



INDO-JAPAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY

India-Japan relations in a Turbulent Indo-Pacific

PREFACE

Dear Readers,

In the ever-evolving geopolitical landscape of the Indo-Pacific, the relationship between India and Japan remains a pivotal area of study and dialogue. This Resource Paper aims to shed light on the diverse perspectives shared during a recent brainstorming session organized by the Indo-Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (IJCCI) in collaboration with the Department of Politics and Public Administration, University of Madras, held in August 2026.

The session brought together a dynamic group of scholars, senior journalists, political analysts and engaged students from city colleges affiliated with the University of Madras, specializing in international studies, international relations, defense studies and journalism. Their active participation enriched the discussions, linking historical contexts with contemporary challenges.

Through this Resource Paper, we offer a comprehensive overview of the insights gained, underscoring the critical importance of India-Japan relations amid the complexities of the Indo-Pacific region. We hope this paper contributes meaningfully to informed discussions on regional stability and cooperation.

IJCCI is honored to present this Resource Paper in English and in Japanese language, reaffirming our commitment to fostering deeper understanding and collaboration between India and Japan. Hope our readers find the Resource Paper interesting and informative.

August 2026

Suguna Ramamoorthy
Secretary General, IJCCI

INDIA-JAPAN RELATIONS IN A TURBULENT INDO-PACIFIC

Introduction

The world shuddered when the Strait of Hormuz was shut down during the ongoing conflict in the Middle East as the narrow strip of waterways accounted for about twenty percent of global energy trade affecting major and smaller powers, especially heavily energy-dependent nations like India and Japan. Contrast this situation to a potential showdown in the larger Indo-Pacific in which equally critical chokepoints straddle the waterways.

The Strait of Malacca is said to facilitate nearly US\$ 5 trillion in commerce annually; the South China Seas handles about USD 4 trillion in annual global trade; and some forty percent of global crude oil shipments pass through the sea lanes of the Indian Ocean. In all, the Indo-Pacific with all its critical maritime hubs and choke-holds is said to account for 80 percent of global trade by volume and 70 percent by value.

The war in the Middle East offers one more valuable lesson: that it does not require a major or a superpower with sophisticated missiles and aircraft to stir things up. A minor power can make things equally difficult by accessing relatively cheaper drones and mines to make sea passage difficult and expensive.

But the Indo-Pacific is not merely a story of waterways and strategic straits. It also encompasses some of the most contested land spaces of South, Southeast and East Asia, where territorial disputes and strategic rivalries continue to shape relations among major powers. India and Japan, for instance, remain deeply engaged in territorial and strategic contestation with China, while Russia adds another layer of geopolitical complexity. Beyond these rivalries lie the Korean Peninsula and the Taiwan Strait-two of the region's most volatile flashpoints, where diplomacy continues to be tested against increasingly assertive rhetoric and the ever-present spectre of conflict. The Spratly Islands constitute yet another major flashpoint, with six claimant states contesting sovereignty over a complex chain of islands, islets and coral reefs, believed to hold significant energy and other maritime resources.

In the turbulent Indo-Pacific, what role do India and Japan play—both bilaterally and through the QUAD, the four-nation grouping that also includes the United States and Australia? India and Japan undoubtedly share a robust and steadily deepening political relationship, accompanied by growing economic engagement and a strong mutual interest in expanding technological cooperation, particularly in the fields of defence and security. Yet, the real challenge lies not merely in navigating the turbulence, but in responding effectively to an evolving regional order. This becomes particularly significant at a time when the United States—the predominant power in the Indo-Pacific - appears increasingly uncertain about its long-term strategic commitments and, at times, signals an inclination to reshape the rules and institutions that have underpinned the regional order. For India and Japan, therefore, the challenge is to strengthen their bilateral partnership while simultaneously determining how the QUAD can remain relevant and effective in an increasingly contested Indo-Pacific.

(Was observed by Ms. Suguna Ramamoorthy in her Opening Remarks)

Dr. Rita John and Dr. S. Armstrong shared the rich contribution made by the University of Madras, adding value to the growing global networks by offering not just state-of-the-art courses relevant to present day world politics but have also served as a stimulating springboard to young faculty researchers pursuing and publishing their high-quality findings in journals, magazines and national and international media outlets, that has left its imprint in world education.

