

MAPPING THE INDIA - USA- JAPAN STRATEGIC CONVERGENCE IN THE INDO – PACIFIC

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Chapter 6

Conclusion

Over the last decade, the Indo-Pacific witnessed geopolitical turmoil. We witnessed a shift from the Asia Pacific to the Indo Pacific in the strategic lexicon of international relations. As such new strategic partners also came up. These forums are a result of the changing geopolitical dynamics in the region, and in turn, they will have strategic implications for the region (*Brown, 2018*). In the changing security architecture in the Indo-Pacific – a growing synergy from a political to strategic focus could be noted in the India, Japan, and the USA relations. It is a fact that these three countries share core strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific region on various issues ranging from their dependence on oil from the West Asia to the safety of the sea lanes in the region principles of democracy, rule of law, to the growing power disequilibrium in the region. The maritime security partnership of this trilateral will have decisive impact on the military, political and strategic balance of power in the years to come in the Indo -Pacific region. On the other hand, China's grand global strategy of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and its adoption of the String of Pearls, its monopolizing strategic choke points could be viewed as an opportunity to maximize its strategic interest in the region. Despite political enthusiasm among New Delhi, Tokyo and Washington, the pace of implementation and the road map to realizing the Indo-Pacific vision remains limited. As the key partners move forward, countries must acknowledge and accept that their Indo-Pacific visions will never align completely with each other (*Baruah, 2020*). Effective coordination based on converging strategic interests and principles is the best way forward in operationalizing the trilateral partnership (*ibid*).

This concluding chapter analyses the findings of this research to arrive at an overall assessment of the trilateral partnership. It concludes by elucidating the various complementary actions and alternate strategic options. The last section of this chapter provides salient recommendations for further scope of research.

Review of the Study

A review of the study is provided in the following paragraphs:

1. In the early years of the 21st century, as Indo-Pacific becomes the centre of global economic activities, geopolitics, and security dynamics, the region needs a comprehensive maritime security cooperation. The regional maritime security cooperation is needed to preserve the increasing seaborne activity and to maintain SLOCs stability. In addition, this region also takes place fierce competition between major powers in the world. China's expanding maritime influence, the emergence of India as regional power, the U.S.'s Indo-Pacific approach, and the regional non-traditional maritime issues have become the core discussions in Indo-Pacific maritime security. The South China Sea disputes also have raised the risks in the region. Indian Ocean Sea Lanes of Communication's stability also needs to be managed, as the waterway has become the busiest sea lines in the world. China on the other hand, has become an important partner for the region in terms of maritime trade and investment; however, its naval presence is still not quite welcomed by some regional countries. The power competition between the major powers will then shape the future pattern of interactions in Indo-Pacific.
2. The twenty-first century security environment in the Indo-Pacific region presents several complex challenges. The examination of the current environment in the Indo-Pacific region present ample evidence to support this statement and confirm that the regional security situation is indeed complex and fraught with strategic risks and uncertainties. The region faces a wide array of threats in various parts, ranging from illegal migration, illegal fishing, and transnational crimes and piracy at the lower end of the threat spectrum to terrorism, natural disasters, and the impact of climate change at the higher end. The seas and oceans of the Indo-Pacific region present several maritime security challenges including piracy, terrorism, territorial claims, jurisdictional disputes, illegal fishing, criminal trafficking, and arguments over the Law of the Sea Convention. The differences among coastal and maritime user nations

involving navigation and military operations represent some of the pressing issues affecting the region. Thus, as the study demonstrates, that due to the cartographic location of the Indo-Pacific the region is exposed and vulnerable to the entire range of traditional and non-traditional maritime threats.

