

## **Chapter 5**

### **The emerging divergences in the India- Japan- US relations**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

It is important to understand the nuanced differences among India, Japan, and the USA to underscore the strength of their enhanced co-operation in the broader Indo-Pacific region. This chapter would study the issues of divergences, ambiguities and subtle gaps that have the potential to shake the relationship among these three countries. The important areas of divergences on based on the following themes:

1. The respective views of India, Japan, and the USA on the speciality of Indo- Pacific,
2. China strategy- the degree to which China should be contained,
3. Approach towards Quadrilateral Consultations,
4. ASEAN centrality, and
5. Trade multilateralism.

One of the key features in the critical analysis of this Indo-Pacific triangle is that two of the three countries (USA and Japan) 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 country of this triangular framework is guided by their national interests. The following sections critically analyses these themes and decodes the issues of divergences.

## **5.2. Evaluating the Spatiality of Indo-Pacific**

While India, Japan, and the USA identify each other as key partners in the Indo-Pacific, their conception of the region's spatiality varies (*Chand and Garcia, 2021*). This variation is predicated on the key roles they seek to play and the areas they prioritise. Japan's conception of the Indo-Pacific is the most expansive (*ibid.*) The U.S.-Japan alliance, particularly the role that Japan plays in the forward projection of U.S. forces, as well as the regular military exercises the two conducts across the Pacific, indicate that Tokyo incorporates the entire Pacific region in its understanding of the Indo-Pacific (*ibid.*). Additionally, Japan possesses several small islands in the central Pacific, which by necessity require attention. (*ibid.*) What makes Japan's conception of the Indo-Pacific the most expansive, however, is its 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 the Asia Africa Growth Corridor.

The origins of Japan's notion of "Indo-Pacific" can be found in Prime Minister Abe's speech before the Indian Parliament in August 2007 (*Abe, 2007*). A senior Japanese government official pointed to the speech as an example of the prime minister's longstanding awareness of the importance of a free and open Indo-Pacific region (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Seminar Speech by Kentaro Sonoura, 2018*). Despite emphasising "the confluence of the two seas", the geographical term that Prime Minister Abe used at the time was not "Indo-Pacific" but "broader Asia" and pointed out the imperativeness of deepening friendship between India and Japan, located at the opposite edges of these seas, as the new "broader Asia" took shape at the confluence of the two seas (*Abe, 2007*). The Prime Minister's Office of Japan interpreted that the "broader Asia" was an integration of East Asia and South Asia, in which Japan and India should work together as key players (*Wada, 2020*). There are two points to be noted. First, the "broader Asia" did not focus on Southeast Asia. There was no reference to the region in the discourse of "broader Asia" regardless of Prime Minister Abe's visit to Malaysia and Indonesia prior to visiting India. (Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, Prime Minister Visits Indonesia, India, and Malaysia) (*ibid.*) Second, he revealed the expectation that cooperation between India and Japan in "broader Asia" would develop a network with the United States and Australia. He mentioned that by Japan and India coming together, "broader

Asia” would evolve into an immense network spanning the entirety of the Pacific Ocean, incorporating the United States and Australia (Abe, 2007). This meant that he had already had quads in mind in the expanded "wider Asia", including the eastern Indian Ocean and the entire Pacific Ocean. The second Abe administration, which was inaugurated in December 2012, gradually increased the use of the geographical term Indo-Pacific and developed its own concept of "Indo-Pacific". In February 2013, Prime Minister Abe used “Indo-Pacific” together with “Asia-Pacific” in his speech at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington, DC (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs Japan, 2013*). In January 2015, the then Foreign Minister Kishida Fumio made a speech titled “Special Partnership for the Era of the Indo-Pacific” in New Delhi and revealed that the region was “bound together by seas, extending from the Indian Ocean through the South China Sea to the Pacific Ocean” (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Policy speech by Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida, 2015*). In August 2016, the administration launched a new diplomatic policy based on the geographical conception of “Indo-Pacific” (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Remarks by Mr. Nobuo Kishi, 2016*). In Diplomatic Bluebook 2017, approved in April 2017, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA) noted that Prime Minister Abe had announced the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy (FOIP)” at the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) held in Kenya in August 2016 (*Wada, 2020*). It stated that Japan intended to open up a new frontier of Japanese diplomacy by regarding the “two continents” — Asia and Africa, and the “two oceans” — the Pacific and Indian Oceans — as an integrated region and promote peace and prosperity in the region as a whole by improving the connectivity of “Asia, the Middle East and Africa”. (*ibid*). It also stressed that Japan would expand infrastructure development, trade, and investment, and enhance the business environment and human development “from East Asia as a starting-point, to the Middle East and Africa” (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Diplomatic Bluebook, 2017*).