Opening Remarks :



Ms. Suguna Ramamoorthy,
Secretary General, IJCCI

Gracing the occasion:



Dr. Rita John,
Registrar, University of Madras



Dr. S. Armstrong,
Member, Vice-Chancellor Convener Committee,
University of Madras



Dr. M. Uma Maheswari

Professor and Head,

Dept. of Politics and Public Administration, University of Madras

India-Japan : A pillar for Indo-Pacific stability

The Indo-Pacific has emerged as the principal arena of contemporary geopolitical competition. It is characterised by intensifying strategic rivalry, maritime insecurity, supply-chain vulnerabilities, technological competition and uncertainty surrounding the future regional order. Within this turbulent environment, India–Japan relations have evolved from a predominantly economic partnership into a multidimensional strategic relationship. It encompasses defence, maritime security, connectivity, technology, economic security and regional institution-building.

India and Japan are not developing a conventional military alliance. They are indeed constructing a flexible strategic partnership based on complementary capabilities, strategic autonomy, economic interdependence and shared support for a free, open, peaceful and rules-based Indo-Pacific. The China factor remains an important driver of convergence, and their relationship extends beyond balancing China to encompass supply-chain resilience, critical technologies, energy security, infrastructure and sustainable development.

Relevance of the Indo-Pacific

It is the geographic region where most of global trade is carried out. The Strait of Malacca alone is estimated to handle at least \$3.4-5 trillion annually, and approximately 40 per cent of seaborne crude oil worldwide is carried by Indian Ocean routes. The Indo-Pacific region is the primary arena of competition between the US and China. The real loci of that competition are Taiwan, the South China Sea and East China Sea. The larger issue here is also whether the emergence of China is remaking the rules of the region, abstract and complex.

There are a large number of flashpoints. There are active tensions along the Taiwan Strait and on the Korean Peninsula, disputes over the Spratly Islands

(six claimants), and still unresolved border disputes between India and China, all of which may lead to escalation in the future. There is also now realigning of the middle powers. Countries such as India, Japan, and Australia, among others, are forging new alliances (the Quad, bilateral deals such as the India-Japan pacts) not because they want to be left with neither US reliability nor Chinese goodwill but rather because the realignment now has real money invested in it. In May 2026, the four Quad countries announced a Critical Minerals Initiative Framework at their Foreign Ministers' meeting in New Delhi. They pledged up to \$20 billion in combined government and business funding for mining, processing, and recycling projects, a direct response to the concentration of approximately 90 per cent of global rare-earth processing capacity in China.

This system was established as part of a Quad Critical Minerals Initiative, originally released in July 2025; a second workshop is scheduled for October 2026, and the outcomes report will be published by January 2027. Supply chains are being rewired through it. Semiconductors, critical minerals, clean energy technologies - all this contraction in the direction of a more China-free position is literally taking physical effect in and around the area. Beijing has demonstrated its ability to react accordingly: further Chinese restrictions on the export of rare earths, components, and battery-related technologies are again expected to be strengthened around November 2026, just the type of chokepoint dependence that the Quad initiative and the agreements between India and Japan on economic security are attempting to hedge against.

A Warning Written in Oil

The recent Middle East conflict was severe, with the Strait of Hormuz gradually closing, forcing the world to reconsider its beliefs. The war kicked off in earnest with the U.S. and Israeli attacks on Iranian targets on February 28, 2026, leading to retaliatory attacks by Iran on commercial shipping in the Strait. The Strait pre-war bore approximately 38 per cent of the world crude oil flows, approximately 29 per cent of LPG and approximately 19 per cent of LNG. With the fighting operational, the impact of the fight on shipping was more visible: daily transits dropped to a low of five ships daily,

nearly 95% of the total of over 100 daily, and crude exports in the Gulf plummeted by nearly half, declining to approximately 9 million barrels a day in August 2026 after rising to almost 17 million barrels a day in 2025. About one-fifth of world energy trade is channelled through that Strait in normal times. Oil traders and finance ministries from Tokyo to Delhi spent several weeks contemplating that the entire world might be dependent on a strip of water. This meant a lot to energy-starved India and Japan, which have witnessed the shadow of this danger back home.

The Indo-Pacific has its possible Hormuz moments, and arguably even larger. The Strait of Malacca alone is estimated to accommodate 3.4- 3.5 trillion in trade annually; however, when spread across the larger area of the South China Sea, some are projected at 5 trillion. Roughly 80% of global trade in volume and 70% in value transits Indian Ocean shipping routes, carrying about 40 per cent of the world's seaborne crude oil, and the region in total. There is no other part of the world that has as many economic lifelines as this region does.

