

Chapter 4

India-Japan-US trilateralism: Emerging Indo-Pacific Consensus

"The United States, India and Japan hold common values and seafaring traditions, making our navies natural partners".

-The US Navy 7th Fleet commander vice-admiral Robert Thomas, July,2014

4.1 Introduction

Strategic and political developments in given historical contexts have come to define geographical regions as geo-political arenas in international politics. Indo- pacific today is more than just cartographic area. To evolve a comprehensive understanding of the developing bonhomie between USA, India, and Japan, one needs to critically analyse the nuances that are shaping this strategic relationship. Though the Strategic⁹ ties remain nascent, their course is dependent on the nature of Asian geopolitics in the coming years defining the future of their relationship. The focus of this chapter is on the strategic context in which USA, Japan-India relations are gaining significant momentum and evaluates how congruence of strategic interests is shaping the contours of USA-India-Japan relations in the Indo-Pacific Region.

Foreign policy is upon shared mutual interests. If Abe walked an extra mile Modi stepped onto Japanese soil in 2014 and caught Abe in a strong warm embrace signalling wider mutual interest. The atmospherics around Modi's visit coupled with the revised global order following Donald Trump's rise in the US have clearly put the partnership on steroids. There has never been a shortage of mutual admiration among the three leaders.

⁹ Defined as the cooperation in various areas between key international actors or as the cooperation between two powerful countries, who can perform strategic actions in the international system.

Importantly, in strategic terms, Asia was often not seen as operating as a single region: instead, the security dynamics and concerns of Northeast Asia and South Asia were seen as operating quite independently (*Buzan and Waever, 2003*). The end of the Cold War and the rise of economic and military power of China, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent change in India's economic policy, from import-substitution and inward-looking to export-oriented development strategies, have led to a convergence of USA's, Japan's, and India's strategic perspectives. In this unfolding strategic landscape, USA, India, and Japan, three important players in the Indo-Pacific, are exploring the strategic dimension of their relationships. The 21st century is an Asian Century which is a departure from the Atlantic epoch in all forays. The focus has shifted from the 'Heartland'¹⁰ to the littoral states who claim to secure the freedom of navigation on the high seas. With the emergence of multiple new regional players in the Indo-Pacific region - presents new complexities of relations within the region. However, the importance of the Indo-Pacific region is due to the interests of dependence on the Sea lanes of communication for energy and trade. With China's growing assertiveness in the region has driven both India and Japan to have a reformed partnership with the US. The growing cooperation of the US, Japan, and India on various issues regarding security development and maritime issues reflects that each nation views China's aggressive behaviour with caution. Hence, maritime security remains a central pillar in this trilateral relationship.

The accompaniment of a strategic colour to this relationship is closely related to two Japanese Prime Ministers, both being members of the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan: Taro Aso (2008-2009) and Shinzo Abe (2012-present)¹¹; the American Presidents- Barack Obama (the first Democratic African American president of the United States- from 2009 to 2017) and Donald Trump (Present Republican President) and their Indian counterpart Prime Minister Narendra Modi (24th May 2014 to present).

¹⁰ sometimes simply as The Pivot of History is a geostrategic theory which states that a sizeable region in Eurasia over which regional political control by a given country will in turn determine that country's supremacy over world politics.

¹¹ Abe had long been a proponent of the idea that India and Japan shared a common strategic interest over the potential threat posed by China and a weakening U.S. commitment to the Asia Pacific. In his 2007 book, "Towards a Beautiful Country: My Vision for Japan", Abe wrote it would "not be a surprise if in another decade, Japan-India relations overtake Japan-U.S. and Japan-China ties."

4.2 Defining Strategic Partnership

Strategic relationship is one of the most frequently used phrases in foreign policy discussions today, but perhaps one of the least understood. It entered the security lexicon to describe privileged bilateral relationships and have proliferated widely since the mid-1990s. Countries that were arranged in blocs during the cold war -allied to one of the two superpowers suddenly found themselves on their own after its end in the 1990s and began to cast about for new bilateral alliances, usually with states more powerful than themselves. Nations define their relations with other countries variously — partnership, alliance — but when two countries describe their relations as strategic, their ties are deemed to have risen to a new level. Strategic partnerships are commonly associated with defence or security related issues, but it also covers a wide range in bilateral relations, from defence to education, health, and agriculture, and quite commonly, economic relations, including trade, investment, and banking. Thus, it calls for greater engagement between the parties than mere ad hoc bilateral relationships that ensue as a result of normal diplomatic intercourse between states.

Strategic partnerships, unlike alliances, are primarily ‘goal driven’ (positive) rather than ‘threat-driven’ (negative) alignments. It will be built around a general (security) purpose known as a ‘system principle’, rather than one specific task, such as deterring or combating a hostile state, as with a conventional military alliance (*Wilkins, 2011; author’s interview with Prof Wilkins*). Following from this, no enemy state is identified by the partnership as a ‘threat’, though the partnership may be concerned with joint security ‘issue areas’, such as proliferation or terrorism, for example (*ibid*). Third, strategic partnerships tend to be informal in nature and entail low commitment costs, rather than being enshrined in a formal alliance treaty that binds the participants to rigid courses of action, such as a mutual defence pact. This permits partners to retain a greater degree of autonomy and flexibility, thus alleviating the ‘entrapment’ dynamic common to orthodox alliances (*Synder, 1984*). Fourth, perhaps due to the term’s inception in the business world, economic exchange appears most striking among their ‘functional areas’ of cooperation and acts as one of the key drivers behind the partnership, alongside security concerns. (*Wilkins, 2011; discussion with the Author*). It is the additional security dimension; however, that distinguishes strategic partnerships from economic partnership agreements (EPAs) (*Weitsman, 2003*). Strategic partnerships are therefore security alignments well-fitted

to challenging on-traditional security threats, not provoking great power rivalry, whilst retaining an ability to ‘hedge’ against it. (*ibid*).

The Oxford Dictionary defines strategic as anything relating to long term interests and goals; a strategic partnership, by extension, would relate to long term shared interests and ways of achieving them. ‘Strategic partnership’ emerged as a valid expression in international politics in the 1990s.¹²

The essence of strategic partnership arrangements is neatly summarized by Goldstein Ikenberry and Mastanduno (*Ikenberry and Mastanduno, 2003*), when they wrote that:

The essential elements are a commitment to promoting stable relationships and extensive economic intercourse, muting disagreements about domestic politics in the interest of working together on matters of shared concern in international diplomacy, and routinizing the frequent exchange of official visits, especially those by representatives of each country's military and regular summit meetings between top government leaders (Wilkins, 2011;2015).

Thus, strategic partnership can be defined as the bilateral relation that combines flexibility and deep rapprochement has become a supplement for the multilateral negotiations on the global pressing issues. It can thus be defined in the context of national strategic interests, i.e., a state’s concrete strategic interests can be implemented only on the grounds of the bilateral cooperation with other state having the same strategic interests (*ibid*). The cooperation in such strategic areas as security, military, politics, economy can also be called a strategic partnership. In the context of the end of the Cold War, the concept of a strategic partnership reflected neo-realism postulates on the structure of the international system: states are sovereign international

¹² The use of ‘partnership’ outside the vocabulary of international politics is much older. In 1890, in a legal/economic context, for example, it comes into force in England ‘The Partnership Act’ according to which a ‘partnership’ can be understood as ‘the relation which subsists between persons carrying on a business in common with a view of profit’

actors, who belong to a hierarchical category of power and operate under granted opportunities and constraints by that category in order to maximize its benefits and minimize action costs, taking into account the fact that their primary strategic goal is national security. Thus, the concept of a strategic partnership reflected the use of national power in cooperation with other countries when seeking the implementation of national interests (<https://www.ajrsp.com/>). However, this concept was frequently confused with¹³ the concepts of coalition (emphasizes a short-term cooperation) and an alliance (emphasizes a military cooperation) (Wilkins, 2011;2012;2015).

‘Strategic’ has been interpreted in different ways. Some scholars of international relations theory have argued against a set definition, arguing that each agreement belongs to a specific time and context, and thus has its own meaning. Some have even argued that the phrase is nothing more than nomenclature, and parties use it to project a higher status to their ties. (*ibid*). Nowadays strategic partnerships can reflect cooperation for the purpose of reaching common goals, that is, bilateral relations are defined by the strategic objectives and cooperation required for achieving these objectives and matches their national interests.

In reality, how a strategic partnership evolves has much to do with how successfully one or both parties balance the conflicting interests of its various partners and keep differences to a minimum. It sounds unrealistic to lay down the line to other actors and expect them to behave as if they have no other interests. (<http://www.economist.com/node/21542763>; <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-opinion/article2806672.ece>).

Convergent strategic goals are a starting point to form special relations. It is inevitable for both partners to possess a conviction that combining the efforts and cooperation increases the chance of implementing those goals. An evidence of existence of this conviction is an act of signing the declaration establishing a strategic partnership between parties. A recognition of a particular relation as a strategic, is manifested in a mutual designation of bilateral relations by

¹³ ‘partnerships’, ‘alliances’ and ‘special relationships’ are older terms used to define relationships between international political actors.

“special name” in the afore mentioned, the most important states documents and devoting in it more space to the second party in comparison to what is reserved for the other partners. The two factors that influence the decision of establishing a strategic cooperation are:

1. Possession of knowledge about common goals, and
2. Recognition that the partner’s resources and assets are highly helpful in their achievement (*Czechowska, 2013*).

The strategic partnerships are established not only between states, but also between states and international and supranational organizations, federal parts of states and even between continents. The strategic partnership itself, as a foreign policy tool, can serve to those in power who are faithful to both liberal and realist’s approach. Its essence lays in cooperation between the subjects that share the same goals. Those goals can stem from the preferences of the main lobbying groups within the subject (priorities ancillary to welfare/social development) or be determined by the structure of the external environment (priorities ancillary to the states’ security) (*ibid*).

Under strategic partnership states do not give up their own national interests for the common good, more often it is the cooperation that they perceive to be the best way to reach their goals. Moreover, even though a long-term cooperation undoubtedly strengthens the dependencies between partners that are caused by the globalization, the base for alliances is still the legal autonomy of the subjects. Since a strategic partnership is an intergovernmental institution, the integration theories that are focused on explaining why states decide to give up part of their sovereignty for the supranational subjects, cannot give much input here. Given some accurate liberal argument, the definition of strategic partnership was set within the framework of the alliance theory (*ibid*).

However, ‘Strategic partnership’ has also been the moniker of choice for some very asymmetrical, potentially exploitative relationships. To sum up, strategic partnership, responding to the condition of the international scene (forced by the globalization and the end

of the Cold War) is a tool of foreign policy of states, that combines both durability and flexibility (*ibid*). The reason why strategic partnerships are established and maintained is therefore not the cooperation-driven role of institutions, but emphasized by the realists, concurrence of the troubling issues (*ibid*).

