a trilateral anti-submarine warfare exercise, *Pacific Bond*, and a new ground forces exercise, *Southern Jackaroo*; and in 2015, Japanese forces joined the large joint U.S.-Australia exercise *Talisman Sabre*. There has also been increased bilateral and trilateral cooperation in missile defence, space, and cyber security.

The momentum for closer defence and security cooperation between Japan and Australia has endured despite Japan losing the highly publicised bid to build the next generation of the Australian Navy’s *Collins*-class submarines in April 2016. This is evidenced by the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue (TSD) ministerial meeting in July 2016, which was held for the first time in three years, and in the signing of a Trilateral Intelligence-Sharing Agreement (TISA) with the U.S. in December 2016, and the revising of bilateral ACSA between Japan and Australia in January 2017. Regular bilateral and trilateral military training and exercises have continued, sometimes involving the participation of a fourth or fifth country such as India, Republic of Korea (ROK) or other European partners. Japan and Australia have also sought to sign a



Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA), which would improve and simplify administrative, policy and legal procedures for when SDF and ADF units visit one another's home country.

## A New Impetus for Cooperation



In addition to these developments, an emerging impetus for the further enhancement of bilateral security cooperation has come about because of the following key developments between 2016 and 2018.

First, Japan, Australia and the United States have expanded their strategic scope from the previous Asia-Pacific region to a broader Indo-Pacific regional construct. In August 2016, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced the vision of “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” (FOIP). Subsequently, U.S. President Donald Trump also announced the American version of a FOIP strategy as its new approach to the Indo-Pacific region in November 2017. Although Australia has not publicly used the term FOIP, it agreed with both Japan and the U.S. to “fully share the grand vision for realising a free and open Indo-Pacific based on the rule of law”, and “cooperate with each other while also coordinating with their regional partners” to achieve such a vision<sup>162</sup>.

With this greater focus on FOIP, all three countries have attempted to revive the Quadrilateral Security Cooperation or QUAD—which had been suspended since Australia's withdrawal in February 2008—by inviting India to this group of regional democracies. In October 2017, Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono revealed his plan to seek the possibility of a strategic dialogue at the Foreign Ministers and Summit-



level meetings between QUAD countries. A spokesperson of the U.S. Department of Defence endorsed Kono's proposal as it was "a natural stepping stone" for trilateral cooperation between the U.S., Japan and India<sup>163</sup>. Australia's former Foreign Minister Julie Bishop said the country would "welcome" Kono's proposal, and said that Australia has a "bipartisan approach toward the Quadrilateral"<sup>164</sup>. As a result, the four countries resumed their meetings at the senior official level on November 2017.

The second development giving Australia and Japan a renewed impetus for greater security cooperation is Australia's changing perceptions for China, which have gradually become severe over the past few years<sup>165</sup>. In his keynote speech at the Shangri-La dialogue in June 2017, former Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull expressed his grave concerns by introducing a "dark view" that sees "China will seek to impose a latter-day Monroe Doctrine on this hemisphere in order to dominate the region, marginalising the role and contribution of other nations, in particular, the United States."<sup>166</sup> It is unusual for the Australian Prime Minister to use such a strong term when referring to China.

Australia has been especially concerned with China's continuous reclamation and militarisation of artificial islands in the South China Sea, as well as its rapidly growing economic and political influence through aid and infrastructure investments in the South Pacific. In fact, the ADF has activated naval patrols, naval exercises, or port calls to countries around the South China Sea. China has criticized Australia's activities, and the People Liberation Army (PLA) ships or aircraft has occasionally challenged the ADF ships or aircraft operating in the region. In May 2019, for example, the Australian Navy was closely followed by the Chinese military in its transit of the South China Sea<sup>167</sup>. As a part of Australia's "step-up" in its engagement with the South Pacific, moreover, Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced plans to open five new diplomatic missions in Pacific islands (Palau, the Marshall Islands, French Polynesia, Niue and the Cook Islands), as well as to create \$2 billion infrastructure initiative to support infrastructure development in Pacific countries and Timor Leste<sup>168</sup>.