The Cheap Weapon Problem

The Gulf crisis was an even greater lesson proving that one need not be a great power to put a shipping route out of business. It can be done with a few sea mines, inexpensive drones and the desire to generate outrage. For at least 5 months in the middle of 2026, the U.S. and retaliatory Iranian attacks had brought Gulf shipping to its knees, demonstrating that a condition equivalent to a blockade can challenge Gulf shipping as long as there is no formal blockade. This is a quieter, cheaper form of geopolitics: not carrier battles, but "grey-zone" harassment that raises insurance costs, spooks shipping firms, and forces navies into an expensive game of deterrence.

Two Democracies, One Difficult Neighbourhood

India and Japan are deepening ties in this crowded, contested ocean. Both are democracies wary of Chinese assertiveness, with complementary economies and a shared stake in open sea lanes. It took nearly two decades to build this relationship from Japanese aid in 2000 "strategic partnership," to the 2014 "Special Strategic and Global Partnership," and

now to real institution-building. The 2011 India-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) gave the relationship its first real trade architecture; today more than 1,400 Japanese companies operate in India, and Japan is India's fifth-largest source of foreign investment, with cumulative FDI exceeding \$47.5 billion between April 2000 and December 2025. Even so, bilateral trade of around \$27.5 billion in FY 2025-26 remains, in the words of India's own commerce minister, "still a fraction" of the relationship's potential and is heavily skewed in Japan's favour. The 2025–2026 year represented a turning point, during August 2025, the India–Japan Joint Vision for the Next Decade, adopted during PM Modi's visit to Tokyo and the 15th Annual Summit, outlined eight priority "lines of effort" next-generation economic partnership, economic security, mobility, ecological legacies, technology and innovation, health, people-to-people ties, and a state-prefecture partnership plus a target of ¥10 trillion (roughly \$65–68 billion) in Japanese private investment in India over ten years, building on an existing 2022–2026 target of about ¥5 trillion (~\$33.8 billion). Alongside it, a Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation established closer military coordination, a new dialogue framework including an annual National Security Adviser dialogue and a dedicated economic-security dialogue between India's Foreign Secretary and Japan's Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs and joint defence R&D between India's DRDO and Japan's ATLA (Acquisition, Technology & Logistics Agency).

A companion Action Plan for Human Resource Exchange set a goal of moving 500,000 persons between the two countries over five years, including 50,000 skilled and semi-skilled Indian workers to Japan. The Joint Declaration on Economic Security Cooperation, signed during PM Sanae Takaichi's three-day Delhi visit (her first as Prime Minister) and the 16th India-Japan Annual Summit, addressed excessive dependence on China across various sectors: semiconductors and critical minerals (including rare earths), information and communications technology (including submarine cables), clean energy (including ammonia), and pharmaceuticals. The same summit produced a Joint Statement on Energy Resilience, an agreement to strengthen strategic petroleum reserve

cooperation in the wake of the Hormuz crisis, and Japanese support for India's bid to join the International Energy Agency. This is not like other strategic agreements, wherein India would not withdraw from common defence, whilst the constitution of Japan limits military cooperation. It is rather a joint venture founded on mutual advantages: Japanese capital and technology, Indian size and geography.

How We Got Here

Throughout the Cold War, India-Japan relations were largely silent and transactional. Japan, a close US ally, was cautious about deepening ties with India, whose policy of non-alignment kept it at arm's length from the American bloc and closer to the Soviet Union. Even as this situation eased after the Cold War's end, the relationship remained predominantly economic and apolitical for some time; Japanese ODA-funded infrastructure projects like the Delhi Metro (financed from the late 1990s) exemplified aid without any accompanying security or strategic dimension. Japan's caution was reinforced after India's 1998 nuclear tests, when Tokyo suspended aid partly to avoid becoming seen as endorsing India's nuclear posture or straining its own relationship with China. This reversed in the early 2000s, and the pace accelerated after 2014, when during PM Modi's visit to Japan, PM Shinzo Abe committed 3.5 trillion yen (roughly US\$35 billion) in public and private investment and financing to India over five years, a target subsequently met and later expanded by his successors.

