

Regional Cooperative Security in the Indo-Pacific: Synergizing Consultative Mechanisms across the Indian Ocean, East China Sea, South China Sea, and the Western Pacific

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Abstract

Given the concept of a broader Asia that is fast transcending geographical boundaries and lines, the emerging proximities render the prospects for collective and cooperative regional security mechanisms, more deliverable than ever before. With the notion of the greater Indo-Pacific beginning to eclipse the limited spheres of influence of the Indian Ocean, East China Sea, South China Sea, and the Western Pacific, regional players are expected to make prudent choices, whilst pursuing a sovereign foreign policy path that best suits their national security interests. Indubitably, greater onus shall lie on the regional liberal democracies that have perennially demonstrated respect for the rule of international law, norms, and agreements and showcase their strategic sagacity in the emerging scenario developing in the Indo-Pacific. This paper intends to outline the pragmatist policy approach to be undertaken by India, Japan, Australia and the US towards a cooperative and consultative working framework to address common threats and challenges to regional peace and stability.

Collective Security, conceptually, provides rationality for international organizations to maintain and uphold international peace and stability.¹ Immanuel Kant presented this idea in his book *Perpetual Peace* towards the end of the 18th century, in which he stated, “The law of nations will be based on one federation of free states”.² Making cooperative security a major mode of interaction in the international system demands that states build a range of capabilities to implement international agreements, address transnational threats, and prevent or resolve conflicts.³ Impediments to enhanced cooperative security involve differences in perceptions of key actors. However, it is states’ perceptions of multiple security threats which could make them more reluctant to pursue cooperative security.⁴

Since the end of the Cold War, the term cooperative security became a catch–phrase used generally to describe a more peaceful approach to security through increased international cooperation. The cooperative security model embraced four concentric and mutually reinforcing

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¹ Stefan Aleksovski, et al., “Collective Security – The Role of International Organizations: Implications in International Security Order,” *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, vol. 5, no. 27, December 2014.

² Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 93-130.

³ Michael Moodie, “Cooperative Security: Implications for National Security and International Relations,” Occasional Paper/14, Cooperative Monitoring Center, Sandia National Laboratories, January 2000.

⁴ Ibid.

“rings of security”: *Individual Security, Collective Security, Collective Defense, and Promoting Stability*.⁵ What gained primacy among these was the traditional aspect of collective security – defending the integrity of member states. In 1992, American strategists — Ashton Carter, William Perry, and John Steinbruner spoke about cooperative security in terms of providing new avenues toward world peace, and said, “Organizing principles like deterrence, nuclear stability, and containment embodied the aspirations of the cold war ... Cooperative Security is the corresponding principle for international security in the post-cold war era.”⁶ Two years later, in 1994, former Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans described cooperative security as tending “... to connote consultation rather than confrontation, reassurance rather than deterrence, transparency rather than secrecy, prevention rather than correction, and interdependence rather than unilateralism.”⁷

In the contemporary and evolving understanding of cooperative security, promotion of stability outside the boundaries of the states has been regarded as an integral component that constitutes the cooperative security system. Cooperative Security can be described as a “strategic system,” as it does not easily fit the generic accepted definition of a “strategy” which has been described as “the integrated application of means to achieve desired ends.”⁸ The word “system” implies that the concept cannot be fully realized in abstract, and should be based on existing or newly-created, and resilient institutions.⁹ The starting point for cooperative security would be creation of a strong normative base.¹⁰ New age collective security can be inferred as an understanding/commitment among groups of nations with commonality of interests and values to protect the security interests of the individual members within their joint spheres of interest. This, to a large extent, applies to liberal democracies that demonstrate a respect for the rule of international law.¹¹

The term “collective security” has been cited as a principle of the United Nations, and the League of Nations and can be seen in reference to getting triggered when a threatened nation, exercising its inherent right of collective self-defense, can call on others for help.¹² The ‘ring’ of maintaining peace embodies the concept of collective security, per se, i.e., protection from threats and aggression. The cooperative security system is seen to be proactive and prepared to engage in collective diplomatic, economic, and, if necessary, military action in areas outside their common space which may threaten their own security and stability. Commenting on ‘status quo’ as a concept, Hans Morgenthau opined, “The policy of the status quo aims at the maintenance of the distribution of power as it exists at a particular moment in history.”¹³ As few nations become ever more revisionist, expansionist, and combative, the essential tenets of new age cooperative security, i.e., to reduce the risk of war [or conflict] which are not directed towards a specific

⁵ Richard Cohen, “Cooperative Security: From Individual Security to International Stability” in Richard Cohen and Michael Mihalka, *Cooperative Security: New Horizons for International Order*, The Marshall Center Papers, no. 3, The George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, 2001.

⁶ Ashton B. Carter, William J. Perry, and John D. Steinbruner, *A New Concept of Cooperative Security*, (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution Press) 1993.

⁷ Gareth Evans, “Cooperative Security and Intra-State Conflict,” *Foreign Policy*, no. 96, Fall 1994.

⁸ Cohen, n. 5.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Moodie, n. 3.

¹¹ Aleksovski, et al., n. 1.

¹² Speech by U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Madeleine K. Albright, Transcript, *Building a Collective Security System* (US Department of State Dispatch, May 10, 1993.).

