

Relations between Japan and India in the Indo-Pacific Age —Transcending the Quad Framework—*

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Abstract

Japanese people apparently share an affinity with India for several reasons, one being its history as the cradle of Buddhism. Based on this affinity, Japan-India relations grew steadily closer and stronger through the Meiji era and thereafter. This trend grew even more pronounced in the post-Cold War period. If the 1990s marked a preparatory phase, then the 2000s were a transitional phase while the 2010s have brought a huge leap forward. One of the more prominent trends through the 2010s was that bilateral relations evolved from a purely bilateral relationship and assumed importance within a broader, multilateral context. The combination of the relative decline of US power and the rapid ascension of China and India is among the factors that contributed to such transformation. The emergence of the Indo-Pacific as a cross-regional concept may be cited as yet another factor and one that interlinks with these trends.

In this paper, I present a general review of Japan-India relations in recent years together with an analysis and study of trends of countries concerned on the concept of the Indo-Pacific, India's striving for major-power status, and the quadrilateral framework between Japan, the US, India, and Australia ("the Quad"). To summarize my conclusions here, although the future direction of Japan-India ties will undoubtedly develop through their responses to China, it is also necessary to creatively build a forward-looking regional framework while keeping future developments in mind beyond the Quad.

Introduction

Japanese people apparently share an affinity with India for several reasons, one being its history as the cradle of Buddhism. In October 2017, the Kabukiza Theater in Tokyo gave a performance of the War Chronicles of Mahabharata, one of the world's three greatest epics and a tale that provides a glimpse into views on human nature and the universe that differ from those in the West. That could be why the theater tickets were sold out for consecutive days.

Based on this affinity, Japan-India relations grew steadily closer and stronger through the Meiji era and thereafter.¹ This trend grew even more pronounced in the post-Cold War period. If the 1990s marked an preparatory phase, then the 2000s were a transitional phase while the 2010s have brought a huge leap forward. One of the more prominent trends through the 2010s was that bilateral relations evolved from a purely bilateral relationship and assumed importance within a broader, multilateral context. The combination of the relative decline of US power and the rapid

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ascension of China and India is among the factors that contributed to such transformation. The emergence of the Indo-Pacific as a cross-regional concept may be cited as yet another factor and one that interlinks with these trends.

In this paper, I present a general review of Japan-India relations in recent years² together with an analysis and study of trends of countries concerned on the concept of the Indo-Pacific, India's striving for major-power status, and the quadrilateral framework between Japan, the US, India, and Australia ("the Quad"). To summarize my conclusions here, although the future direction of Japan-India ties will undoubtedly develop through their responses to China, it is also necessary to creatively build a forward-looking regional framework while keeping future developments in mind beyond the Quad.

1. The transitional phase in Japan-India relations: Factors fueling closer ties since the 2000s

Although Japan-India relations had steadily improved following the Cold War, they suffered an abrupt setback when India conducted a series of nuclear tests in 1998.³ As a country that had centered its foreign policy on the abolition of nuclear weapons, Japan was unable to show any tolerance for these new nuclear tests. This period may be described as a preparatory phase during which the two countries sought to re-establish their bilateral relationship.

1.1 The advancement of economic ties between Japan and India

It was the 2000s and thereafter when the two countries clearly improved the bilateral relations. From a birds-eye perspective, their bilateral economic ties were the first driving force of that development. The Indian economy demonstrated steady gains backed by liberalization policies implemented since 1991, and eventually achieved average annual growth of 7.4 percent⁴ through the first decade of the 21st century. In 1993, India unveiled its Look East policy⁵ and on that basis began working to cultivate stronger economic ties with the countries of East and Southeast Asia.

By contrast, Japan in the early 2000s found itself confronted by the necessity of averting certain "China risks." More specifically, by 2004 the scale of bilateral trade between Japan and China had reached 22 trillion yen, surpassing the 20 trillion yen in trade between Japan and the United States, thus making China Japan's largest trading partner. However, around this same period, a series of large-scale anti-Japanese demonstrations and riots broke out across China. As one outcome, India began to appear ideal as a new market for Japan. In 2003, India displaced China as the largest recipient of yen loans. Official development assistance (ODA) functioned as a "connector" to strengthened Japan-India ties.⁶

1.2 Improved ties between India and the US

The second factor behind better Japan-India relations was the improvement of India-US relations. Over approximately seven decades following the Independence in 1947, India's foreign policy had been characterized by a history of trial-and-error in how to position the US in its foreign policy and how to cultivate ties with it on that basis.⁷ In fact, it would not be an overstatement to describe India's foreign policy through that period in terms of the history of its relationship with the US.

Although India-US ties began improving in the 1990s, they suffered a setback following India's nuclear tests in 1998. Then US President Bill Clinton's visit to India in March 2000, the first-ever visit by a US President since Carter's 22 years earlier, impetus for improved relations emerged and continued to grow after the George W. Bush administration came to power in 2001.