Although the geographical boundaries of “Indo-Pacific” were ambiguous, the map in the bluebook outlining the coverage of the FOIP illustrated Japan’s initial geographical perception of “Indo-Pacific” (*ibid*). The map only marked almost the entire Indian Ocean and the western part of the Pacific Ocean, thus including Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, and the East African littoral countries. The figure also listed India, the United States and Australia as strategic collaboration partners to bring the strategy into shape, but not all of them were denoted in the map as a part of the “Indo-Pacific” (*Wada, 2020*).

After the official adoption of the “Indo-Pacific” concept, Japan's geographical perception has gradually expanded on the Pacific Ocean side. In regard to the FOIP, the then Foreign Minister Kono Taro referred to not only Africa, the Middle East and Asia, but also “North America” in a speech at Columbia University in September 2017 (*ibid*). He mentioned that “the Indo-Pacific Ocean links rapidly growing Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and North America” (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Speech by Foreign Minister Kono at Columbia University, 2017*) In his remarks at the Atlantic Council in February 2018, the then Special Advisor to the Prime Minister Sonoura Kentaro mentioned that the Indo-Pacific region stretched from “Asia-Pacific” through the Indian Ocean to the Middle East and Africa, and referred to “the Pacific Islands countries”, as well as “ASEAN, Southwest Asian, Middle Eastern and African countries”(Atlantic Council, 2018).The extended geographical perception was reflected in a map outlining the reach of the FOIP in the MOFA’s White Paper on Development Corporation 2017, published in February 2018 (*Wada, 2020*). The range of the Indo-Pacific on the map spread to the western coast of the United States and fully covered Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Islands (*ibid*). MOFA also changed the starting point of Indo-Pacific from “East Asia” to the “Asia-Pacific” and added New Zealand and the ASEAN countries to the list of strategic collaboration partners mentioned in the map (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, White Paper, 2018*).

The reason for this adjustment could be interpreted as a desire for policy resonance with the United States, along the same lines as Australia. In November 2017, Prime Minister Abe and President Trump affirmed that Japan and the United States would work together to promote peace and prosperity in the region by developing the Indo-Pacific as free and open. Japan made it clear that the United States was a part of “Indo-Pacific” by expanding the geographical scope to include it and added the Pacific Islands to promote development assistance with the United States, Australia and New Zealand under the Indo-Pacific concept(*Wada, 2020*).

Japan’s geographical perception of Indo-Pacific has kept changing. In September 2018, the then Foreign Minister Kono included “South American continent” to the eastern end of Indo-Pacific when he participated in a panel discussion at the World Economic Forum (*World*

*Economic Forum, 2018*). He mentioned that Japan was trying to connect “from eastern shore of African continent, through the Indian Ocean, through ASEAN countries, through the Pacific Ocean, to the western coast of the North and South American continents” (*ibid*). Around the same time, MOFA reflected this expansion to the outline of FOIP in a map posted on its official webpage (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs Japan, White Paper, 2018*).

In addition to the expansion of the Pacific Ocean, this updated draft of FOIP noted two important geographic changes. First, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs emphasized ASEAN as a hinge between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. It not only accentuated ASEAN on the FOIP map but also mentioned “strengthening connectivity in ASEAN region”, Japan’s will to expand “ASEAN’s success” to other regions such as the Middle East and Africa, and “ASEAN’s centrality and unity” (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, White Paper, 2018; World Economic Forum, 2018*). This ASEAN related adjustment was probably based on Japan’s consideration of ASEAN’s view that ASEAN centrality and unity should be supported in any proposal on regional cooperation and engagement in the “Indo-Pacific” region (*Prime Minister’s Office of Singapore, 2018*). Second, the geographical scope of the “Indo-Pacific” was enlarged to penetrate more deeply into the Eurasian continent and covered China, too. One of the underlying reasons for this change could be the progress in Japan’s cooperation with China. In May 2018, Japan and China signed the Memorandum on Business Cooperation in Third Countries during Premier Li Keqiang’s visit to Japan. In October 2018, the two countries held a meeting of the Japan-China Forum on Third Country Business Cooperation and exchanged 52 memoranda of cooperation. Another reason may be to show that Japan does not support China's "containment." Mapping China as a whole can serve as a signal of the "inclusiveness" that some of the "Indo-Pacific" countries have sought.