Beyond the China Question

The driving force behind this increasing bilateral relationship has been China, but now the relationship has now expanded beyond it. Semiconductors, critical minerals, supply-chain resilience, clean energy, and infrastructure are all targets in their own right. The 2026 Economic Security Declaration is less an anti-China document and more an anti-dependence on chokepoints in general. Contemporary maritime threats comprise mines, drones, and grey-zone coercion, implying that the defence focus will shift away from big hardware and towards undersea awareness, mine countermeasures, collaboration between coast guards, and undersea cable protection. The

security declaration's focus on information sharing and joint exercises aligns with this quieter approach. That shift became concrete in August 2026, when the two countries' defence ministers signed a Memorandum of Arrangement on Maritime Security, agreed to expand ship-repair and logistics cooperation, and welcomed a second Indo-Pacific Logistics Network tabletop exercise planned for that September at Japan's Ministry of Defence. The two sides also flagged the shipborne UNICORN integrated communications antenna system as their first-ever defence equipment transfer project, a small but symbolically important step given how rarely India and Japan have moved from talk to actual hardware transfers. A new director-general/joint-secretary-level working group was established to advance cooperation across operational, intelligence, equipment, technology, and industrial tracks, and both sides agreed to accelerate plans for a fourth "2+2" Foreign and Defence Ministerial Dialogue in Tokyo.

The Quad, and the obvious question is whether India and Japan also operate through the Quad (with the US and Australia), made real progress in 2026. Beyond the \$20 billion Critical Minerals Initiative, the group advanced an Indo-Pacific Energy Security initiative and disaster-response logistics cooperation. But 2026 also saw the India-hosted Quad Leaders' Summit fail to take place as scheduled, raising doubts about the group's momentum and America's Indo-Pacific focus amid crises in Europe and West Asia. India held the Quad's rotating chairmanship throughout 2025 without ever finalizing summit dates, and by February 2026 External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar was fielding questions at the Munich Security Conference about whether the Quad had lost momentum; his answer that the absence of a leaders' level summit shouldn't be "overread," and that the grouping's working-level mechanisms were still functioning, was as much a hedge as an assurance. The Quad Foreign Ministers met in New Delhi in May 2026, alongside a visit by U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, which advanced cooperation on maritime security, emerging technology, and humanitarian assistance. Still, the leaders' level summit itself remained unscheduled. The bilateral India-Japan collaboration delivers promptness and flexibility, although it

was never intended to substitute for a full devotion to a Quad supported by the US. India and Japan might have to do with a lot less.

The View from the Ground

This bilateral relationship and its future is of interest to an Indian shipping company that has chartered a tanker over Malacca, or to a Japanese producer who buys rare earths from a single supplier with a bottleneck or to a fisherman off the Spratlys where each coast guard looks at the other. What this partnership is actually worth will be reflected in insurance premiums, diversification of supplies, and the sense of safety among people on the water, rather than in the joint statements.

What Still Needs Fixing

The Real gaps remain. The pace of defence-industry collaboration is too slow relative to the severity of the threat that analysts warn about. To be considered otherwise, a decade of successive years of negotiations over the purchase of the ShinMaywa US-2 amphibious aeroplane, which went nowhere, should be viewed as a caution that, even in times of political goodwill, it can still be halted at the doorstep. Investment promises usually outpace fulfilment; the 10 trillion objective is just an objective, and the lesser 2022-2026, 5 trillion objective took years even to come close to. India's ties with Russia, trade tensions with Washington, and a balancing act with China are achingly out of sync with Japan's more stable relations. Coordinating the pillars of cooperation between two huge bureaucracies is both an administrative challenge and a political one.

The Real Test is still ahead

India and Japan are not forming a conventional alliance; they are creating something a bit more fungible: collective advantages, autonomous positions, close financial ties, and a shared interest in a free, open, rule-based Indo-Pacific. What was initially a reaction to China has now become more general: a protection against weak supply chains and chokepoint crises, such as the one in Hormuz, which just proved to be a crisis which, even at the end of August 2026, has been lingering for over five months with no end in sight. The actual question is whether this insurance policy would

ever be put to the test and whether it could quickly prevent a crisis in the Strait of Malacca or the South China Sea, given that it failed to prevent the crisis in the Gulf. The narrowing of the gap between goal and capability in the military industry, implementation, and India's freedom to make decisions about the contested ocean will either transform India and Japan into a feasible pillar of Indo-Pacific stability or into a couple of well-intentioned allies gazing at the water. India and Japan can work together to strengthen the legitimacy and implementation of international maritime law. Both could contribute to a broad and regionally driven maritime order through greater legal and institutional cooperation.