Rapidly increasing infrastructure investment by China, including digital infrastructure such as 5G networks, has also raised concerns about data security in Australia. In August 2018, Australia made a decision to effectively ban Chinese companies such as Huawei and ZTE from supplying equipment for a 5G mobile network, citing national security risks. After the Solomon Islands government decided against Huawei's plan to lay a submarine cable from the Solomon Islands to the Australian mainland, the Australian government announced the plan to build its own cable that links the South Pacific and Australia<sup>169</sup>. The Australian government has maintained a cautious attitude to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) without fully endorsing it, and Australia joined an infrastructure fund with Japan and the U.S. in July 2018 to counter Chinese growing regional influence.



Furthermore, there have been growing concerns about Chinese “interference” in Australia’s politics and society. The high-profile scandal involving Australian Labor Party Senator Sam Dastyari’s acceptance of political donations from China brought the Australian public’s awareness of Chinese political interference and covert operations in their country to the forefront. As a result, Australian Parliament passed in June 2018, national security and foreign interference laws that criminalise covert, deceptive, or threatening actions by foreign agencies. Moreover, in December 2018, Foreign Minister Marise Payne and Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton released a joint statement that expressed their “serious concern about a global campaign of cyber-enabled commercial intellectual property theft by a group acting on behalf of the Chinese Ministry of State Security.”<sup>170</sup>

Finally, but perhaps the most important development is the emergence of the new U.S. presidential administration led by Donald Trump in January 2017. On the one hand, the victory of Donald Trump – as well as his nationalistic, isolationist and protectionist remarks during and after the election campaign – raised serious concerns about the credibility of the U.S. commitment to Asian allies like Japan and Australia. On the other hand, the uncertainty about the Trump administration provides a greater incentive for Japan and Australia to cooperate closely and work together to maintain the rules-based international order and encourage a continued U.S. military presence in the region.

For example, both Japan and Australia work together to conclude the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), also known as TPP-11, after the U.S. withdrawal in January 2017. Furthermore, both Japan and Australia have accelerated their defence efforts with their increasing budgets. Such efforts include Japan’s decision to introduce long-range hypersonic missiles and to renovate its *Izumo*-class helicopter destroyers to operate the F-35B short take-off and vertical landing (STOVL) variant. Australia has already undergone its largest-ever naval build-up project, including the construction of twelve new submarines, three *Hobart*-class Air Warfare Destroyers, nine new future frigates optimized for anti-submarine warfare, 12 new offshore patrol vessels, and 21 patrol boats.

With their enhanced power-projection capabilities, the SDF and the ADF may have more opportunities to work together to respond to regional flashpoints such as Korean Peninsula or South China Sea. Indeed, Australia’s former Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull promised that Australia would invoke the ANZUS Treaty and “come to the aid of the United States” if North Korea launched an attack against the United States<sup>171</sup>. Since 2018, Australia has occasionally dispatched P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft to Japan to join maritime surveillance operations in support of United Nations Security Council sanctions against North Korea.





JS IZUMO and JS MURASAME crews visited the Royal Australian navy, HMAS CANBERRA

Amid the uncertainties caused by the Trump administration, an increasing number of regional experts have started to discuss Japan-Australia security cooperation in the context of a “Plan B” for worst-case scenarios, such as a U.S. withdrawal from the region. Peter Jennings, one of most influential strategists in Australia and the head of Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), proposed “ten steps” to build Australia’s more independent defence posture, including the conclusion of “a formal defence treaty with Japan”<sup>172</sup>. Another ASPI expert Malcolm Davis also asserts that Australia should develop a “formal alliance relationship with Japan” as a key step for Australia’s “forward defence in depth” strategy. Such cooperation could, according to Davis, see “forward deployments of Japanese and Australian air and naval forces along the second island chain in a crisis, pivoting around Manus and Momote, as well as Darwin-Tindal in the south, Guam and Micronesia in the centre, and Okinawa to the north.”<sup>173</sup>

The discussion for “Japan-Australia alliance” remains unpopular in Japan. Still, it has become increasingly common to discuss Japan’s preparation for undesirable scenarios, including the significant reduction of the U.S military presence in the region<sup>174</sup>. While discussing a “Plan B” is seen as too premature in Japan, and many believe that there is no alternative to the US-Japan alliance, already many experts view Japan’s diverse array of strategic partnerships with regional countries like Australia, as a sort of hedging strategy to prepare for future uncertainties, including the decline of U.S. military presence in the region<sup>175</sup>. While Japan’s security cooperation



cannot become an alternative for Japan, Australia has been increasingly seen as the most reliable security partner for Japan next to the United States in an increasingly uncertain and unpredictable security environment.

