

POLICY BRIEF

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Japan, India, and the Indian Ocean Region 2025: Signifying Regional Commons to Secure Maritime Routes and Borders

Dr. Monika Chansoria

Socially defined states, operating within given institutional sites, engage in behavior, which can both be competitive and cooperative. Bound by common values of freedom, democracy, human rights, international rule of law, and peaceful resolution of disputes, Japan and India's commitment to peace and stability in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) transcends across multiple fronts including, security, sustainable development, capacity-building, blue economy, trade, and connectivity avenues. It is well acknowledged that maritime development, safety, and security remains the primary and key focus in achieving a free, open, inclusive and rules-based Indo-Pacific region. The Indian Ocean Region constitutes the nucleus of the Indo-Pacific, with Asia remaining an essential partner and interlocutor in the promotion of common values and goals across the Indo-Pacific. This thematic line also relates to comparative foreign policy which includes theories of international factors that drive states' foreign policy choices, as well as highlights foundations to study domestic political drivers influencing states' foreign policy behavior.¹

Bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the IOR through collaborative approaches by means of identifying commonalities reinforces strategic focus, presence, and concerted actions of primary players. These objectives and their implementation would eventually contribute towards regional stability, security, prosperity, and sustainable development across. In their respective capacities

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¹ For related details and references see, R.K. Beasley, J. Kaarbo, J.S. Lantis, & M.T. Snarr, *Foreign Policy in Comparative Perspective: Domestic and International Influences on State Behavior*, SAGE Publications, Inc., Second Edition ed., pp. 1-26; also see, Ann Marie Murphy, "Great Power Rivalries, Domestic Politics and Southeast Asian Foreign Policy: Exploring the Linkages," *Asian Security*, vol. 13, n. 3, 2017, pp. 165-182; On ideas in international relations, see, Mark Haas, *Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

as Asia's two most prominent democracies, the renewed commitment of Japan and India towards the Indo-Pacific, and the Indian Ocean Region, remains crucial in defining the foundation on which upholding democracy, human rights, free movement, free trade, and adherence to a rule-and law-based international order including the Law of the Sea Convention (UNCLOS) shall be guaranteed. Tokyo and New Delhi also remain committed to respect for national sovereignty and territorial integrity, and peaceful settlement of disputes without resorting to the threat or use of force, and emphasized the need for all countries to refrain from any attempt to unilaterally change the status quo.² Be it the major Asian players, or the small littoral island states of the IOR-Rim countries, the developmental assistance and cooperative security measures between the India and Japan should be the way forward in promoting common values and goals across the IOR.

Protection of critical maritime routes from the Indian Ocean into South and Southeast Asia with a view to contribute to safer sea lanes of communication, protecting sustainable infrastructure, and secure supply chains not just adds to the regional studies' discourse, but also contributes to the discourse on the region's comparative political geographies. In the larger context of fair and equitable multilateralism in the IOR, the latter remains diverse with various models of political and economic integration at the center. If states are characterized only by

interests and strategies, cooperative outcomes are unlikely to occur.³ Any step of geopolitical rebalancing Act that is solely dictated by interests rather than shared values shall be short-lived. Laying the groundwork for deeper cooperation requires a vision based on shared values, positions, and systems.

The 2025 Middle East Conflict and Ensuing Strategic Vulnerabilities

The year 2025 is witnessing unprecedented global and regional rebalancing. At the two ends of the Indian Ocean, the regional crises that could well escalate beyond, is at its sharpest. In the Middle East, there is a serious conflict underway with the potential for further escalation and spillover complications. Further, its maritime consequences are widely visible in terms of the serious challenges to global shipping and considerable costs to regional and global economies.⁴ At the other end, the Indo-Pacific has been witnessing deeper tensions and sharper contestations. The scenario is intrinsically maritime in nature involving respect for and observance of international law. While stronger assertions of interests are one issue, concerns about unilateral changes to the status quo is another.⁵

While multiple regional crises and conflicts across Asia and Eurasia have drawn in the big powers directly and indirectly, they simultaneously have highlighted over-dependencies and vulnerabilities of key regions