3. About the issue of maritime disputes, there are several maritime areas which have been contested the most across the Indo-Pacific, namely the East China Sea, South China Sea, and the Indian Ocean. Although there has never been any direct military conflict in those areas, however those areas are the sources for rising the security risks in the region. The contestation of those areas is caused mainly by the different security needs of the regional countries. Moreover, those areas hold significant geostrategic importance, thus the disputes have been a complex matter in Indo-Pacific maritime security.
4. As a continental power and occupying a central strategic position in the Indian Ocean, India has become a prominent actor in Indo-Pacific region. India's 'Look East' policy which was introduced in 1990s has expanded India's strategic engagement to the Southeast and East Asian countries. Over the years, India's engagement in the region transcended from economic relations to security. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "Act East" policy has strengthened India's approach in Indo-Pacific, in which the Act East will increase India's involvement through strategic partnerships. The "Act East" policy also reassures India's commitment to protect the SLOCs of Indian Ocean for every littoral state to use. Moreover, India has its own vision of the Indo-Pacific, in which it wants to promote peace and stability through equal access to the sea and air, freedom of navigation, combating maritime crimes, protecting the marine environment, and developing the blue economy. India has been championing the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) idea, initiating forums like the Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) and the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI). It engages with its Indo-Pacific partners either bilaterally, or on plurilateral and multilateral platforms, in a multitude of spheres including maritime security, Blue Economy, maritime connectivity, disaster management, and capacity building. In April 2019, India set up an Indo-Pacific wing in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) meant to integrate under one Indo-Pacific umbrella, the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region, and the Quadrilateral of the

US, Japan, Australia, and India (*Bagchi, 2019*). An Oceania division was created in the MEA in September 2020 to bring India's administrative and diplomatic focus on the region stretching from western Pacific (with the Pacific islands) to the Andaman Sea—this is the maritime space where China is trying to maintain its dominance and India is seeking to assert its own relevance (*Bagchi, 2020*). To promote its strategic interests in the Indian Ocean, India launched the SAGAR vision in 2015. India views the Indo-Pacific as a geographic and strategic expanse, with the ASEAN connecting the two great oceans—and at the heart of this conception lie the principles of inclusiveness, openness, ASEAN centrality, and unity. Security in the region must be maintained through dialogue, a common rules-based order, freedom of navigation, unimpeded commerce, and settlement of disputes in accordance with international law (*ibid*). Sustainable connectivity initiatives that promote mutual benefit should be continually fostered (*Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, June 2018*). From the beginning, India's vision of the Indo-Pacific has focused on the region stretching eastwards from the country, with ASEAN as the focus. New Delhi is broadening the regional canvas covered in its Indo-Pacific policy to include the Western Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea (*ibid*). India is now looking to engage in “issue-based” alignments. (*Raja Mohan, 2017*).

5. China's power in the Indo-Pacific revolves around three maritime zones: the Indian Ocean, the Pacific Ocean, and the South China Sea. Its geostrategic approach is grounded in a bellicose desire to expand economic, strategic, and security horizons through heavy investments in port developments and militarization of bases. In its global venture to expand its influence, China is converging with other regional players to increase regional connectivity through infrastructure and economic development projects such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor, and the Belt and Road Initiative to build a vast network of trade routes across the globe (*Levesque and Stokes, 2016*). In recent years, China has also intensely extended its undersea fleet and expanded its exploration of its close waters including Taiwan, Indonesia, and Australia—this growing appetite for power and influence, when combined with the unyielding intentions of creating a hyper-aggressive presence through its “wolf warrior” diplomacy across the globe, has triggered threat perceptions and provoked security concerns for the India, the United States, and Japan (*ibid*).

6. The three countries have already established close bilateral security relations among themselves. The empirical analysis of the three sets of bilateral relations- India and Japan, India and the USA, and Japan and the USA provides sufficient proof to support this statement.
7. A core element of Japan's Indo-Pacific strategy is economic, in particular identifying and expanding cross-cutting sectors that allow Tokyo to displace China while creating regional security. Two of those sectors are energy and infrastructure. The energy sector strategy is well developed, and combines multiple elements, incorporating: the Trump administration's request for Japan to reduce the US-Japan trade imbalance; Tokyo's assumption that liquefied natural gas (LNG) will become more important in the Indo-Pacific, especially as a lower-carbon alternative to coal; the concern that countries could become dependent on China for energy shipments and/or control of critical energy infrastructure; and the desire to keep sea lanes free and open not only for Japan, but for the region. While the country's defence and strategic communities are clearly concerned about Beijing, its businesses are heavily invested in China, muting some elements of strategic response.
8. The foundational documents describe the USA's Indo-Pacific Strategy. The first, the administration's December 2017 National Security Strategy called China a 'revisionist power', and continued, 'China seeks to displace the United States in the Indo-Pacific region, expand the reaches of its state-driven economic model, and reorder the region in its favour' (*Weaver, 2018*). It added, 'A geopolitical competition between free and repressive visions of world order is taking place in the Indo-Pacific region.' (*ibid*). In June 2019, the Department of Défense published the second key document Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships and Promoting a Networked Region (*United States Department of Defence, 2019*). It opened with the statement, 'The Indo-Pacific is the Department of Défense's priority theatre.' (*ibid*). The reason for this was described thus, 'the People's Republic of China, under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, seeks to reorder the region to its advantage by leveraging military modernization, influence operations, and predatory economics to coerce other nations' (*ibid*). The document underlined how the US considered the key to countering the challenge was to work more closely with allies and partners. That was one of the reasons for the May 2018 change of name for the US Pacific Command (USPACOM)