¹³ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 5th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978) p. 46.

country or coalition of countries¹⁴ shall be sought after. In order to develop the spirit of a common future, and promotion of stability, the system of cooperative security should seek for democratic countries to cooperate mutually for regional peace and security. The future success of cooperative security will hinge upon common systems, institutions and values that foster a sense of security based on global rules and commons.

Maritime Security and Stability in the Indo-Pacific: Charting a Sovereign Path

The term Indo-Pacific depicts centrality vis-à-vis approaches that regional nations seem to be adopting toward security competition/cooperation in maritime Asia. In fact, the proactive role and official policy positions adopted by major stakeholders in the region clearly reflects the primacy of the Indo-Pacific. These include the United States' "Rebalance/Pivot to Asia", China's "Maritime Silk Route Initiative", Japan's "Confluence of the Two Seas", India's "Act East Policy", and Australia's official embrace of the term Indo-Pacific in most policy documents and pronouncements. Maritime security, safety and cooperation within ocean spaces and its linkages to forging closer foreign policy ties between nations sharing converging ideals is well recognized. For that matter, numerous policy statements coming from Japan have indicated that security issues in the Indian Ocean, Pacific Ocean, South China Sea, and East China Sea cannot be treated separately, or, as stand-alone issues alone.

The strategic realities have become far more pertinent, given the rising centrality of the Indo-Pacific to regional security and stability. The renewed focus of India's active engagement in the region within the ambit of its "Act East" policy initiative compliments Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy". Both these policy initiatives seek to nurture an open and transparent Indo-Pacific maritime zone as part of a broader Asia. This concept of a broader Asia is fast transcending geographical boundaries, with the Pacific and Indian Oceans' mergence becoming far more pronounced and evident. These emerging proximities render the prospects for collective and cooperative regional security mechanisms, more deliverable than ever before. Commensurate with the 'Act East' policy announcement and consequent re-orientation of India's strategic focus, establishing security norms and rules across the stretch of the Indo-Pacific region will be a vital objective for both India, and Japan. The two nations today, depict strong and united leadership with a determination to persevere, by virtue of sharing basic freedoms and democratic values. Given the post-war identity as a state unconstrained by great-power relationships, India's broader approach resonates and dovetails neatly with the omnidirectional pragmatism¹⁵ of the combined leadership of Prime Ministers, Shinzo Abe and Narendra Modi.

At its heart, a strategic system can be understood as a set of geopolitical power relationships among nations where major changes in one part of the system affect what happens in the other parts.¹⁶ The contemporary Indo-Pacific means recognizing the accelerating economic and security connections between the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean region in creating a single strategic system. The 2013 Australian Defense White Paper defines Southeast Asia as

¹⁴ Aleksovski, et al., n. 1.

¹⁵ John Nilsson-Wright, "Creative Minilateralism in a Changing Asia: Opportunities for Security Convergence and Cooperation between Australia, India and Japan," Asia Programme, Chatham House (The Royal Institute of International Affairs) July 2017.

¹⁶ Rory Medcalf, "The evolving security order in the Indo-Pacific Professor," in David Brewster, ed., *Indo-Pacific Maritime Security: Challenges and Cooperation*, National Security College Crawford School of Public Policy ANU College of Asia & the Pacific, The Australian National University, July 2016; also see, Rory Medcalf, "The Indo-Pacific: What's in a Name?" *The American Interest*, vol. 9, no. 2, Nov/Dec 2013, pp. 58-66.

the 'geographic center' of the Indo-Pacific.¹⁷ The Indo-Pacific system is defined in part by the geographically expanding interests and reach of rising big powers, i.e., China, and the continued strategic role and presence of the United States, in both, the Pacific and Indian Oceans. A major driver of the interconnection between the Pacific and Indian Oceans, economically and strategically, has been the extension of Chinese interests and presence, south and west across the seas.¹⁸

Symbolizing acknowledgment of the economic and strategic dependence on developments across a much wider maritime region, Indo-Pacific prioritizes allocation of resources, security partners, membership and agendas of regional diplomatic and security institutions.¹⁹ This also suggests that the Indo-Pacific region will remain central in achieving its foreign policy objectives, whilst also underscoring that the history, geo-economics, geopolitics and strategic cultures amongst major players represents a fundamental clash of interests that would pose as a major obstacle to their co-existence.²⁰

The historical patterns of commercial, cultural and strategic interaction suggests that the artificial division of maritime Asia into East Asia and South Asia, the Indian Ocean and the Pacific, was something of a post-1945 anomaly, not a permanent state of affairs.²¹ With around 15.5 million barrels (i.e., 2/3rds of global oil shipments) passing through the Gulf of Hormuz, more than 40 percent of the global seaborne bulk cargo trade passing through the Strait of Malacca, and, 11 million barrels of oil passing through the Malacca and Singapore Straits, the region's significance and vitality can be judged by the statistics themselves. By 2030, the Indo-Pacific is expected to account for 21 of the top 25 sea and air trade routes. According to predictions, by 2050, half of the world's top 20 economies will belong to the Indo-Pacific region.²²