2 Minister of Defense of India, Rajnath Singh, Minister of External Affairs of India, S. Jaishankar, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, Kamikawa Yoko, and Minister of Defense of Japan, Kihara Minoru held the third India-Japan 2+2 Foreign and Defense Ministerial Meeting in New Delhi in August 2024; for further details on this meeting, see, *Joint Statement: Third India-Japan 2+2 Foreign and Defence Ministerial Meeting*, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, August 20, 2024, available at <https://shorturl.at/Pq2RS>

3 For further reading on this subject see, MS Graefrath and M. Jahn, "Conceptualizing Interstate Cooperation," *International Theory*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2023, pp. 24-52; also see, Kenneth A. Oye, "Explaining Cooperation under Anarchy: Hypotheses and Strategies," *World Politics*, vol. 38, no. 1, October 1985, pp. 1-24.

4 *Indian Ocean Conference 2025: Voyage to New Horizons of Maritime Partnership*, Keynote Address by India's External Affairs Minister, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, February 16, 2025, available at <https://shorturl.at/tWoun>

5 Ibid.

and maritime passages. The Israel-Iran war in June 2025 reiterated the grave reality that regional challenges pose to global peace and stability. Benchmark Brent crude prices, often considered a gauge for geopolitical risk, rose from below \$70 a barrel on June 12, the day before Israel's initial attack, to a peak of \$81.40 on June 23 following the United States' strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities.⁶ Prices, however, dropped sharply that same day after it became clear Iran's retaliation against Washington—a well-telegraphed attack on a US military base in Qatar that caused limited damage—was essentially an act of de-escalation. Prices then fell to below pre-war levels at \$67 after US President Donald Trump announced that Israel and Iran had agreed to a ceasefire.⁷

Most importantly, the doomsday scenario for energy markets, i.e., Iran blocking the Strait of Hormuz⁸ through which nearly 20 percent of the world's liquified natural gas, and 25 percent global seaborne oil trade passes, did not occur. In fact, there was almost no disruption to flows out of the Middle East throughout the duration of the conflict. This, however, does not take away the likelihood of this becoming a reality during the next regional Middle East crisis. For instance, consider the impact on prices of previous tensions in the region. The 1973 Arab oil embargo led to a near quadrupling of oil prices. Disruption to Iranian oil output, opened a new tab following the 1979 revolution leading to a doubling of prices. Iraq's invasion of neighboring Kuwait in August 1990 caused

the price of Brent crude to double up. And, the start of the second Gulf war in 2003 led to a 46 percent surge in prices.⁹

Global geopolitics, particularly the challenges surrounding the Indian Ocean Region have forced its stakeholders to recalibrate their respective thinking and policies. The current dynamics in the IOR have given rise to intense geopolitical competition adding to increasing tensions on trade and supply chains as well as in technological, political, and security arenas. These developments increasingly threaten the stability and security of the region and beyond, directly impacting on Japan and India's regional security and strategic interests. Specifically, on security cooperation, there is added attention and focus on protecting critical maritime routes flowing from the Indian Ocean into South and Southeast Asia.

Japan's Indian Ocean Connect

The historical roots of Japan's presence and involvement in the Indian Ocean Region go far back to the 16th century when the expansion of Indian Ocean routes to Southeast and East Asia increased the scope of links between India and Japan. Japan's story in this reference dates back to the 17th century, when a prominent Japanese adventurer, writer, and merchant, Tokubei Tenjiku (1612–1692) was hired by a trading company in Kyoto to pursue commercial activities aboard Japanese Red Seal ships.¹⁰ As part of this vocation, Tokubei sailed to Siam

6 For details see, Ron Bousso, "Israel-Iran war highlights Mideast's declining influence on oil prices," *Reuters Commentary*, June 25, 2025, available at <https://shorturl.at/Y6SnZ>

7 Ibid.

8 The Strait of Hormuz is a narrow waterway separating Iran and Oman, connecting the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman. It is a critical part of the Indian Ocean Region, which then leads into the Arabian Sea, that is a northwestern extension of the Indian Ocean, acting as the sole maritime route connecting the Persian Gulf to the open ocean. The Strait provides the only sea passage from the Persian Gulf to the open ocean and is one of the world's most important chokepoints strategically.