In the words of Glenn Snyder alliance are formal associations of states for the use (non-use) of military force in specified circumstances against states outside their own membership.¹⁴ In juxtaposition Stephan Walt and Stephan David define alignment as relationship between two or more states that involves mutual expectations of some degree of policy coordination on security issues under certain conditions in the future. Thus, an alignment includes all forms of security coalitions and partnerships, ententes, non-aggression pacts and concerts. Simply put an alliance is just a subset of the larger alignment. We are thus witnessing – a shift from the cold war military alliance to a more flexible post-cold war alignment.

4.3 The Troika: United States, Japan, and India

The Indo-Pacific region is witnessing a growing convergence of economic and security interests among the United States, Japan, and India, with their fast-growing trilateral cooperation. Washington continues to be a security network provider across Asia, leveraging its nearly seventy-year strong relationship with Tokyo to deepen its economic ties. Since returning to power in 2013, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has clearly stated his vision for Japan's stronger role in the Asia-Pacific region. Similarly, India's Look East policy has expanded its economic and security efforts across Asia over the past decade, and Narendra Modi's success in the Spring 2014 elections is a new level evoked by New Delhi. Triggered momentum and foreign policy activity. In a joint statement released during Abe's trip to India in December 2015, the two sides agreed on "the need to leverage their excellent bilateral relations to promote trilateral dialogues and cooperation with major partners in the region." (*Ministry of External Affairs of the Government of India, 2015*).

¹⁴ <https://www.e-ir.info/2013/10/05/chain-ganging-and-the-outbreak-of-world-war-i-causation-or-coincidence/>

In many ways, the three countries are natural partners. They are three of the world's largest countries by population (India: 1,342,512,706; U.S.: 326,474,013, Japan: 126,045,211; as on 2017)¹⁵, three of the largest democracies, and three of the largest economies (the US is ranked first, Japan as third, and India fourth as of 2017)¹⁶). They are linked by the Indo-Pacific strategic construct that makes explicit the geographical connections and overlaps that each of them shares. All three are part of a dynamic and growing region, with each government eager to find new partners, or old partners with new capabilities, to raise its profile and extend its reach. Each eyes the other two as economic and strategic partners, possessing assets and resources that it values.

The Washington-Tokyo-Delhi partnership is important because it helps to connect the East Asian US alliance and partnership with India's South Asian anchors. Both Japan and India are located in an extremely dangerous areas and recognize that a security relationship with the United States is essential. With the leadership of the United States, Japan, and India, we will be able to more actively and in principle protect the rule-based order of the region and support international law in the maritime field. The United States has played an important role in signalling that it is desirable to accelerate the growth of strategic relations between Tokyo and New Delhi. On the security side, trilateral relations¹⁷ have seen a boost with India's decision in 2015 to agree to Japan's inclusion as a permanent participant in its annual Malabar naval exercises with the United States. Japan had previously participated in the Malabar exercises—which provide an invaluable opportunity for exchanges and operational synergies for the three navies—for several years, but it was not formally included in the exercise until 2015. The decision to expand the Malabar exercises is a significant turning point not just for India's role in the region, but also towards the development of the trilateral US-Japan-India relationship.

For both American and Japanese officials, India is the only Asian country with the weight and scale to offset China's power and influence. The Indian Navy Patrols Sea Lane, the world's energy highway, connecting the oil and gas resources of the Persian Gulf to the major

¹⁵ Ranking as second, third and eleventh. <http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/population-by-country/>

¹⁶ taticstimes.com/economy/countries-by-projected-gdp.php

¹⁷ Trilateral partnerships are an emerging diplomatic configuration of shared temporary goals, flexible postures, and agendas.

economies of East Asia. India is a victim of historic terrorism and shares a keen interest in curbing violent extremism with the United States and Japan. As the economy grows, India will increasingly have the resources to act as a security provider from East Africa to the West Pacific and to the Middle East, home to seven million Indians. But in order to rise, India needs all the capital, technology, and defence equipment it can obtain. The United States and Japan are one of the most likely external providers of these resources and have the most compelling share of India's success.

India is seeking US-Japan investment and know-how to accelerate economic development. Cross-border investment, joint ventures, technology transfer, and other corporate activities have increased significantly as all governments are committed to developing policies and regulations that are more business-friendly. India actively modernized its army, and the United States quickly became a major arms supplier. Delhi and Tokyo have expanded the scope of joint naval exercises and strengthened defence dialogue to pay more attention to maritime security and counterterrorism.

For the United States and Japan, India is becoming more and more the focus of their economic and security calculations. India can be a low-cost manufacturing hub for US and Japanese companies not only to sell in the large and fast-growing Indian market, but also to export to emerging markets in Asia, the Middle East and Africa. In terms of security, India with its strong military power can provide the coveted stability in South Asia and the Indian Ocean (IOR) region. Although South Asia is a growing country, it also faces long-term security challenges. India can also be a major partner within the IOR in protecting and promoting the interests of the United States and Japan, especially in ensuring freedom of navigation and other maritime security goals. Conversely, Japan and India see the United States as a potential energy supplier, as the shale gas revolution has made the United States a major gas exporter.

The US Department of Defence articulates strategic congruence between its rebalance policy and India's Act East course and further argues the case of buttressing India's maritime strengths as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean region and beyond. The US-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region enunciated in January 2015 and the US-

India Joint Statement on the Visit of Secretary of Defence Carter to India in April 2016 underscore the importance of safeguarding critical maritime sea-lanes and ensuring freedom of navigation and over flight throughout the region, including in the South China Sea. Furthermore, the Joint Strategic Vision outlines the objective of boosting regional dialogues and advancing trilateral consultations with regional countries in the coming five.

As Secretary Carter and Défense Minister Parrikar agreed, in principle, to conclude a Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement, and India's Agreement Concerning Transfer of Defence Equipment and Technology Cooperation with Japan instilled new depth to the bilateral equation, India's Special Strategic and Global Partnership with Japan and the Joint Vision 2025 added qualitative value to the bilateral relationship. The joint vision, among other issues, discussed maritime themes and endorsed the principles of peaceful settlement of disputes, the rule of law, freedom of navigation, and over flight, and noted the importance of sea lines of communication (SLOCs) in the South China Sea for regional energy security and trade and commerce. Both urged "states to avoid unilateral actions that could lead to tensions in the region" (*Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2015*).

Mirroring the developing union of their individual interests in the Indo-Pacific region, on September 29, 2015 United States Secretary of State John Kerry hosted the inaugural U.S.-India-Japan Trilateral Ministerial dialogue with Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj and Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida on the side-lines of the 70th United Nations General Assembly in New York. The three consented to cooperate in order to keep up sea security through more prominent joint effort. (*ibid*). The joint statement issued stated that the three ministers also underscored the importance of international law and peaceful settlement of disputes; freedom of navigation and overflight; and unimpeded lawful commerce, including in the South China Sea (*ibid*). Recognizing the three countries' extensive disaster response capabilities and converging interests, the three sides agreed to convene an experts-level group on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief to enhance ability to respond jointly to complex disasters

Addressing the meeting, Sushma Swaraj said the Asia Pacific and the Indian Ocean region is strategic for India to its security and economic interests. The sea lanes of communication in the region are the lifeline of India's trade and commercial externalities, she said. She noted that as part of India's 'Act East' policy, the country has focused on building stronger linkages with centres of economic growth in the region and deepened political and security ties with them, including ASEAN member countries. In keeping with the Act East policy, India seeks an early membership of the APEC, Swaraj said as she voiced keenness to work with the US and Japan for early membership of APEC (*ibid*). "We see the first meeting of India-US-Japan as a trilateral partnership for peace, prosperity, and stability in the region as an effort to strengthen transparency, inclusivity, and the rule of law in the region, and as a commitment to what we can do together for our mutual benefit and also for the larger good of the region," she said at the meeting held on the side-lines of the 70th UN General Assembly (*United States, Department of State, 2015*).

The Trilateral Strategic Dialogue Partnership, established in 2011 between India, Japan and the United States, focused primarily on the balance of power in the Asia-Pacific region and maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region. Gradually, trilateral maritime agreements were increasingly institutionalized. The US-India trilateral ministerial framework takes advantage of strengthening trilateral relations. The US-India Trilateral Secretary-level dialogue, which began in 2011, was promoted to a ministerial-level dialogue in September 2015, pushing the boundaries of cooperation. Maritime benefits with an emphasis on disaster response capabilities and humanitarian assistance form one of the key elements of this trilateral design dialogue. Cooperation on regional connectivity, women's skill enhancement, and economic empowerment also featured in the inaugural trilateral meeting (*Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 2015*). Subsequently in October, Japan was incorporated into the India-US Malabar exercises as a permanent feature. The goal is improving cooperation between navies and buttressing capacities for prompt action while confronting challenges related to disaster prevention and relief (*ibid*).

On November 30, 2018, Prime Minister Abe of Japan visited Buenos Aires, Argentina, and the first US-Japan India Summit was held with US President Donald J. Trump while attending the G20 Summit with Mr. Modi, the Prime Minister of India. The conference brought together

leaders of Indo-Pacific partners for the first time to openly exchange views on regional issues and their common interests in security. The three leaders reiterated that their trilateral cooperation is essential to the stability and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region. They shared their views, especially on strengthening cooperation on improving maritime security and regional connectivity. Modi reportedly outlined five areas that the grouping could work on—connectivity, sustainable development, maritime security, disaster relief and freedom of navigation.

A White House official, who briefed reporters before the trilateral meeting said it was "an opportunity to promote a resilient quality secure infrastructure" and "all three countries promote a free and open Indo-Pacific region".¹⁸ The official said that the leaders planned to discuss "strong naval cooperation", following up on a recent joint exercise in the South China Sea.¹⁹

On 28th June 2019, the three leaders held the second Trilateral Summit Meeting on the margins of the G20 Osaka Summit.. At the meeting, the leaders reaffirmed the critical importance of their trilateral cooperation in efforts to maintain and promote a free and open Indo-Pacific region, sharing their understanding of an increasingly complex security situation. (*ibid*). The three leaders confirmed their views to further promote the trilateral cooperation in various fields, such as maritime security, security in new domains including space and cyberspace, and quality infrastructure investment. About quality infrastructure investment, the leaders welcomed the G20 Principles for Quality Infrastructure Investment to be endorsed at the G20 Osaka Summit and confirmed their will to continue to cooperate to promote the principles to the international community. (*ibid*). Abe, Modi, and Trump decided to continue exchanges in the trilateral framework.

Trilateral cooperation with the United States has been the main vehicle for Japan and India the United States with the two largest and most influential democracies in the Indo-Pacific.

¹⁸ <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/pm-modi-donald-trump-pledge-strong-leadership-to-address-global-challenges/story-xi0BQNkIl3xIHPexjYyWVM.html>

¹⁹ *Ibid*.