to US Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM). (*ibid*). This highlighted the role of India in the region, and by extension the growing focus on the Quad (US, India, Japan, Australia) (*United States Indo-Pacific Command, 2018*). In November 2019, the Department of State published the third foundational document, Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision (*United States Department of State, 2019*). It again emphasized working together with partners, highlighting ‘our strategic partner India’ to ‘address shared challenges and advance a shared vision’ (*ibid*). Going further, it acknowledged that many countries in the region needed infrastructure development, a sector that China dominated with its BRI. Accordingly, the document described a series of infrastructure programmes designed to offer partners alternatives (*ibid*).

9. The idea of minilateralism has gained importance in attracting attention in recent years. This is a narrower (usually informal) initiative to solve a particular problem, with fewer states sharing the same interests. They are task oriented in nature. Mission is often regional-focused, so it is less threatening for countries that it considers to be the subject of a bilateral alliance. Therefore, minilateralism can overcome obstacles to the problem of collective action by claiming fewer actors and a closer convergence of interests, identities, or powers. Policymakers find minilateralism appealing because of its inherent flexibility, lower transaction costs, and voluntary commitments” (*Saha, Bland and Lakshmana, 2020*).
10. The challenge in security of the ocean is to clarify internal and external coordination within a coherent framework, which allows countries to look for areas that can have the greatest impact. Maritime security is not just about political issues, after all, but about identifying spheres where the entire region can be mobilised, especially since all the countries are committed to multilateralism. This may be achieved by understanding the leverage of working together in the maritime domain to sustain a “safe and secure” maritime and marine environment along with a stable Indo-Pacific. The “three Cs—“Confluence, Crisis and the Convenient”—can help in the understanding (*Nayak, 2021*).

Research Outcomes

The main aim of the thesis was to assess the convergences among India, Japan, and the USA in the Indo-Pacific region. The findings of the study are expounded in the following paragraphs.

1. The Indo-Pacific is characterized by a range of dualities of idea. The Indo-Pacific is both an exclusive and inclusive in nature. Secondly, it has both economic and strategic characteristics- economic origins but in strategic consequence. Third, Indo-Pacific is both a regional and global in character. It is often referred to as Asia without continent – sea without land. Interestingly, it one such region where the USA is a follower rather than a leader. On the other hand, China is the influencer and architect (*Medcalf,2012;2013;2019*) of the Indo-Pacific. The Indo-Pacific does not contain China but dilutes its effect in the region (*ibid*). it also portrays Beijing’s assertiveness and Washington’s uncertainty (*ibid*). It is too vast and diverse as a region to be dominated by one single hegemon. Lastly, the Indo-Pacific lacks a single perceived threat.
2. The terms Indo-Pacific and Maritime Security overlap. The concept of the Indo-Pacific was first mentioned in 2007 by Indian Navy officer Gurpreet S. Khurana. In a 2007 speech by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Japan was the first country to officially introduce the concept of the Indo-Pacific. However, after being mentioned in President Donald Trump's speech in Da Nang, Vietnam in 2017, the term Indo-Pacific began to attract worldwide attention. India, Australia, and ASEAN countries have also proposed their own vision for the Indo-Pacific. In fact, the geographic area of the Indo-Pacific varies from vision to vision of each of the respective Indo-Pacific Countries. The United States believes that the Indo-Pacific extends from the west coast of India to the west coast of the United States. Australia believes it extends from the eastern Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. India, Japan, and ASEAN have similar views because they consider the Indo-Pacific to be roughly composed of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. All these visions agree that the Indo-Pacific is interrelated based on economic and cultural