As a country that had made the Japan-US alliance the backbone of its own foreign policy, Japan viewed the advancement of India's relationship with the US as an opportunity to improve its relations with India. During the Cold War era, India pursued a foreign policy stance centered on nonalignment together with the continuation of its alliance with the Soviet Union, and thus had

little if any latitude for improved relations with the US. At that time, Delhi's limited relations with Washington exerted a negative impact on its relations with Tokyo. During a stay in New Delhi in November 2017, I was told by an Indian expert of international politics that "following the Second World War, Japanese foreign policy has been interlocked with the Japan-US alliance; during the Cold War, it was anti-communist, but since the end of the Cold War, it has been anti-China." That perspective may carry an element of truth. In any case, we cannot deny the fact that Japan-India ties have advanced in tandem with the improvement in India-US relations.

Up until the 1990s, India's foreign policy frequently reflected a pro-Soviet, and later, pro-Russian, stance, but underwent changes that eventually gave it an increasingly pro-US complexion over time. For example, Rajesh Rajagopalan professor of Jawaharlal Nehru University in international politics known for past skepticism regarding closer India-US ties, asserts that establishing stronger relations with the US is currently the only effective strategic option available to India that will help it protect its interests and ensure its security.⁸

2. China's expansion into the Indo-Pacific and Japan-India relations

2.1 China's expansion into the Indo-Pacific

China counts as a third factor that has fostered closer ties between Japan and India. To put this into better perspective, China since the 2000s has developed into a major economic and military power and pursued an assertive foreign policy. These trends have had the effect of encouraging closer Japan-India ties, which in turn have been reinforced by the Indo-Pacific as a geopolitical area.

To elaborate, the Asia-Pacific or Asia as a whole were for an a pretty long period the principal regions of interest to Japanese foreign policy.⁹ However, in the mid-2000s China began implementing an Indian Ocean sea lane strategy that others have labeled the "String of Pearls" strategy.¹⁰ Further, in 2010 it surpassed Japan to become the world's second-largest economy in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) and pursued aggressive maritime military policies in the East and South China Seas. Not only that, but beginning in 2013 it also began expanding its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). BRI comprises a series of port and harbor infrastructure projects across the Indian Ocean rim including includes the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project.

Consequently, it was not possible for India to view China's activities in the international arena as someone else's problem. Sushma Swaraj was the Minister of External Affairs for the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi assumed office in May 2014. At a conference of heads of Indian diplomatic missions abroad that assembled in August that year, she called for the implementation of measures in line with the Act East policy that would move India from merely "looking" to "acting". After the Modi government came into power, the Indo-Pacific found increasingly frequent use within in the Indian strategic community as a policy-based regional concept; furthermore, this concept carries certain strategic implications.

2.2 A new phase in the strategic relationship between Japan and India

India demonstrated an awareness that resonates with the Indo-Pacific strategy crafted by Japan and began engaging in external actions on that basis. For that reason, it seems safe to conclude that Japan and India are capable of pursuing joint actions involving the Indo-Pacific. In fact, since the start of the 2000s, relations between the two countries have been accented by the launch of numerous regular meetings and the conclusion of various agreements. After Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi paid a state visit to India in 2005, the two countries began holding reciprocal state visits by their prime ministers every two years. Additionally, in 2006 the Japan-India relationship was elevated to a Global and Strategic Partnership. While these steps had several

business and trade-related objectives, among them the implementation of a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in 2011¹¹ and the holding of the first Cabinet-level business dialogue the following year, they were primarily concerned with strategic and security-oriented issues.¹² To summarize, responding to an ascendant China was their main objective.

Sanjaya Baru, journalist, who served as media advisor to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, has noted that during the second term of India National Congress (INC) government led by Singh (2009 to 2014), its major diplomatic achievement was the closer bilateral relations between India and Japan.¹³ Those accomplishments coincided with the birth of the second government of Shinzo Abe (from 2012), who had championed treating the Indian and Pacific Oceans as a single geopolitical unit.

3. The Indo-Pacific and India's foreign policy foundations

3.1 India, a country striving for major-power status

The rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi also factored significantly behind the increasingly close-knit ties between Japan and India. With its victory in the 2014 general election, the BJP forced the INC out and assumed the reins of government. Backed by an aggressive Hindu nationalist platform, the BJP made the “Shreshtha Bharat” initiative the centerpiece of its public commitment. In English, the Hindi “Shreshtha” roughly translates as excellence (whereas “Bharat” refers to “India”).

In effect, the BJP demonstrated that it would seek to transform India into a major power. This objective was further highlighted during a conference of Indian heads of diplomatic missions abroad in New Delhi in February 2015, about nine months after the inauguration of the new Modi government. Modi called on Indian ambassadors worldwide to help India move beyond purely upholding the balance of power and instead assume a leading role in world affairs. The drive to fulfill this role was widely accepted as a natural extension of the BJP’s “Shreshtha Bharat” election pledge.