Other select indicators underscoring the dramatic shift in power relativities is China that is predicted to overtake the United States by 2030 as the world's largest economy in market exchange rate terms; and India, expected to become the world's third largest economy in US dollar terms by 2030. Further, *The Economist* predicts that by 2050, Indonesia will leap from being the 16th largest economy into the top 10 economies; Vietnam may become one of the fastest growing large economies; and; established economies such as Japan, South Korea and Australia will likely drop in relative GDP rankings. Thus, the Indian Ocean doubling up as a geopolitical and geo-economic nerve center remains critical to the regional construct, and its primacy. To a large extent, the Indian Ocean has significantly replaced the Atlantic in order to become the world's busiest and strategically most significant trade corridor.²³ Consequently, the major economies of East Asia have acute dependence on the oil imports across the Indian Ocean from the Middle East and Africa. The region can be labeled as the artery carrying the resources that

¹⁷ Commonwealth of Australia, *Defense White Paper 2013*, p. 69, available at <http://www.defence.gov.au/whitepaper/2013>

¹⁸ Medcalf, n. 16.

¹⁹ Rory Medcalf, "Reimagining Asia: From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific," The Asan Forum, June 26, 2015, available at <http://www.theasanforum.org/reimagining-asia-from-asia-pacific-toindo-pacific/>

²⁰ For a detailed debate on India-China relations, see Mohan J. Malik, *China and India: Great Power Rivals*, (First Forum Press, Boulder, 2011) p. 9.

²¹ Medcalf, n. 16.

²² Speech by Australian Minister for Defence, Kevin Andrews, "Australia's Defence Policy and Relationship with India," September 2, 2015, available at <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/minister/kevin-andrews/speeches/minister-defence-australias-defence-policy-and-relationship-india>

²³ Justin Jones, "Submarines and Maritime Strategy – Part 1," *The Strategist*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, January 29, 2013; and see Commonwealth of Australia, *Defense White Paper 2013*, p. 13, available at <http://www.defence.gov.au/whitepaper/2013>

fuel the growth of regional economies. However, dependence of this nature can simultaneously take shape of becoming a strategic vulnerability that could well influence regional partnership-building and diplomatic relations.

Theory of Liberal Institutionalism and Confidence-Building Measures

There is a need for regional players in the Indo-Pacific to promote security cooperation in a free and flexible way. Confidence-building through exchanging official dialogue and information sharing, and consultative frameworks are among the broad generic characterization of confidence building measures (CBMs) being a set of unilateral, bilateral, or multilateral procedural actions that primarily are put in place to decrease military tensions. Consultative mechanisms include pre-notification requirements and joint military exercises. CBMs serve as an effective tool to make a breakthrough towards the larger goal of maintaining stability and conflict resolution. CBMs, thus, are not necessarily an end in themselves, but rather useful steps to negotiate and implement processes that could help in securing conditions of stability and preservation of status quo in a limited or extended sphere. CBMs, defense cooperation and military engagement can be clubbed under the liberal institutionalist school, arguing that international cooperation is not only possible, but also highly desirable, since it reduces transaction costs and makes interstate relations more predictable. Institutional liberalism, or liberal institutionalism, claims that international institutions and organizations have aided the possibility of cooperation between states.²⁴ In this reference, CBMs have emerged as an attractive option because they are low-cost and low-risk activities.²⁵ Besides, they can be implemented with limited resources and calculated risks. As CBMs are usually reciprocal in nature, they display goodwill²⁶ that will reflect regionally.

Growing Centrality of the Indo-Pacific and Emerging Challenges

Back in 1967, the Australian National University held a conference on the theme, *India, Japan, Australia: Partners in Asia?* The conference delegates thought ‘the future in would be determined by how China behaved, and how others behaved towards China’ and were concerned about Washington’s actions in the region and securing lasting economic growth.²⁷ Fifty years on, the notion of enhanced cooperation between Australia, India and Japan is back, driven once more by the challenges posed by Beijing.²⁸ The Indo-Pacific region is undergoing a prolonged and dramatic period of flux and transformation bringing in its own set of opportunities and challenges, which require flexible and swift mechanisms for cooperation to manage change in the region.²⁹

More than anything else, it perhaps is uncertainty that is becoming the defining feature of the region with predictions that by 2020, the combined military budgets within the Indo-Pacific will exceed \$600 billion, matching military spending in North America for the first time ever. The Indo-Pacific is expected to drive 60 per cent of the global increase in defense acquisition, research and development with 19 countries in the region accounting for one third of global

²⁴ Robert O. Keohane and Lisa L. Martin, “The Promise of Institutional Theory,” *International Security*, vol. 20, no. 1. p. 39.

²⁵ Simon JA Mason, and Matthias Siegfried, “Confidence Building Measures in Peace Processes,” in *Managing Peace Processes: Process Related Questions—A Handbook for AU Practitioners*, vol. 1, African Union and the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, 2013, pp. 57-77.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ian Hall, “The Australia–India–Japan trilateral: converging interests... and converging perceptions?” *The Strategist*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, March 17, 2017.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Transcript, “Indo-Pacific Security Paradigm- Australia’s Choices,” Australian High Commissioner to India’s Address, National Defence College, New Delhi, May 8, 2017.

defense budgets by 2020.³⁰ A prominent projection is that of China's likelihood of building 30 new submarines and another new aircraft carrier.³¹ These in turn, can be interpreted as vital indicators of Beijing's strategic priorities that lean towards the entire Indo-Pacific region per se. Beijing's maritime priorities are not likely to remain limited to the "near seas" off China's eastern seaboard. Recall the 2015 Defense White Paper which suggested China not necessarily remaining confined to East Asian waters, adding the role of "open seas protection" to the PLA Navy's existing task of "offshore waters defense". Additionally, the Chinese terminology of turning to the "far seas" is increasingly apparent in the South China Sea stretching till the Indian Ocean with instances of repeated deployments in the recent past. Not surprisingly, regional concerns are mounting regarding the rise of China, the direction and intent of which, continues to remain ambiguous.