Dr. Sridhar Krishnaswami

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Is there turbulence in the Indo-Pacific?

The Indo-Pacific is one broad area that has assumed tremendous political, economic and strategic significance. Yesterday we observed the 81st anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima; and tomorrow we will remember Nagasaki. Between Yesterday and the Day After Tomorrow, there will be talk and speeches of the terrible consequences of atomic weapons with a sober reminder that if within three days Japan had tragically lost some 200,000 souls, today's power of nuclear weapons is such that in a single clip some two million lives could be lost. At one time policy makers, civilian and military, used to only whisper about nuclear weapons. That is not the case these days when there is open and loud talk of using theatrical and tactical nuclear weapons making us wonder if somehow, we have all drifted from rational actors to those who have lost or close to losing their rationality.

In the immediate context many policy makers in the region must have been worried, if not rattled, by the war in the Middle East which till this day no one is clear as to why it all began. Seriously speaking, the world was woken up from slumber when missiles and bombs started raining on Iran on February 28; but the real jolt came when Iran shut the Strait of Hormuz - a

narrow strip of waterway accounting for some twenty percent of global energy passage affecting major and smaller powers, especially heavily energy-dependent nations like India and Japan.

The Indo-Pacific is still reeling over the uncertainty in the Hormuz; and much more is in store. But look at it in a larger context: the region is home to about 50 countries drawn together from the Indian and Pacific Oceans more as a result of geo-political and strategic considerations than any set, accepted, universal definition. It has nations from South, South East, East Asia, Oceania, Islands and regions of the two Oceans, and perhaps more to come. More than 50 per cent of the global population is accounted by the Indo-Pacific; India and China together account for close to 3 billion people; India, China and Japan are heavily dependent on the Indo-Pacific Sea lanes for trade and energy supplies; two-thirds of container trade passes through this area.

Look at the Indo-Pacific in the larger perspective of other chokepoints that straddle the waterways. For example, the Strait of Malacca is said to facilitate nearly US\$ 5 Trillion in commerce annually; the South China Seas handles about US\$ 4 Trillion in annual global trade; and some forty percent of global crude oil shipments pass through the sea lanes of the Indian Ocean. In all, the Indo-Pacific, with all its critical maritime hubs and choke-holds, is said to account for 80 percent of global trade by volume and 70 percent by value.

If this by itself is not scary enough, look at the security envelope: a risky blend of nuclear distribution and unchecked arms control. There are several nuclear-armed nations in this area; the United States is a massive military power that has the ability to flex its muscles in several areas at one time; Russia by no means is a forgotten entity. Russia has a frightening armoury, including the largest inventory of nuclear weapons; China is rapidly modernizing its armed forces including its nuclear arsenal; North Korea is a nation that is propelling its nuclear capacities despite global penalties; and there is the danger of territorial struggle among nuclear states: India and Pakistan.

There is a reason why the word “turbulence” is used in looking at the Indo-Pacific: just look at the tremendous changes taking place in East Asia. We have Japan that is trying to re-work its foreign and defence policies keeping in mind the challenges it is facing; a South Korea that suddenly finds that

peaceful re-unification is no longer on the table with a North Korea that keeps fine tuning its nuclear arsenals including long and longer-range ballistic missiles; China's new found belligerence over the Senkakus and a Japan-United States alliance that is fraught with uncertainties. Taiwan too is perhaps wondering if it is a matter of time to be thrown under the bus by Washington. Economically, Japan finds itself strapped having to face stiff competition from South Korea, Taiwan and China with each one of these countries having an agenda of their own in the region and beyond.

This is not to forget India in the Indo-Pacific: New Delhi has had to deal with China over its String of Pearls strategy; the inroads of Beijing in Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Indian Ocean States; Beijing's continuous and ever-growing nexus with Pakistan; the persisting border dispute with China. South Asia is a highly troubled region, not just on account of military rivalries and internal discontent. The region has at least one nearly failed state - Pakistan - constantly harping on the "loose" talk of use of nuclear weapons; but of late trying to bounce back into international and diplomatic relevance thanks to the largesse of the Trump administration.

The notoriety list in East Asia is long, starting with the regime of Kim Jong Un of North Korea competing vigorously with Pakistan in the irrational talk of the use of nuclear weapons. The deliberate militarization of the South China Seas by China has brought forth strong responses from countries like Vietnam and the Philippines, two of the six claimants to the chain. India is drawn to the area not only for the rights of freedom to navigate. It also has commercial prospects through association with Vietnam.