However, subsequent remarks made on July 20, 2015 by Foreign Secretary Subrahmanyam Jaishankar had the effect of bringing India’s quest for major-power status squarely into the public spotlight. In a lecture address delivered at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) in Singapore, the foreign secretary stated in a nutshell India aspires to become a leading power rather than just a balancing power. A “leading power” can also be interpreted as meaning a “dominant state.” Here, it may be best understood simply as referring to a “major power” or “great power.” Foreign Secretary Jaishankar’s words essentially built on Modi’s remarks and shed light on their true meaning.

The declaration of intent to seek major-power status signified a crucial turning point in Indian diplomacy. Although foreign policy under the INC government also revealed India’s interest in becoming a leading power, it was distinguished by an emphasis on ensuring “strategic autonomy.” The key points in *Nonalignment 2.0*,¹⁴ a semi-official policy paper released in 2012 by the Centre for Policy Research, a private think tank, stood as a representative example of this stance.

3.2 The strategic framework for current Indian diplomacy

The strategic matrix shown in Table 1 images the structural compositions of Indian foreign policy aiming to achieve major-power status, in other words, its foreign policy platform since the mid-2010s. If summarized, the key point of Indian diplomacy as pursued by the Modi administration can be categorized in three levels: global, regional (Indo-Pacific), and local (South Asia).

At the global level, India cooperates with China and Russia to foster the creation of a multipolar international order as the early stages of its quest for major-power status. As a parallel endeavor, it also engages in efforts to boost its own national prosperity and military strength. At

the regional (Indo-Pacific) level, however, it endeavors to develop a larger presence and evolve into a maritime power and advance its Act East policies in the political and economic spheres through cooperation with Japan, the United States, and Australia. Politics at the local level (South Asia) will comprise a subset of regional level and try to secure its hegemonistic position. At this

Table 1. India’s Strategic Foreign Policy Matrix

	Goals (○), Measures (–), Future Objectives (*)
Global level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Multipolarization of the international system (revisionist orientation), strengthening national wealth and military power – Cooperation with China and Russia (BRICS of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa summits, Shanghai Cooperation Organization [SCO], Russia-India-China [RIC] foreign ministers’ meetings) – Acquisition of permanent member status on UN Security Council – Military buildup (with sustained nuclear capability) – Development of diplomatic infrastructure (such as forming strategic partnerships, etc.) * Achievement of major-power status with acquiring capacity for building the international order
Regional level (Indo-Pacific, etc.)	<p>[Asia & Western Pacific]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strengthened presence and status as maritime power – Cooperation within Quadrilateral framework (Japan, US, Australia, India) (steps to counter China) – Advancement of political and economic now Act East policies, cooperation with ASEAN economies, etc. <p>[Middle East, Indian Ocean]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Establishment of superiority – Actions to counter China-Pakistan axis including BRI – Promote regional cooperation in the Indian Ocean – Cooperation with countries in Middle East and East Africa (harnessing Indian migrant resources and securing access to energy resources) * Major-power status in the Indo-Pacific <p>(Additionally, since the mid-2010s India has been moving forward with its International North-South Transport Corridor plan. The goal is to build a multi-modal cargo shipping network of sea-, rail-, and road-based corridors connecting India [Mumbai], with Iran [Chabahar Port], Azerbaijan, and Russia.)</p>
Local level (South Asia)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Achievement of hegemonic status (with orientation toward status-quoism) – Steps to counter China-Pakistan axis – Economic integration of South Asia * Establishment of hegemony

(Source) Takenori Horimoto, “Explaining India’s Foreign Policy: From Dream to Realization of Major Power,” *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Vol. 17, Issue 3 (September 2017) <<https://academic.oup.com/irap/article/doi/10.1093/irap/>>

level, India is currently concentrating its efforts to counter China.^{15, 16} Due to this complexity of different sets of policies at different levels, from Japan's perspective, India appears to be pursuing an inconsistent foreign policy that blends coordination with China and Russia on the one hand with cooperation with Japan and the US on the other.

4. The Quadrilateral framework (“the Quad”) in the Indo-Pacific

As long as the Indo-Pacific occupies a pivotal position in Chinese foreign policy, an atmosphere of serious apprehension will compel India to respond. That concern has been given symbolic expression by the Indian Navy. A document on naval strategy (*Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy*)¹⁷ released in 2015 was the first official publication to formally refer to the Indo-Pacific, and as such, presented areas of interest broader in scope than a similar document (*Freedom to Use the Seas: India's Maritime Strategy*) released in 2007. That being the case, one question is how India plans to engage with Japan, the US, and Australia. Although that question was not covered in the 2015 document, Gurpreet S. Khurana, an expert on military affairs in the Indo-Pacific has illustrated the issue in Fig. 1. In other words, to counter China in

Fig. 1. Maritime Areas of Interest to India



(Source) Gurpreet S. Khurana, “India’s Maritime Strategy: Context and Subtext,” *Maritime Affairs: Journal of The National Maritime Foundation of India*, April 19, 2017 (<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09733159.2017.1309747>).

the Indo-Pacific, military cooperation between Japan, the US, Australia, and India will be a must.