connections, not on adjacent territorial spaces. All connectivity strategies refer to the concept of "maritime security" but do not clarify its meaning. The term maritime security has been part of political discourse for about twenty years. Several government and intergovernmental mechanisms have announced maritime security strategies, including the United Kingdom, France, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the European Union, and the African Union. However, there is still a different perception of this concept. Maritime security can be seen in a "maritime security matrix" with related concepts, including national security, marine environment, economic development and human security; it can be put into a "securitisation framework" with a list of threats to human beings; or it can be seen through the aspect of "security practices and communities of practice" or the security of those whose work is related to the sea (Bueger, 2015). In the Indo-Pacific region, only the United States and India have national strategies for maritime security. The 2005 National Strategy for Maritime Security by the United States considers maritime security from the perspective of a list of threats, including nation-state threats, terrorist threats, transnational crimes and piracy, environmental destruction, and illegal seaborne immigration (The White House, United States, 2005). Meanwhile, India's 2015 Maritime Security Strategy views maritime security as conditions for the "freedom to use the seas for the pursuit of maritime activities, in support of national development and prosperity, and [to] promote legitimate use of the maritime global commons" (Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 2015). In this sense, these connectivity strategies make the already complicated concept of maritime security further complicated.

3. The need for collective actions on maritime security is essential. The three countries understands that they cannot succeed through unilateral approaches in the vast Indo-Pacific Region. Hence there is an emphasize on the role of multilateral institutions. There also the need to uphold international law, particularly the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) which almost served as the constitution of the oceans. No other legal instrument has been able to replace the 1982 UNCLOS on maritime issues. Many interests are shared. the maritime security challenges to good order at sea are too many and too varied for any state to effectively address alone.
4. The Indo-Pacific is characterized by ceaseless presence of the sea. This is one uninterrupted sheet of water around the world. From a geographical point of view,

adjacent marine areas can be considered connected, even if the connection is a narrow passage surrounded by both the peninsulas and archipelago of Southeast Asia and the land formation of the Australian continent. From these geophysical points of view, the sea and the sea are essentially cross-border, in contrast to the political and legal notions of sovereignty and other forms of maritime jurisdiction. The second factor is the increasing importance of the sea, whether as a major mediator of international trade or as the natural environment of the world, which is increasingly becoming scarce in natural resources. The rising global importance of the Asia-Pacific region will hasten a corresponding rise in the salience of the sea and maritime factors in international politics and economics because the region is identified as primarily maritime (*Till, 2009*).

5. Japan's approach in the Indo-Pacific thus ultimately aims at ensuring its strategic autonomy by shaping a favourable regional environment and expanding its diplomatic and security options (*Pajon, 2019*). Tokyo's strategy in the Indo-Pacific is necessarily multi-layered, from "minilateral" cooperation to a recent emphasis on more multilateral and inclusive initiatives articulating the Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy and the Quadrilateral Dialogue with a support for mega trade deals and regional organizations led by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), as well as conditional engagement with China (*ibid*). Japan's approach toward the Indo-Pacific rests on two elements. The first is the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy, announced in Kenya in August 2016- an updated, maritime version of the 2007 Arc of Freedom and Prosperity, FOIP takes stock of the economic and strategic integration of the vast area running from the eastern coast of Africa to the South Pacific (*ibid*). Japan's vision for the region has three pillars: the promotion of the rule of law, freedom of navigation, and free trade; the promotion of connectivity through infrastructure to achieve prosperity; and the contribution to peace and security through capacity-building, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and anti-piracy operations (*ibid*). Importantly, FOIP is a flexible and evolutionary geopolitical narrative that offers an alternative to the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (*ibid*). The FOIP has a dual nature- As a geo-economic initiative, it is clearly meant to include as many countries as possible in the area and be presented as a public good and, as a geostrategic alternative to BRI and part of a counterbalancing approach vis-à-vis China, it is not really compatible with a truly multilateral and inclusive approach. (*ibid*). The second element of Japan's strategy

is the Quad — an informal arrangement between Japan, Australia, India, and the United States, which revived in 2017 on the initiative of the Abe administration, has been largely conflated with the broader FOIP strategy (*ibid*).