All of this is to say that there are numerous challenges at a time of great transition in states' economic activity, strategic weight and international ambitions. Crises and transnational issues don't respect the boundaries of traditional groupings or stay neatly in a single region.³² Therefore, smaller group diplomacy / 'minilateralism' will matter more over time in the Indo-Pacific because every strategic issue that the region is confronted with, is different and will engage different countries in different combinations.³³

Teng Jianqun, Director of the Department for American Studies at China Institute of International Studies, presents the case for an understanding of China's maritime policy which requires at least two approaches: a historical one and a 'realistic' one (i.e. an approach that combines interests and pragmatism). For centuries, there has been a debate in China whether the country should 'go to sea' or should 'remain on the continent'. This essentially implies the 'blue' vs 'yellow' civilization argument. Teng highlights that China eventually would become a strong maritime power, when former President Hu Jintao told the National Congress, "We should enhance our capacity for exploiting marine resources, develop the marine economy, protect the marine ecological environment, resolutely safeguard China's maritime rights and interests, and build China into a maritime power."³⁴ According to the Chinese perspective, the maritime policy of China today, hinges on sovereignty issues and protection of its maritime interests and rights. After China adjusted its maritime policy under the current leadership of President Xi Jinping, the major transformation visible today is that of China placing security and sovereignty right on top of its foreign policy agenda.³⁵ Teng further asserts that "no matter whether they like it or not, the United States and other countries should have a new vision towards China ... The reason for such a change is simple: this is not an era of spheres of influence."³⁶

In the above reference, to an extent, it is the expansion of China's interests, diplomacy and strategic reach especially into the Indian Ocean that defines the Indo-Pacific most of all. It is notable that China's own overarching geo-economics' thrust since 2013 – with the Belt and Road initiative – includes an ambition to extend China-centric infrastructure and strategic partnerships into and through the Indian Ocean. The PRC's preference for combining military intimidation and stealth economic infiltration in redrawing borders and rewriting history is visible the world over, with its nearly uniform policy of injecting investments and reaping disproportionate economic

³⁰ For more details see, Deloitte Global Defense Outlook 2016, *Shifting Postures and Emerging Fault Lines*.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Transcript, n. 29.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ President Hu Jintao, Report to the 18th National Congress, Chinese Communist Party, November 8, 2012.

³⁵ Teng Jianqun, "Understanding China's Maritime Policy: 21st Century Maritime Silk Road," in Brewster ed., n. 16.

³⁶ Ibid.

and strategic benefits out of it.³⁷ Strikingly reminiscent of mercantilism, this protracted endeavor led to a steep rise in Beijing's capacity to invest further and hold unprecedented foreign exchange reserves. The mercantilist policy approach adopted by Beijing can be credited for it becoming a global economic powerhouse that is launching strategic ambitions well beyond its immediate territory and shores.³⁸

China's much pronounced Maritime Silk Road strategy initiative needs to be read in conjunction with the cumulative maritime activity of the PLA Navy (PLAN) and its mounting forays into the Indian Ocean — the third-largest water body in the world. The expanding strategic naval footprint in the Indian Ocean by means of acquiring more maritime bases and berthing facilities is a core pillar of China's ports policy. The PLA Navy could well build as many as 18 overseas naval military bases in the greater Indian Ocean area³⁹. The long shadow of China's ports policy in the Indian Ocean being currently driven and characterized by both, state- and private-sponsored "infrastructure investment" foretells strategic ramifications militarily, as these facilities shall end up becoming communication and surveillance facilities, in addition to being repair and replenishment centers for the Chinese Navy. This underscores the intransigent course of Beijing's influence in South Asia and the Indian Ocean.⁴⁰ Palpably, Rory Medcalf terms the Maritime Silk Road as the 'Indo-Pacific with Chinese characteristics'.⁴¹

Indo-Japan Defense Framework

As far as India is concerned, its resolute posture and approach highlights the growing convergence of political, economic and security interests with stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific and Indian Ocean Regions that remain critical to India's strategic objectives. The momentum at which the Indo-Pacific has assumed focus in New Delhi's strategic thinking is unmistakable, both characteristically and substantively. And Japan, surely, remains among the key frontal pivots of this focus. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Indian PM Narendra Modi have long been in agreement to secure stability in the Indo-Pacific region, which remains indispensable to Tokyo and New Delhi's national security. India's growing regional standing has influenced its integration with key stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific region. Re-orientation of India's strategic focus from a "Look East" to an "Act East" policy, finds manifestation in the ensuing approach, by and large, towards the Indo-Pacific. What seems more pronounced is that New Delhi is likely to continue to pursue a sovereign foreign policy path and undertake decisions that best suit its national security interests in light of the hard-power priorities of naval modernization by nations in the region. Recall an Indian Defence Ministry statement five years ago, which argued, "As rising nations ... become more powerful, emerging risks require greater attention ... India remains conscious and watchful of the implications of China's military profile in the immediate and