The Indo-Pacific is a pivotal part of China's BRI and is also the most important oceanic region to India (especially the Indian Ocean). As such, it is destined to become a theater for rivalry between these two countries.¹⁸ India has achieved rapid gains in national power in recent years. One example is its GDP, which in 2018 was ranked seventh-largest in the world, up from 12th in 2006.¹⁹ Another example is defense spending, in which India was ranked fourth worldwide in 2018, surpassing Japan's ninth-place ranking.²⁰ Nonetheless, India still trails far behind China, which is currently ranked second in terms of both GDP and defense spending. Given these statistics, India will face the necessity of joining hands with other countries. The quadrilateral framework ("the Quad") and closer ties with Japan will be the principal countermeasures to that end.

This will not be the first time India has sought multilateral cooperation. It has continued to pursue cooperation and diplomacy with other countries since gaining its independence in 1947. As a country, India is usually associated with the nonaligned movement. While that impression is not off the mark, it is only half the truth. The other half is that India has also pursued alliances and partnerships with other countries. In effect, up through the 1960s, Indian diplomacy was shaped by a policy of nonalignment and oriented toward cooperation with other nonaligned countries. Through the next two decades the 1970s and 1980s India aligned itself with the Soviet bloc.

4.1 The Quad in the mid-2000s

Moving from the preparatory phase in its foreign policy through the 1990s,²¹ India in the early 2000s once again turned to partnerships and diplomacy in response to the aggressive foreign policy of a rapidly ascendant China. As one consequence, it was compelled to participate in the Quad. From a different vantage point, at least in terms of countering Chinese policies through the 2000s and thereafter, Japan, the US, Australia, and India applied a mixture of engagement and hedging policies, albeit marked by varying degrees of intensity. The Quad framework itself was a classic hedging policy.

In the mid-2000s, Japan, the US, and Australia began intensifying their efforts in engagement with one another for the Quad framework with participation by India. During the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) leaders' summit that convened in Sydney in September 2007, Japan, the US, and Australia held their first top-level trilateral meeting. Quoting a Japanese Foreign Ministry press officer in its September 7 edition, one Indian newspaper²² reported that India had been asked to participate in the meeting as a country with a shared interest in the ideals of liberalism and democracy. Japan's 2007 White Paper on Defense (July 2007) also cited strengthened cooperation with Australia and India and called for policies that would help curb the growing prominence of China and North Korea in the military dimension and ensure a more stable balance of security at the regional level through strengthened collaboration by Australia and India on matters of security.

Additionally, in August 2007 the US Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) published *The US-Japan-India Report* in collaboration with the Japan Institute of International Affairs and the Confederation of Indian Industry. Underlining the importance to the US, Japan, and India of protecting their shared values and sustaining an open and stable international system, this report recommended strengthened trilateral cooperation (along with Australia) in the security, energy, environmental, and economic fields.²³ Although described as something that should not be construed as "targeting China" per se, the plan nevertheless resembled aspects of the Quad, which comprised hedging policies aimed at China.

As an outcome of this report, India decided to participate in the Quad. In September 2007, five countries of the US, Japan, India, Australia, and Singapore conducted Malabar 07-2, a joint naval exercise in Bay of Bengal. The scope of this exercise extended from the central region of the Bay of Bengal to the vicinity of the Coco Islands in Myanmar territorial waters (where China

was noted in India to have stationed meteorological monitoring facilities). Malabar 07-2 was a large-scale undertaking that mobilized approx. 20,000 naval personnel, 28 ships, and 150 aircraft; its implementation as a multilateral exercise was the key feature that distinguished it from past Malabar exercises by India and the US.

The countries that participated in Malabar 07-2 insisted that the exercise was primarily aimed at boosting the interoperability of their naval forces and stressed that it was not intended to establish an “axis of democracy” in the Asia-Pacific to contain China.²⁴ However, the Kyodo News agency was arguably closer to the mark with its assessment that it was aimed at strengthening cooperation by participating countries in protecting the sea lanes for oil tankers and other cargo traffic from the Indian Ocean into the Pacific. Kyodo reported that “such objectives also reflect a conscious interest in curbing efforts by China to provide aid to Indian Ocean basin countries and expand its network for military cooperation and that Japan considers the exercises to be an integral element of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue between Japan, the US, India, and Australia, as proposed by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.”²⁵

The Quad drew harsh criticism from China. Furthermore, following the political exit of its main proponents, namely, US President George W. Bush, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, and Australian Prime Minister John Howard, Howard’s successor, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd (December 2007 to June 2010), implemented policies that put stronger emphasis on ties with China. Rudd also was not supportive of the Quad and thus terminated Australia’s involvement, leaving the Quad to die out spontaneously. However, the Quad lived on as a series of bilateral policy hedges against China: Specifically, these were the New Framework for the US-India Defense Relationship (2005), the India-Australia Memorandum of Understanding on Defense (2006) and Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation (2009), and the Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation between Japan and India (2008), for Japan, the first such arrangement with a country other than the US or Australia.