6. Beyond the rhetoric of a “free and open” Indo-Pacific, the speeches and documents of the US are primarily influenced by the expansion of China in the region rather than the development of the region itself (*Samaan, 2019*). By defining its Indo-Pacific approach through the lens of the great power competition, Washington’s policy is frozen in a decades-old vision of the region that misses the local dynamics at play (*ibid*). Beyond the strategic triangle with India and China, the American vision barely concedes any agency to the littoral states of the Indo-Pacific region (*ibid*). The geographical reach of the Indo-Pacific Strategy essentially stops at the India-Pakistan border and heads south in a rough line to Antarctica. The United States largely excludes Pakistan, the Arabian Peninsula, Iran, and the African littoral from its conception of the Indo-Pacific region (*Hannah, 2019*).
7. India’s Indo-Pacific strategy has emphasised on to create and construct a robust, proactive, and influential role in the region without formally aligning with the United States or gesturing for any confrontational behaviour against China. It revolves around Pragmatic Balancing between the United States and China in the Indo-Pacific, building India's maritime security order in the Indian Ocean region, maintaining the maritime economy's flow and to deal with China on the geo-economics front, thereby preventing any confrontational behaviour with China (*ibid*). The Andaman and Nicobar Islands plays a role for both expanded and longer maritime domain awareness missions across these straits for India.
8. This trilateral relationship is based on the already existing robust bilateral relationships between the three countries. India- Japan bilateral relationship has developed not merely as a response to Chinese aggression. The resurrection and cooperation of these two forces reveals a complex and profound transformation of the international order. Moreover, the evolving security environment in the Indo-Pacific and the important role of maritime power in the international order makes the rise of these two countries even more important. The strengthened relationship between India and Japan reflects mature multilateral security cooperation between the United States, India, and Japan. The

Malabar exercise, now a trilateral joint naval exercise by the three countries after Japan became a permanent member of this exercise in 2015. The mid-2000s, witnessed the security policies of Tokyo and Delhi changed drastically culminating in their strategic partnerships. Today, Japan and India are natural partners and they have been assertive foreign policy strategy in response to the changing dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region. In just a decade, New Delhi and Tokyo have expanded high-level ministerial and bureaucratic contacts, conducted joint military exercises, and concluded military pacts such as the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) logistics agreement (*Pant, 2019*). There is a willingness to continue to support for the free and open Indo-Pacific and towards the Quad by India and Japan. The two countries have expanded cooperation in areas such as cybersecurity and new technologies. During Shinzo Abe's time, New Delhi and Tokyo built a partnership of digital research and innovation across technologies ranging from AI and 5G and space exploration. Economic relations and infrastructure development have become an important agenda in this bilateral relationship. The exercise MALABAR focused on interoperability between the Indian and Japanese navies, deterring China's threats in the Indo-Pacific, and building synergies between navies. The India-U.S. bilateral relations have developed into a "global strategic partnership", based on shared democratic values, and increasing convergence of interests on bilateral, regional, and global issues. United States and India have been on a path of increasing convergence on their strategies vis-à-vis the Indo-Pacific region over the last few years, spanning three administrations across both political parties (*Tellis, 2020*). However, as the United States and India look to open a new chapter in their bilateral cooperation in this region, they will need to grapple with serious challenges and differences of opinion that will shape not just the trajectory of this deepening partnership, but the wider region as well (*ibid*). Regular exchange of high-level political visits has provided sustained momentum to bilateral cooperation, while the wide-ranging and ever-expanding dialogue architecture has established a long-term framework for India-U.S. engagement (*Abercrombie,2019*). Today, the India-U.S. bilateral cooperation encompass the major pillars of strategic partnership and is broad-based and multi-sectoral, covering trade and investment, defence and security, education, science and technology, cyber security, high-technology, civil nuclear energy, space technology and applications, clean energy, environment, agriculture, and health. Vibrant people-to-people interaction and support across the

