



ORF ISSUE BRIEF

MAY 2009

ISSUE BRIEF # 19

Indo-Japanese Partnership: The Security Factor

K.V. Kesavan

The signing of a declaration on security cooperation by India and Japan in October 2008 marked the culmination of a process that had started in 2000. The fact that Japan had signed such an agreement only with the US and Australia understandably gives it an additional point of importance. Very few would have expected such an important development to materialize so quickly because until about ten years ago, India hardly ever figured in any Japanese discourse on the emerging Asian security landscape. But today it is difficult to think of any such security discussions in Japan without reference to India. There is a fundamental transformation in the Japanese assessment of India's role in the shaping of new Asian security architecture. There has been a perceptible change in the nature of the bilateral partnership since the turn of the century. Rather than being centred on economic interactions, Indo-Japanese ties today cover a far wider spectrum of subjects. There is also a marked change in their mutual perception of each other's national interests and foreign policy goals. Regional and global developments have brought them together on a platform where they address critical issues on which their national interests converge.

The end of the Cold War proved quite propitious for the bilateral relations since many converging factors which had remained dormant for years began to manifest rather strongly in the unfolding new regional environment. Bilateral relations started entering a new phase after 2000. India's rapid economic progress following its adoption of economic reforms and liberalization was one major reason for Japan to sit up and realize what an economically strong India could mean to the peace of Asia as a whole. The wide support that the liberalization programme enjoyed on the domestic front and the accompanying high rate of annual growth of the economy convinced most Japanese leaders that India was firmly committed to free market economy. They saw many new opportunities for foreign direct investment in India which had now adopted an outward-looking economic strategy under which it assigned a key role to FDI as an important catalyst for national progress.

Second, the end of the Cold War had also released India from its earlier ideological constraints and enabled it to launch a multi-dimensional foreign policy that resulted in forging a closer economic and strategic partnership with the US. Their relations

Observer Research Foundation is a public policy think-tank that aims to influence formulation of policies for building a strong and prosperous India. ORF pursues these goals by providing informed and productive inputs, in-depth research and stimulating discussions. The Foundation is supported in its mission by a cross-section of India's leading public figures, academics and business leaders.

warmed up steadily and culminated in the signing of a civilian nuclear agreement in 2008. This was considered as a landmark in the bilateral Indo-US partnership that in a way provided a new stimulus to Japan to seek closer partnership with India.

The 'Look East' policy initiated by New Delhi in 1991 soon became a major driving force for India to forge closer links with East Asian countries, including Japan South Korea, ASEAN and China. India became a full-fledged dialogue partner of ASEAN after 1994 and today it takes an active part in the deliberations of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). India also participates in the annual ASEAN+1 summit meeting. In 2005 India became a member of the East Asian Summit (EAS) meeting largely due to the strong support extended by Japan. Prior to the convening of the EAS, China had made it clear that it would like to limit the membership of the EAS only to ASEAN+3 countries. Suspecting that China wanted to keep the EAS under its own influence, Japan quickly moved to broaden its geographical area to include India, Australia and New Zealand. The absence of the US from the EAS compelled Japan to desperately look for other options to balance China and despite Beijing's stiff resistance, Japan succeeded in including India, Australia and New Zealand. The only point on which both China and Japan agreed related to the role of ASEAN as the driver of the EAS with the ultimate objective of building an East Asian community.¹

It was Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori who took the initiative to redefine the contours of the bilateral partnership. He believed that both India and Japan, despite their high global profiles, were far too much embroiled in their narrow bilateral issues and neglecting several important global problems which they could address together effectively and make positive contributions. He realized that the ties had been held hostage to a single issue: India's nuclear tests in 1998. His call to both countries to think in terms of building a global partnership certainly carried a great deal of sense and urgency.

The circumstances that compelled Mori to propose the idea of a global partnership with India need to be

examined in some detail. After the end of the bipolar world, it was not easy for Japanese diplomacy to adapt itself to the unfolding post-Cold War realities. The Nineties even witnessed serious signs of friction between Japan and the US. President Bill Clinton's overtures to China made many Japanese leaders wonder whether it would be prudent to depend too much on their strategic partnership with the US. The perceived 'neglect' of Japan was further reinforced by a widening trust deficit between the two at the time of the 1997 financial crisis in Southeast Asia. The crisis marked a turning point in Japan's ties with Asian countries. Tokyo realized that unless it drastically broadened its Asian diplomacy, its own legitimate national interests could not be promoted.² Caught between a rising China with tremendous economic and military clout and a seemingly uncertain alliance with the US, Japan had no other alternative but to reach out to countries like India and Australia.