Although the Quad was shelved, Japan’s gradually strengthening security ties with Australia and India along with the Japan-US alliance nevertheless sent a signal that a new security order was taking shape in Asia.²⁶ In short, the Quad may be better understood in terms of its association with the Indo-Pacific, a new regional designation that emerged in the 2000s.

4.2 Efforts to promote the Quad by Japan, the US, and Australia in the 2010s

With that historical backdrop, on November 12, 2017 senior officials for diplomatic authorities in Japan, the US, Australia, and India met on the occasion of the ASEAN summit in Manila. They “discussed measures to ensure a free and open international order based on the rule of law in the Indo-Pacific” and “affirmed their commitment to continuing discussions and deepening cooperation based on shared values and principles” (“Australia-Japan-India-US Consultations on the Indo-Pacific,” a November 12, 2017 press release on the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs website).²⁷

These four-way consultations by diplomatic authorities represented a substantive first step toward implementation of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy championed by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD VI) that assembled in Kenya in August 2016.²⁸ Japanese Minister for Foreign Affairs Taro Kono proposed the creation of a new quadrilateral framework at the August 2017 gathering of foreign ministers for the seventh Japan-US-Australia Trilateral Strategic Dialogue in Manila, and again on the occasion of the Japan-US-India Trilateral Foreign Ministers’ Meeting in New York.²⁹ Kono articulated his views on creating a summit-level quadrilateral strategic dialogue again on October 25, 2017.³⁰ During their November 2017 summit meeting in Japan, US President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Abe were in agreement on the Indo-Pacific strategy.

This latest Quad proposal presents Japan in a cheerleading role and appears to have won

support from the US for a transition from diplomacy centered around the US and China to a new framework that allows them to use relationship with India as a diplomatic card. During the Obama administration, the US advanced an Asia policy that paired the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) in the economic and trade spheres with a policy of strategic rebalancing to the Indo-Pacific or Asia. However, under the “America First” policies of President Trump, the US withdrew from the TPP. As a consequence, during his November 2017 tour of Asia, President Trump arguably had little choice other than to join the Indo-Pacific strategy championed by Japan. In Washington on October 18, 2017, prior to the state visit to Asia, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson clarified his views regarding security cooperation by Japan, the US, India, and Australia.³¹

T. J. Pempel (University of California) has summarized the first year of Trump’s administration as an exercise in “democratic destruction and Asian absenteeism.”³² Also, immediately prior to his tour of Asia, Trump and his national security advisor, H.R. McMaster, reportedly began using the term “Indo-Pacific” with increased frequency.³³

In the National Security Strategy that it released in December 2017, the US government revealed a sense of alarm toward China and Russia, and criticized China as a country that “seeks to displace the United States in the Indo-Pacific region” and “expand the reaches of its state-driven economic model.”³⁴ It noted that the United States “welcomes India’s emergence as a leading global power and stronger strategic and defense partner,” and added that it “will seek to increase quadrilateral cooperation with Japan, Australia, and India.”³⁵

However, not all changes to US policy on Asia are attributable to the arrival of President Trump. On the importance of Japan and China to the US, Sheila Smith, a leading scholar in the field of Japan studies, points out that building cooperative ties with China while avoiding harm to the close relationship between Japan and the US is the biggest challenge that US policymakers face.³⁶ Given the implications of that perspective, the Quad is at present probably an appropriate framework for consultations at the diplomatic level. The American political scientist John Mearsheimer notes that a behind-the-scenes approach that places most of the burden of containing China on neighboring countries is the best strategy for the US as a country with a rich history as an “offshore balancer.”³⁷

New perspectives have also been tendered on the role of US Forces in Japan. For example, Mikio Haruna, a journalist who has examined released US diplomatic documents with confidential content, states that the reality of the Japan-US alliance, that is, the US forces stationed in Japan, are not there to defend Japan but rather to provide for the strategic defense of South Korea, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia, and concludes that military logistics are their main mission.³⁸

Published in November 2017, Australia’s *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper*³⁹ repeatedly discusses the Indo-Pacific. In Chapter 3 (A stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific),⁴⁰ the white paper notes, “Our alliance with the United States is central to Australia’s security and sits at the core of our strategic and defense planning.” On that understanding, it follows up by stressing the central roles of the US and China in the Indo-Pacific and cites Japan, Indonesia, India, and South Korea as partners in the Indo-Pacific region. Another white paper (*Australia in the Asian Century*)⁴¹ released by the Australian government in 2012 only mentions the Indo-Pacific in three places.