political spectrum in both countries nurture our bilateral relationship (*ibid*). It is important to note that one of the reasons for the development of US-Japan relations is that the two countries enjoy significant benefits from the alliance system. Japan also serves as the basis for the United States' forward expansion strategy in East Asia. Japan has no nuclear or other offensive weapons, and its security options are severely restricted by the Constitution. Therefore, protection from the United States, including the United States nuclear shield, is essential. But the benefits of the alliance extend beyond the United States and Japan. It has played an important role in maintaining stability throughout the Asia-Pacific region. The USA Japan bilateral relations is commitment to universal values and common principles, including freedom, democracy, human rights, the rule of law, international law, multilateralism, and a free and fair economic order, advances a shared vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific based on the commitment to universal values, common principles, and the promotion of inclusive economic prosperity, respect sovereignty and territorial integrity and are committed to peacefully resolving disputes and to opposing coercion, promote shared norms in the maritime domain, including freedom of navigation and overflight, as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, to demonstrate that free and democratic nations, working together, are able to address the global threats and climate change while resisting challenges to the free and open rules-based international order, importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and encourage the peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues (*The White House, United States, 2021*). Both the countries share serious concern over Chinese activities that are inconsistent with the international rules-based order and its unlawful maritime claims and activities in the South China Sea (*ibid*).

9. The study finds that the strategic value and importance of these minilateral (minilateral and trilateral) approaches lies in the fact that -it is efficient in realizing and responding to mutual objectives and facilitates rapid decision making. In the Indo-Pacific, minilateral have helped like-minded countries provide a platform for addressing common concerns and interests. It provides with the opportunity to expand role in regional security cooperation. Minilateralism can be formed based on functional issue-based coalitions of the interested partners or identity-focused blocs of like-minded allies or partners (*Anuar and Hussain, 2021*). Still, by working with “the

smallest number of countries needed to have the largest possible impact on solving a particular problem”, (*ibid*), thriving off informality and interpersonal relations for open discussion, and compartmentalising complex policy issues into smaller agendas, minilateralism is deemed to deliver speed, ad hoc flexibility, and innovative experimentalism (*ibid*). This stands in contrast to multilateralism, which is increasingly seen to be saddled with rigid traditional norms and structural considerations (*ibid*). However, these issue-based arrangements could run into difficulties when leveraging issue linkages since the aim would be to parcel negotiations into smaller agendas (*ibid*). A small membership eases the building and maintenance of trust. Yet with fewer members, agendas are difficult to advance if and when participating countries cannot be present or cannot commit as a consequence of competing diplomatic priorities, changes in government, and the like (*ibid*). For example, in the 2007 Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), was short lived when Japan's prime minister Shinzo Abe resigned from his term of office, and Australia's new Rudd administration decided against the economic risks of China's hostilities. Fewer members and a narrowly framed agenda could also perpetuate certain narratives that are detrimental to the minilateral itself. As evidenced by the Quad initiative, “initial perceptions of groupings being targeted at certain countries can take hold quickly and influence not only current iterations of minilateral institutions but future ones as well” (*Parameswaran, 2018*). The China-containment narrative related to the Quad has caught even after its resurrection as Quad 2.0 even a decade later. Establishing and expanding minilaterals could be challenging where there is a trust deficit or a lack of familiarity between existing and new members. (*Anuar and Hussain, 2021*). Both reduce the advantage of informality. Moreover, despite its ad hoc nature, it is unclear if downsizing minilaterals could be undertaken when needed, for instance, to remove members no longer able to contribute substantially to a policy issue (*ibid*). Minilaterals, whether functional or otherwise, are an exercise in political signalling (*ibid*). Power structures may be frozen and become irrelevant over time (*ibid*). Although new minilaterals with different memberships could mushroom in response, this runs the risk of duplicating rulemaking and policy efforts (*ibid*). As the lifeblood of minilateralism, informality is credited with many advantages (*ibid*). With low bureaucratisation at play, there are more open and honest discussions, more flexibility to create ad-hoc arrangements, and less need to finance institutionalisation, such as a permanent secretariat. However, informality

poses some challenges. A fluid, non-hierarchical arrangement could create a leadership vacuum that works against minilaterals. This might be a more salient affliction among minilaterals comprised of small and middle powers, as minilaterals featuring major powers run the opposite risk of denying smaller members ownership over minilaterals (*ibid*). Another challenge is that informality contributes to a loss of focus in minilateral arrangements without organising principles, frameworks, or institutionalisation (*ibid*). Admittedly, ambiguity could be strategic: broad aims and vague language provide space to manoeuvre among members that cannot agree on appropriate actions, even if there is consensus on reasonable interests (*ibid*). However, without clarification on the contours of purpose and deliverables, progress occurs in unstructured and inconsistent ways. Low institutionalisation also means minilaterals are often set up for shorter life expectancies than formal multilateral arrangements (*ibid*). Finally, a reliance on informality and interpersonal relations poses risk with regards to personnel or administrative changes (*ibid*). Interpersonal connections, which take time to develop, have to be forged anew with staffing transitions (*ibid*). The impact is worse for minilaterals that have fewer points of contact among members, since such discontinuity could feed into institutional memory loss, and in turn, undermine the long-term viability of minilaterals (*ibid*).