The initiative taken by Tokyo to play a leading role in the currency crisis created a deep impact on the foreign policy establishment in Japan. Indeed, this explains the subsequent compulsions that forced Japan to think in terms of creating new institutions that would link it with countries other than its nearest Northeast Asian neighbours. It is fairly well known that the Asian currency crisis which started in Thailand soon rapidly spread to other Southeast Asian countries like Indonesia and Malaysia. The IMF held a conference in Tokyo in August 1997 for mobilizing financial assistance to the affected countries. Japan, which took a lead in the meeting, soon came out with a proposal for instituting an Asian Monetary Fund (AMF) that would create a fund of 10 billion dollars for assisting those countries affected by the crisis. But Japan's initiative was scuttled by the US which was not favorably disposed to any prominent Japanese role in East Asia. Despite serious differences between the two, by October 2008, Japan did come out with a new proposal called the New Miyazawa Initiative that pledged a package of 30 billion dollars for the affected countries. This initiative was indicative of the increasing eagerness on the part of Japan to seek a niche for itself outside the influence of the US.³

Simultaneously, Tokyo was actively promoting a new institutional mechanism that would bring greater coordination with China and South Korea and link it up with ASEAN countries. The first ASEAN+3 meeting that took place in 1997 seemed to have opened a new avenue for a broader participation to address regional issues. From then on, Japan tended to systematically move in the direction of broadening the horizons of its own concept of Asia.

It is in this backdrop of Japan's quest for seeking an expanded Asian arena to safeguard its own national interests that Mori's call for a global partnership between India and Japan was made. In fact, the beginning of this trend goes as far back as January 2000 when Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes visited Tokyo to initiate a new defence dialogue. Following a series of meetings with Japanese leaders, he stated that "after fifty years of aloofness, India and Japan have decided on a security and defence related dialogue on a regular basis."⁴

After Mori's enunciation of the concept of global partnership in August 2000, the strategic factor in the bilateral relations began to be strongly emphasized. In July 2001, the first comprehensive bilateral security dialogue was held in Tokyo to discuss security and defence policies, the Asian security environment, and nuclear non-proliferation. The dialogue was institutionalized as an annual event. This was simultaneously accompanied by greater military-to-military cooperation between the two sides. Japan's participation in the International Fleet Review held in Mumbai in February 2001 was an important event followed by the visit of a Japanese Maritime Self-defence Force (MSDF) squadron to Chennai in May 2001. Such mutual visits have been taking place regularly since then, in addition to the visits of service Chiefs of both countries at regular intervals.

This new emphasis on security was welcomed by Atal Behari Vajpayee, India's Prime Minister, and his Japanese counterpart, Junichiro Koizumi, who in their joint communiqué on December 10, 2001 stated that they were pleased with the outcomes of the Japan-India Comprehensive Security Dialogue

and Japan-India military-military consultations, both of which were held in July the same year. Emphasizing the importance of holding such dialogues, they also created another mechanism on counter-terrorism within the bilateral security framework.⁵

As the two countries were involved in broadening the parameters of their partnership, and as the Asian situation itself was becoming more complex, the security factor tended to assume greater salience. In January 2003, Japanese Foreign Minister Yoriko Kawaguchi visited New Delhi and stated that, "achieving ever-closer cooperation on the security and defence front is crucial for both Japan and India". The momentum for an intensified dialogue on security was kept up at the talks between Shigeru Ishiba, Japan's Director General of Defence Agency, and George Fernandes in New Delhi in May 2003. This was the first visit by the high-ranking official and was highly symbolic of Japan's increasing interest in forging a new strategic partnership with India.⁶

The idea of global partnership subsequently received further momentum from the top leaders of the two countries. The joint statement issued by Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and his Indian counterpart, Manmohan Singh, in April 2005 included an eight-point agenda which provided a new direction to the course of the bilateral relations. One of the main objectives was the need for developing a well-structured framework for security dialogue and cooperation between the two countries. Both leaders agreed that they should pursue their partnership at three levels. Bilaterally, they should strive to strengthen the prevailing political and economic links. At the regional level, they should promote peace and security in Asia by contributing to regional cooperation in areas, including maritime security and energy self-sufficiency. At the global level, both should cooperate in areas such as UN reforms, nuclear disarmament, counter-terrorism and environment.⁷

In December 2006, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited Japan to further consolidate the partnership and the India-Japan Strategic and Global Partnership,

which involves closer political, economic and strategic coordination on regional and global issues, was established. Both countries emphasized the need for institutionalizing the bilateral dialogue process at multiple levels, holding annual summit meetings, strategic dialogue at the foreign ministers' level, pursuing negotiations for concluding economic partnership agreement/comprehensive economic partnership agreement and cooperation at multilateral fora like the UN, EAS and ARF.⁸