India is in between a rock and a hard place when it comes to dealing with China. India's biggest diplomatic and geopolitical challenge lies in balancing its continental integration with Eurasia in the form of the Russia-China-India (RIC) trilateral along with maritime interests in the Indo-Pacific-focused US-Japan-India trilateral. Only with tactful diplomacy and a panoramic vision of its interest in maritime and continental Asia, can India successfully transform into a "leading power" from a balancing power. Firstly, in the present context trilateral dialogues appear to be an ideal framework of diplomatic cooperation for countries like India who is wary of the word alliances because of the implicit requirement of resigning some amount of sovereignty and autonomy. Japan presently appears to be vigorously expanding its political influence through the structure of the US-Japan alliance and encouraging third partners/allies (India, Australia, Philippines, and Vietnam) to join aboard. India's role as the net security provider in the region aims to leverage India as a leading power. This catchphrase first articulated by Indian Foreign Secretary Dr. S. Jaishankar while delivering the Fullerton Lecture at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) on "India, the United States and China", stated that India looks to transforming itself from a "balancing power to a leading power". (*Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, IISS Fullerton lecture by Dr. S. Jaishankar, 2015*). Later, US Ambassador to India, Richard Verma while delivering a lecture at the Observer Research Foundation New Delhi, asserted the same vision for India. The countries plan to strengthen maritime capacity building, along with launching a space dialogue and will soon begin to negotiate designs to build India's next aircraft carrier.

Reflecting the growing convergence of their interests in the Indo-Pacific region, India, US, and Japan have agreed to work together to maintain maritime security through greater collaboration and strengthen regional connectivity. India and the United States earlier in January this year released a Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region highlighting shared concerns over Chinese maritime aggression in the South China Sea.

Interestingly, the direction and pace of US-Japan-India trilateral arrangement is proportional to Chinese behaviour in the international system, particularly the maritime sphere. Analysts have painted this trilateral canvas as a counterweight to China. All three countries have complex relationships with China that are a mix of cooperation and competition. All three see China as a vital partner: it ranks among the top trade partners of each country, and all reach

out to Beijing to build confidence and cooperation on security issues. Japan and India both face claims to their territory by China, and the US regularly squares off against China over a range of security concerns. In addition, all three nations are attempting to moderate their large trade deficits with China (*Miller, 2016*).

The trilateral relationship has the potential to serve as a regional bulwark that could head off China's ambitions to control the maritime domain in East Asia (*ibid*). This is true especially as China continues to increase its involvement in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), with development and infrastructure projects in several peripheral states to Delhi, such as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and, of course, Pakistan.²⁰ China unites the triads. Its military continues to encroach on India's north-eastern border, while refusing to scale down its territorial infringement on international waters in the East and South China Sea. But China also divides them: The trio flirted with establishing a "democratic quadrilateral" with Australia in 2007, which was quickly dismantled for fear of ruffling China's feathers (*ibid*).

Despite these positive drivers and shared interests, the trilateral relationship between Washington, Tokyo, and Delhi is still nascent and faces a number of challenges. There are obstacles to deeper cooperation between India, Japan, and the United States. The US, Japan and India are three distinct countries, at different stages of economic development with variations in their strategic orientation on some issues, and so at times their interests are bound to diverge. Perhaps, the most existential difficulty for the growth of the partnership is Delhi's allergy to alliances or "quasi-alliances" and its concern that stronger and more overt alignment with Japan and the United States would incur more costs than benefits.²¹

²⁰ For example, China has built seaports, including one in Sri Lanka, and has finalized the deal to provide submarines to the Bangladeshi Navy. Elsewhere in the region, China has funded a massive deep-sea port in Pakistan at Gwadar, as well as a dry port in Nepal.

²¹ Specifically, India remains wary of taking steps that would hamper its relationship with China. Although Delhi is uncomfortable with China's assertive moves in the maritime domain—such as its actions to change the status quo via force in the East and South China seas—, there has not yet been enough strategic rationale to bring India more into the fold of the US-Japan camp in openly and actively opposing Beijing's moves.

Similarly, Japan and the United States—despite their concerns about Beijing’s regional behaviour—are cautious about constructing networks in the region that are solely purposed, or perceived, to contain China. (*ibid*). The containment of China would be counterproductive to the interests of all three nations—which rely on positive relations with Beijing to ensure shared prosperity and stability in the Asia Pacific. Indeed, as Secretary of Defence Ash Carter has indicated: “The United States welcomes the emergence of a peaceful, stable, and prosperous China that plays a responsible role in and contributes to the region’s security network...the United States remains committed to working with China to ensure a principled future for the region.”²²

Tokyo also relies on stable relations with Beijing, which remains one of its top trading partners despite politics being on ice since tensions over the Senkaku Islands boiled over in 2012 (*ibid*). The trading relationship with Beijing is less ascendant than before as Japan seeks out cheaper production sites and, potentially, more dynamic markets in Southeast Asia and India, but Tokyo still relies on China as a large hub of its supply chain (*ibid*). Moreover, the Abe administration is pragmatic about its need to work with China to defuse tensions in the East China Sea and work towards establishing effective mechanisms to mitigate unintended clashes in the disputed waters, through joint pledges to implement hotlines, common radio frequencies, and other measures (*ibid*). However, despite commitments to manage tensions in the East China Sea, none of these confidence-building mechanisms have yet been implemented.

Trilateral relations also continue to be hampered by the lack of concrete operational and political exchanges. The start of high-level political dialogue is a positive sign, as shown at the 2015 Foreign Ministers' Meeting, but the trilateral group still lacks the political influence and commitment of the Japan-US-Australia or Japan-Australia South Korea trilaterals who holds regular meetings at the ministerial level and also holds summit meetings at the national leader level. In other words, the trilateral remains in the "testing stage" and has not yet reached maturity or strategic acceptance by all sides. Another final-but important-challenge to trilateral relations will be the attention paid to such trilateral vehicles in the post-Obama era. With

²² <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2016-10-17/rebalance-and-asia-pacific-security>

Donald Trump's surprising elections, (and now at present President Joe Biden), the future of Washington's foreign policy and Obama's "rebalance" policy in the region remains uncertain.

Managing a trilateral relationship will be a complex and sometimes frustrating process. There will rarely be total uniformity of interests on any issue amongst all three partners, and this holds true for the US-Japan-India trilateral (*ibid*). But all three share a vision for security and prosperity for Asia and beyond (*ibid; Miller, 2016*). The US-Japan-India trilateral needs to look for ways to go beyond traditional security cooperation, as highlighted in the Malabar exercise. Involvement in other areas, such as combating piracy and combating maritime crime, will help diversify trilateral partnerships. Washington, Delhi, and Tokyo could also seek coordination of activities related to humanitarian and disaster relief (HADR) and search and rescue (SAR) exercises. Given the region's vulnerability to natural disasters and the need for a swift, effective, and multilateral response, this cooperation can bring tangible value. Still, the combination — America's commitment to democracy and strong military power, India's rapid economic growth and promise of strategic position in the Indian Ocean, and Japan's initiative to protect groups of freedom of navigation for commerce. —cannot be wasted. Given the nature of Trump's trading policies, the gradual move from Modi's non-allied foreign policy, and Prime Minister Abe's vision of a more confident Japan, a stronger trilateral partnership makes sense. It is encouraging to see that their annual naval exercises in Malabar evolving from a relationship of trust and goodwill to one of building shared capacity. Japan's emphasis on long-term Asian strategy and patience with India will neutralize America's impatience, engage India, and play a greater role in regional strategic issues, and ultimately use the platform to reaffirm the free world order. A strong economic foundation can thus determine the grand strategy of this trilateral partnership.

4.4 Ripples on The Oceans: The Malabar Exercise

The stakes in the new game unfolding in the Indian Ocean are rising by the day. (<https://www.indiawrites.org/2015>). Against the backdrop of China's growing clout and assertiveness in the region, the world's three maritime democracies, the US, Japan, and India, set to conduct joint naval exercises —the Malabar Exercise mid-summer exercise aimed at

addressing shared threats to maritime security in the India-Asia Pacific region. The exercise is held annually in one of the three locations, the Indian Ocean, the West Pacific maritime regions or the Bay of Bengal as a token passage exercise (PASSEX) between the Indian Navy (IN) and the US Navy (USN), off India's southwestern Malabar coast. (*Khurana, 2007; discussion with the author*). Since 1992, Indian and US navies have regularly conducted the annual bilateral exercise. Since 2007, Malabar has been held alternatively off India and in the Western Pacific. It may be mentioned here that MALABAR was initially designed as an annual event when it started in 1992 as a joint naval exercise between the navies of India and the US. It was institutionalized under the India-US Defence Framework Agreement signed in June 2005. This has now been extended for a further period of 10 years under an agreement signed by US Defence Secretary Ash Carter and Indian Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar on June 03, 2015.

Malabar Exercise is a trilateral naval exercise involving the United States, Japan, and India as permanent partners. The USA described the Malabar as, -Series of complex, high-end war-fighting exercises conducted to advance multi-national maritime relationships and mutual security issues. Originally a bilateral exercise between India and the United States, Japan became a permanent partner in 2015. New Delhi's decision to expand the Malabar exercises, which it conducts with the US navy in the region, signals India's needs to enhance maritime security in the region by forming alliances with like-minded countries, which are also wary of China's growing aggression in the region.²³ The inclusion of Japan in Malabar 2015 also shows Tokyo's new strategy to assert itself militarily. With China's rising strength in the Asia-Pacific region, it may well have been inevitable that Japan had to enter the game sooner or later. Past non-permanent participants were Australia²⁴ and Singapore. The annual Malabar exercise started in 1992 with the navies of US and India in the Indian Ocean. Since Japan joined in 2007²⁵, it has alternated between the West Pacific and the Indian Ocean. It includes diverse activities, ranging from fighter combat operations from aircraft carriers through Maritime Interdiction Operations Exercises. The exercise supports maritime security in the Indo-Pacific

²³ The Indian Ocean has become a bone of contention between India and China with China saying India should not treat it as its backyard where India wants to be the dominant player in the region. China, on the other hand, is making inroads into the region by reportedly docking of Chinese submarines at Karachi passing through Indian waters and building naval bases near Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

²⁴ In 2007, Australia took part in the Malabar exercise, but withdrew from the drills and accompanying security talks following concerns expressed by Beijing.

²⁵ naval exercise involving 26 warships from Australia, Japan, and Singapore

region and benefits the global maritime community. In recent times, the exercise assumes significance as it is being conducted close to South China Sea when Chinese assertiveness in this region is a raging issue. The exercise also aims to achieve deeper military ties and greater interoperability amid rising tensions in the region. Japan's participation as a non-permanent participant in 2007 had drawn a strong protest from China; Japan, nonetheless, participated in the 2009, 2011 and 2014 editions of the exercise, which were held off the Japanese coast. In 2011, due to the Fukushima nuclear accident, Japan did not take part in Malabar naval exercise. In November, India's Defence Minister met with Japanese Defence Minister, and they decided to carry out bilateral exercise between the Japan Maritime Self-Defence Force and the Indian Navy (*ibid*).