The United States appears to have the second most expansive spatiality of the Indo-Pacific as well as the most clearly defined (*Chand and Garcia, 2021*). It is defined by the area of responsibility of the Indo-Pacific Command, one of the six commands designated by the U.S. Department of Défense. This command replaced the former Pacific Command in 2018 in recognition of the “increasing connectivity of the Indian and Pacific Oceans” (*Mattis 2018*). It is evident that the State Department’s FOIP document follows the framing that the Department of Défense has set out, which brings spatial cohesion to the regional construct (*Chand and*

*Garcia, 2021*). This spatiality covers the entire Pacific Ocean but only involves a little over half of the Indian Ocean since it ends at 68 degrees east, leaving out East Africa and the Middle East, which are under the area of responsibility of other commands (*ibid*).

The United States government started to use the term “Indo-Pacific” under the Obama administration’s rebalancing strategy towards Asia. However, there was no clear and coherent geographical definition of “Indo-Pacific” under the administration. (*Wada, 2020*). The geographical focus of the “Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor” initiative, which the then Secretary of State John Kerry introduced at the US-India Strategic Dialogue in June 2013, was South and Southeast Asia (*United States Department of State, Remarks by John Kerry, 2013*). Meanwhile, in April 2014, the Assistant Secretary of the US State Department’s Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs described Indo-Pacific as “the vast littoral arc stretching from South Africa to Australia” (*United States Department of State, Remarks by Nisha Desai Biswal, Assistant Secretary, 2014*).

The administration also used the term “Asia-Pacific” and “Indo-Asia-Pacific” when it referred to the region linked by the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean. Hillary Clinton, when she was Secretary of State, defined “Asia-Pacific” in October 2011 as “stretching from the Indian subcontinent to the western shores of the Americas, the region spans two oceans — the Pacific and the Indian” (*Clinton, 2011*). “Asia-Pacific” was also used as the region “stretching from the Indian Ocean, through the South and East China Seas, and out to the Pacific Ocean” in a discourse on maritime security (*United States Department of Defence, 2015*). On the other hand, the US Department of Défense defined “Indo-Asia-Pacific” as a region “spanning form the West Coast of the United States to the eastern coast of Africa”.<sup>37</sup>

The Trump administration’s initial geographical perception of Indo-Pacific was similar to that of Japan at the time since the United States seemed to have been inspired by Japan’s idea of “Free and Open Indo-Pacific”. In October 2017, the then Secretary of State Rex Tillerson made a speech in Washington, in which he described Indo-Pacific as “the entire Indian Ocean, the Western Pacific, and the nations that surround them” and highlighted India’s

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<sup>37</sup> <https://cimsec.org/new-us-maritime-strategy/>

role by stressing that the United States and India must serve as “the eastern and western beacons” of the Indo-Pacific or as “the port and starboard lights between which the region can reach its greatest and best potential” (*United States Department of State, Remarks by Rex W. Tillerson, 2017*). Despite the geographical definition in the speech, his answer to the question on the architecture of the US engagement in the new strategy indicated that there was a different geographical perception. He pointed out that the Indo-Pacific map all the way to the western coast of the United States was the part of the map they were dealing with, and that India, Japan and Australia were democracy pins on the map of Indo-Pacific (*ibid*). This recalls “the Quad” and Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo’s idea of “Asia’s Democratic Security Diamond” (*Le, 2019*). Furthermore, Secretary Tillerson mentioned that there was an important part of the South Pacific that also needed an important pinpoint (*Tillerson, 2017*). These remarks predicted an eastward geographical adjustment of the Indo-Pacific.