## Toward a Formal Alliance?

Will Japan-Australia security cooperation continue to develop, and depending on circumstances, become a formal alliance underpinned by a mutual defence treaty? Although predicting the future is impossible, this question can be considered from at least three perspectives—geography, China, and domestic factors.

First, despite their close defence and security relations, Japan and Australia have different strategic priorities due to their different geographies<sup>176</sup>. Although Japan has stressed its vision for FOIP, Japan's primary security and strategic interests remain concentrated on Northeast Asia for the defence of the Japanese homeland, rather than the broader Indo-Pacific (or even narrower Asia-Pacific). True, Japan has recently increased its defence engagement with countries in Southeast Asia, the South Pacific and the Indian Ocean. However, many of those initiatives, except for some military exercises with the U.S. and its allies, remain low-key cooperation such as communication or search and rescue training and exercises, capacity building in non-traditional security fields, and norm-setting or rulemaking<sup>177</sup>. Some Australian experts argue that the introduction of new capabilities, such as the renovated *Izumo*-class destroyers equipped with F-35B aircraft, will "directly support Japan's long-range maritime strike, air interdiction and fleet aviation capabilities, which are critical to defending Japanese territorial and economic interests in the Indo-Pacific"<sup>178</sup>. Japan also established the Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade in April 2018 to improve the ground-based SDF's amphibious operation capabilities. However, most of these forces are primarily directed towards defending Japan's territory, including its offshore islands, rather than projecting Japan's strike capabilities beyond its homeland defence. Except for some peacetime operations, it is highly unlikely that Japan will use these capabilities overseas independently from the U.S. military. As will be discussed later in this paper, SDF activities beyond its homeland defence are still highly limited by domestic legal constraints.

For Japan, the most important aspect of FOIP is keeping and strengthening the U.S. military presence in the region by expanding the scope of U.S.–Japan cooperation, rather than strengthening Japan's independent military role. While Japan will support and if necessary, supplement U.S. regional security roles with other like-minded democracies, it has no will or capacity to replace the U.S. as a security guarantor in the South China Sea or Indian Ocean. Indeed, due to the lack of finance and manpower of the Maritime SDF (MSDF), as well as the deterioration of the regional security environment surrounding Japan, the MSDF has reduced (or considered reducing)



some of its overseas activities. Those activities include counter-piracy missions in the Gulf of Aden and the Antarctic Research Expedition mission, which has continued since 1965<sup>179</sup>.

The Japanese government has attempted to respond to a shortage of personnel and resources through labour-saving or raising the retirement age of the SDF officers. Nevertheless, the SDF's serious shortage of personnel would likely to continue to be a problem so long as Japan's population ages with a low birth rate<sup>180</sup>. Already a number of Japanese experts argue that Japan should concentrate its available resources on its "core interests". These interests include addressing the threats and challenges regarding the Senkaku Islands dispute in the East China Sea, China's anti-access/area-denial strategy close to Japan's own shore and North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile developments, instead of geographically expanding its defence and security activities<sup>181</sup>.

Likewise, Australia's primary strategic focus beyond its homeland is "maritime South East Asia and the South Pacific", rather than Northeast Asia or the Indian Ocean<sup>182</sup>. As Prime Minister Turnbull promised, Australia would come to aid the U.S.-led coalition mission in the case of a crisis on the Korean Peninsula by dispatching ADF aircraft, ships and even Special Forces. Most of these assets are, however, likely to be used for Non-Evacuation Operation (NEO), supporting missions for the U.S.-led land-based battles, or post-conflict missions<sup>183</sup>. More importantly, Australia's commitment to the Korean Peninsula comes from its status as a U.S. ally or a member of United Nations forces, which are still, in effect, in a state of war with North Korea. Australia's commitment to the ANZUS alliance becomes much less obvious in other cases such as the Taiwan Strait crisis or Sino-Japanese conflicts.