³⁷ Monika Chansoria, "In Africa, it is China vs India and Japan," *The Sunday Guardian*, July 8, 2017.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ According to reports in the Chinese media, Walvis Bay will be one of 18 naval bases that will be established in various regions; this has been cited in *The Namibian*, "Chinese naval base for Walvis Bay," November 19, 2014, available at <https://www.namibian.com.na/index.php?id=130693&page=archive-read> ; also see, *China Daily Mail*, "China to build 18 naval bases in the Indian Ocean," November 22, 2014, available at <https://chinadailymail.com/2014/11/22/china-to-build-18-naval-bases-in-indian-ocean/> ; and see, Kwame A. Insaïdoo, *China: The New Imperialists & Neo-Colonialists in Africa?* (Author House Publishers, 2016); also see, Monika Chansoria, "China eyes 18 overseas naval bases," *The Sunday Guardian*, August 15, 2015, available at <http://www.sundayguardian.com/analysis/china-eyes-18-overseas-naval-bases>

⁴⁰ Monika Chansoria, "China eyes 18 overseas naval bases," *The Sunday Guardian*, August 15, 2015.

⁴¹ Medcalf, n. 19.

extended neighborhood.”⁴² Besides, in a public interaction during his 2014 Tokyo official visit, Prime Minister Modi remarked on the presence of 18th century ‘expansionist mindset’ among certain regional actors – that of encroaching upon other countries, intruding in others’ waters, and capturing territory. This was widely interpreted as an oblique reference to China’s recent and recurring actions in the East China Sea and South China Sea.

The September 2014 Tokyo Declaration on the Special Strategic and Global Partnership acknowledged converging global interests and critical maritime inter-connections between India and Japan. It was in this declaration that both sides attached special importance to the regularization of bilateral maritime exercises as well as Japan’s continued participation in the India-US Malabar series of naval exercises. Speaking many years back while addressing the Indian Parliament in August 2007, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe averred, “ ... a strong India is in the best interest of Japan, and a strong Japan is in the best interest of India.” The role of India and Japan for stability, prosperity and engagement in the Indo-Pacific region by means of the “Act East Policy,” and “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy” shall further be consolidated through bilateral and multilateral security and defense cooperation mechanisms. The entry into force of the two Defense Framework Agreements concerning the Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology and concerning Security Measures for the Protection of Classified Military Information was considered a welcome move. Japan’s readiness to provide its state-of-the-art defense platform, US-2 amphibian aircraft is a key development and shall be an important bilateral security benchmark.

Further, the defense engagement needs to be expanded through greater two-way collaboration and technology cooperation, co-development and co-production, by expediting discussions for determining specific items through the Joint Working Group on Defense Equipment and Technology Cooperation.⁴³ Former Japanese Vice-Minister of Defense, Masanori Nishi has pointed out that Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) deployment has significant reliance on Indian logistical support that would provide more opportunities for Japanese vessels to visit Indian ports during voyages across the Indian Ocean. Nishi opines that Japan could play an active role in stabilizing the Indian Ocean and reinforcing a rules-based order in areas including: 1) Engagement with key Bay of Bengal states such as Myanmar, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka through investments in infrastructure and capability-building; 2) Support for emerging regional institutions in the Indian Ocean such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium; 3) Maritime capacity-building among Indian Ocean island states and other developing states in the Indian Ocean, with a focus on blue economy; and 4) Enhanced role for the Japanese Coast Guard.⁴⁴

This emergent *realpolitik* reflected yet again in the November 2016 joint statement between Prime Ministers Abe and Modi that highlights safeguarding global commons in the maritime, space and cyber domains. Tokyo and New Delhi remain committed to respecting freedom of navigation and over flight, and unimpeded lawful commerce, based on the principles of international law, as reflected notably in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which establishes the international legal order of the seas and oceans. In this context, all parties need to resolve disputes through peaceful means without resorting to threat or use of force and exercise self-restraint in the conduct of activities, and avoid unilateral actions that raise

⁴² Indian Ministry of Defence, *Annual Report 2011-2012*, Government of India, 2012, available at <http://india.gov.in/outerwin.php?id=http://mod.nic.in/reports/welcome.html> pp. 6-9.

⁴³ *Japan-India Joint Statement*, November 11, 2016, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tokyo; also see, *Annual Report 2015-16* Ministry of Defence, Government of India.