The bottom line is one of freedom of navigation and protection of vital sea lanes through which much of oil passes through. What is happening in the Indo-Pacific is a source of interest and concern to India, a democracy in a region that is laced with dictatorships, dangerous and irrational ones at that. Russia is trying to bounce back and reclaim its status in the international system as evidenced in the recent military invasion of the Ukraine; and the United States has an undefined role as yet in the Asia Pacific.

At times it appears as if the Indo-Pacific has come a full circle in terms of perceptions. During the Cold War the Japanese were worried that they were going to be dragged into the anti-communist crusades of the United States.

Due to the rising belligerence of China, the United States is now worried that it may be drawn into the problems of Japan. As a country that is facing an economic slowdown for many years, Japan will also be confronted or taunted with getting a “free ride” on defence spending - a faulty perception that dates back to the 1970s and 1980s! But Japan’s troubles with its neighbours have had an unintended effect, as well that has come to worry many, in the region: pushing Japan to a breaking point that it will be forced to think of the unthinkable, or move towards the pursuit of nuclear weapons.

Fortunately for India, it was a good run of four years with a Republican administration under President Donald Trump starting in 2017. It was seen as extremely supportive of New Delhi’s security and strategic compulsions. Bilateral relations were steady under President Trump as it has been over the last two decades or so, with only occasional brushes on the human rights front. But relations in Trump Two starting 2025, have been quite bumpy, especially on the economic front although the two sides do put on a face of normality. The tariff war that India was caught on soon extended to the sanctions front, having to pay a penalty for supposedly subsidizing President Vladimir Putin’s Ukraine war. India and China are in the same bracket, but China has always been in a better position because of its ability to fight back with counter-tariffs and threatening to or simply shutting off the rare minerals pipeline.

Without getting distracted on tariffs and sanctions and staying with “turbulence”, the ongoing war in the Middle East has an important lesson for the Indo-Pacific over and beyond closing waterways: it does not require a major or a super power with fancy missiles and aircraft to stir things up. A minor power can make things equally difficult by accessing relatively cheaper drones and mines to make sea passage difficult and expensive.

The Indo-Pacific is just not all about waterways, Straits and canals. It plays host to some of the difficult land masses of South, South East and East Asia where nations like India and Japan are locked in bitter feuding with China and Russia. All this is not to forget the Korean Peninsula or the Taiwan Straits that continue to test skills of diplomacy in the midst of escalating rhetoric of war. The Spratlys is yet another flashpoint with some six nations in competing claims over a chain of islands, islets and coral reefs, at times

best defined by high and low tides but supposedly rich in energy resources that no one is sure of.

Finally, in a turbulent Indo-Pacific, what is the role of India and Japan, bilaterally and in the context of the QUAD, a four-nation grouping that includes the United States and Australia? The real challenge of navigating is not merely in cleverly managing the turbulence but in effectively addressing the challenges especially in an environment of a predominant power, the United States, showing signs of disinterest or in wanting to re-write the rules of the game. The regional projection of Washington will depend to some extent on the kind of relationships the administration in Washington seeks to establish with individual states in the area. Still Beijing sees the QUAD as an Asian NATO intended to contain China militarily.

There was a time when the United States was a dominant actor in the area, politically and strategically; and even today, it is perhaps the only power that has the extent and reach, and in more than one theatre at a time. But not many are convinced that Washington wishes to remain engaged in an area that is politically too far away from Capitol Hill and at times when old agreements seem easy to discard. For more than seven decades it was a foregone conclusion that if China is found messing in the Taiwan Straits, there would be a price to pay. But today Washington goes about as if this is routine business for Beijing and Taipei to sort out; and that arms sales to Taiwan could be held up as a bargaining chip with China effectively giving the Communist giant a veto power, all of which were unheard of a few years ago.

The Indo-Pacific is at an age when yesteryear adages of France, America or China sneezing and Europe, Asia or the world catching a cold are over. Today, even the major powers are waking up and seeing their multi million-dollar missiles and anti-missile shields being put to test by Drones that cost a fraction. Iran and Ukraine have perhaps given United States, Russia and others a lot to think about in their use of Drones in modern military warfare. At the time of the Cold war between the United States and the then Soviet Union, it was all about Satellites, Killer Satellites and Hunter-Killer Satellites. Today the buzz word is Drone and anti-Drone warfare.