10. The US-Japan-India trilateral, launched in 2011. The upgrading of the trilateral dialogue to summit level meeting in 2018 among India, Japan and the USA can be perceived as expanding cooperation among these three partners. The US, Japan and India are coming together in the Indo-Pacific region to deliver shared responsibility and managing common security concerns like – securing the maritime global commons and combatting terrorism. India, Japan, and the USA have made contributions to regional maritime capacity building and maritime domain awareness. Their security cooperation has extensively enhanced through conducting joint military exercises and holding trilateral summit. The Malabar military exercise between the US and India started in 1992 has become the de facto military exercises of the trilateral since 2015. Japan was for the first time included and participated in the Malabar exercises in 2007. Japan joined the Malabar exercises annually since 2015 thereby making the Malabar exercises a trilateral military exercise in its true sense. These growing maritime exercises among the US Navy, the Japanese Maritime Self Defence Forces (JMSDF) and the Indian

Navy at the bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral level signifies their security cooperation and mutual trust. Each of the three states has been increasing its infrastructure investment in the Indo-Pacific. The US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, announcement on 30th July 2018, that the US would invest seed money of USD130 million, to cultivate public-private partnerships (PPP) for infrastructure development in the Indo-Pacific. With the US's BUILD Act, the new International Development Finance Corporation (IDFC) and Infrastructure Transaction and Assistance Network (ITAN), aimed at utilizing private sector capital and skills in the economic advancement of developing economies, trilateral projects should be explored (*Basu, 2020*). Japan provided a public fund of about USD35 billion in 2017 for quality infrastructure development. India has been actively engaging with South Asian region and Indian Ocean states to respond to China's BRI in the sub-region. India and Japan also formed the 'Asian African Growth Corridor' (AAGC) in order to cooperate with each other for development projects across Southeast Asia, South Asia, and East Africa. The Trilateral Infrastructure Working Group (TIWG) was formed in February 2018 by US-Japan-India trilaterals to launch the Indo-Pacific Infrastructure Trilateral Forum among private institutions by May 2018. It aimed to explore projects in critical sub-regions of the Indo-Pacific. Meanwhile, Japan and the US are committed to Indo-Pacific infrastructure development through the newly unveiled Blue Dot Network. The SAGAR- Security and Growth for all in the region, was indicated by prime minister Narendra Modi to focus on India's strong connection on the Indian Ocean Region. The SAGAR signifies the economic and maritime security outreach of India's Act East Policy. The islands of Andaman and Nicobar Islands provide India with ability to exercise surveillance in the region with a special focus on the Malacca Strait. It can be mentioned here that Japan has been developing basic infrastructure in the Andaman and Nicobar Island, installing an undersea cable from Chennai to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and laying optic fibre across the Bay of Bengal. In order to modernize its navy India has been working with Japan to build submarines and sought technological assistance from the USA for its aircraft carriers.

11. Thus, in an era of growing uncertainties and emerging shift in the geopolitical landscape in the Indo-Pacific have played a significant role in shaping this trilateral partnership. Japan-USA-India trilateral has immense strategic potential as their strategic interests

have converged significantly in recent years. There is an increasing convergence of interests and complementarities of three democracies in the maritime realm. Maritime cooperation and managing the global commons will be a crucial area of focus as the trilateral relationship evolves in the coming years.

12. The study finds that though there are differences in their approach to the Indo-Pacific, tapping the potential opportunities of converging strategic interests is huge. Secondly, all the three governments have been open to new challenges and ideas which may test their partnership. Thirdly, there has been common willingness to manage and preserve their relationship with China peacefully. All the three countries have genuine economic interests to cooperate with China. Fourthly, concerns over China is not the 'only factor' for cooperation among these three countries. There are wide range of issues and potential threats that offers scope for deepening cooperation and exploring opportunities. Despite the prospects and challenges in this trilateral cooperation this thesis finds that this trilateral relationship has the potential to become a foundation for engagement with other countries in activities that build regional peace and stability.
13. The study finds that an area that remains untapped and holds a key potential for cooperation in the future is the competition over networks and cyber platform.