The United States changed its geographical definition immediately after President Trump officially announced a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy (FOIP)” as its new regional policy. (*The White House, Remarks by President Trump at APEC CEO Summit, Da Nang, 2017*). The National Security Strategy (NSS), published in December 2017, defined “Indo-Pacific” as “the region, which stretches from the west coast of India to the western shores of the United States”. (*The White House, National Security Strategy of the United States of America, December 2017*). Through this adjustment, the “Indo-Pacific” was enlarged in the Pacific Ocean, whereas it shrunk in the Indian Ocean. That is, the United States excluded the western part of the Indian Ocean, the Middle East and Africa in the concept while expanding it to cover the entire Pacific Ocean. As a result, the “Indo-Pacific” almost coincided with the area of responsibility of the US Pacific Command (USPACOM) (*United States Indo-Pacific Command, 2018*). Since then, the United States has argued that it is a part of the Indo-Pacific and underlined how important the region is for its future, based on the adjusted geographical definition. For instance, in January 2018, the then Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Dan Rosenblum mentioned that when they spoke about the region, they were defining it as stretching “from the US West Coast through the Bay of Bengal”, and explained that the reason for the US commitment to the region was that they were a part of it and they had a major stake in its success (*Remarks by Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Dan Rosenblum, 2018*). In its Indo-Pacific Strategy Report of June 2019, the US Department of Défense reaffirmed that “Indo-Pacific” was “spanning a vast stretch of the globe from the west coast of the US to the



western shores of India” and declared that the “Indo-Pacific” was “the single most consequential region for America’s future” (*United States Department of Defence, 2019*).

The United States reflected the adjusted geographical definition in its military structure. In May 2018, it renamed USPACOM as US Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) (*United States Indo-Pacific Command, 2018*). As mentioned above, the “Indo-Pacific” has already adjusted to almost coincide with USPACOM’s area of responsibility and this change of name of the command implied that the United States had by then regarded the Indo-Pacific strategy as a long-term regional security policy framework and that its geographical definition of Indo-Pacific was not likely to change easily (*Wada, 2020*).

The reason why the United States limited the geographical scope of Indo-Pacific up to the west coast of India can be considered in two aspects. First, the country’s Indo-Pacific strategy is subordinate to its security strategy. In June 2018, the then Secretary of Défense James Mattis mentioned in his remarks at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore that the Indo-Pacific strategy was a subset of America’s security strategy (*United States Department of Defence, Remarks by Secretary Mattis at Plenary Session of the 2018 Shangri-La Dialogue, 2018*). Taking the US military command structure into consideration, it is efficient that a single geographical command, USINDOPACOM, rather than multiple geographical commands, is responsible for security under the strategy (*United States Department of Defence, 2018*). Second, the United States divides India’s roles into its two regional strategies: the Indo-Pacific Strategy and the South Asia Strategy (*United States Department of State, Joint Regional Strategy, 2018*). India was mentioned not only in the Joint Regional Strategy for East Asia and the Pacific, but also that for South and Central Asia. In September 2018, a senior State Department official mentioned that India’s role was prominent in not only the NSS but also the South Asia Strategy and the Indo-Pacific Strategy. According to him, the expected role of India in the South Asia Strategy was in the stabilisation of Afghanistan, and that in the Indo-Pacific Strategy was committing itself to a free and open Indo-Pacific region in the security and economic dimensions.



Regarding India's role in the Indo-Pacific Strategy, the US expectation was limited to the eastern side of India. In April 2018, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs provided the two reasons that led the United States to use the term "Indo-Pacific" instead of the existing term "Asia-Pacific", or simply "Asia": one was South Asia's, in particular India's, key role in the Pacific, in East Asia and in Southeast Asia, and the other was India's increasingly weighty role in the region( *United States Department of State, Special Briefing by Alex N. Wong, 2018*). The geographical adjustment could have been related to this expectation of India as a key player limited to the east.

Under the geographical definition, the United States government has been formulating and implementing its "Indo-Pacific" strategy (*ibid*). It started announcing a concrete approach to three focus areas: economics, governance, and security (*United States Department of State, Fact Sheet, 2018*). In July 2018, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo explained his country's Indo-Pacific economic vision, focused on digital economy, energy, and infrastructure, and announced a US\$113 million fund allocation to expand economic engagement in the region (*United States Department of State, Remarks by Michael R. Pompeo, 2018*). In August 2018, he announced nearly US\$300 million in new funding to reinforce security cooperation, especially to strengthen maritime security, develop humanitarian assistance and peacekeeping capabilities, and enhance programmes that counter transnational threats (*United States Department of State, Fact Sheet, Office of the Spokesperson, 2018*). In November 2018, Vice President Mike Pence announced an initiative for transparent governance (*The White House, Remarks by Vice President Pence, 2018*). In June and November 2019, the Department of Défense and Department of State each published its first report on the Indo-Pacific strategy.