Stanly Johnny

International Affairs Editor,
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Indo-Pacific : Geo Political & Geo Economic Center of Gravity

The Indo-Pacific has become the world's geopolitical and geoeconomic centre of gravity. It is home to more than half of the world's population, produces over 60% of global GDP, and carries the bulk of global maritime trade. What happens in these waters no longer stays in the Indo-Pacific. It affects energy markets, supply chains, technology, trade and global security.

Yet the region today is entering a period of unprecedented turbulence

Three developments, in my view, will shape the future of the Indo-Pacific over the coming decade: China's rise and its growing military assertiveness; the increasing unpredictability of the United States; and the cooperation and partnership between middle powers such as India and Japan.

China's Rise

For nearly four decades, China's rise was primarily an economic story. It became the world's factory, integrated itself into global markets and lifted hundreds of millions of people out of poverty.

Today, China is no longer merely an economic power. It is also a military power with global ambitions. The People's Liberation Army has built the world's largest navy by the number of ships. China has expanded its missile capabilities, modernised its air force, invested heavily in cyber warfare, AI and space tech, and developed the ability to project power far beyond its coastline.

This military expansion is accompanied by a much more assertive foreign policy

One can see it in the South China Sea, where Beijing has transformed reefs into military bases and seeks to reinforce expansive maritime claims. In the East China Sea, there is a simmering dispute over the Senkaku Islands. In the Taiwan Strait, military exercises have become larger, more frequent and more sophisticated. In the Indian Ocean, China's naval deployments have steadily increased, supported by a growing network of ports and logistics facilities stretching from the South China Sea to the Arabian Sea.

For India, the challenge is even more direct as it shares a long unsettled Himalayan border with China. The Galwan clash of 2020 demonstrated that military confrontation between two nuclear powers is no longer unthinkable.

For Japan, China's military modernisation creates a different but equally serious challenge. Chinese naval and coast guard vessels regularly operate around the Senkaku Islands. Any crisis over Taiwan would have immediate consequences for Japan's security and economy.

The point is not that war is inevitable. The point is that deterrence, preparedness and strategic coordination have become far more important than they were even 10 years ago. China's rise is a structural reality.

Uncertainty surrounding the U.S.

For decades, the United States served as the principal security provider in the Indo-Pacific. Its alliances with Japan, South Korea and Australia created stability, while its naval presence guaranteed freedom of navigation and its markets drove economic growth.

That role is changing as American policy has become increasingly unpredictable. Trade tariffs have increasingly become instruments of foreign policy, affecting rivals and allies alike. The recent crisis in West Asia also demonstrated how quickly American strategic attention can move away from Asia when another theatre demands urgent military and diplomatic resources.

This is an important lesson for Indo-Pacific countries. The challenge is not simply whether the United States remains powerful. The challenge is whether regional countries can build long-term strategies around assumptions about American policy. That the U.S. could do little when Iran bombarded American allies in the Persian Gulf would deepen the insecurity of American allies elsewhere including in East Asia. This uncertainty is encouraging many countries to diversify their partnerships. That is one reason why defence cooperation among middle powers has accelerated.

Why India and Japan matter

If Asia is becoming more competitive and the global order more uncertain, what should countries like India and Japan do?

The answer is not confrontation. Nor is it dependence. The answer is partnership. India and Japan are natural strategic partners. They support a free, open and rules-based Indo-Pacific. They share concerns about maritime security. Neither seeks regional domination. Both believe that economic growth and strategic stability reinforce one another.

Japan is one of India's largest development partners. Japanese investment has transformed infrastructure across India - from metro systems to industrial corridors and the Mumbai-Ahmedabad high-speed rail project. Defence cooperation has expanded steadily and the two countries conduct regular military exercises, including the Malabar naval exercise.

But this partnership should become much more ambitious. India and Japan should build trusted manufacturing ecosystems in semiconductors, electronics, batteries and advanced materials. They should also build resilient supply chains. The third area is technology. Artificial intelligence, quantum computing, cyber security and critical minerals will determine future economic competitiveness. India's digital capabilities and Japan's technological strengths complement one another.

And the fourth is maritime security. The Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific are increasingly connected strategic theatres. Joint naval exercises, intelligence sharing and maritime domain awareness should continue to deepen.

G-minus-two

This brings me to what I call a 'G-minus-two' approach. For decades, we have become accustomed to thinking in terms of the G7, the G20 or great-power competition between the United States and China.