9 Bousso, n. 6.

10 For details see, Monika Chansoria, "Japan in the Indian Ocean Region: Centuries of Ties, Growing Importance," *Japan Forward*, October 19, 2022, available at <https://japan-forward.com/japan-in-the-indian-ocean-region-centuries-of-ties-growing-importance/>

(Thailand) and subsequently to India in 1626 aboard a Red Seal ship via China, Vietnam and Malacca. Often referred to as the “Marco Polo of Japan” Tokubei’s adventurous journey and account of his travels to India gained widespread distinction.

By the late 19th century, contact between Europe and the IOR countries began giving rise to the first wave of nationalist movements. In Egypt, India, and Iran, the European political and diplomatic control was being seriously challenged by World War I, and by the end of World War II, Europe’s days of direct political domination over the Indian Ocean littoral were numbered.¹¹ Nationalist philosophies had taken root in most colonial territories on the littoral of the Ocean, whilst European power and prestige had diminished as a result of the War and Japan’s takeover of Indonesia, Malaya, Singapore, and Burma.¹² The post-1945 decade saw a rapid dissolution of European empires across the Indian Ocean. As for Japan, although a notable sea power in the pre-1945 world, it did not exercise a telling influence in the Indian Ocean area during peacetime.¹³ It was only when the former forayed into the Indian Ocean in pursuit of its war objectives, Tokyo attempted to gain naval and aerial supremacy over the “Southern Resources Area”—a broad arc from the Andamans in the Bay of Bengal to the Bismarck Archipelago in Southeast Asia.¹⁴

Today, a shared Indo-Japanese vision of the Indo-Pacific has re-imagined the Indian Ocean

Region through an expanded and evolving geography¹⁵ with its emerging architecture of growing maritime connectivity. Development cooperation growing out of this vision is aiming to unlock the potential for an equitable, and forward-looking change in the region. It is a process in which both India and Japan are firm stakeholders. The Indian Ocean sees more than 75 percent of the world’s maritime trade moving along its international shipping lanes.¹⁶ Besides, more than 145,000 ships navigate through the waters of the IOR carrying 66 percent of the global oil, 33 percent of the world’s bulk cargo, and 50 percent of worldwide container shipments. Being deficient in natural energy resources, Japan depends heavily on oil imports. A large portion of Japan’s oil imports originates from the Middle East nations, which consequently passes through the Indian Ocean. The two critical maritime chokepoints within this sub-region are: the Strait of Hormuz; and the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb. These serve as vital passageways for a predominant share of global oil trade, including that of Japan.

In fact, nearly all of Japan’s foreign trade remains sea-borne. As among the leading commercial and maritime nations of the world, Japan holds vital interest in the Indian Ocean Region, relating to sea traffic and, flow of raw materials and fuels from the littoral nations and hinterlands to industries back home. A large part of Japan’s foreign trade flows along two major sea routes. The first being the Pacific route, of which, the central lane links Japan

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 For further details and reading on this subject see, P.A. Narasimha Murthy, “Japan and the Indian Ocean Basin,” *India Quarterly*, vol. 37, no. 1, 1981, pp. 36-58.

15 “Confluence of the Two Seas” Speech delivered by Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan at the Parliament of the Republic of India, August 22, 2007, transcript available at <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmv0708/speech-2.html>

16 For details see, “Raksha Mantri Inaugurates Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR),” Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Ministry of Defence, December 22, 2018, available at <https://shorturl.at/xlibb>

with Canada and the US; the southern lane with Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Islands; and the south-eastern lane with South America. The second sea route for Japan's trade flows is the Indian Ocean route which connects Japan, via the East and South China Seas and the Strait of Malacca with the Indian sub-continent, the Middle East, Europe, and eastern Africa.¹⁷

According to the Japan Maritime Public Relations Center (*Shipping Now*), the Indian Ocean route and the Pacific route are the most prominent sea routes for Japan's import of energy resources.¹⁸ Almost one-half of Japan's seaborne trade is carried along the Indian Ocean route, which remains vital for its tanker fleet in particular—given that it is the only economic route available to Japan. The importance of this route has only increased with the passage of time, sensing which, Japan began enhancing its trading ties with the Persian Gulf region.