Within the sphere of foreign trade, Australia is heavily dependent on China. In 2016, exports to China were valued at US\$94.0 billion, making China the top destination market for Australian goods. (Japan was the second-largest market, valued at US\$39.0 billion, while the US came in third place, at US\$21.0 billion.) China was also the largest source of Australian imports, at US\$62.0 billion in value (followed by the US at US\$44.0 billion and Japan in third place at US\$23.0 billion).⁴² Moreover, China’s powers of influence over Australia’s internal affairs have grown more serious in recent years.⁴³ In effect, Australia has established economic ties with China that compare with its ties to ASEAN, a situation that in strategic terms has compromised its ability to cope even as a member of the Quad.

4.3 Mixed views toward the Quad

Scholars in the US have expressed doubts about the reincarnation of the Quad as version 2.0.⁴⁴ It is true that on his visit to India in September 2017, Prime Minister Abe coordinated views with Prime Minister Modi on maritime security and agreed on the subject of curbing China's advances into the region. Despite reaching an agreement to "continue the discussions," the November 2017 conference of diplomatic authorities for the four Quad countries did not set a clear timetable for the next round. Further, participation in the discussions has been limited to officers at the bureau-head level. Presumably, India will hold the key that determines whether the meetings are upgraded to the foreign-minister level. In effect, it is as if Japan, the US, Australia, and India do not share equal levels of commitment to the Quad.

Comparable precedents exist. Prior to the start of these quadrilateral discussions, two trilateral conferences had been held: one involving Japan, the US, and India, and the other involving Japan, India, and Australia. The Conference involving Japan, the US, and India was launched in December 2011 after participation had been downgraded to the bureau-head level from its initially planned foreign-minister level. This (bureau-head level) trilateral conference convened eight times until its conclusion in 2016. The first foreign-minister level meeting was held in 2015. In effect, India was integrated into the existing Japan-US framework.⁴⁵ The first meeting of the other trilateral conference with the participation of foreign secretaries from Japan, Australia, and India was held in 2015 and concluded with its third meeting in 2017.

India's China-oriented foreign policy was one reason that factored strongly behind its lack of enthusiasm for the Quad. When the Modi government came into power, Sandy Gordon, an expert on South Asia (Australian National University), predicted: "That realisation may not stop the Modi government attempting to 'play both ends against the middle,' especially since this approach has been a classic feature of Indian foreign policy for many decades. Under this scenario, India would seek the best deal it can from China, both economically and in terms of a possible border settlement, while attempting to maintain its hedge against a possible difficult rise of China with powers such as the US and Japan."⁴⁶

Former Indian Foreign Secretary Kanwal Sibal has suggested India need not choose between either Japan or China as a partner; it can cooperate with Japan on China policy and in other areas where they have a shared interest, and with China in areas that deliver mutual benefits.⁴⁷ Furthermore, even if India saw value in working together with Japan and the US, it may have lacked motivation to team up with Australia.⁴⁸

In its September 26, 2017 issue, the Japanese edition of *Newsweek* magazine ran a special feature titled "Indo no kyo-zou" ("an Indian giant elephant"), which noted in effect, "while Japan looks to India as a partner to help contain China," India does not yet actually have enough power to compete with China nor is it necessarily pro-West or anti-China. While India would prefer to follow an independent approach to China, collaborating only with Japan will still not be sufficient. That is presumably why it will be compelled to rely on the Quad framework as well.

As indicated earlier in Fig. 1, at the regional level, the Indian Ocean counts as the primary battleground for Indian diplomacy at this time. China, moreover, will be India's main counterpart in that engagement. Given that India is pursuing a two-pronged policy⁴⁹ of both engagement and hedging with respect to China, Quad discussions involving the diplomatic authorities are a viable and realistic option for diplomacy at this stage.

On closer examination, India could utilize the Quad as a mechanism to curb China's ambitions and respond to its criticism of the Quad through exchanges at the working level, not at the head-of-state or foreign-minister levels. Of course, as a formal participant in the summit-level conferences of SCO and the BRICS (five emerging national economies) summits, India is also prepared to seek elevated Quad status at any time. Moreover, the foreign ministers of Russia, India, and China (RIC) have met regularly since 2002, and convened their 15th meeting in India

in December 2017.

Moreover, India and China has established the meeting of the Special Representatives of the two countries in 2003 and its 22nd meeting between National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi has held in December 2019. Also, Prime Minister Modi emphasized “inclusive” nature of the Indo-Pacific at his keynote address at Shangri La Dialogue in June 2018. He might have intended to tell China “Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)” to signify its inclusive nature and not excluding China. Basically, India would like to keep stable relations with China.

India has pursued a balancing act with China and Russia on the one hand and Japan and the US on the other. From another angle, India may be viewed as a country that has engaged in cooperation with Japan and the US in the Indian Ocean and with China and Russia on the Eurasian continent. As one element of its continental strategy, India has been working to put into motion its International North-South Transport Corridor plan, an undertaking that will establish improved sea, rail, and road connections for cargo flows between India (Mumbai), Iran, Azerbaijan, and Russia (Table 1).