⁴⁴ Masanori Nishi, “The role of Japan in Indian Ocean security: A Japanese perspective,” in Brewster, ed., n. 16.

tensions. Japan and India are in agreement that effective implementation of the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea and early conclusion of the negotiations to establish a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea in accordance with universally recognized principles of international law. What featured prominently in the Japan-India Joint Statement was underscoring the UNCLOS, freedom of navigation and over flight and unimpeded lawful commerce in international waters. The ongoing strategic upheaval in the South China Sea caused by unilateral actions such as massive land reclamation of submerged reefs, and militarization of that converted land has notched up regional tensions, and the criticality of the sea lanes of communication, that underpin vitality of seeking to ensure continuing stability in the Indo-Pacific. This resonates well with the larger goal of cooperative security – which is not the creation of stability at any price.⁴⁵

During the latest India-Japan Annual Defense Ministerial Dialogue, held in September 2017, exchanges between Japan Ground Self Defence Force and the Indian Army were agreed upon, especially to develop counter-terrorism as a key area of common interest. In the context of enhanced co-operation between the two ground forces, it was decided to explore a joint field exercise in the field of counter-terrorism between the Indian Army and the JGSDF in 2018. In the maritime realm, the success of Japan-India-US Trilateral Maritime Exercise Malabar 2017 held in July was welcomed and Japan expressed its intention to have state-of-the-art Japanese assets including P-1 to participate in the Malabar 2018. The two sides shall also consider inclusion of Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) training to expand cooperation and pursue exchanges and training by ASW aviation units such as P-3C. The Japanese side proposed inviting the Indian Navy to mine-countermeasures training held by the JMSDF.⁴⁶ The two countries agreed to encourage equipment collaboration including defense and dual-use technologies and identified specific areas of collaboration in the field of defense equipment and technology cooperation, including commencing technical discussions for research collaboration in the areas of unmanned ground vehicles and robotics.⁴⁷

Consultative Trilateral Mechanisms and Joint Maritime Maneuvers in the Indo-Pacific

The steady upward trajectory in formal and informal cooperation between India, Japan, and Australia has been shaped by economic complementarity, as well as by political fundamentals such as the tradition of supporting the rule of law and international norms, including respect for state sovereignty and multilateral cooperation, democratic governance [in that, them being functioning liberal democracies] and multilateralism.⁴⁸ In addition to their geography, each country is strongly embedded in the Asian region in terms of history and contemporary interests, but equally, each has a national identity that incorporates an extra-regional identity.⁴⁹

With the “Indo-Pacific Region” featuring prominently in the very title of the 2025 joint vision statement between India and Japan, the writing on the wall is apparent. A vital demonstration of India’s growing maritime focus extending beyond the Indian Ocean comes with Japan’s participation in the trilateral maritime exercise [Malabar] between India, US and Japan. The bilateral Indo-US Malabar naval maneuvers got a boost in 2014, after being upgraded to a trilateral

⁴⁵ Moodie, n. 3.

⁴⁶ For more details see, *Joint Press Statement on India-Japan Annual Defence Ministerial Dialogue*, Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Ministry of Defence, September 6, 2017, available at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=170560>

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Nilsson-Wright, n. 15.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

initiative, this time including the Japanese navy. Since 2014, Exercise Malabar has involved the navies of India, and the United States, along with Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Forces. The trilateral exercises held in 2014, 2015, 2016, and most recently in 2017, have witnessed greater inter-operability and integration between the three navies. With the involvement of three aircraft carriers, the 2017 Malabar naval initiative was by far the biggest, since this exercise was first launched in 1992. Common political values, principles, democratic systems and convergence on regional and world views, renders the Malabar exercises carrying a political message that seeks to convey India, US and Japan's orientation towards the future of security in maritime Indo-Pacific. A priority area for trilateral cooperation lies in intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) to improve maritime domain awareness, and expanding nascent links between the respective Coast Guards of these nations. The vastness of distances across the Indian Ocean makes tracking of vessels and aircrafts a difficult task, which is beyond the resources of a single country.⁵⁰ To increase involvement in the existing maritime surveillance systems, such as the Malacca Straits Patrol (MSP) and the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAPP), Secretary General of the Japan Institute for National Fundamentals, Seiji Kurosawa, suggests setting up a new maritime surveillance framework in which Indo-Japanese armed forces can assume a leading role.⁵¹ Prioritizing creation of a continuous surveillance system, and expanding the scope of the multilateral Malabar naval maneuvers by expanding Japan's defense role and capability and anti-submarine warfare drills are the next vital steps in the way forward.

To an extent, a shared experience of having operated in the shadow of great-power politics, often in a subordinate or supporting role to more influential actors has helped in facilitating this trilateral cooperation.⁵² A report by the United States Studies Centre titled *Australia, India and the United States: The Challenge of Forging New Alignments in the Indo-Pacific* argues that Canberra must promote a trilateral security relationship with Washington and Delhi, focused on the Indian Ocean. The idea of an Indo-Pacific 'strategic arc' reinforces India's role as a key regional partner that could eventually rank alongside Australia's traditional partners in the Asia Pacific.⁵³ The Japan-India-US Foreign Ministers' Trilateral Dialogue as well as the inaugural Japan-India-Australia Trilateral Dialogue strongly echoes the twin themes of regional connectivity and maritime security. These trilateral dialogue mechanisms will contribute to a balanced, open, inclusive, stable, transparent and rules-based economic, political and security architecture in the Indo-Pacific region.⁵⁴ The recurring strains on durability of the regional and international order make it more incumbent upon India, Japan, and Australia to develop new forms of cooperation to hedge against uncertainty, consolidate and widen their existing bilateral partnerships, and explore new opportunities for trilateral cooperation.⁵⁵ This 'creative minilateralism' as John Nilsson-Wright states, could best be put into practice in case of the Malabar naval exercises along with the US. As key regional stakeholders, Tokyo, Canberra and New Delhi should look towards capitalizing on the positive momentum of their strategic and defense relationship, deepening engagement and increasing consistency and complexity of activities. For India to consolidate its position in

⁵⁰ David Brewster, "Security in the Indo-Pacific Needs India's Helping Hand," *The Wire*, September 5, 2016.