Malabar 2014 featured both onshore and at-sea training, the complex, high-end operational exercise, held off Okinawa Island in Japan (*Khurana, 2014; the author's interview and discussion with Captain Khurana*). The onshore training session involved discussions on subject matter expert and professional exchanges on carrier strike group operations, maritime patrol and reconnaissance operations, and anti-piracy and visit, board, search, and seizure (VBSS) operations. (*ibid*). The sea phase of the exercise was conducted in the Western Pacific Ocean (Philippines Sea) designed to advance participating nations' military-to-military coordination and capacity to plan and execute tactical operations in a multinational environment. It involved search and rescue exercises, helicopter cross-deck landings, underway replenishments, gunnery, and anti-submarine warfare exercises, VBSS and liaison officer exchange and embarkation (*ibid*). This exercise enabled advance professional interaction and understanding between the three navies to achieve better synergy to tackle common maritime challenges.

In 2015²⁶, it was conducted off Chennai coast in Bay of Bengal and included participation of Japan making it trilateral naval exercise. The six-day Malabar 2015 exercise that concluded in the Bay of Bengal put into perspective the convergence of India's Look East policy, Japan's repeated insistence on freedom of navigation in the South China Sea, and the Obama administration's Asia-Pacific Rebalance. Over twenty ships and ninety aircraft from

²⁶ In 2015, Japan was made a permanent invitee to Malabar Exercise.

India, Japan and the U.S. took part in the 20th edition of Malabar exercises close to several islands claimed by China in the South and East China Sea. The sea phase of exercise began in the Philippine Sea after conclusion of the harbour phase at Sasebo port. The scope of Malabar-16 included professional interactions in harbour and a diverse range of activities at sea, including complex surface, sub-surface, and air operations. The joint fleet of three navies included aircraft carriers, warships, and fast attack submarines. Four ships of Indian Navy from the Eastern Fleet participated in the naval exercise in consonance with country's 'Act East Policy'. They were Missile stealth frigates INS Sahyadri and INS Satpura, modern fleet tanker and support ship INS Shakti, missile corvette INS Kirch These ships have embarked one Sea King 42B ASW helicopter and two Chetak utility helicopters. US Navy was represented by ships from CTF 70 of the USN 7th fleet based at Yokosuka, Japan. The CTF included aircraft carrier USS John C Stennis (CVN 74), Arleigh Burke class destroyers USS Stockdale and USS Chung Hoon and Ticonderoga class Cruiser USS Mobile Bay (*ibid*). All these ships will be embarked helicopters. In addition, one nuclear powered submarine, Long Range Maritime Patrol aircraft and carrier wing aircraft are also participating in the exercise (*ibid*). The Japanese Navy was represented by the helicopter carrier JS Hyuga, which integrated the SH 60K helicopter. Along with other advanced warships, long-range maritime patrol aircraft also participated in certain parts of the exercise. Navy Exercise MARABAR 2016 is seen as an important step in strengthening mutual trust and interoperability and sharing best practices among the Navy in India, Japan, and the United States.

Malabar 2017 was a series of ongoing exercises that have increased in scope and complexity over the years. Starting July 10, the Indian, Japanese, and US Navy participated in Malabar 2017, the first major military exercise under President Donald Trump, with a particular focus on submarine warfare. The exercise involved naval vessels, aircraft, and personnel from three countries and was conducted in both land and sea training off the east coast of India in the Bay of Bengal. The training focused on high-end skills in warfare, combined operations of carrier attack groups, surface and submarine operations, explosives disposal (EOD), helicopter operations, and search and seizure visit committee (VBSS) operations. Exercises also included medical operations, maritime patrol and reconnaissance operations, damage management exercises, and the exchange of experts in the subject area. This was the first time that Indian single carrier INS Vikramaditya with MIG29KS has participated in a full-scale combat exercise with other countries since it was commissioned in November 2013. The US was engaging with

its over 100,000- tonne USS NIMITZ, a nuclear-powered super carrier with its full complement of F/A-18 Fighters. The carrier strike group included Ticonderoga- class missile cruiser, a Los Angeles – class nuclear attack submarine and three to four Arleigh Burke class destroyers. Japan engaged with 27, 000 tonne helicopter carrier Izumo and another warship for the intensive ten-day combat manoeuvres on the high seas off Chennai. The new Japanese warship was capable of carrying nine helicopters was primarily meant for anti-submarine warfare. Thus, the main thrust area and the interest of this 21st edition Malabar was on the submarine hunting with India and USA also deploying their Poseidon-8 long range maritime patrol aircraft. With around 15 warships, two submarines and scores of fighter jets surveillance aircrafts and helicopters coming together at a time when the elephant and the dragon are locked in tense face off near the Sikkim Bhutan Tibet tri junction since June 2017 had displayed a deepening cooperation among the three navies.

The 2018 Malabar exercise was conducted from 7 to 16 June 2018 off the coast of Guam in the Philippine Sea. This was the 22nd edition of the exercise and the first time it was held on United States territory. The exercise is divided into two phases. The harbour phase was held from 7 to 10 June at Naval Base Guam, and the sea phase from 11 to 16 June. Based on news reports, India refused Australia participation in the exercise to avoid posturing it as a military group against China (*ibid*). For this year's edition of the Malabar exercises, the Indian Navy was represented by “two indigenously designed and built ships, the multi-purpose stealth frigate INS Sahyadri and Anti-Submarine Warfare corvette, INS Kamorta, Fleet Tanker INS Shakti and Long-Range Maritime Patrol Aircraft P8I” (*ibid*). Unfortunately, India's aircraft-INS Vikramaditya was not a part of the Malabar drills as it was undergoing a pre-scheduled refit. The JMSDF sent a Hyuga-class helicopter carrier JS Ise with integral helicopters, the Takanami-class destroyer JS Suzunami, Akizuki class destroyer JS Fuyuzuki, two P1 Maritime Patrol Aircraft besides a submarine (*ibid*). The US Navy was represented by the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier, USS Ronald Reagan with its air wing, two Ticonderoga class cruisers, two Arleigh Burke class destroyers, a Los Angeles-class attack submarine, and one Long Range Maritime Patrol Aircraft P8A (*ibid*). A US Navy press release on these exercises stated that the Navy of India, Japan, and the United States share a common understanding and knowledge of a common working environment at sea. Each iteration of this exercise, the navies of the three countries gain an understanding about the seafarers as members of the Indo-Pacific countries

which in turn continue the process of strengthening the bonds and personal connections among the members.

However, the anti-submarine warfare of the US, Japan and India won't make them succeed in countering China as China has significantly improved its technologies in ballistic missile submarines and attack submarines. With the development of multi-dimensional operations, merely elevating anti-submarine capability won't enable these countries to contain China (*ibid*). China sees this strategy designed to target PLA's (People's Liberation Army) submarines in the East and South China Seas as the one similar to forming groups such as NATO by US-led security grouping in Asia-Pacific²⁷. It is a strategy by Washington, according to the Chinese - to bring New Delhi and Tokyo into the exercise to relieve its pressure due to overstretched military presence around the globe and tighten its grip on the Indo-Asia-Pacific region. Tokyo on the other hand as a permanent member of the exercise to enhance its military cooperation with the US and find a solution to its dispute with China over islands in the East China Sea. It used the exercise to enhance the anti-submarine capability of the Japanese Maritime Self-Defence Force and spy on China's military deployment in the waters²⁸. China feels focus on anti-submarine warfare is intended to target Chinese submarines in the East and South China Sea. China also considers drills focusing on East China Sea as a ploy to distract it from South China Sea, its current focus.

The Malabar exercise has been criticized for reasons cited by the United States, and Japan and India are merely partners for different purposes. This paralyzes the actual effect of exercise. In fact, this type of exercise is unlikely to affect China's presence in the East China Sea, except to increase tensions and create friction in the waters (*Chubb, 2021*). However, the purpose of these exercises is to improve comfort in terms of interoperability between the navies involved in order to achieve optimal results in humanitarian rescue operations and natural disasters at sea. However, China prefers to see such a move as directed at it and as a growing anti-China UN indicator. Meanwhile, China has seen anti-Chinese plots emerging in the region.

²⁷ China's intention is probably both to surveil the exercise and to send a message that it do not take kindly to this form of maritime collaboration between three rivals.

²⁸ China also fears India improving on submarine warfare and fears Japanese Maritime Self Defense Forces would use enhanced capabilities to spy on China.

It envisions India and Japan joining forces to become part of a larger US-based group to stave off the rise of China. It has openly accused Japan of increasing tensions "by maliciously exaggerating China's threat" (*ibid*). It was more cautious against India, but clearly sees India as a serious threat to its ambition to become a regional hegemon (*ibid*).

Table 4. 1 A detailed analysis of the Malabar Exercises is given as follows:

YEAR	INDIA	USA	JAPAN	IMPORTANT FACTS
1992				Destroyers/ frigates Elementary. PASSEX29 Basic manoeuvres
1995-1996 Persian Gulf Off Kochi	Indian warship and	US SSN30 on passage (UAE to Kuwait) US logistics ship		2-dimensional, PASSEX, Anti-submarine warfare (ASW) Indian warship and US SSN on passage (UAE to Kuwait)
2002	2 destroyers/ frigates	2 destroyers/ frigates		Comprised basic passing manoeuvres among naval vessels, anti-submarine exercises and