Working together, India and Japan can build resilient supply chains, finance infrastructure, develop emerging technologies, improve maritime security and support a stable regional balance. That model can then expand to include Australia, ASEAN partners, Europe and others whenever interests converge. The future of the Indo-Pacific will not be decided by one superpower alone. It will be shaped by networks of capable countries working together.

Summing-up :



Dr. Maithili Sane,

Assistant Professor,

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More than five centuries ago, when Ferdinand Magellan encountered a seemingly tranquil ocean after navigating a treacherous Strait, he named it the Mar Pacífico - the “Peaceful Ocean.” History and today’s discussion, however, reminds us that the Pacific has rarely lived up to its name. Today, it is perhaps the most strategically contested maritime space in the world. The region is witnessing intensifying geopolitical rivalries, supply chain realignments, emerging technologies, climate challenges, and evolving security partnerships.

Our gathering today is made even more significant by the date. We meet on 7th August, between two of the most solemn anniversaries in modern history - the atomic bombings of Hiroshima on 6th August and, Nagasaki on 9th August 1945. These anniversaries remind us of the unimaginable human cost of conflict and the enduring responsibility of nations to preserve peace through dialogue, diplomacy, and international cooperation.

Several important themes have emerged from today’s discussion

First, India and Japan have moved well beyond a traditional bilateral relationship. The partnership has evolved from development cooperation into a broader geo-economic and strategic partnership, encompassing trade, technology, infrastructure, supply chains and regional security.

Second, economic resilience is now an essential component of national security. Diversifying supply chains, protecting critical technologies, strengthening infrastructure and building trusted economic partnerships are increasingly central to the India–Japan relationship.

Third, the Indo-Pacific must be viewed not merely as a space of strategic competition, but also as a region of immense opportunity. With some of the

world's fastest-growing economies, critical sea lanes and a young population, maintaining an open, stable and rules-based Indo-Pacific is a shared responsibility.

Two important and relatively underexplored dimensions of the India–Japan partnership would have to be drawn attention to:

The first is human mobility and the demographic challenge. Japan's ageing population and labour shortages have led it to gradually expand opportunities for foreign workers. Its Specified Skilled Worker Program is an example. India, with its large pool of young and educated people, is naturally positioned to contribute. Yet, language barriers, cultural differences, workplace expectations and perceptions of work ethics have limited this potential.

This is where Northeast India presents a particularly promising opportunity. Its young and increasingly educated population, growing interest in Japanese language and culture, and geographical relevance to the Act East Policy provide a strong foundation for deeper engagement with Japan. However, such programmes should go beyond employment placement. They must include language proficiency, cultural orientation, labour-rights awareness, financial literacy and social support.

If managed responsibly, this partnership can benefit both sides. Indian workers can gain international experience, technical skills and exposure to Japanese production systems, while returning workers can contribute these skills to manufacturing, healthcare, hospitality and logistics in Northeast India. Human mobility, therefore, should become as central to Act East as infrastructure, connectivity and trade.

The second dimension is Technology and Artificial Intelligence. India and Japan are uniquely positioned to collaborate in developing trusted, safe and human-centric AI by combining Japan's strengths in robotics, advanced manufacturing, semiconductors and precision engineering with India's digital public infrastructure, software capabilities and growing AI talent.

The India–Japan Digital Partnership 2.0 and the subsequent cooperation on Artificial Intelligence demonstrate the growing importance of AI within the

bilateral relationship. Collaboration in AI, semiconductors, digital infrastructure, talent development and responsible technology governance can have applications ranging from healthcare and smart manufacturing to disaster management, cybersecurity and e-governance.

More importantly, India and Japan have an opportunity not merely to develop technologies, but to shape the global conversation on how emerging technologies should be governed responsibly.

As students and scholars of international relations, we should view today's discussion not as the conclusion of a conversation but as the beginning of many more questions. How can regional institutions remain effective in an increasingly fragmented world? How can technological advancement be balanced with ethical responsibility? And how can middle powers like India and Japan contribute to a more stable and equitable international order? These are questions that deserve our continued research, debate, and reflection.

Today's discussion also reminded us that no partnership is without challenges. Strategic autonomy, domestic priorities, changing global power equations, economic uncertainties, and regional conflicts all require continuous dialogue and careful diplomacy. The strength of the India–Japan relationship lies precisely in its ability to adapt to changing realities while remaining anchored in mutual trust. In times of turbulence, nations are tested not only by the challenges they face but by the partnerships they build.