During the decade of the mid-1960s, the Indian Ocean was firmly drawn into the orbit of superpower military competition, to the extent, that even while stressing the need for détente, militarization of the Indian Ocean became a stark reality, pushing for a rampant search for naval bases and other facilities in the region involved the littoral states and mid-ocean islands. In the following decade, the foreign trade of Japan stood at \$213.70 billion in 1979—with it being the leading importer of raw materials including coal, iron-ore, petroleum, timber, etc. Of these, petroleum held an overwhelming dominance in Japan's trade with the Middle East, for which the sea lanes of the Indian Ocean

became, what appropriately was described as the “great veins” on which the Japanese economy depended.¹⁹ The IOR's richness in raw materials complemented the might of Japan's industrialization.

These predominant economic interests rendered freedom of navigation along the Indian Ocean route a prerequisite for Japan. The threats posed to peaceful sea traffic that could result in the denial or suspension of vital supplies during this period was that of regional crises/conflicts in the Gulf region. The energy-flows primarily slanted towards the west-to-east route, with the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf serving to be the critical maritime corridor in the west. As per the 2023 US Energy Agency (EIA) statistics, oil-flows through the Strait of Hormuz averaged 20.9 million barrels per day (b/d) making for almost 20 percent of global oil feeding.²⁰ The US Agency further cited that 83 million b/d of crude oil and condensate moved through the Strait of Hormuz primarily headed for Asian markets, with Japan (1.7 million b/d) being among a major destination.²¹

Notably, in the past three to four years, the evolving trajectory of Japan's energy stakes in the Indian Ocean empirically points towards Tokyo seeking to gradually, yet steadily, reduce its dependence on oil imports traversing the IOR. This gradual decline in Japan's oil imports and conforming rise of non-fossil fuel sources has propelled the debate surrounding Japan's maritime interest in the Indian Ocean being on a decline. The rethink could be attributed, among other factors, to the attack on a Japanese-

¹⁷ Murthy, n. 14.

¹⁸ For details see, Japan Maritime Public Relations Center (*Shipping Now-2024-2025*), full report available at https://www.kaijipr.or.jp/assets/pdf/shipping_now/allpage2024.pdf

¹⁹ Murthy, n. 14.

²⁰ “World Oil Transit Chokepoints, Strait of Hormuz,” US Energy Information Administration” (EIA), June 25, 2024, available at <https://shorturl.at/L5KON>

²¹ Ibid.

owned oil tanker, *Kokuka Courageous*, in the Strait of Hormuz in June 2019.²² This has been a key turning point in Japan's approach towards overt dependence on the region. This incident triggered a wider debate not just on Japan's peace and prosperity, but on the safety and security of all the ships and vessels passing through the region.²³

More importantly, Japan has been working on alternative methods so as to reduce heavy dependency on fossil fuel imports, which has rendered its steady changeover towards non-fossil fuel sources, including an active increase in the use of renewable energy sources, such as solar, wind, hydropower, geothermal, and biomass. The Japanese government aims to achieve 36-38 percent renewable energy in its national power mix by 2030.²⁴ Significantly, Japan's government has set a national target of achieving 59 percent non-fossil fuel power generation by 2030.²⁵

Japan's scale back could well be attributed to rising concerns around energy security, as well as an attempt to reduce strategic vulnerabilities. While Tokyo seemingly has recalibrated its energy priorities, its stakes in the Indian Ocean are not likely to be subjected to a sea change, or,

undergo any sort of transformational strategic repositioning. The sea lanes of communication (SLOC) carrying energy resources from the Middle East pass through the Indian Ocean, and this criticality shall always be factored in not only by Japan, but by all other prominent stakeholders too.²⁶ The SDF's information gathering activities cite the geographical scope which includes three waters of the high seas: the Gulf of Oman, the northern Arabian Sea, and the Gulf of Aden to the east of the Bab el-Mandeb Strait (including the exclusive economic zones of the coastal states). It is evident that Tokyo's security objectives shall continue to factor in the IOR as a key Asian regional security turf. The construct of maritime geopolitics over sea lanes has been a political outcome of globalizing maritime trade, and Japan's case vis-à-vis its sea-lane security policy in the Indian Ocean is no different. The Indian Ocean has constantly been coded as a sea lane vital for Japan's maritime trade and such coding has repeatedly emphasized Japan's military alliance with the US to ensure protecting these sea lanes against emerging challengers.²⁷