29 Passage exercise

30 Nuclear-powered attack submarine

				replenishment-at-sea drills.
2003	INS Brahmaputra INS Ganga Indian submarine INS Shalki		USS Fitzgerald (DDG-62) USS Chosin (CG-65). US submarine USS Pasadena (SSN-752)	The defence ties between the two nations are highest at this point aircraft conducted anti-submarine warfare tactics.
2004 1st-9th October Southwest coast of India	destroyer INS Mysore, frigate INS Brahmaputra, tanker INS Aditya Submarine INS Shankul.		USS Paul F. Foster (DD-964), USS Alexandria (SSN-757), a Los Angeles-class submarine, US Navy P-3C Orion maritime and reconnaissance patrol aircraft SH-60B Seahawk LAMPS MKIII helicopter. Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser USS Cowpens (CG 63), the Oliver Hazard Perry-	Both navies engaged in submarine familiarization exercises -a key capability for anti-submarine warfare collaboration. two navies were in a position to exercise in a multi-dimensional and multi-threat scenario with the presence of major combatants, which included destroyers and frigates with integral helicopters, both nuclear and diesel submarines, carrier-borne fighter aircraft

		class frigate USS Gary (FFG 51)		<p>and, lastly, maritime patrol aircraft.</p> <p>Designed to increase interoperability between the two navies, while enhancing the cooperative security relationship between India and the United States.</p> <p>Bilateral exercise involved a number of events designed to test the abilities of Sailors on both sides. Some of these included small boat transfers, manoeuvring as a group, night-time underway replenishments, visit, board, search, and seizure (VBSS) drills, and the central event, a "war at sea."</p>
<p>2005</p> <p>25th September - 4th October</p>	INS Viraat	USS Nimitz (CVN-68)		<p>US and Indian forces collaborated on a wide variety of tasks ranging from a joint diving sge operation to a 24-hour 'war at sea' simulation</p>

				that saw the two forces engage in mock combat.
<p>2006</p> <p>Off Goa from 24th Oct – 5th Nov 2006</p>	<p>Mysore (Delhi class destroyer)</p> <p>the guided missile frigates Beas and Ganga</p> <p>underway replenishment tanker Shakti,</p> <p>a large landing ship (Tank) Gharial,</p> <p>the sub-surface killer submarine INS Shankul</p> <p>Coast Guard Ship Samar</p> <p>reconnaissance aircraft and Sea Harrier fighters operating from ashore.</p>	<p>US submarine USS Providence (SSN-719) as well as Marines from the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU)</p> <p>The US Navy's Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG-05) comprises USS Boxer (LHD 4 landing platform - helicopter & dock),</p> <p>Expeditionary Strike Group (BOXESG) comprising 13 ships including amphibious ships, cruisers, destroyers' cruiser USS Bunker Hill, destroyers Benfold and</p>		<p>First time a United States Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG) led the exercise.</p> <p>The addition of the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Midgett (WHEC 726) and an Indian Coast Guard Patrol Ship allowed for the exchange of Coast Guard practices between nations in maritime law enforcement, anti-piracy operations, pollution control, search, and rescue, and VBSS support.</p> <p>During the second phase, BOXESG pulled into several Indian ports, including Mumbai and Goa.</p> <p>The stop offered BOXESG a chance to experience Indian culture, re-supply, and</p>

		<p>Howard, the US Coast Guard Cutter Midgett, the Canadian Frigate Ottawa nuclear powered submarine USS Providence P3C Orion (operating from Goa).</p>	<p>support a Habitat for Humanity project.</p> <p>The visit gave leadership a chance to discuss future Malabar exercises and interoperability between the three nation's armed forces.</p> <p>"War-at-Sea" phase, which split the forces into two international blue and gold teams.³¹</p> <p>The two navies would, for the first time, be also exercising expeditionary operations off the Konkan coast.</p> <p>For this operation involving sea-borne landings, the army troops have been trained an onboard INS Gharial (a landing ship).</p> <p>These troops would now be exercising with</p>
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31 . The blue team simulated a friendly force providing aid to a disaster-stricken nation, while the gold team simulated an enemy force attacking them. During the exercise, both teams tested their response capabilities and ability to work with each other

US Marines as a part of Malabar - 06.

The exercise saw the two navies engaging in advanced exercises including anti-submarine operations, maritime interdictions, weapon firings, Visit Board Search & Seizure (VBSS) operations, Dissimilar Air Combat (DACT), cross deck flying and a simulated 'war at sea'. At one level, such Navy-to-Navy interactions help us to hone our skills and audit our own standards by first-hand comparison with navies of advanced countries.

On the other, it improves mutual understanding and co-operation and helps evolve inter-operability through common drills and procedures.

<p>20073233</p> <p>4th- 9th September</p>	<p>Eight warships, including the aircraft carrier INS Viraat</p> <p>Destroyers INS Mysore</p> <p>INS Rana</p> <p>INS Ranjit</p> <p>fleet tanker INS Jyoti (A58)</p> <p>corvette INS Kuthar</p> <p>Viraat's Sea Harrier jets</p> <p>Sea King helicopters</p> <p>Indian Air Force's Jaguar deep-penetration strike aircraft were also seen in action.</p>	<p>with 13 warships, including the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS Nimitz34</p> <p>The other vessels included the conventionally powered carrier USS Kitty Hawk, the nuclear submarine USS Chicago (SSN-721), two guided missile cruisers, and six guided missile destroyers.</p>	<p>two destroyers</p>	<p>US Navy had the largest representation during Malabar 2007 first one to be held outside the Indian Ocean, off the Japanese island of Okinawa</p> <p>Ships ranging from the size of a super carrier to frigates, aircraft, and helicopters from five nations - India, US, Japan, Australia, and Singapore.</p> <p>This was the first time a joint exercise of this scale involving 25 vessels was conducted.</p> <p>The exercise was previously a bilateral India-US engagement that was expanded for the first time.</p> <p>Japan as a foreign invitee.</p>
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32 The exercise culminated with a "mock battle" in which all assets (irrespective of nationality) were divided into opposing groups with matching capabilities. These rival forces enacted a virtual maritime threat and engaged each other in a simulated war. This was followed by a "hot wash-up" on one of the ships - an on-the-spot debrief and assessment about the exercise.

33 China was known to be unhappy over the event as it was being conducted in the Bay of Bengal for the first time

34 protested when it dropped anchor off Chennai in July

exercises were conducted round the clock in all three dimensions (under-water, surface, and air) that included Dissimilar Aircraft Combat Tactics (DACT), cross deck landings by aircraft and helicopters between various ships, strike, and combat air patrols (CAP) by fighters operating from aircraft carriers, air defence exercises (ADEX), combined anti-submarine exercises (CASEX) with the nuclear propelled submarine USS Chicago, gun firing and opposed transit in the area of threat. In addition to this, counter mechanisms to other maritime threats that affect all countries such as marine terrorism, piracy at sea, human arms and drug trafficking were also

				<p>practiced. Shore based aircrafts, namely Long-Range Maritime Patrol (LRMP) TU-142M of the Indian Navy and P-3C Orions from US Navy and Japan Maritime Self Défense Force (JMSDF) also participated in the exercise operating out of Chennai.</p>
<p>2008 19 October 2008, conducted in the Arabian Sea</p>	<p>Guided-missile destroyers Mumbai and Rana. The guided-missile frigates Talwar, Godavari, Brahmaputra, and Betwa. The replenishment tanker Aditya. Shishumar-class diesel-electric submarine</p>	<p>USS Ronald Reagan (CVN-76)'s Carrier Strike Group Seven. submarine, USS Springfield (SSN-761), and one P3C Orion aircraft Joining Carrier Group Seven were the fast combat support ship Bridge nuclear-powered fast-attack submarine Springfield</p>		<p>to promote increase inter-operability between the United States and India, with a special emphasis on maritime interdiction, including counter-piracy and counter-terrorism operation</p>

		P-3C maritime patrol aircraft.		
2009 Off the coast of Japan between 29 April and 3 May 2009.	INS Mumbai (D62), INS Khanjar (P47), INS Ranvir (D54) and INS Jyoti (A58)	USS Blue Ridge (LCC 19), USS Fitzgerald (DDG 62), USS Chafee (DDG 90) and the USS Seawolf (SSN 21)	JDS Kurama (DDH144) and JDS Asayuki (DD132).	Visit, Board, Search & Seizure (VBBS) techniques • Surface warfare manoeuvres •Anti-submarine warfare •Gunnery training • Air defence Japan as a foreign invitee
2010 Goa, India, 23 April	Guided missile destroyer INS Mysore three frigates - INS Godavari, INS Brahmaputra and INS Tabar submarine INS Shishumar	United States Navy's Seventh Fleet Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser USS Shiloh (CG 67) Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyers USS Lassen (DDG 82) and USS Chafee (DDG 90), Oliver Hazard Perry-class guided-missile frigate USS Curts (FFG		Focused on anti-submarine warfare, surface firings and maritime interdiction operations apart from humanitarian assistance and disaster relief efforts. Training conducted at-sea included surface and antisubmarine warfare, coordinated gunnery exercises, air defence, and visit, board, search, and seizure drills. Sailors took part in professional exchanges

		<p>38), Los Angeles-class fast-attack submarine USS Annapolis (SSN 760), P-3 Orion aircraft, SH-60 helicopters and a Sea, Air and Land (SEAL) special forces detachment.</p>		<p>and discussions while at-sea and on shore. United States Navy personnel participated in a community service project during the port visit to Goa.</p> <p>Fundamental coordination and communication to more advanced and complex strategic naval operations.</p> <p>Training conducted at sea included surface and anti-submarine warfare, coordinated gunnery exercises, air defence and visit, board, search, and seizure drills.</p>
<p>2011 2nd –10th April 2011 off the Okinawa coast</p>	<p>guided-missile destroyers Delhi, Ranvijay, INS Ranvir (D54). corvette INS Kirch (P62) replenishment tanker Jyoti.</p>	<p>Carrier Strike Group Seven participated in Malabar 2011 guided-missile destroyers Sterett and Stethem guided-missile frigate Reuben James</p>		<p>India had stopped involving more countries in the exercises after China, in 2007, sent demarches to all the participants of a five-nation naval exercise held in the Bay of Bengal.</p>

		<p>nuclear-powered attack submarine USS Santa Fe (SSN-763).</p>		<p>With the Japanese participation in 2009 raising no political storm, India was once again agreeable to the idea of allowing the Japanese Maritime Self Défense Force to participate.</p> <p>Designed to advance United States-Indian coordination and operational capacity</p> <p>The at-sea portions were conducted in the western Pacific Ocean, east of the Luzon Strait, and east of Okinawa.</p> <p>The exercise's location coincided with the Indian Navy's western Pacific deployment.</p>
<p>2012 9th- 16th April Bay of Bengal Harbour Phase (07-09 Apr 2012) Sea Phase I (10-14 Apr 2012)</p>	<p>The frigate INS Satpura destroyers INS Ranvir INS Ranvijay, and</p>	<p>Carrier Strike Group (CSG) 1 of the US Navy, comprising USS Carl Vinson, embarked Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 17, Ticonderoga-class guided-</p>		<p>Exercise took place in approximately 450 nautical miles of sea and air space and offered the opportunity for the United States and Indian naval services to conduct communications</p>