According to a former naval officer of the ADF, "Australia has no realistic strike capability more than a few hundred miles offshore and covering only a small percentage of its SLOCs [Sea Lanes of Communications]."<sup>184</sup> The ongoing defence build-up plan, with its increasing defence budget could help offset such a weakness of Australia's power-projection capabilities. However, the successful implementation of the defence build-up, including the construction of 12 new French submarines, manufactured by a French firm, has already fallen under scrutiny due to increasing costs and delays to the planned schedule<sup>185</sup>. According to Malcolm Davies, the current plans for Australia's future force structure depend heavily on Attack-class submarines to provide long-range strike and deterrence. As Davies writes, however, the first of those submarines will not go into service until the mid-2030s at the earliest, and "a sizeable force won't be available until the late 2040s."<sup>186</sup> The "tyranny of geography" between Japan and Australia will continue for at least the next two decades.



## The China Factor

Closer defence and security cooperation between Japan and Australia also risks provoking China, the largest economic partner for both countries. As the relationship becomes increasingly “alliance-like”, two countries would need to face this dilemma with their potential adversary, as well as address abandonment and entrapment concerns from their alliance partners<sup>187</sup>.

Compared to Australia’s economic relations with China, little has been discussed about Japan’s economic relations with China in the context of defence and security issues. Like Australia and other regional powers, however, China is also the largest trading partner for Japan, and the amount of both imports and exports has continued to grow despite a political tension between two countries. The total amount of Japan’s trade with China in 2018 was US\$353.7 billion, 7.4 percent increase from 2017 (In the same year, Japan’s trade amount with the U.S. was \$206.5 billion)<sup>188</sup>. Exports increased 9.3 percent while exports increased to 5.5 percent, and Japan’s trade surplus with China increased from 2017 when Japan’s trade moved into surplus for the first time in 6 years<sup>189</sup>.

The number of Japanese firms operating in China, which had decreased due to Chinese anti-Japan riots and increasing labour costs since around 2012, has also recovered. As of October 2017, the number of China-based Japanese firms was 32,349, the largest number in the world, followed by the U.S. (8,606) and India (4,805)<sup>190</sup>. According to METI’s annual survey, these firms’ ordinary profit temporarily dropped in 2012, but later recovered and reached ¥2,600 billion, which is almost 20 percent of the total share of profit of Japanese firms globally<sup>191</sup>.

Japan’s investment in China, which has plummeted to less than half of its peak in 2016, has also gradually recovered due to the improvement of Japan-China political relations. Due to China’s improved manufacturing productivity, Japanese companies that were considering shifting their production to Southeast Asia have begun to re-evaluate China as a manufacturing base and increased local production and sales in China<sup>192</sup>. Uncertainty over the U.S. market due to Trump administration’s protectionist policies have contributed to this trend. While the impact of the U.S.-Sino trade war remains unknown, Japanese companies maintain strong incentives for the investment to China under the prediction of an increasing Chinese domestic demand. In addition to the Chinese government’s recent move to invite more investments from Japan, strengthening of intellectual property right protection and easing of forced technology transfer as “side effects” of U.S.-Sino trade war are also said to create a favourable environment for Japanese companies<sup>193</sup>.





The number of Chinese visitors to Japan has seen significant growth since 2013, mainly due to the depreciation of the yen. In 2014, 2.4 million Chinese visited Japan. It was an 83 percent increase on the previous year<sup>194</sup>. In 2015, China became a top country to send tourists (4.99 million) to Japan overtaking Korea's 4 million. The number of Chinese visitors to Japan reached 7.36 million in 2017, a 15.4 percent increase from the previous year<sup>195</sup>. China is now a top destination for Japanese inbound market, sharing 38.4 percent followed by Taiwan (13 percent) and Korea (11.6 percent)<sup>196</sup>. Given that Chinese tourists support a significant tourism industry in Japan, the government has sought to lower the barriers to entry for even more visitors from China by changing its visa policy<sup>197</sup>.

Japan's deepening economic relations with China may undermine Japan's ability to deploy diplomatic and military pressure against China more than ever before. Even though the Trump administration has taken an increasingly tougher stance in its China policy, exemplified by the tariffs applied against Chinese exports and barring some Chinese companies from the U.S. market, Japan has been reluctant to take as tough a stance as the U.S. has in its policy towards China. Instead, during his visit to China in November 2018, Prime Minister Abe reportedly agreed with President Xi on "three principles", including shifting from "competition to collaboration", working together as partners that will not threaten each other, and developing a free and fair trading system<sup>198</sup>. Japan also resumed defence exchanges with China in 2018. Such exchanges, including high-ranking officials' visits and security dialogues, had been suspended since 2012.