The Trump administration had also promoted legislation for implementing the Indo-Pacific strategy. In October 2018, President Trump signed the Better Utilization of Investment Leading to Development (BUILD Act), which doubles US development finance capacity to US\$60 billion<sup>38</sup>( *The White House,2018*). The Department of State evaluated that the act would

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<sup>38</sup> On 5<sup>th</sup> October 2018, Trump passed the BUILD Act, which establishes a new US International Development Finance Corporation. This legislation consolidates, modernises, and reforms the US government's development finance capabilities. Backing from the US government can catalyse significant amounts of private capital into emerging markets. This model of mobilising private investment is vital as the needs of developing countries are too great to meet with official government

ignite more opportunities for partnership in the Indo-Pacific. (*United States Department of State, Fact Sheet, 2018*). In December 2018, President Trump signed the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act of 2018 (ARIA), which establishes a multifaceted US strategy to increase US security and economic interests and values in the Indo-Pacific region. (*The White House, Bill Announcement, 2018*).

Third, India has the most limited framing of the Indo-Pacific, notwithstanding its growing partnership with the United States and Japan, it is clear that India centres its conception of the Indo-Pacific around the Indian Ocean Rim Association and its members. This includes the entirety of the Indian Ocean Rim (IOR) as well as sections of the Western Pacific, namely, Southeast Asia and part of Oceania. This framing is understandable given India's geographic centrality in the IOR as well as its self-image as a regional power (*Chand and Garcia, 2021*). Its expanding relationship with Western Pacific states maps neatly onto its Indo-Pacific construct since it demonstrates the reality of interconnectivity as well as India's budding power projection capabilities (*ibid*).

India used to employ the term Indo-Pacific as an eastern exit of the Indian Ocean. The Indian Maritime Security Strategy, published in October 2015, listed Indo-Pacific as one of the six sea areas around India and explained that the Indo-Pacific was Indian Ocean to Pacific Ocean, through the various Indo-Pacific Straits and South/East China and Philippines Seas and across which India expands its engagement and relations to its east under the Act East policy. This area consisted of India's primary and secondary areas of maritime interest because India saw itself as the centre of the Indian Ocean (*Khurana, 2019*).

The Narendra Modi administration explained that India's conception of Indo-Pacific covered the entire two oceans (*Wada, 2020*). In June 2018, Prime Minister Modi presented India's vision of Indo-Pacific in his keynote address at the Shangri-La Dialogue where he

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resources alone. The BUILD Act prioritises low-income and lower middle-income countries, where the Development Finance Corporation's services will have the greatest impact. It more than doubles the US development finance capacity from US\$29 billion to US\$60 billion. The new authorities and flexibility provided under the BUILD Act will give the US greater agility to offer financially sound, transparent investment alternatives.

described Indo-Pacific as a natural region, and concretely as a region “from the shores of Africa to that of the Americas” (*ibid*). In particular, he mentioned the Pacific and most of India’s partners — ASEAN, Japan, Republic of Korea, China, the Americas, the Indian Ocean region, Australia, New Zealand, Pacific Island nations, Russia, and Africa (*ibid*). This speech showed that India’s Indo-Pacific consisted of the whole Indian and Pacific Oceans and the surrounding countries. (*Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, June, 2018*).

In his speech, Prime Minister Modi stated that the geographical definition played an important role and that India's involvement in the region was inclusive. He used the geographical definition as evidence that India's vision for the Indo-Pacific region was positive and had many elements. He pointed out that India does not see the region as a strategy, as a club with a limited number of members, or as a group striving to dominate others and where India never considered it directed at any country. He stressed that a geographical definition as such could not be negative. Given this emphasis on inclusiveness, India’s definition of Indo-Pacific has one of the largest geographical scopes among the various conceptions. (*ibid*).

There are two reasons why India unveiled its broader geographical scope of “Indo-Pacific”. First, India needed to argue that the Indo of Indo-Pacific denoted the Indian Ocean (*Wada,2020*). The United States, Australia and Japan had already by then set “Indo-Pacific” at the centre of their regional policies and unveiled their expectations that emerging India would play an important role in the region (*ibid*) India’s primary strategic focus was on the Indian Ocean, needed to clarify that the western edge of Indo-Pacific was not India (*ibid*).