<p>Sea Phase II (15 and 16 Apr 2012)</p>	<p>corvette INS Kulish</p> <p>Indian Navy replenishment oiler INS Shakti (A57)</p> <p>one Los Angeles Class nuclear submarine USS Louiseville and one shore based P3C Orion</p>	<p>missile cruiser USS Bunker Hill and Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Halsey</p> <p>Military Sealift Command's fast combat support ship USNS Bridge also provided support for the exercise.</p> <p>USS Halsey along with USS Carl Vinson and USS Bunker Hill</p>		<p>exercises, surface action group (SAG) operations, helicopter cross-deck evolutions, and gunnery exercises.</p> <p>The participants split into two SAGs, with Bunker Hill leading one and Satpura leading the other. Carl Vinson and CVW-17 provided air support for the exercise</p>
<p>2013</p> <p>5 November 2013 and continued until 11 November 2013 in the Bay of Bengal</p>	<p>INS Shivalik (F47)</p> <p>guided missile destroyer INS Ranvijay (D55)</p> <p>Tupolev Tu-142 Maritime Reconnaissance aircraft.</p>	<p>Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS McCampbell (DDG 85)</p> <p>P-3 Orion aircraft.</p>		<p>Indian Navy-US Navy bilateral exercise included professional exchanges and embarkations; communications exercises; Surface Action Group operations; leapfrogs; helicopter cross-deck evolutions; gunnery exercises; Visit Board Search and Seizure (VBSS) and anti-</p>

				submarine warfare (ASW). Include liaison officer professional exchanges and embarks; gunnery exercises; visit, board, search, and seizure; Surface Action Group operations; helicopter evolutions; underway replenishments.
2014 commenced on 24 July 2014 at Sasebo Naval Base, Japan. 27 to 30 July Onshore at Port Sasebo, Japan from 24 to 26 July, the interactions will include subject matter expert and professional exchanges on Carrier Strike Group operations, maritime patrol and reconnaissance operations, anti-piracy operations and Visit, Board, Search	INS Ranvijay (guided missile destroyer), INS Shivalik (stealth frigate) INS Shakti (fleet tanker) INS Ranvijay, INS Shivalik INS Shakti, two Japanese Navy destroyers together with a P3C Orion and a seaplane (US-2), in addition to a US Navy submarine, two destroyers, a	U.S. Navy one submarine (SSN), two destroyers, one tanker along with one Maritime Reconnaissance aircraft participated. One United States Navy Carrier Strike group (CSG) based on the Nimitz class carrier USS George Washington joined for the sea phase of the exercise	Two destroyers along with a P3C Orion and a ShinMaywa US-2 two Japanese Navy destroyers together with a P3C Orion and a seaplane (US-2),	exercise involved Carrier strike group operations, Maritime patrol and Reconnaissance operations, anti-piracy operations and Visit, board, search, and seizure (VBSS) operations, Search and rescue exercises, helicopter cross-deck landings, Underway replenishment, gunnery and anti-submarine warfare exercises, and Liaison officer exchange and embarkation. Japan as a foreign invitee

<p>and Seizure (VBSS) operations.</p> <p>The sea phase of the exercise scheduled from 27 to 30 July</p>	<p>tanker and one MR aircraft</p>			<p>onshore and at-sea training, the complex, high-end operational exercise</p> <p>onshore training session involves discussions on subject matter expert and professional exchanges on carrier strike group operations, maritime patrol and reconnaissance operations, and anti-piracy and visit, board, search, and seizure (VBSS) operations.</p> <p>The sea phase of the exercise, to be conducted in the Western Pacific Ocean, is scheduled from 27 to 30 July and involves search and rescue exercises, helicopter cross-deck landings, underway replenishments, gunnery, and anti-submarine warfare exercises, VBSS and</p>
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				liaison officer exchange and embarkation. Exercises planned during this phase include search and rescue exercises, helicopter cross-deck landings, underway replenishments, gunnery and anti-submarine warfare exercises, Visit, Board, Search and Seize operations (VBSS) and Liaison officer exchange and embarkation. Designed to enhance maritime cooperation among the navies of the participating nations, these exercises further hone individual capacity to conduct operations in a multi-national environment.
2015 In Bay of Bengal Harbor phase till 16th October	INS Sindhuraj (diesel-electric submarine)	nuclear aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN 71),	JS-Fuyuzuki, the latest Akizuki class destroyer which is known for its enhanced	As part of war-game, the US Navy Seals, and Indian Marine Commandos

<p>Thereafter the action began in the Sea-phase which continued till October 19, 2015.</p>	<p>INS Ranvijay (guided missile destroyer), INS Shivalik (stealth frigate) (F 47) INS Betwa (guided-missile frigate) INS Shakti (fleet tanker). Shivalik Brahmaputra-class frigates fleet support ship, P-8I maritime surveillance aircraft,</p>	<p>Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser USS Normandy (CG 60) Freedom-class littoral combat ship USS Fort Worth (LCS 3) Los Angeles-class submarine USS City of Corpus Christi (SSN 705) US aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN 71), Carrier Airwing (CVW)</p>	<p>C4ISR and Anti-Aircraft Warfare (AAW), with an OYQ-111 advanced Combat Direction Sub-System (CDS) and FCS-3A2 AAW weapon sub-system. A missile destroyer with SH 60K integral helicopter.</p>	<p>(MARCOS) conducted joint drills. A table-top exercise to acquaint the personnel from the three navies was earlier conducted On 26 January 2015, the U.S. President and Indian Prime Minister agreed, in a joint statement, to upgrade exercise Malabar. India invited Japan to be a part of exercise Japan became a permanent partner series of complex exercises in a bid to advance multi-national maritime relationships and mutual security and included wide-ranging professional interactions during the Harbour Phase and a diverse range of operational activities at sea during the Sea Phase</p>
<p>2016</p>	<p>INS Sahyadri</p>	<p>Ships from CTF 70 of the USN 7th</p>	<p>JS Hyuga, a helicopter carrier</p>	<p>Special Forces (SF) of the three navies</p>

<p>The harbour phase at Sasebo from 10 to 13 June</p> <p>the sea phase in the Pacific Ocean from 14 to 17 June</p>	<p>INS Satpura, INS Shakti, a modern fleet tanker and support ship</p> <p>INS Kirch, an indigenous guided missile corvette.</p> <p>The ships have embarked one Sea King 42B ASW helicopter and two Chetak utility helicopters.</p>	<p>fleet- based at Yokosuka, Japan.</p> <p>The CTF included the aircraft carrier USS John C Stennis (CVN 74)</p> <p>Ticonderoga class Cruiser USS Mobile Bay</p> <p>Arleigh Burke class destroyers USS Stockdale and USS Chung Hoon,</p> <p>All with embarked helicopters. In addition,</p> <p>one nuclear powered submarine, carrier wing aircraft and Long-Range Maritime Patrol aircraft</p>	<p>with SH 60 K integral helicopters and Long-Range Maritime Patrol aircraft,</p> <p>Other advanced warships for specific parts of the exercise.</p>	<p>interacted during the exercise.</p> <p>Primary aim of this exercise has been to increase interoperability amongst the three navies and develop common understanding of procedures for Maritime Security Operations.</p> <p>Significant step in strengthening mutual confidence and interoperability as well as sharing of best practices between the Indian, Japanese and US Navies.</p> <p>The exercise will support maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region, and benefit the global</p> <p>The scope of this exercise included professional interactions in harbour and a diverse range of activities at sea, including complex</p>
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				surface, sub-surface, and air operations.
<p>2017</p> <p>10 - 17 July</p> <p>Included a harbour phase at Chennai from 10 to 13 July 2017</p> <p>A sea phase from 14 to 17 July 2017 in the Bay of Bengal.</p>	<p>Aircraft carrier INS Vikramaditya and its air wing, Guided missile destroyer INS Ranvir</p> <p>Two indigenous stealth frigates INS Shivalik and INS Sahyadri, Antisubmarine Warfare corvette INS Kamorta,</p> <p>Two missile corvettes INS Kora</p> <p>INS Kirpan, one Sindhughosh-class submarine, fleet tanker INS Jyoti and a Poseidon P8I aircraft.</p>	<p>Aircraft carrier USS Nimitz and its air wing, Guided missile cruiser USS Princeton,</p> <p>Three guided missile destroyers: USS Howard, USS Shoup and USS Kidd,</p> <p>Los Angeles-class fast-attack submarine Poseidon P-8A aircraft</p>	<p>Helicopter carrier JS Izumo (DDH 183) and its air wing</p> <p>Missile destroyer JS Sazanami (DD1 13)</p>	<p>This edition focused on Aircraft Carrier operations, Air defence, Anti-submarine warfare (ASW), Surface warfare, Visit Board Search and Seizure (VBSS), Search and Rescue (SAR), joint and tactical procedures.</p> <p>There was also joint training between the naval special forces of the Indian and US Navies at INS Karna, Visakhapatnam. A total of 16 ships, 2 submarines and 95 aircraft participated in this exercise.</p> <p>It was the first exercise between the three countries which involved three aircraft carriers.</p>

<p>201835</p> <p>7 - 16 June 2018 off the coast of Guam in the Philippine Sea.</p> <p>The exercise is divided into two phases.</p> <p>The harbour phase was held from 7 - 10 June at Naval Base Guam</p> <p>The sea phase from 11 - 16 June.</p>	<p>Stealth frigate INS Sahyadri (F-49)</p> <p>Antisubmarine Warfare corvette INS Kamorta (P-28),</p> <p>Fleet tanker INS Shakti (A-57).</p> <p>Boeing P-8I</p> <p>Neptune aircraft</p>	<p>Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan (CVN-76) with its air wing</p> <p>Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruisers USS Antietam (CG-54) and USS Chancellorsville (CG-62)</p> <p>Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyers USS Benfold (DDG-65) and USS Mustin (DDG-89).</p> <p>Los Angeles-class fast-attack submarine</p> <p>Poseidon P-8A aircraft.</p>	<p>Hyuga-class helicopter carrier JS Ise (DDH-182) and its air wing</p> <p>Takanami-class destroyer JS Suzunami (DD-114), and Akizuki-class destroyer JS Fuyuzuki (DD-118)</p> <p>Kawasaki P-1 patrol aircraft and a diesel-electric attack submarine</p>	<p>first time it was held on United States territory</p> <p>focused on onshore and at-sea training</p> <p>practice surface and anti-submarine warfare operations, combined carrier strike group operations, maritime patrol and reconnaissance operations, and visit, board, search, and seizure operations, Aircraft carrier operations and professional exchanges</p> <p>the U.S. Pacific Command renamed to U.S. Indo-Pacific Command</p>
<p>2019</p> <p>26 September - 4 October</p>	<p>Stealth Frigate INS Sahyadri</p>	<p>Guided-Missile Destroyer USS Mccampbell</p> <p>From Yokosuka,</p>	<p>JMSDF Helicopter Destroyer JS Kaga,</p>	<p>Japan Maritime Self-Defence Force for The</p>

35 Based on news reports, India refused Australia participation in the exercise to avoid posturing it as a military group against China.