In the contemporary setting, this especially comes at a time when Japan, as a prominent member of the quadrilateral security initiative,

- 22 "Japan ship attacked near Strait of Hormuz, U.S. blames Iran," *Kyodo News*, June 13, 2019, available at <https://english.kyodonews.net/articles/-/11493?phrase=dog&words=>
- 23 For more details see, statement by Japanese Foreign Press Secretary, Takeshi Osuga, *Press Releases*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, available at https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_002478.html
- 24 For details see, "Pillar 2: Addressing Challenges in an Indo-Pacific Way; Case (9): ODA for Promoting Green Transformation (GX)," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, available at <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100482250.pdf>
- 25 For further details see, *Japan 2021 Energy Policy Review*, International Energy Agency (IEA), full review report available at <https://rb.gy/orcpt3>
- 26 *Information Gathering Activities by the SDF in the Middle East*, Report by Japan's Ministry of Defense, Tokyo, available at https://www.mod.go.jp/en/d_architecture/m_east/index.html; for related reading on the subject also see, Ji Guoxing, "SLOC Security in the Asia Pacific," *Occasional Paper*, Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, Honolulu (HI), February 2000, available at <https://dkiapcss.edu/college/publications/occasional-paper-series-reports/sloc-security-in-the-asia-pacific/>
- 27 For more details see, Takashi Yamazaki, "Maritime Trade and Geopolitics: The Indian Ocean as Japan's sea lane," cited in, Robert C. Kloosterman, Virginie Mamadouh, and Pieter Terhorst, eds., *Handbook on the Geographies of Globalization*, Department of Geography, Planning and International Development Studies (GPIO) Centre for Urban Studies, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 2018.

Quad, continues to underscore stability and security in the Indo-Pacific. To ensure the *Quad's* enduring impact, the grouping pledged a new, ambitious, and strong agenda in July 2025 focusing on four key areas: maritime and transnational security, economic prosperity and security, critical and emerging technology, and humanitarian assistance and emergency response.²⁸ By means of this renewed focus, the *Quad's* ability to leverage its resources to address the region's most pressing challenges shall be sharpened.²⁹

Japan is well placed to help lesser developed IOR countries work on sustainably developing their respective maritime resources including traditional industries such as fisheries, shipping, or ports, as well as newer industries including aquaculture, renewable energy, bio-products, carbon sequestration, and desalination. These sectors can potentially address employment issues, thus leading to socio-economic development. Multiple regional endeavors in this regard are visible ranging from respective partnerships with the IOR littoral states aimed at capacity-building, developing infrastructure and contributing to the regions' sustainable development.³⁰ Besides, securitization of the SLOCs is a primary driver to build upon security and economic partnerships with potential strategic partners across the IOR.

Japan and India's strategy for cooperation through collaborative approaches in the Indo-Pacific region finds growing commonalities in their respective pledges to reinforce the strategic focus, presence and actions in this region to promote effective rules-based multilateralism, and enhance communication on cooperation. The deliverables regarding cooperation in the

Indian Ocean can carry better results with increased interactions between Japan, and India, in multiples arenas of cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region and the Indian Ocean Rim countries through institutionalized frameworks based on shared interests and goals. Japan and India are well placed to help lesser-developed IOR countries work on sustainably developing maritime resources, as well as newer avenues. These sectors can potentially address local employment issues, thus leading to socio-economic development.

The 2025 Indian Ocean Conference, Muscat

The Indian Ocean Region is home to a plethora of regional forums including the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), Colombo Security Conclave, the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), and the Indian Ocean Conference.