4.4 China’s apprehensions about the Quad

China categorically rejected the Quad when it first materialized in 2007 and deemed the multilateral Japan-US-India, US-Australia-India, and Japan-US-Australia-India frameworks as policies aimed at encircling China.⁵⁰ It has reacted to the latest incarnation of the Quad in much the same way. For example, Chinese experts have warned that the four-way dialogue signifies an effort to contain China and that it will stymie regional development.⁵¹ Additionally, as an alternative to rebalancing policies in the Asia-Pacific, the Indo-Pacific strategy has been viewed as an undertaking with the objective of disrupting the BRI but that is destined to fail.⁵²

The Quad, moreover, has been described as an Asian version of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).⁵³ During a press conference on November 13, 2017, Geng Shuang, Deputy Director of the Chinese Foreign Ministry’s Information Department, hinted at China’s misgivings about the Quad with his emphasis that it should be a framework that encourages cooperation by all relevant countries, not a mechanism for exclusion.⁵⁴ In fact, representatives of the Quad have been upgraded from the bureau-head level to foreign minister level for the first time in September 2019 at the New York meeting during the United Nations General Assembly.

5. Future prospects

Geopolitical developments in the Indo-Pacific have shifted the focus to the question of how to deal with China. China has rallied from a history of humiliation that stretches back to the Opium Wars and now aspires to achieve the “Chinese dream” through a grand resurgence of the Chinese people.⁵⁵ In other words, one could argue that China is striving to wrest hegemonic dominance in this region from the US and establish a China-centric international order. In a sense, it appears to be in the process of acquiring the capacity to build a new international order and establish itself as the rule-maker.

Since the start of the twenty-first century, the situation in the Indo-Pacific has been marked by the growing national power of China and the relative decline of the US, which has been losing its capacity to keep China in check.⁵⁶

Under such development, as a strategic framework in the Indo-Pacific for Japan, the US, Australia, and India, the Quad has been brought into existence to counter these trends. Neither Japan nor India are capable of halting China’s growing influence on their own, nor can they rely on the US. They have no choice but to turn to “minilateral” cooperative mechanisms that occupy an intermediate position somewhere between the bilateral and multilateral approaches. Unlike Europe, Asia does not yet have any well-established economic or security frameworks. The

implication is that the Quad will serve as an inescapable regional mechanism for the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) for East Asia or the East Asian Community. Since the RCEP is one of the main components of Japan's, Indo-Pacific policy along with the Quad, India's withdrawal from it said in November 2019 would be the big miscalculation for Japan.

India has aspirations of major-power status. For now, however, strategies based on partnering mechanisms are its only option. The Japan-US alliance was the single largest infrastructural cornerstone of Japan's foreign policy. However, Japan's dependence on the US appears to be softening. Given these conditions, ties between Japan and the India will continue to grow closer and develop even further.⁵⁷ The US cannot be described as an ally that Japan can always rely on 100 percent; India, however, is in a position to complement that relationship. India actually faces a similar situation, itself. After the Cold War, Russia harnessed its semi-alliance functions to provide backing for Indian efforts in diplomacy.

However, since the mid-2010s, Russia's leanings toward China have grown more pronounced. Moreover, ties between China and Pakistan have rapidly grown much closer as an outcome of the CPEC project and also in reaction to the cooling trend in US-Pakistan ties. Given these developments, Japan is a welcome presence in India's eyes.⁵⁸

That said, as is commonly the case with close bilateral ties, the relationship between Japan and India may be described as a marriage of convenience because Japan is pursuing policies to sustain the status quo while India has future aspirations of becoming a major power. Consequently, one cannot discount the possibility of disparities arising between Japan and India in terms of awareness or within the context of policy implementation. Although such disparities have not seriously harmed their bilateral relations up to now, major problems could emerge in the future.

The US, Japan, China, Australia, and Indonesia to say the least of India are all countries with significant powers of influence in the Indo-Pacific. Although their current administrations are already positioned or seen likely to retain the reins of government. Modi government continues in its second term by its ruling party, Bharatiya Janata Party has won the landslide victory in April–May 2019 general election. Therefore, India's Indo-Pacific policy is able to understand in terms of its continuity.

Although not discussed in this paper, the North Korea issue will be a major factor for uncertainty in the Indo-Pacific. Relations between Japan and India in the Indo-Pacific will continue to face these uncertainties as well as a set of unpredictable conditions in the years ahead.