Ironically, such a changing relationship between Japan and China, along with Australia's changing perception of China, has narrowed the "China gap"—different threat perceptions of or attitudes towards China—between the two countries<sup>199</sup>. Increasingly, Japan and Australia share a similar dilemma between their largest economic partner and their most important security partner. While some Japanese (and American) policymakers used to be frustrated by Australia's reluctance to step up its commitment to counter-balancing against China, such concerns have seemed to be muted at least for now. Instead, both Japanese and Australian policymakers have been more concerned with the negative impact of rapidly deteriorating U.S.-China relations, and have sought ways to navigate intensified strategic competition<sup>200</sup>.



## Domestic Factors

Finally, defence and security cooperation between Japan and Australia must be examined from a domestic perspective, such as legal constraints and public opinion. In September 2015, the Japanese Diet passed new security legislation, which came into force in March 2016. This was the most significant revision of Japanese security legislation, including amendments of 10 laws related to defence and security, in the post-war period. Most importantly, the new security legislation allowed Japan to partially exercise the right of collective self-defence, which, under certain conditions, enables the SDF to protect other countries' militaries even in case Japan is not directly attacked.

The new security legislation increased opportunities for the SDF to collaborate with the U.S. and Australian defence forces without any geographical limits, at least theoretically<sup>201</sup>. The SDF could, for instance, engage with refuelling, resupplying or undertaking emergency repairs for the U.S. or Australian militaries operating in the Middle-East or the Indian Ocean. Japan-Australia ACSA, which was revised after Japan's introduction of new security legislation and came into force in September 2017, also expanded the scope of Japan-Australia bilateral cooperation, enabling the SDF and ADF to exchange services and goods including ammunition, even during the "internationally coordinated peace and security operations" which fall outside United Nations auspices<sup>202</sup>.

Even so, there remains a number of legal and normative constraints on Japanese security policy. During peacetime or "grey-zone" operations, for example, the SDF is now able to protect military assets of foreign countries, including Australia. Such operations are, however, limited to the protection of foreign countries that engage in "activities that contribute to the defence of Japan". They are also limited to "non-combatant areas" and operations should be immediately terminated once a conflict breaks out between foreign defence forces and enemy countries<sup>203</sup>.

In situations like those above, Japan could apply the following clause of the new security legislation, "Situations that will have an Important Influence on Japan's Peace and Security" (or "Important Influence Situations"), enabling the SDF to provide a logistical support, including weapons and ammunition, to the U.S. or Australian defence forces. Yet SDF's logistical support should also be conducted in a "non-combatant area" and terminated once the area turns into a conflict zone. In principle, these activities need prior approval of the Diet. This would significantly delay the SDF deployment by provoking a debate in the Diet over whether situations meet the legal test of having "an important influence on Japan's peace and security".



Japan could deploy SDF forces overseas more flexibly once “an armed attack against a foreign country that is in a close relationship with Japan occurs and as a result, threatens Japan’s survival and poses a clear danger to fundamentally overturn people’s right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness”<sup>204</sup>. In such a “Survival-threatening Situation”, and if there is no alternative measures, Japan can exercise the right of collective self-defence to support or even engage in battles against an enemy’s forces with the ADF, although the use of force should be only the “minimum necessary”. The prior approval of the Diet is necessary in principle, but it can be exempted more easily than in “Important Influence Situations” as these circumstances are expected to be much more intense and require an immediate response by the SDF.

Nevertheless, it is not entirely certain that an armed attack against Australia or the ADF legally falls within the scope of “Survival-threatening Situations” for Japan. Prime Minister Abe did not rule out the possibility that the government would acknowledge an armed attack against Australia or the United Kingdom as qualifying as a “survival-threatening situation.” At the same time, however, Abe said that such a possibility is “highly limited in reality”<sup>205</sup>. After all, it depends on how much Australia can play a significant role in keeping Japan secure. However, as previously discussed, Australia’s role protecting Japan would be quite limited, just as Japan’s direct contribution to Australia’s security is highly limited.