In the said reference, the eighth Indian Ocean Conference was held in Muscat, Oman in February 2025, at a time when there was considerable churn in world affairs that was to get more challenging and fiercer, as times witnessed. Changes in the global order may be expressed through new ideas and concepts. But they are also reflected in the evolving landscape. The Indian Ocean Region is no exception to that rule. It is veritably a global lifeline given that its production, consumption, contribution and connectivity are central to the manner in which the world runs today.³¹

28 "Joint Statement from the Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Washington," *Media Note*, Office of the Spokesperson, July 1, 2025, available at <https://tinyurl.com/rj4356c5>

29 Ibid.

30 G. Gvalia, D. Siroky, B. Lebanidze, and Z. Iashvili, "Thinking Outside the Bloc: Explaining the Foreign Policies of Small States," *Security Studies*, vol. 22, 2013, pp. 98-131.

31 *Indian Ocean Conference 2025*, n. 4.

Like other parts of the Global South, the Indian Ocean nations too face resource constraints and economic headwinds. Many of them are struggling to meet their Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) targets. In quite a few cases, debt is a serious concern. Some of that arises from the stresses of the international economy, but in certain cases, from imprudent borrowing and unviable projects. Another common issue is that of rebuilding connectivity in the region, after decades of colonial-era disruption.³² To make this a truly shared endeavor, it is vital to ensure that connectivity initiatives are consultative and transparent, not unilateral and opaque. Yet another widespread concern is the challenge faced by Indian Ocean states to monitor their Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and secure their fishing interests. Nor can they be impervious to illegal trafficking of various kinds and the specter of terrorism. Each of these dimensions, and certainly their cumulative impact, has a strong maritime implication.³³

India has increasingly been active in a *First Responder* mode in the Indian Ocean Region. Be it during the conflict in Yemen, natural disasters in Mozambique, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, the earthquakes in Nepal and Turkiye, or the water crisis in the Maldives. Both off Mauritius and Sri Lanka, India has responded to significant oil spills too.³⁴ In a world of increasing traditional and non-traditional threats/challenges in the maritime domain, it is essential that there is a common operating picture as well as shared platforms. The setting up of the Information Fusion Centre in the Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) as a single point center linking the coastal radar chains to generate a seamless real-time picture of the nearly 7,500-km coastline aims to do that. The IFC-IOR serves as the nodal

center for promoting collaborative maritime safety and security towards a peaceful, stable and prosperous IOR. By establishing coastal surveillance radars and partnering on *White Shipping* agreements, maritime traffic is made safer and more secure for the IOR's collective benefit.³⁵

When Shared Understanding and Values Make Way for Shared Deliverables

The heart of the Indo-Pacific lies in the Indian Ocean Region, whose native countries share similar challenges and opportunities by virtue of their strategic location, access to limitless unexploited maritime resources, vulnerability to natural disasters, political instability, and rising challenges from revisionist powers that seek to drive and establish an economic and politico-security dominant Asian architecture. In this backdrop, the strategic node of the Indian Ocean becomes even more crucial. Home to nearly 2.7 billion people of the world, the Indian Ocean is the third-largest ocean woven together by trade routes, commanding control of major sea-lanes.

It has also been an endeavor to promote cooperation on various cross-cutting security issues through the architecture of multilayered dialogues between India and Japan. These include: the Defense Policy Dialogue, Foreign Office Consultations (FOC), Vice Minister/ Foreign Secretary level Dialogue, the Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Dialogue, the Cyber Dialogue, and the India-Japan Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism.³⁶ Moreover, there are high prospects of having dialogues in additional areas including space, maritime affairs and Africa, that shall not only add to the strategic depth of bilateral ties, but also promote in-depth dialogues for further

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 *Joint Statement: Third India-Japan 2+2 Foreign and Defence Ministerial Meeting*, n. 2.

cooperation in the field of economic security and strategic trade.