A sense of mutual affinity is at the root of the relationship between Japan and India, and that foundation is not going to be shaken. That said, Japan-India ties have transitioned from a limited bilateral relationship to a bilateral relationship with a cross-regional emphasis, and that relationship can be expected to develop a more-realistic political and economic dimension. Japan needs to move beyond the RCEP and TPP frameworks in the economic arena and the Quad in the strategic arena and act as quickly as possible to build an inclusive multilateral framework by expanding and strengthening the East Asian Community and welcomes the participation of China. Japan and India are both entering an era that will call on them to fulfill their commitments to broader Asia and the global community.⁵⁹ In the process, they will face the necessity of looking beyond their mutually complementary bilateral relationship and recognizing it as a new international asset to the Indo-Pacific at large.⁶⁰

(January 13, 2018. Updated on February 27, 2020)

Notes

1. For further details, see Takenori Horimoto, "Japan and India – a review of history with thoughts on the future," Chapter 4 in *India, the Giant Elephant Going Global* (in Japanese),

- Iwanami Shoten, 2007.
2. For recent trends in the Japan-India relationship, see Takenori Horimoto editor, *Introduction to Contemporary Japan-India Relations* (in Japanese), University of Tokyo Press, 2017. This contains an in-depth study of trends in three fields: politics, economics, and foreign policy.
 3. Kazutoshi Tamari, “Turn to Cooperation on Nuclear Issues,” Chapter 10 in Horimoto, supra Note 2.
 4. Etsuro Ishigami and Takahiro Satou ed., *Economic of Contemporary India and South Asia* (in Japanese), Minerva Shobo, 2011, p. 23.
 5. According to former Indian Foreign Secretary Salman Haidar, the “Look East policy” phrase was first used by Prime Minister Narasimha Rao to add extra significance to his first state visit to South Korea in 1993. (Salman Haidar, “Chapter 3. Look East,” in Amar Nath Ram, editor. *Two Decades of India’s Look East Policy*, Manohar, 2012, p. 53) . Incidentally, “Look East” initially had a strong economic-policy flavor but since the year 2000 it appears to have been converted into a basic policy for East and Southeast Asia with security-oriented content. Note also that Raja Mohan dates the first usage of the expression to 1992 based on a speech given by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (on March 18, 2006). (C. Raja Mohan, *Samudra Manthan: Sino-India Rivalry in the Indo-Pacific*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012, p. 94.)
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 9. Purnendra Jain, “Japan-India Relations in a New Geo-strategic Environment of the Indo-Pacific Era,” Chapter 11 in Horimoto, supra Note 2. Also, Purnendra Jain and Takenori Horimoto, “Japan and the Indo-Pacific,” in Priya Chacko editor, *New Regional Geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific*, Routledge, 2016.
 10. “China builds up strategic sea lanes,” *The Washington Times*, January 17, 2005. <<https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2005/jan/17/20050117-115550-1929r/>> Kondapalli, an Indian expert on China, pointed out, “It is only since 2005 that China started considering relations with India ‘strategic’ in nature.” (S. Kondapalli “China’s Foreign Policy and Indo-Japan Relations,” in T. Horimoto and L. Varma (eds), *India-Japan Relations in Emerging Asia*, Manohar, 2013, pp.63-91.) This is not a coincidence.
 11. Makoto Kojima, “Emergence of Indian Economy and New Phase of Japan-India Relations,” Chapter 9 in Horimoto, supra Note 2.

12. Horimoto, *supra* Note 7, p. 109 (Table 3-1).
13. Sanjaya Baru, *The Accidental Prime Minister: The Making and Unmaking of Manmohan Singh*, Viking, 2014, p. 170.
14. *NONALIGNMENT 2.0: A FOREIGN AND STRATEGIC POLICY FOR INDIA IN THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY*, Centre for Policy Research. <<http://www.cprindia.org/workingpapers/3844-nonalignment-20-foreign-and-strategic-policy-india-twenty-first-century>>
15. For details, see “Indian Diplomacy today—strategic Frameworks,” Chapter 1.3 in Horimoto, *supra* Note 7.
16. Takenori Horimoto, “Modi’s Foreign Policy in the 3rd year” (in Japanese) in *Contemporary India Forum Quarterly Review*, No. 30, Summer 2016. <<https://www.japan-india.com/forum/2d0305059bb96690755a48af9f477b2490b75a18>>
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20. SIPRI Fact Sheet April 2019, p.2 <<https://www.sipri.org/publications/2019/sipri-fact-sheets/trends-world-military-expenditure-2018>>
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36. Sheila A. Smith, *Intimate Rivals: Japanese Domestic Politics and A Rising China*, Columbia University Press, 2015, p. 260.
37. John J. Mearsheimer (Masashi Okuyama, translation), *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics, updated edition*. Gogatsu Shobo, 2014, p. 511.
38. Mikio Haruna, *Masked Japan-US Alliance—Truths Revealed in Declassified US Diplomatic Documents* (in Japanese), Bunshun Shinsho, 2015, p. 249.
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41. http://www.defence.gov.au/whitepaper/2013/docs/australia_in_the_asian_century_white_paper.pdf#search=%27Australia+in+the+Asian+Century%27
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