Recommendations

The thesis broadly recommends an expansion of the framework for a trilateral cooperation to serve the common challenge and interests especially security and maritime cooperation in the Indo Pacific region. It recommends that Washington, Delhi, and Tokyo also look to deepen their coordination of activities related to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) and search and rescue (SAR) exercises. This cooperation could have a tangible value, considering the propensity for natural disasters in the region and the need for rapid, effective, and multilateral responses.

1. India could concurrently endeavour to strengthen maritime multilateralism in the Indian Ocean region and work towards closer integration of extant institutions and maritime capabilities. One of the key reasons for the failure of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) to emerge as all-

inclusive frameworks could be attributed to India's efforts to take complete "ownership" of these fora. This approach could potentially stymie growth of maritime multilateralism. By being more inclusive it could be possible to facilitate a larger, but controlled, role for China. India must try to meld both fora into a single framework or an Indian Ocean Assembly – as mooted by Sri Lanka – involving the regional heads of states, in order to facilitate greater synergy of effort and maritime capabilities. India should also seek to upgrade the extant multinational combined exercise Milan into an operational forum for Indian Ocean navies, on the lines of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM+). Furthermore, India could help to develop a Track 2 forum to provide guidance and support to regional institutions and drive policy formulation.

2. By strengthening the posture of the Andamans and the Nicobar Islands, India could fully exploit its geostrategic advantage over China in the Indian Ocean. India can strengthen the Andaman and Nicobar command and upgrade it to the level of other naval commands. The functions of a strategic outpost in the Indian Ocean could be achieved by new facilities in the Seychelles and Mauritius. Upgrading the Andaman and Nicobar Command would serve as an enduring symbol of India's maritime power in the Indian Ocean.
3. India, Japan, and the USA could initiate development of a pan-Indo-Pacific Information Grid for maritime domain awareness (MDA) by linking all the available global and regional information systems. Linking all the information resources in the region could thus be the first step practical, operational level step towards achieving a comprehensive framework.
4. The three countries India, Japan and the USA could focus more on naval education and both long term and short-term exchange programmes along with their annual naval exercises. These programmes could be vital components for strategic partnerships. Conferences and projects would further boost trust and confidence building. Negotiation and discussion could be encouraged to reach agreements and consensus to avoid any miscalculation or misconception that may affect the trilateral partnership.

5. Port screening measures and code for unplanned encounters at the sea (CUES) are some of the measures that would help build greater professional linkages among the navies of India, Japan, and the USA. The role of the coast guards is equally important towards strengthening of maritime security of the region. As the waters of the Indo-Pacific are shallow and there are submarines at play in the region hence under water CUES are necessary.
6. Maritime industries like shipping, offshore hydrocarbons, coastal tourism, and aquaculture could be new avenues where this trilateral partnership can make immense contribution.
7. Programs building maritime capacity and interoperability among the partners to better enable them to support maritime security across the region. These programs ideally would include training and facilities for enhanced domain awareness and Exclusive Economic Zone protection.
8. Build on the strategic convergence with India's "Act East" policy in developing the U.S. re-engagement agenda by reinforcing India's capabilities as an advocate for and a provider of maritime security, not only in the Indian Ocean region but beyond into the Pacific.
9. Ratify the 1982 Law of the Sea Convention, which requires that maritime claims are derived from land features, as the first step in a push for all claimants to clarify territorial and maritime claims in accordance with international law.

Areas for Further Study

The implementation of China's "One Belt, One Road" infrastructure over the next few years will highlight China's presence and influence across the region and is expected to add another dimension to the study. Obviously, there are some risks inherent in the program, and it is difficult to predict the outcome of China's efforts and the role of regional nations. This aspect is beyond the scope of this study and deserves another study. Other areas for further research include research to determine the extent and technical modality of integrating different subregional maritime information systems into a common network to help improve regional

maritime governance. The strategic interests and role of the United States in the Indo-Pacific under President Biden's newly formed administration, and most importantly, the situation in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands aimed at developing strategic and military infrastructure could also be another area for further study and research. Also, the study of another trilateral relationship among India, Australia, and the USA which has not yet developed can be studied for further research.