⁵¹ Seiji Kurosawa, "Challenges in Maintaining the Rules-based Maritime Order in the Indo-Pacific," Japan-India Bilateral Dialogue, May 23, 2017, available at <http://en.jinf.jp/news/archives/4898>

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Brewster, n. 50.

⁵⁴ As cited by the Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Prime Minister's Office, November 11, 2016.

⁵⁵ Nilsson-Wright, n. 15.

the Indo-Pacific, Japan and Australia for sure, will have to find greater prominence, both at the bilateral and multilateral levels. Multilaterally, India, Australia and Japan, notwithstanding their very substantive differences in population and economic power⁵⁶, share an identity informally defined as ‘middle powers’. This identity is less rooted in raw, quantifiable expressions of global and/or regional influence, but more in a common preference for pragmatic decision-making, rejection of doctrinaire policymaking, and support for humanitarian and non-traditional security cooperation, including a commitment to constructive dispute management and mediation.⁵⁷

The Third Japan-Australia-India Trilateral Dialogue was held in Canberra in April 2017 to exchanging views on wide ranging issues including regional affairs in the Indo-Pacific and more specifically on Japan-Australia-India trilateral cooperation. The trilateral arrangement (Japan-Australia-India) will prove to being among the most significant vehicle for shoring up regional stability, norms and institutions. Expanding cooperation among the partners and synchronizing capacity building efforts and outreach across the region shall remain future steps that the trilateral can take to bolster the regional order. A rules-based order should be upheld, but so should processes, by means of which, all get a say in suggesting how those rules should be set. Beijing cannot be allowed to undermine a rules-based order, by seeking to replace ‘rule of law’ and enforce ‘rule of force’. Upholding values of liberalism and democracy should be the ultimate objectives of the trilateral mechanisms. Perhaps the most vital area where the rule of law needs to be enforced at present is in the maritime realm – i.e., in maintaining a rule-based maritime order.⁵⁸

Co-opting Japan as a permanent member of the Malabar Trilateral Initiative and India’s accreditation of its Ambassador to a separate and dedicated diplomatic mission at the ASEAN are manifestations of Delhi’s intent. Moreover, India and Japan remain committed to strengthen the East Asia Summit (EAS) and make it a more dynamic proactive process and platform to discuss regional political, economic and security issues. New Delhi and Tokyo also are working towards convening the EAS Ambassadors’ meeting in Jakarta and establishment of the EAS Unit within the ASEAN Secretariat. Maritime cooperation and regional connectivity within the EAS framework needs to be enhanced further. This only highlights the significance and vitality of regional architecture through ASEAN-led fora such as ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting Plus, Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum and their coordination to tackle global and regional challenges including maritime security.⁵⁹

Corresponding with the “Act East” policy approach and course, the regular dispatch of warships, including frontline destroyers and stealth frigates on long overseas deployment to the Indian Ocean and South China Sea verify India’s renewed maritime intent.⁶⁰ The noticeable presence of the Indian flag on these strategically vital points, reiterates that New Delhi is fully cognizant of the ongoing movements in its strategic backyard, being a major stakeholder there, and is all set to emerge as a geared up player on the scene, and not a reluctant one. Given its 7,500 km coastline, 1,200 islands and 2.4 million sq km exclusive economic zone (EEZ), India’s reorientation and demonstration of being a consistent security partner for the region highlights

⁵⁶ Pricewaterhouse Coopers LLP (2015), *The World in 2050. Will the shift in global economic power continue?* p. 3, available at <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/issues/the-economy/assets/world-in-2050-february-2015.pdf>

⁵⁷ T. Wilkins, “Australia and middle power approaches to Asia Pacific regionalism,” *Australian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 52, n. 1, 2017.

⁵⁸ Hall, n. 27.

⁵⁹ *Japan-India Joint Statement*, November 11, 2016, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tokyo; also see, *Annual Report 2015-16* Ministry of Defence, Government of India.

⁶⁰ *Annual Report 2016-17*, Ministry of Defence, Government of India.

its maritime interests and stakes in the larger Indo-Pacific. Notably, India's first Tri-Service Andaman and Nicobar Command in the southeast corner of the bay – lies just 90 miles (145 kilometers) from Indonesia's Aceh Province, bordering the strategically vital Strait of Malacca.

The Indo-Japanese-US equation should work towards integrating Australia in the existing Malabar Trilateral and upgrade it to a Quadrilateral Initiative. The term Indo-Pacific brings India, Japan, Australia and the US into the strategic frame of regional interests, stakes, and reflects greater institutional involvement. It is well accepted that policy dialogue works best when supported by practical cooperation including the existing bilateral frameworks for security cooperation that should be discussed and promoted to trilateral and quadrilateral initiatives to create a regional order that is flexible, resilient and vital to secure a collective future.⁶¹ Australia is already seeking to join this grouping, where it has previously held non-permanent membership. During a visit to Tokyo in April 2017, Australian Defense Minister, Marise Payne publicly acknowledged Canberra's desire to join the naval maneuvers stating, "Australia is very interested in a quadrilateral engagement with India, Japan and the United States."⁶² As the strategic games unfold in the region, incorporating Australia will prove to being an invaluable asset, and India, US, and Japan should not hand over a quasi-walkover to nations which are attempting to alter/change the existing status quo in the region, be it in the East China Sea, the South China Sea, or the Himalayan borderlands. It has been confirmed that India will be participating in Australia's multi-lateral air Exercise *Pitch Black* in northern Australia in 2018, and Australia's request of participating in the multilateral Malabar maritime exercise to be undertaken by India, Japan, and the United States, should positively be accepted at the next available opportunity.