Second, India’s relationships with regional powers are not only with the United States but also with China and Russia (*ibid*). The term Indo-Pacific is sometimes interpreted as a region where the countries advocating the concept have visions of achieving their strategic interests through collaboration with countries that share their views (*ibid*). Therefore, India is uncomfortable about being incorporated into a grouping of like-minded countries under the rubric of Indo-Pacific, especially one interpreted as a grouping aimed at the containment of China. Prime Minister Modi stressed in his speech that India would work with other nations individually or in formats of three or more for a stable and peaceful region, but its friendships

were not alliances of containment (*ibid*). The large geographical scope including China and Russia gave India wider options for achieving its national interests in the Indo-Pacific, avoiding a situation of being overly committed to a specific side.

As already mentioned, the local situation is shaping politics in the Indo-Pacific. The early stages of the Indo-Pacific structure, at this point, show how these different spatial realities affect the stability of the region, and in particular the level of cooperation between these three key stakeholders related to mutual security interests. However, it is clear that the IOR, ECS, and especially SCS bottlenecks are central to the regional spatiality of these actors. This indicates that threat management collaboration is likely to occur in these areas of concern.

Thus, beyond the core area, the Indo-Pacific converged to the east and diverged to the west as various countries adjusted the geographical extent of the concept. In the east, the US-Japan concept of the Indo-Pacific included only the Western Pacific. However, these two countries later adjusted their geographic extent to cover the Pacific Islands that reached the United States. The definition of India's Indo-Pacific also covers the entire Pacific Ocean. As a result, the various concepts of the Indo-Pacific on the Pacific side have been integrated to cover the entire region known as the Asia-Pacific. Conversely, the Indo-Pacific has diverged westwards in the geographical adjustment process (*Wada, 2020*). The definitions of Japan and India include the entire Indian Ocean reaching the continent of Africa, while the United States includes only the eastern part of the Indian Ocean. For the security of India, the western part of the Indian Ocean is one of the priority areas. This is because India faces this region. For Japan, connectivity between Asia, the Middle East and Africa is one of the core elements of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific. Thus, this gap in geographical range in the various conceptions of Indo-Pacific could be an obstacle to progress in collaboration among the trilateral players involved i.e., India, Japan, and the USA.

### **5.3 Challenges and Divergences in the trilateral cooperation**

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. The setting up of an Indo-Pacific wing in the Indian Ministry of External Affairs in April 2019 is an encouraging sign that India is more than willing to play a greater, more coherent role in the broader Indo-Pacific region.

Japan enshrines free trade and open markets, defends trade liberalization, and fights for 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<sup>39</sup> (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership), which are important economic tools for geopolitical games. The reasons that India gave forth for not being a member of the RCEP was about the issues of environment and labour are key components of any trade or policy making programme. Analysts argue that India's final decision not to sign the RCEP was triggered by continued tensions with China. Indian politicians feared that the elimination of tariffs would expose markets to floods of imports, leaving India as a dumping ground for cheap imports, primarily from China, and damaging local producers (this would result in major conflicts with the policy of "Make in India" launched by the Government of India). Since India did not sign the RCEP, it missed the opportunity to join a giant international trade agreement that could form regional trade patterns and economic integration in the Indo-Pacific region for

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<sup>39</sup> After eight years of negotiation, 15 Asian-Pacific economies including China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and ten members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) concluded the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement during a virtual signing ceremony on the occasion of the 37th ASEAN Summit in Hanoi, Vietnam, on 15 November 2020. This agreement covers almost a third of the world's population — two billion people — and nearly a third of the global GDP — 28.9 percent. The negotiations concerning RCEP included trade in goods, services and investment; intellectual property rights; and special and differential treatment to less developed ASEAN member states, among others. The agreement will simplify the customs procedure and rules of origin laws between countries — implying reduced potential regulatory frictions for firms and countries for regional supply chains.

the future. The RCEP could have upheld India's commitment towards trade liberalisation and regional integration in the larger Indo-Pacific region.

The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) was central to US President Barack Obama's strategic focus on Asia. The TPP was the target of attacks from across the U.S. political spectrum, especially during the 2016 presidential campaign, as well as from some groups in other participating countries. The then presidential candidate Presidential candidate Trump long criticized the deal, claiming that it would push more manufacturing jobs overseas, increase the U.S. trade deficit, and fail to address currency manipulation by U.S. trade partners (*ibid*). Trade unions in Australia, Canada, and elsewhere opposed the deal on the grounds that it gives global corporations too much power over domestic policymaking, undercuts wages, and increases the incentives to move manufacturing production to lower-cost countries (*ibid*). Critics also maintained that provisions on labour and environmental standards were vague and unlikely to be consistently enforced (*ibid*).