Shared understandings regarding the rules of the game, the nature of permissible plays, linkages between choices and outcomes, and the nature of agents involved remain important prerequisites when sharing similar perspectives on Asia's geostrategic, geo-political and geo-economic future. India and Japan should not let go of the solid foundation and convergences at the strategic level for greater leverage and say in Asia's future developmental and security design by undertaking flexible decisions based on maritime border variables to achieve strategic and developmental deliverables.³⁷ Tokyo and New Delhi's role and presence can serve as a balancer and significant partner in the regional maritime paradigm in the IOR in particular and the Indo-Pacific in general. This, in turn can serve to enhance maritime domain awareness and coordinate activities through information-sharing, cooperation, and expertise development. Besides, promoting cooperation in the field of capacity-building and development through cooperation with IOR-Rim countries is an important avenue waiting to be expanded and developed further.³⁸

Multiple regional endeavors mentioned earlier in this paper are visible ranging from their respective partnerships with the IOR littoral states aimed at capacity-building, developing infrastructure and contributing to the regions' sustainable development. Given the severe diversity and differences between countries that are bound together by the

Indian Ocean, the need to promote sustained growth and balanced development in the region through regional economic cooperation becomes far more pronounced. The disparity in the capacities of the IOR Member States is a challenge that needs to be addressed through institutionalized cooperation between prominent stakeholders with shared understanding of the global commons.

By virtue of being two of the most prominent liberal Asian democracies, Japan and India must necessarily work collaboratively towards addressing these challenges by forging partnerships with Indian Ocean littoral states, near and far. Tokyo and New Delhi also need to address disaster situations by means of an institutional response, to what is being termed as *plurilateral cooperation*.³⁹ The most notable of these being the *Quad* initiative that encourages interoperability and cooperation for such contingencies. Another instance of this being the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP) Centre at Singapore to which India contributes in order to address the challenge of piracy.⁴⁰ Training and equipping other navies and coast guards is a natural next step for India and Japan. Moreover, ensuring trusted communication in a digital era is a crucial national security objective—a task too big to be attempted by most individual nations. Participating in consortiums is therefore an inevitable outcome.⁴¹ Ranging from enhancing maritime domain awareness and coordination of activities through information sharing, cooperation, and expertise development, partner

37 For details see, Monika Chansoria, "[All Politics is Global] Indian Ocean Geopolitics in the Crosshairs," *Japan Forward*, October 31, 2023, available at <https://japan-forward.com/all-politics-is-global-indian-ocean-geopolitics-in-the-crosshairs/>

38 *Maritime Security Strategies for Japan and Australia*, Report published by the United States Studies Centre & Japan Foundation, University of Sydney, June 2025, available at <https://www.jpff.go.jp/j/project/intel/exchange/jfipp/jade/pdf/JADE-Report-v2.pdf>

39 *Indian Ocean Conference 2025*, n. 4.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

nations and multi-national maritime constructs shall engage to develop comprehensive maritime domain awareness.

Another arena to be expanded further is that of harnessing the blue economy resources that shall serve as a key catalyst for sustainable development throughout the Indian Ocean and encourage regional-level blue economy initiatives to guide regional cooperation. Blue economy incorporates not just traditional maritime industries, but also developing industries like aquaculture, renewable energy technologies for wind, wave and tidal power, bio-products (pharmaceutical and agrichemicals), blue carbon (carbon sequestration) and desalination.⁴² A new ocean agenda should focus on devising blue economy strategies that shall boost economic development while protecting the environment and welfare of coastal communities across the IOR.

With a shared perspective for the future geo-political and geo-economic order of the Indian Ocean Region, India and Japan should collaborate towards defining a prospective dawn of an alternative regional Asian dynamic. They should not let go of their solid foundation and convergences at the strategic level for greater leverage and say in the future security design of Asia, and undertake proactive measures based on maritime border variables to achieve strategic deliverables. This shall go a long way to address the prevalent systemic security conditions in the Indian Ocean Region, and offer solutions for cooperative security, and maritime border resolutions.

42 For details and further reading see, Monika Chansoria, "Blue Economies of the Indian Ocean Region: Japan's Role in Transition to Sustainable Development and Growth," *Policy Brief*, The Japan Institute of International Affairs, Tokyo, August 24, 2020, available at https://www.jiia-jic.jp/en/policybrief/pdf/PolicyBrief_Chansoria_200824.pdf; also see, Timothy Doyle, "Blue Economy and the Indian Ocean Rim," *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2018, pp. 1–6.