In addition to its legal constraints, Japan’s security cooperation with Australia may be challenged by domestic pacifism, which has constrained Japan’s security policies for many years<sup>206</sup>. Although Japan’s pacifistic sentiment has gradually shifted to a more realistic direction due to the deterioration of Japan’s security environment, it proved to remain strong when a massive public protest occurred against the introduction of new security legislation in 2015. Indeed, it was such a public protest, as well as some political parties’ influence backed by such a protest, that forced the government to maintain strict conditions for the use of collective self-defence as identified above.

Compared to U.S.-Japan alliance cooperation, Japan’s security cooperation with Australia has far been less controversial and has barely emerged as a political issue. With the expansion of the scope of Japanese defence activities due to the introduction of the new security legislation, however, some opposition politicians have begun to ask why the government needs to conclude ACSA or expand military trainings with Australia<sup>207</sup>. Some left-wing media criticised Japan’s intensifying defence cooperation with Australia, such as the jet fighter training, to be conducted in 2019, as too provocative<sup>208</sup>.



Japanese conservative faction, including its security community, has generally welcomed Japan's closer defence relations with Australia. Yet there remains a certain level of scepticism inside the Japanese security community regarding whether or not Australia can be a trustworthy security partner, especially given its huge economic dependence on China. Thus, after Japan's failure to secure a contract to build Australia's next generation of submarines, some Japanese journalists and commentators pointed out the "China factor" as a major reason why Australia did not purchase the Japanese *Soryu*-class submarine, even though there was no clear evidence that this influenced Australia's decision<sup>209</sup>.

Unlike Japan, Australia has no domestic legal constraints on the use of force overseas. Under Australian law, declaring war or deploying military forces overseas are the Government's prerogative. The Prime Minister of Australia also does not have to consult Parliament before those actions<sup>210</sup>. Aside from some exceptions, the Australian public is generally supportive for the ADF's overseas operations, given its inherent sense of insecurity and Australia's long tradition of supporting allied missions overseas<sup>211</sup>. Australia's security cooperation with Japan has also enjoyed bipartisan support, except for some highly political issues such as the submarine bid.

Nevertheless, as Australia's security cooperation with Japan becomes more "alliance-like", Australia's public may be increasingly concerned with the risk of entrapment in conflicts that do not directly affect their own security. This can be particularly the case when one looks at Japan's unreliability as an alternative security guarantor due to its legal and political constraints. So long as the "alliance" requires a certain level of mutuality, Japan's legal and normative constraints will remain major obstacles to a prospective formal treaty alliance with Australia.



## Conclusion

Despite a strengthening impetus for closer relations between Japan and Australia, there is a certain limitation for what this bilateral security cooperation can achieve due to their different geographical positions, relations with China, and domestic constraints. Because of these factors, it remains unlikely that Japan and Australia will form a formal alliance with a mutual defence treaty at least in the short-term. So long as two countries maintain close alliance relations with the United States, they would find it less attractive to conclude a formal alliance treaty than to maintain their current status of a “quasi-alliance”.

This by no means suggests that “Japan-Australia alliance” is forever unlikely. Indeed, the rapidly changing geo-strategic circumstances, including the growing threat of China and the decline of the U.S. power and influence, can quickly change these factors identified above. Japan and Australia may attain greater power-projection capabilities, while reducing their economic dependence on China and abolishing domestic legal constraints to become more independent powers. If this is the case, Japan and Australia may become more powerful and attractive as alliance partners with each other.

Another possibility is that the more Japan and Australia become independent powers that are attractive as alliance partners, the less likely they are engaged with joint military operation overseas, making a Japan-Australia alliance even more unlikely. As they are more self-reliant and less dependent on U.S. security guarantees, they may find it unnecessary to contribute to overseas missions beyond their immediate neighbourhoods, and put more resources towards the protection of their homeland or region. In other words, Japan-Australia security and defence cooperation might be weakened once the United States can no longer provide a sufficient security guarantee for these allies. If such is the case, one might realise the real meaning of “quasi alliance”, ostensibly similar, but essentially different, from a formal alliance relationship with a mutual defence treaty.

