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Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific": What Role for India?

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Acronyms

AAGC	Asia-Africa Growth Corridor
ACSA	Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement
ADB	Asia Development Bank
AEP	Act East Policy
AIIB	Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank
AOIP	ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASEM	Asia-Europe Meeting
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CEPA	Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement
COC	Code of Conduct
CPEC	China-Pakistan Economic Corridor
CTBT	Comprehensive Nuclear-test-Ban Treaty
DPJ	Democratic Party of Japan
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea)
EAS	East Asia Summit
ECS	East China Sea
EEZ(s)	Exclusive Economic Zone(s)
FDI (s)	Foreign Direct Investment(s)
FOIP	Free and Open Indo-Pacific
FONOP(s)	Freedom of Navigation Operation(s)
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
ICB	International Cooperation Bureau
INA	Indian National Army
IONS	Indian Ocean Naval Symposium
IOR	Indian Ocean Region
IORA	Indian Ocean Rim Association
IP	Indo-Pacific
IPOI	Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative
IPR	Indo-Pacific Region
JASDF	Japan Air Self-Defense Force

JGSDF	Japan Ground Self-Defense Force
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
JIMEX	Japan-India Maritime Exercise
JMSDF	Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force
JSDF	Japan Self-Defense Force
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party
LEP	Look East Policy
MEA	Ministry of External Affairs (India)
MOFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan)
MSR	Maritime Silk Route
MSS	Maritime Security Strategy
NDPG	National Defence Program Guidelines
NER	North Eastern Region (India)
NSS	National Security Strategy
ODA	Official Development Assistance
ODI	Outward Direct Investment
PASSEX	Naval Passing Exercise
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PM	Prime Minister
QUAD	Quadrilateral Security Dialogue
RCEP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
RCST	Regional Security Complex Theory
ROK	Republic of Korea (South Korea)
RSC(s)	Regional Security Complex(es)
SAGAR	Security and Growth for All in the Region
SCS	South China Sea
SLOC(s)	Sea Lines of Communication(s)
SOE(e)	State-Owned Enterprise(s)
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

Abstract

Il presente elaborato si propone di analizzare le relazioni tra il Giappone e la Repubblica dell'India (India) nel contesto dell'“Indo-Pacifico,” un nuovo costruito geopolitico frutto di una serie di rapporti economici, politici e strategici nella regione che ne hanno favorito l'emergenza. Di conseguenza, questa analisi si basa sulla “teoria dei complessi di sicurezza regionali” (TCSR) inizialmente elaborata dal politologo Barry Buzan nel 1983. Questa teoria è particolarmente adeguata a descrivere l'architettura di sicurezza della regione asiatica poiché incorpora il livello di analisi “regionale” ai livelli “nazionale” e “globale”, da sempre protagonisti degli studi delle tradizionali teorie di sicurezza regionali.

La necessità di elaborare un nuovo approccio per comprendere l'evoluzione dei rapporti di sicurezza tra gli stati asiatici è nata dalla crescente regionalizzazione del sistema internazionale del periodo post-Guerra Fredda e susseguente diminuzione dei livelli di globalizzazione nella regione (Buzan, Wæver e de Wilde 1998). Tale cambiamento è stato innescato dalle dinamiche intrinseche alla fine della Guerra Fredda, quali l'affievolimento delle rivalità militari, il passaggio da un sistema mondiale bipolare a internazionale, l'acuirsi dei processi di globalizzazione e la propagazione dell'economia di mercato (Buzan, Wæver e de Wilde 1998). A loro volta, queste dinamiche hanno portato alla luce nuove minacce provenienti da settori non-tradizionali (politico e militare), quali, ad esempio, i settori economico, sociale, e ambientale.

All'interno di questi settori, la percezione del pericolo percorre più velocemente distanze brevi rispetto a distanze lunghe e, di conseguenza, gli stati limitrofi tendono a securitizzare i loro vicini (Buzan e Wæver 2003). Per questo motivo, i processi di securitizzazione e desecuritizzazione sono strettamente connessi tra loro e le questioni di sicurezza non possono essere affrontate separatamente (Buzan 2012). Nel campo della sicurezza internazionale, tre sono le prospettive teoriche più influenti per l'analisi del sistema internazionale: neorealismo, globalismo e regionalismo. Il regionalismo è naturalmente l'approccio prediletto dalla teoria dei sistemi di sicurezza regionali sebbene contenga anche elementi provenienti dalle teorie neorealista e globalista.

Tuttavia, diversamente dal neorealismo e il globalismo, il regionalismo affronta la distribuzione del potere e i rapporti amichevoli ed ostili degli stati come variabili indipendenti poiché i processi di securitizzazione sono influenzati da molteplici fattori (Buzan et. al. 2003). Pertanto, secondo Barry Buzan, la TCSR rinnega la concezione generale circa l'unicità delle dinamiche di sicurezza dell'Asia e si focalizza sull'interazione di tali dinamiche a livello nazionale e globale, esplicitamente visibile al livello regionale (2003). L'idea alla base della TCSR risiede nell'interdipendenza dei rapporti di sicurezza modellati in "complessi di sicurezza regionali" (Buzan et. al. 2003).