The ominous shadow of China has been looming large on the "Quad" since 2007 when Australia's then government led by Kevin Rudd took the call of withdrawing from the exercises and accompanying security talks following negative feelers received from Beijing. Today, a decade later, the situation can result differently by means of prudent and futuristic scenario-based thinking and approach. Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull's government has been known to throw its support behind a Japanese initiative to re-establish a security dialogue between the US, India, Japan and Australia. This underscores that an Indo-Pacific security structure might just be evolving in reference to another such strengthening equation – namely between China and Russia. The 2016 Joint Sea naval exercise conducted by Russia and China was interpreted as maritime signaling by Beijing and Moscow that involved PLA's Nanhai Fleet and was China's biggest naval drill with Russia. Also, it was the first time that Russian and Chinese naval contingents met for combat drills in the South China Sea, shortly following the pronouncement of the verdict by the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague, on the South China Sea Arbitration initiated by The Philippines. The Russian Navy has co-opted China as a 'core partner' in its new maritime doctrine, indicating shifting realignments in the regional balance of maritime politics.

Conclusion

In the above setting, managing China's rise shall remain the foremost challenging task for stakeholders. Although, the People's Republic of China is more integrated into, and supposedly more cooperative with global political and economic systems than ever before in its history, growing uneasiness in the Indo-Pacific region are indicators of China's increasing economic

⁶¹ Transcript, n. 29.

⁶² Minister for Foreign Affairs statement, Transcript released by the Australian Embassy, Tokyo, April 20, 2017.

and military power, and lack of China's adherence to regional and international norms.⁶³ The region, by and large, views the problem of China's rising power as a root source of instability in the greater Indo-Pacific region. With a rising regional and global footprint, coupled with a strategic outreach that is being backed by a strong and robust military characterized by the Chinese leadership as being essential in achieving great power status, China today is far more focused and adept at supporting missions beyond its immediate periphery. This includes power projection, development and focus of China's naval capabilities for long-range naval deployments. Issues pertaining the South China Sea including land reclamation, landing civilian aircraft and military transport aircraft, and the continued constructions at China's military outposts in this region shall definitely be the highlight among numerous tensions. Besides, investments in ports across various locations in the Indo-Pacific stretching from Southeast Asia to the Indian Ocean Region have critical strategic ramifications that shall likely shuffle security alignments regionally. All these coupled with pure military strategies such as anti-access/area-denial capabilities, long-range precision strikes, and surface and undersea operations, will render tensions across the Indo-Pacific to only rise further.

What seems more and more apparent and ostensible, is China's management of leveraging its growing economic and military power to assert over sovereignty claims with repeated attempts to change or alter the existing status quo, below the threshold of actual conflict, and bid to create a *new/fresh status quo situation* – be it over features in the East China Sea, South China Sea, or over the Himalayan borderlands. By means of balancing and mobilizing economic, technological, and human resources to translate into military/strategic power⁶⁴, China's domestic politics, has witnessed pressure on the central government to craft a strong Chinese national identity.

Based on the above geo-strategic graph of events, the Indo-Pacific, calls for enhanced security cooperation between regional democracies, i.e., India, Japan and Australia. Ensuring that dialogue participation will remain the lynchpin for mapping out a shared vision for a futuristic Indo-Pacific strategy, the trilateral must work together to build the political, economic and military capacity of regional states to retain and exercise their autonomy, defend their interests and identify common regional security challenges that straddle a geographic space extending from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean, and incorporate risks in South, Southeast and Northeast Asia.

Cooperative security shall only be realized when nations develop a sense of a common future, based upon shared political systems, forms of representation and governance, institutions and values that foster a sense of a security based on global commons and rules. Regular military and political dialogue, confidence-building and deterrence-enhancing regional exercises will be crucial in offsetting traditional security threats and challenges. Maritime security and stability in the Indo-Pacific can be rendered more effective with converging themes in the realms of maritime security and cooperation. These will constitute to being the benchmark in identifying potential challenges in the Indo-Pacific that remain common to major players. Also, it will be critical in analyzing gaps in the corresponding domestic and regional policy frameworks. Growing symmetry in defense cooperation will help creating stronger capabilities to deal with common maritime threats and challenges in the Indo-Pacific region – through enhanced disaster response and mitigation capacities. Exploring and emphasizing the potential arenas of maritime stability and security between India and Japan amid the respective triangular equations, i.e., India-Japan-US, and Japan-Australia-India, will be the major regional equations that shall determine the balance of power and future roadmap of Indo-Pacific security and stability.

⁶³ Alastair Iain Johnston, "Is China a Status Quo Power?" *International Security*, vol. 27, no. 4, Spring 2003, pp. 5-56.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*