After Trump withdrew from the TPP, the remaining eleven signatories, known as the TPP-11, continued talks with the aim of salvaging a pact without the United States (*ibid*). Their effort was successful, leading to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, or CPTPP, which was signed in March 2018 (*ibid*). It has already been ratified by a majority of members and entered into force for those countries on December 30, 2018 (*ibid*). The largest and most substantive change centres was on the intellectual property. In TPP negotiations, Washington pushed hard for longer copyright terms, automatic patent extensions, and separate protections for new technologies, including so-called biologics, a cutting-edge class of medications. Largely opposed by the other participants, these provisions were removed from the CPTPP. emphasizes the commitment of the United States to free and fair trade and encourages future discussions on “measures designed to promote more efficient markets and higher levels of economic growth.” (*ibid*).

TPP's economic objectives included liberalization of trade in Asia, market reforms, and strengthened trade rules to support America's competitive industries and accord with the modern realities of digital commerce (*Mazarr, Heath, and Cevallos, 2018*). But the TPP also aimed to further the country's strategic interests in at least in three ways-first, U.S. leaders and strategists saw it as a way to strengthen the country's leadership in Asia by complementing its

diplomatic and military power (*ibid*). Second, the TPP served as part of a broader effort to shore up an international order premised on market economics and liberal values (*ibid*). Third, the pact aimed to strengthen key partners; most notably Japan and Vietnam, by spurring badly needed domestic economic reforms and boosting growth (*ibid*). The TPP thus served as an important component of the rebalance to Asia initiative and informed the U.S. approach to a rising China. (*ibid*). By strengthening its leadership, bolstering its alliances and partnerships, and revitalizing an international order, Washington hoped to provide China strong incentives to integrate into and support a U.S.-led order (*ibid*).

America's withdrawal from the TPP in January 2017 marks a major blow to these ambitions (*ibid*). The withdrawal has exacerbated regional doubts about U.S. international leadership and of its role in Asia (*ibid*). To be clear, concern about Washington's commitment dogged the rebalance since it became clear that a fiscally strapped U.S., burdened with global woes, would only commit limited resources to the initiative. Yet even more than U.S. military deployments, the TPP's fate powerfully communicated U.S. ambivalence about Asia, because the American people appeared to repudiate the trade deal by electing a president and congressional legislators opposed to it. Combined with fresh diplomatic tensions and the formal abandonment of the rebalance to Asia initiative, these developments have seriously strained the confidence of allies and partners. Another important consequence of the TPP's unravelling has been a further fracturing of the international order. Indeed, China greeted the news of the U.S. withdrawal from TPP by advancing its own trade pact, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership. The TPP's failure also leaves unresolved the stalled state of international trade regimes.

Trade multilateralism is being questioned by Washington's withdrawal from the TPP<sup>40</sup> 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.

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<sup>40</sup> The TPP was a massive trade agreement signed by twelve Pacific Rim countries, including the United States, that together comprised 40 percent of the global economy.



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.

In addition to infrastructure cooperation with other third countries in South Asia and Africa, Tokyo and Delhi have designed the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC). But again, here we find that the USA is not in the party of the partners. There are frictions and tensions over U.S. sanctions on Iran and the potential for sanctions on India's purchase of Russian-built S-400 air defence systems.

On 7th April 2021, USS John Paul Jones carried out a freedom of navigation operation off the coast of India. According to the United States Seventh Fleet, the operation was "in accordance with international law, about 130 nautical miles west of the Lakshadweep Islands in India's special economic zone, without the prior consent of India." The Indian government has protested that it was a violation of India. Interpretation of the UN Treaty on the Law of the Sea. Indian observers were confused by the timing of this manoeuvre when US-India relations are at its peak. There is a growing sense in Washington that the free and open Indo-Pacific strategy has neglected the Indian Ocean region, where China has made steady inroads (*Singh, 2021*). With the maturation of the Quad, a loose security partnership of the United States, India, Australia, and Japan, many U.S. analysts believe the time is right for the U.S. Navy to stage a return to the Indian Ocean region (*ibid*). But USA's move is a little too much for India's comfort. Despite a common understanding of strong ties with the United States and China's active rise in the Indo-Pacific, New Delhi remains vigilant for its great presence on the South Asian coast. The Indian Navy has sought closer cooperation with the U.S. Navy, especially after the Indian-China border dispute last June, but the general situation in the Indian Ocean justifies increased pressure from the U.S. Navy. Despite warming bilateral ties, New Delhi and