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's initiative: In an effort to accelerate the pace of the partnership, Prime Minister Abe, during his visit to New Delhi in August 2007, articulated his vision of a 'broader Asia', clearly outlining the role that Japan and India could play together for ensuring peace and security of the continent. Both he and Dr. Manmohan Singh reiterated their keenness to strengthen the bilateral partnership at multiple levels and make it a critical determinant for peace in the region. During his talks with Dr. Singh, Abe broached his proposal for working out a value-based quadrangular understanding between India, Japan, the US and Australia to preserve peace and security in Asia. But while India did not show much interest in the proposal, China predictably reacted to it very sharply. In fact, even in May 2006 when the officials of the four countries met on the sidelines of the ARF security policy meeting to conduct exploratory talks on the quad, China had registered its strong protest to them individually.⁹ Ultimately, the proposal did not take off, not only because of China's stiff resistance, but more importantly because of the subsequent political change in Australia as well as in Japan where Abe had to resign in August due to a combination of political and personal reasons. Yasuo Fukuda who succeeded Abe showed no interest in pursuing it; on the contrary, he went on to build new bridges of understanding with China.

US interest in trilateralism: The US has been evincing considerable interest in developing a close security understanding with Japan and India. In fact, the three countries have many common interests and concerns, including the security of the sea-lanes, counter-terrorism and energy security. Along with

others, they conducted joint naval exercises in the Bay of Bengal and also participated in the relief operations following the Tsunami in 2004. Many influential individuals and groups in the US have also shown considerable interest in the development of a new trilateral security mechanism between the US, Japan and India.¹⁰ Further, the Japanese Government consistently played a positive role in supporting the Indo-US civilian nuclear agreement at the IAEA and the Nuclear Suppliers Group. Given the Japanese antipathy to any nuclear agreement, there is little doubt that it was the American prodding that ultimately brought Tokyo around.

Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation: The persistent efforts made by the leaders of both countries finally resulted in signing of the Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation by Dr. Manmohan Singh and Mr. Taro Aso, his new Japanese counterpart on October 22, 2008. It is a landmark document and Japan has signed a similar understanding only with Australia and the US though one could see certain differences in the two documents.

A Study of the Joint Declaration shows that it embodies almost all aspects of the pledges made by the top leaders of the two countries since 2001. However, one salient feature of the present Declaration relates to the emphasis laid on the need for policy coordination between the two countries in regional affairs in the Asia-Pacific as well as bilateral cooperation within multilateral frameworks in Asia such as the East Asia Summit, ARF and ReCAPP processes.

The first part of the Declaration mentions the commitment to several common interests like democracy, open society, human rights, counter-terrorism, safety of the sea-lines, UN reforms. and nuclear disarmament. Second, it outlines areas of cooperation, including information exchange and policy coordination on regional affairs in the Asia Pacific region and on long term strategic and global issues; cooperation in forums like EAS, ARF, and RECAPP, defence dialogue, Coast Guard cooperation, fight against terrorism, disarmament

and non-proliferation; and sharing experiences in peace-keeping and peace-building. In the third part, it spells out several mechanisms for concretizing bilateral cooperation in a wide range of areas.¹¹

Maritime Security: Maritime security is one critical area where both Japan and India share many common interests and concerns. The safety of the sea-lanes of communication (SLOC) calls for systematic efforts at multilateral levels in view of the diverse and overlapping interests of numerous countries involved. Though some beginnings have already been made, it will take a long time before any regional ocean security regime is instituted. Until then, concerned countries should direct their efforts at bilateral levels to undertake such measures that would contribute to the security of the SLOC. It is very important, therefore, for India and Japan to jointly address several issues such as ocean piracy, maritime security, environment, transport of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and the safety of the Malacca Strait.

Indo-Japanese cooperation could become a core component of the entire Indian Ocean security mechanism. Japan is essentially a maritime nation depending on the oceans for its resources and external trade. More than 75% of its energy resources are transported by sea from the Middle East and any disruption to its energy supplies could seriously affect its economy.

Like Japan, India's national interests are also closely linked to the security of the Indian Ocean. India has a coastline of about 7,500 kms, including the Andamans and Nicobar Islands which are closer to Sumatra and Myanmar than to the mainland. Despite its long historical maritime traditions, India initially did not pay much attention to the need for ensuring the safety of the coastline due to conflicts with China and Pakistan. But since the end of the Cold War, it has pursued a comprehensive maritime strategy that takes into account several factors like the development of modern ports and harbours, exploitation of marine resources, expansion of commercial shipping, and modernization of fishing industry. Following the implementation of the UN

Convention on Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS), it set up its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and proceeded to widen the framework of its own maritime policy. India has now one of the strongest and most sophisticated navies in the Asia-Pacific region equipped with warships, aircraft carriers, submarines and minesweepers. In 1978, a strong Coast Guard was set up as an independent armed force and one of its main functions is to protect life and property at sea against piracy and terrorism. Its responsibilities have increased considerably with the demarcation of wide EEZs and continental shelves. As India's commercial and trade relations with Southeast and East Asian countries are on an expanding trajectory, the need for maintaining the safety of the sea lanes has assumed critical importance. It should be noted that about 90 per cent of India's external trade is sea-borne. India also depends on Middle East energy supplies to the extent of about 75 per cent of its total needs. Thus one finds a strong convergence of common interests between India and Japan whose dependence on the Middle East energy is even greater.

Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the US, certain new trends have become salient in Japan's maritime security policy. Japan took speedy measures to send its maritime self-defence forces to the Indian Ocean to extend rearguard support to the US-led military operations in Afghanistan. The earlier International Peace-keeping Force Law could commit the Japanese contingents only after the termination of a conflict. But the new anti-terrorism law authorized the Japanese forces to extend support to one of the parties even during a conflict. Under this, supply ships and aegis equipped destroyers have been dispatched to the Indian Ocean and they have supplied fuel to the vessels of the allied countries. Japan has been discreetly extending the frontiers of its maritime security interests. However, the projection of its naval power is still constrained by Article 9 of the Constitution, strong domestic resentment and resistance from neighbouring countries.

The prospects of cooperation between India and Japan should be examined keeping in view the mutuality of interests. Japan is quite pleased with

several significant strides that have been witnessed in Indo-US defence cooperation. Further, both India and Japan share many perceptions on the evolving security situation in the Indian Ocean region. Since piracy is one of the most serious threats to the safety of the sea-lanes in recent years, they have already started cooperating with ASEAN countries. The well-known case of *Alondra Rainbow* in October 1999 convinced both countries of the urgency to take collective action for combating maritime piracy. In March 2000, Japan organized a preparatory conference on anti-piracy which was attended by 14 countries, including India. It examined in detail the kind of threats posed by piracy in each country and the measures to be adopted. This was followed by an international conference held in Tokyo in April 2000. The appeal issued by the participating countries reiterated their resolve “to cooperate, devise, and implement all possible measures to combat piracy and armed robbery against ships.” In pursuance of this, India and Japan have been holding regular anti-piracy joint Coast Guard exercises in the

Bay of Bengal with a view to enhancing safety of the SLOC.

Following the 2004 Tsunami, India, Japan, the US and Australia cooperated closely in the relief operations that subsequently contributed to their participation in joint naval exercises. For instance, the five-power Malabar Naval Exercises held in the Bay of Bengal. in September 2007 provoked a strong protest from China, which suspected that participating countries had ganged up against Beijing. A major challenge in the Indian Ocean region from now on would relate to the question of how to deal with the expanding Chinese naval power. The ASEAN Regional Forum and its second track wing, Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP). could play a useful role in allaying the suspicions of China by encouraging member countries to undertake confidence-building measures. In promoting maritime cooperation, both India and Japan should carefully avoid creating an impression that it is directed against China.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Prof. K.V. Kesavan is a Distinguished Fellow at Observer Research Foundation, New Delh.

Ends Note:

1. See East Asian Strategic Review 2006, (National Institute of Defense Studies, Tokyo, 2006), pp 152-61.
2. For details see Tadahiro Yoshida, East Asian Regionalism and Japan, IDE APEC Study Center Working Paper Series 03/04, No 9, (IDE, Tokyo, Jetro), March 2004.
3. Ibid, p 10. and also see Tsutomu Kikuchi, “East Asian Regionalism: A Look at the 'ASEAN Plus Three' Framework,” Japan Review of International Affairs, (JIIA, Tokyo), pp 23-45.
4. The Times of India News Service, 16 January, 2000
5. See Vajpayee-Koizumi joint declaration 10 December 2001, (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan).
<http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/india/joint0112.html>
6. The Hindu Online, 30 April 2003.
7. See the joint statement by Manmohan Singh and Koizumi, 28 April 2005. (MOFA, Japan)
<http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/india/partner0504.html>
8. See the joint statement by Manmohan Singh and Japanese PM Shinso Abe.
<http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/2003/04/30/stories/2003043003811200.html>
9. See Siddharth Varadarajan, “Four-power meeting drew Chinese demarche” Global Research .ca, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=6100>
- 10 See East Asian Strategic Review 2008, (NIDS, Tokyo) pp 197-200
11. Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation between Japan and India , October 22, 2008,
http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asiapaciindia/pmv0810/joint_d.html



Observer Research Foundation,
20, Rouse Avenue, New Delhi-110 002
Phone: +91-11-43520020 Fax: +91-11-43520003
www.orfonline.org email: orf@orfonline.org