Antisubmarine Warfare	The Amphibious Transport Dock	Guided Missile Destroyers JS	First Time Will Be Leading Malabar
Corvette INS Kiltan	USS Green Bay from Sasebo	Samidare JS Cruiser	
Boeing Poseidon-8I Long-Range Maritime Patrol Neptune Aircraft P-8I Aircraft	Boeing P-8A Poseidon Aircraft An Unnamed Los Angeles-Class Nuclear Fast Attack Submarine from Submarine Group 7	Choukai, P1 Aircraft	

Source: By the author based on discussion with Captain Gurpreet Khurana

Establishing a maritime partnership through the Malabar exercise promoted security and stability throughout the Indo-Asia-Pacific region. The exercises have helped create better synergies in addressing common maritime challenges and promote professional interaction and understanding among seafarers from the three countries. Training, building maritime partnerships and understanding are needed to take cooperation between the United States, Japan, and India to a new level. The "MALABAR" exercise can be viewed as a routine expert interaction between the Indian, US and Japanese Navy, building mutual trust and trust by sharing operational capabilities. In addition to enhancing interoperability, these exercises provide Indian planners with insights into the methods and doctrines being developed and implemented by prominent navies such as the United States and Japan. Malabar exercises will continue to help maintain and strengthen the stability and security of the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Territory. The Navy of India, Japan and the United States has a good understanding and knowledge of the general working environment at sea. This exercise will

further help to deepen the understanding between the Navy. On a larger scale, it also reflects the intertwining of strategic interests inevitably controlled by political leadership, presenting a broad, visible, and transparent message. In the evolving strategic environment of the newly formed strategic geography of the Indo-Pacific, the waters are the fulcrum of the broad involvement of these prominent Indo-Pacific stakeholders who define common strategic interests. Therefore, "MALABAR" does not have a prominent meaning as a daily activity of the Navy in general but defines India's aggressive approach in important parts of the globe. Exercise Malabar is the broadest professional interaction that the Indian Navy makes with all its partners. India has neither political capital nor strong naval capabilities to contain the categorical naval achievements of the Chinese Navy in Naval Asia. Similar concerns about China's growing footprint in IOR are also felt by the IOR and the United States, which has many bases in Japan. In seeking a solution to such significant complexity, India must ensure that the Indian Navy must fulfil its primary mission of protecting national interests. In the current power asymmetry that is developing in and around the Indo-Pacific, it can certainly serve as a soft stabilizer in the region. However, our comprehensive maritime partnership with Japan, which is expanding its reach in the Indo-Pacific while ensuring the security of the United States, guarantees reliable security and stability in the Indo-Pacific. Importantly, the reinterpretation of Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution will allow Japan to improve and redefine its strategic position in the Indo-Pacific as a credible military force in the east and as a strong military partner in India. I can do it. Sharing best practices by the three navy is effective and swift to strengthen their respective capabilities and address disaster risk reduction, relief, and safety challenges at sea within the Indo-Pacific region for the benefit of global maritime affairs. A community that manages something that helps create better synergies for action. Finally, through the Malabar exercise, the navies of the three countries will learn to trust, develop, and cooperate with each other for peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

4.5 Analysing the Trilateral Convergences in the Indo-Pacific

Triangular partnerships have become ubiquitous for numerous reasons ranging from the ineffectiveness of larger multilateral frameworks to the benefits from capability enhancement and perceptions that old alliances are weakening, which induces hedging (*Paul and Underwood, 2019*). Despite huge asymmetry in normative and material power between these three democracies, India–US–Japan are committed to upholding rules-based order and international law, given the high geopolitical and geo-economic stakes each have in the Indo-Pacific (*Basu, 2020*). Drawing from the depth and scope of the strategic congruence in their respective bilateral relations with elevated 2+2 and ministerial-level trilateral meeting, they have invested political, economic, and diplomatic capital in forward thinking while navigating the challenges and opportunities in the Indo-Pacific (*Basu, 2020*). There are several points of convergence and divergences among India, Japan, and the USA about the Indo-Pacific. The three important issues on which these three countries converge are:

1. each actor acknowledges the other as a core constituent of the Indo-Pacific construct.
2. they share core values that establish the normative foundations of the construct, particularly a rules-based order underpinned by international law; and
3. they intentionally mobilize securitization discourses to support the previous two points and to promote the construction of the Indo-Pacific.

Secondly the three broad areas of divergences among these three countries are on:

1. spatial conceptions about the Indo-Pacific are not identical among these three countries based on their respective Indo-Pacific construct i.e., there is differences over the geographic scope of the Indo-Pacific
2. Managing the rise of China and the degree to which China should be contained.
3. ASEAN centrality and trade multilateralism

The first move toward a trilateral structure came in Manmohan Singh's tenure with the initiation in 2006 of a Track 1.5 dialogue hosted in Washington by the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in collaboration with the Confederation of Indian Industry and the Japan Institute of International Affairs. The three sides held the inaugural US-Japan-India trilateral dialogue in 2015 at the side-lines of the United Nations General Assembly. Manmohan Singh favoured a 'cooperative architecture' but, not wanting to antagonize Beijing, as he was inclined to hedge rather than seek a strong institution to counter China. Nevertheless, he supported the move for a formal grouping and the first official trilateral dialogue was held at the bureaucratic level in December 2011. The triangular partnership among India, Japan, and USA consolidated under the Modi Government. A more organized arrangement developed, and Trilateral Ministerial Dialogues were conducted from September 2015. These highlighted commitment to FOIP within a rule-based international order, including freedom of navigation and overflight and unhindered trade and to incorporate strategic dialogue, military exercises, counter-proliferation, counterterrorism, and connectivity through a Trilateral Infrastructure Working Group.

Japan, the United States, and India are partners in the Indo-Pacific that share fundamental values such as freedom, democracy, and the rule of law. At the meeting, the leaders reaffirmed the critical importance of their trilateral cooperation in efforts to maintain and promote a free and open Indo-Pacific region, sharing their understanding of an increasingly complex security situation. The three countries are engaged to promote trilateral cooperation in various fields, such as maritime security, security in new domains including space and cyberspace, and quality infrastructure investment.

The triangular linkage among India, Japan and the USA has helped build a network of powers designed to encourage Beijing to exercise restraint while leaving open the possibility of a détente by advancing political and economic cooperation (*Basrur and Kutty, 2021*). Above all, India has sought to sustain its strategic autonomy by avoiding too close a strategic embrace with its partners (*ibid*). During Singh’s premiership, tentative moves toward building a trilateral security network began with naval cooperation on assisting (together with Australia) tsunami-hit nations in 2004. In 2007, the three navies, along with those of Australia and Singapore, joined in the India-hosted Malabar exercise, which officially focused on countering terrorism and piracy, but encompassed submarine and anti-submarine warfare, ‘cross-deck’ carrier landings by fighter jets and helicopters, and air defence (*Khurana, 2007*). The exercise helped the Indian Navy achieve a higher level of warfighting skills (*ibid*), but unfortunately, the trilateral naval cooperation received a setback when Singh deferred to Chinese protests and ended Japan’s involvement for the remainder of his tenure till 2014. Japan returned to the Malabar exercises in 2015 permanently. Naval joint exercises now included anti-mine operations and combined carrier strike group operations. In 2018, the three air forces held their first joint exercise. The India–Japan agreement on Reciprocal Provision of Supplies and Services of September 2020 synced with the US–Japan alliance and the 2016 India–US Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement. In May 2019, the three conducted joint naval exercises with the Philippines in the South China Sea -a format that could be expanded to other states. There has been much emphasis on the gains from ‘inter-operability’ through military exercises. But while exercises do have hard balancing effects by enhancing capabilities, they are unlikely to produce advanced military cooperation (*Basrur and Kutty, 2021*). Joint interdiction may be contemplated against sea pirates—and India has been reluctant even here—but it is hard to see it happening vis-à-vis the Chinese Navy (*ibid*). however, India had resisted

joint patrols with the United States Navy, though it has agreed on joint patrolling with France (*ibid*).

India, the United States, and Japan all have individual and clear indications of their respective approaches to the Indo-Pacific. There are subtle differences between India, the United States, and Japan's understanding of the Indo-Pacific regarding the perception of order, China's strategy, and its approach to four-party talks. One of the key features is that two of the three countries have been formal treaty allies since the decades after the war. Therefore, the main goal of the Japan-US alliance remains to support a US-led order as the balance of power changes in the Indo-Pacific. India's political decisions, on the other hand, have been guided by the concept of strategic autonomy and a vision of multipolar order. Undoubtedly, in the eyes of others, the relative excellence of each of these forces has increased over the decades. However, each authority of this triangular framework is guided only by national interests. For example, the Chinese strategy of Washington, Tokyo and Delhi remains fragmented as Tokyo and Delhi reserve to pursue a pure zero-sum approach to Beijing, given its importance in Asian calculus. There is disagreement over the question of the strategic usefulness of the quad and its future potential as a military alliance.

Japan enshrines free trade and open markets, defends trade liberalization, and fights protected trade principles. The United States has lost its leading role in the multilateral trading system by politicizing trade as part of its "America First" policy. The United States under President Trump hampered international trade rules, and Tokyo led negotiations on both the CPTPP (Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership) and RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership), which are important economic tools for

geopolitical games. Trade multilateralism is being questioned by Washington's withdrawal from the TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership) and Delhi's unresolved concerns about RCEP. The pillars of the Indo-Pacific economy are not clear. In addition, Tokyo's Indo-Pacific bet depends on financing "quality" infrastructure, and the United States has shown unconvincing involvement in this area so far. When it comes to infrastructure financing, India, along with the United States and Japan, adheres to the principles of global governance standards, but the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) takes a different stance than Washington and Tokyo.

Although the three countries clearly recognize themselves as key partners in their efforts to advance the Indo-Pacific structure, their visions for spatiality in the region are different. This variation is based on the key roles they want to play and the areas they prioritize. Japan's vision for the Indo-Pacific is the most comprehensive. Japan's role in the Japan-US alliance, especially in the positive predictions of the US military, and regular military exercises of two actions across the Pacific show that Tokyo includes the entire Pacific region in its understanding of the Indo-Pacific. In addition, Japan owns several small islands in the Central Pacific, which inevitably requires caution. But what makes Japan's vision for the Indo-Pacific the most expansive is the inclusion of the African continent. Its FOIP vision illustrates how the “two oceans” link the “two continents” of Asia and Africa (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs Japan, 2020*). This is being promoted through its Asia Africa Growth Corridor.³⁶

³⁶ India's and Japan's co-envisioned Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) was announced at the 52nd Annual Meeting of the African Development Bank (AfDB) summit in Gandhinagar, India, on May 22-26, 2017. During the announcement, Prime Minister Narendra Modi stated that both India and Japan aim to achieve closer developmental cooperation in Africa.

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Despite ASEAN's central position as an important anchor in the Indo-Pacific discourse of the three major powers, President Trump had not prioritized an ASEAN-centric multilateral framework. He ignored the ASEAN and East Asia Summits and questioned Washington's commitment to ASEAN centrality. Meanwhile, Japan and India have carefully promoted ASEAN through the Vientiane Vision and Act East Policy, respectively. The differences between ASEAN's Indo-Pacific outlook to avoid competition between major powers and the US's Indo-Pacific strategy are clearly expressed. ASEAN emphasizes "open" and "inclusive" proposals that are close to Delhi's approach.