Washington have somewhat incompatible expectations in the Indian Ocean, where the U.S. Navy has been increasingly active, obtruding — wittingly or unwittingly — on what many in India see as India’s sphere of natural influence (*ibid*). After the signing of a defence pact between the United States and the Maldives in September 2020, some Indian analysts counsel the need for New Delhi to hedge against the possibility of an “over-crowding of the neighbourhood strategic space in the Indian Ocean” (*ibid*). While they welcome an American forward presence in the Indian Ocean region as a vital hedge against China, some Indian observers believe that an excessive U.S. military presence in the eastern Indian Ocean region could needlessly provoke China, with adverse implications for New Delhi (*ibid*). Indian observers remain concerned that a U.S. strategic presence in South Asia might result in the shrinking of Indian influence in the neighbourhood (*ibid*). While Indian unease is often latent and rarely ever overtly expressed, signs of dissatisfaction occasionally bubble up (*ibid*). There is particular worry among Indian analysts that by encouraging the United States to assume a dominant role in South Asia, India might be on a path to relinquish its security commitments in the neighbourhood (*ibid*). The gaps between Indian and U.S. positions become plainly evident—such as after the recent freedom of navigation operation near Lakshadweep (*ibid*). For the United States, freedom of navigation operations is a way of showing that the maritime claims of certain states are inconsistent with international law (*ibid*). India’s requirement of prior consent for the passage of foreign warships through Indian exclusive economic zones, U.S. officials believe, is a violation of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which requires that all states act with “due regard” for the rights of the coastal state but makes no explicit mention of military activity (*ibid*).

From an Indian vantage point, the convention cannot be interpreted to permit military activities in other nations’ exclusive economic zones (*ibid*). When it ratified the convention in 1995, New Delhi clarified its position in a declaration stating that in its understanding, the convention does not “authorize other states to carry out in the EEZ [exclusive economic zone] and on the continental shelf military exercises or manoeuvres, in particular those including the use of weapons or explosions, without the consent of the coastal state” (*ibid*). This position is consistent with India’s domestic laws, the Territorial Waters, Continental Shelf, Exclusive Economic Zone and Other Maritime Zones Act of 1976, and remains unchanged. For India, a U.S. naval presence in the eastern Indian Ocean has implications that go beyond the interpretation of U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea (*ibid*). As this analyst noted in a recent

paper, U.S. freedom of navigation operations normalize military activism (including Chinese operations) near Indian islands that remain vulnerable to incursions by foreign warships in the surrounding seas (*ibid*). The U.S. emphasis on navigational freedoms in the exclusive economic zones encourages warships of other regional navies to violate Indian authority and jurisdiction in the waters off island territories (*ibid*). Since Washington is yet to ratify the U.N. convention, Indian officials aren't eager to accept U.S. lecturing on the subject of navigational freedoms (*ibid*). When it comes to a U.S. naval presence in the Indian Ocean, New Delhi, it seems, faces a predicament. India's security managers deem a U.S. military presence in the Indian Ocean a necessity, but only up to a point (*ibid*). For all its utility in deterring China, a U.S. naval presence in South Asia, many suspect, could erode India's status as a "net security provider" and a "preferred security partner" in the Indian Ocean (*ibid*). An extended U.S. military presence in South Asia could even exacerbate power rivalries in the Indian Ocean, damaging India's prospects in the neighbourhood (*ibid*). Consequent to the signing of the U.S.-Indian mutual logistics agreement and other foundational pacts, Washington expects naval access to India's bases in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands- militarizing the Andaman Islands and the Bay of Bengal, many say, would impose inevitable costs (*ibid*). India has also shied away from pursuing joint projects of a strategic nature with the United States and Japan (*ibid*).

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

However, these subtle differences do not prevent the trilaterals- India, Japan, and the USA to pursue a mutually beneficial partnership on common strategic issues and interests in the Indo-Pacific region. All three are committed towards ensuring a free, open, and prosperous and securing a stable and rule-based order in the Indo-Pacific. All the countries have strong bilateral cooperation and strategic partnership among them. Unlike alliances, which could require binding responses with the aid of using events to precise events, strategic partnerships contain a far decrease degree of commitment. Moreover, the interests of these three sides in such a relationship may overlap or diverge depending on the issue at hand. Divergences in the strategic mapping of Indo-Pacific is significant because it signals divergent perceptions and strategies among the countries.