However, these subtle differences do not prevent major Indo-Pacific powers and economies from pursuing a mutually beneficial partnership on the issue of common strategic interests. India, the United States and Japan combine the ability to provide global public goods in the Indo-Pacific based on universal values. There are several key areas in which these three Indo-Pacific economies are working on co-ownership to promote quality infrastructure and connectivity projects in key sub-regions such as the Bay of Bengal, the Mekong region, and the Indian Ocean. The main goal is to promote inter-regional and intra-regional economic integration between growth centres and to maintain regional production networks and value chains. Japan is a global leader when it comes to advancing 'quality' infrastructure, regional connectivity, and economic corridors. Prime Minister Abe, through the Expanded Partnership for Quality Infrastructure (EPQI), has chased two objectives of propelling Japan's national economic engine on one the hand, and strengthening regional strategic partnerships to balance Beijing's clout on the other (*Yoshimatsu, 2017*). Japan has rather boldly pitched its infrastructure export on 'quality', justifying cost-effectiveness in the long term and further emphasized the advantages of public-private partnership vis-à-vis BRI projects, which buttress Chinese state-owned enterprises (*Basu, 2020*).

However, recent developments in Japan-China relations have led to ongoing discussions on market cooperation with third parties. The possibility of cooperation in Thailand's East-West Economic Corridor was explored, but this did not bear fruit. In addition, Nippon Express has suggested that it will use the Eurasian Railway to carry cargo from the east coast of China to Europe via Central Asia. These led to a greater debate as to whether Tokyo's attitude towards BRI changed. It is important to note that Tokyo's conditional approach to BRI depends on economic feasibility, financial soundness, openness, transparency, and impartiality. This has been repeatedly emphasized in parliamentary speeches and economic forums. Major Japanese sinologists claim that Tokyo's approach to BRI has not changed. But the tactics have become smarter. Previously, concerns about global governance standards restricted Tokyo's involvement in Beijing ventures, but now Tokyo uses exactly the same variables as the requirements for BRI involvement.

To promote Indo-Pacific infrastructure and regional connectivity, Japan has bilateral and trilateral partnerships with both India and the United States. In addition to infrastructure cooperation with third countries in South Asia, Tokyo and Delhi have designed the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC). In addition, Tokyo and Washington have promoted infrastructure development as part of a memorandum of understanding between Japan, the United States and Australia. There is already a trilateral infrastructure working group between Japan, the United States and India. This should be activated to investigate potential connectivity projects in the Indo-Pacific subregion. The Indo-Pacific Infrastructure Forum, the BUILD Act in Washington, the Blue Dot Network, the Multilateral Development Banks (IDFC), the Infrastructure Transactions and Support Network (ITAN) have brought the time for a trilateral project. In addition, it can be combined with Modi's SAGAR Vision and the Indian Ocean Coastal Line of Credit.

As the economy seeks ways to reduce its dependence on China, more discussion is needed between India, the United States and Japan on supply chain diversification and potential alternatives. The Southeast Asian economy remains the preferred choice. However, according to the latest annual survey by the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC), since 2016, Japanese manufacturers have favoured India as their top destination rather than China. The three states see market opportunities in one another, with India a potential regional production base for the other two (*Rossow, Ito, Srivastava, and Glosserman, 2014*). Nevertheless, though India's combined trade with Japan and the United States has grown, it actually fell in proportion to its global trade from 20.95 percent in 1991 (the year liberalization commenced) to 12.24 percent in 2018. In contrast, trade with China as a proportion of India's global trade grew from 0.18 percent in 1991 to 10.83 percent in 2018 (*Basrur and Kutty, 2021*). To decrease India's trade dependence on China, India joined Japan and the US in seeking to build an alternative network of trade and investment (*ibid*). Japan in 2015 launched a competitive response to China's BRI with its Partnership for Quality Infrastructure in sync with the Asian Development Bank to foster sustainable growth in developing nations. In 2018, the United States initiated its own infrastructure investment strategy for the Indo-Pacific. India's response to these developments included a 2019 agreement with the US for cooperation on infrastructure development (*Ministry of External Affairs, India 2019*); the India–Japan AAGC mentioned previously; and parleys on joining the US-led Blue Dot Network, announced in November 2019, which coordinates infrastructure development with Japan and Australia in third countries. An India–Japan–US Trilateral Infrastructure Working Group aims at competing with China and setting up alternatives for regional economic capacity enhancement.

In addition, India-US-Japan, as a concert of maritime democracy, upholds the laws of the sea and promotes a rule-based international order of the sea. There is a sense of shared responsibility to secure important sea lanes as global commons and public goods, and to enable these sea routes to power the Indo-Pacific economic engine through unhindered trade and energy transport. The strategic depth of Japan-US, Japan-US, and Japan-US security relations has supported a strong agenda for US-Japan maritime cooperation centered on capacity building and raising awareness of the sea area. With the imminent signing of the Logistics Exchange Memorandum with Washington and the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement with Tokyo, Delhi will provide mutual support in the course of joint exercises and disaster relief efforts to improve logistics, supply, and operational capabilities. going. In addition,

trilateral interoperability exercises such as the Malabar exercise focus on aircraft carrier operations, air defence, anti-submarine warfare (ASW), surface warfare, Visit Board Search and Seizure (VBSS), and mine warfare exercises. With the IPOI proposed by Prime Minister Modi aiming for safe and stable waters in the Indo-Pacific, Japan and the United States need to further explore ways of cooperation in areas such as the protection of the marine environment and resources, and advances in marine science and technology for ocean security and transportation.

While modes of threat management are likely to vary based on the degree of economic interdependence, territorial disputes and geopolitical rivalries, there does appear to be a convergence in a preferred approach for dealing with Beijing's policies – namely, economic and security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific in order to provide smaller states in the region with options for economic and political diversification (*Chand and Garcia 2017*).

The changing security architecture in the Indo-Pacific region is witnessing a growing synergy in the political, maritime, and strategic interests among India-Japan -USA. To sum up, in economic activity the India–Japan–US relationship has not developed beyond a moderate level. Together they have pressed for the FOIP and the centrality of fundamental values such as freedom, democracy and the rule of law. The US, Japan and India will benefit in security and prosperity terms from stability in the Indo-Pacific and have a joint responsibility to safeguard this order for their own benefit. In the coming times, due to the complexity in the geopolitical nature of the Indo-Pacific region, it will be a crucial trilateral framework to look forward to in the future.

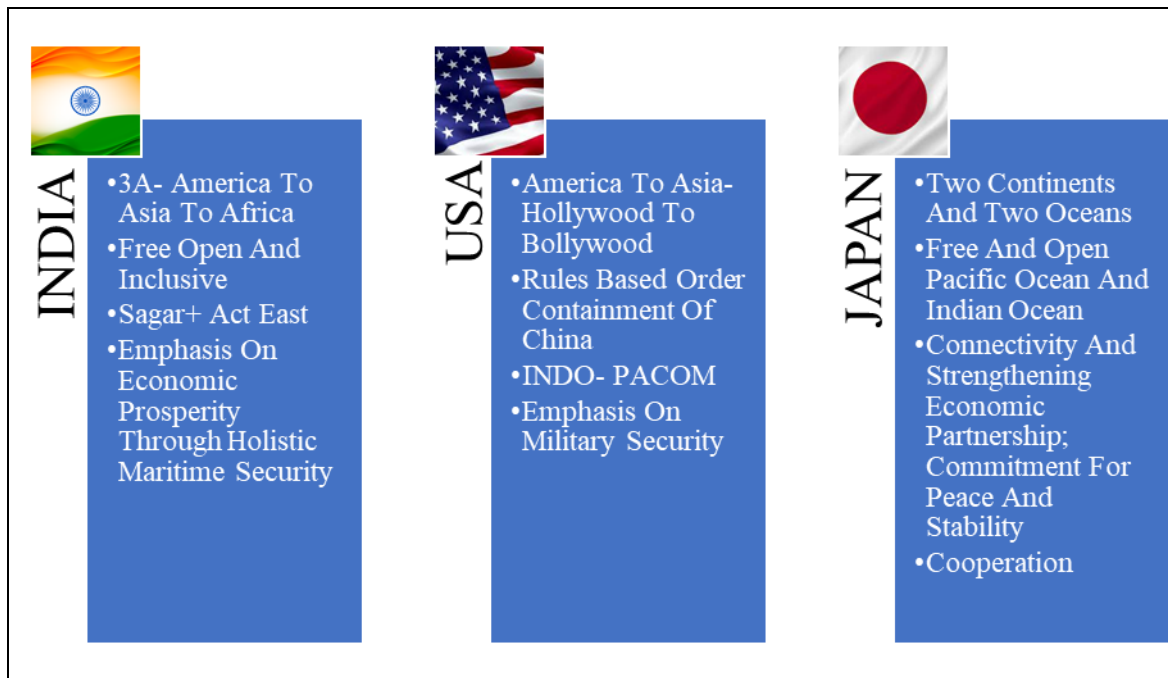


Image 4.2: A comparison of Indo-Pacific Approaches of- India, the USA and Japan

Source: by the Author

4.6 Conclusion

The trilateral relationship among India, Japan and USA is designed as a strategic partnership – a new form of security alignment and does not qualify as an alliance at this juncture. The JAI considers this framework for a trilateral cooperation to serve the common challenge and interests especially security and maritime cooperation in the Indo- Pacific region. In the words of Abe, the three countries share “fundamental values and strategic interests” (Singh, Pande, Smith, Saran, Joshi, and Lohman, 2018).

There is realization in Japan and India that each is in a very dangerous neighbourhood and that their security ties with the US are critical. Cooperation among India, the United States and Japan is necessary to face the Chinese assertiveness in the strategic Indian Ocean and Pacific regions. The US “pivot” to the Pacific Ocean in 2011, coupled with New Delhi’s greater cooperation with Washington and Tokyo under former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, had

triggered concerns in Beijing about the emergence of a US-India-Japan axis to contain its growth.

The anti-Chinese coalition cannot promote Japan-US-India cooperation. The three countries have many common interests and reasons to cooperate. Practical pursuit of common interests, backed by realistic expectations of what trilateral cooperation can achieve, is the most effective approach to ensure that they fulfil their potential. The United States, Japan and India have benefited from the stability of the Indo-Pacific in terms of prosperity and security and therefore share a responsibility to maintain this order. Despite a rough rhetoric about the value of the alliance, the Trump administration was unlikely to deviate from this vision. According to Professor Walter Russell Mead, the three major Asian powers, China, India, and Japan, have their own strengths and weaknesses, different patterns of relations with the United States, who in turn playing an offshore role shows importance as a local balancer. It is difficult to imagine the world without the strong involvement of the United States, as the United States has played a leading role in building the world order today. The Trump administration had considered a structure of positive policy in the wider Indo-Pacific to counter China's growing influence in the region.

The convergence of India, Japan and USA relationship in the Indo-Pacific fosters trust and confidence to promote a free, open, rules-based, and inclusive order. Japan, the United States, and India are partners in the Indo-Pacific that share fundamental values such as freedom, democracy, and the rule of law. (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, 2019*). When three of the world's most mature democracies come together around one table one can certainly expect a road map for global stability for achieving common good for all.