Inoltre, la TCSR è strettamente collegata alla teoria dell'equilibrio di potere e alla teoria della securitizzazione. Il livello di analisi "regionale" non è esente dalle dinamiche dell'equilibrio di potere poiché, secondo la TCSR, nei complessi di sicurezza regionali le potenze emergenti (come la Cina) o le coalizioni regionali (come il QUAD) costituiscono le principali fonti di problemi, dato che alte potenzialità economiche e militari indicano il livello di potere di uno stato (Paul, Wirtz e Fortmann 2004). Comportamenti di *balancing* regionale vengono adottati con lo scopo di generare una distribuzione equa di potere o per mantenere l'equilibrio di potere in una regione.

Il balancing può essere adottato nei confronti di superpotenze (di solito, potenze esterne a un complesso di sicurezza regionale) o di stati regionali che perseguono politiche revisionistiche, come nel caso della Cina. Potenze revisioniste sono particolarmente percepite come una minaccia sia dai poteri minori che dai grandi poteri della regione poiché con le loro azioni aspirano a cambiare l'equilibrio di potere, solitamente in loro favore. Inoltre, gli stati possono anche allinearsi alle posizioni di stati emergenti adottando quindi un comportamento *bandwagoning* oppure una strategia *hedging* nel caso in cui alternino atteggiamenti cooperativi ad atteggiamenti conflittuali.

La rilevanza dei processi di (de)securitizzazione nella teoria nei complessi di sicurezza regionali deriva dalla teoria della securitizzazione, termine coniato dal politologo Ole Wæver nel 1993, che si fonda sulla politica delle minacce esistenziali. Nel momento in cui un attore (ad esempio, il governo) percepisce un pericolo in quanto minaccia alla sopravvivenza di un oggetto di riferimento (ad esempio, lo stato), esso può securitizzare tale minaccia per cercare legittimazione da parte di un pubblico (ad esempio, la

popolazione) nell'adottare misure straordinarie in modo da surclassare i procedimenti ordinari (Buzan, et. al. 1998). La chiave per un efficace processo di securitizzazione (speech act process) risiede nel creare un senso di urgenza e far riconoscere a un pubblico (consensualmente o forzosamente) la pericolosità di una certa problematica (Buzan, et. al. 1998).

Questi principi della teoria dei complessi di sicurezza regionali saranno dettagliatamente illustrati nel capitolo 1 di questo elaborato. Oltre a questa parte descrittiva, la TCSR include anche una componente predittiva, particolarmente utile nel determinare gli scenari futuri di un dato complesso di sicurezza regionale. Tale trattazione ha sostanzialmente valore introduttivo e sarà fondamentale nel cogliere le dinamiche di sicurezza che stanno ritrasformando la mappa della regione asiatico-pacifica in un complesso di sicurezza più esteso, quale l'Indo-Pacifico, e i rapporti tra il Giappone e l'India nell'ambito di questo nuovo costruito.

Infatti, in quanto superpotenza in ascesa, la Cina è particolarmente percepita come una "minaccia" allo *status quo* della regione e la ridenominazione di "Asia-Pacifico" in "Indo-Pacifico" è generalmente ritenuta come un'iniziativa statunitense mirata a controbilanciare Pechino. Di conseguenza, la seconda parte di questo elaborato presenterà innanzitutto i fattori che hanno portato alla formazione di una super-regione indo-pacifica, in particolare l'ascesa economica della Cina e dell'India; la percezione del relativo declino della presenza statunitense in Asia; l'emergenza di un balancing contro la Cina in risposta all'atteggiamento assertivo di Pechino nella regione, in particolare, nel Mar Cinese Meridionale; e l'Indo-Pacifico come il centro economico più importante del XXI secolo.

Successivamente, particolare attenzione verrà rivolta nell'identificare le dinamiche a livello globale, regionale e nazionale che hanno portato il Giappone a considerare l'India come un partner strategico indispensabile. Inoltre, questo capitolo intende determinare se l'"Indo-Pacifico" costituisca in effetti un complesso di sicurezza regionale, considerando che i vari approcci adottati dagli stati regionali hanno dato vita a varie forme di regionalismo indo-pacifico, in concerto con il futuro scenario della regione. Le

nozioni esposte in queste prime due parti assisteranno quest'analisi nel valutare come l'Indo-Pacifico ha influenzato le politiche estere del Giappone e dell'India.

Di fatto, la Visione del Giappone per un “Indo-Pacifico Libero e Aperto” (FOIP) è considerata come l'idea organizzativa più influente della politica estera contemporanea giapponese promossa dalla seconda Amministrazione Abe nel 2016. FOIP è generalmente riconosciuta come la risposta diplomatica del Giappone ai cambiamenti dei rapporti di sicurezza nella regione e al riavvicinamento strategico con l'India. Tuttavia, poiché la FOIP è considerata come un concetto “ambiguo” e in costante evoluzione, questa terza parte (i) individuerà la natura e gli obiettivi che la FOIP si propone di raggiungere; (ii) e se faccia parte della strategia di sicurezza nazionale giapponese.

Considerando che la crescente influenza della Cina è frequentemente ritenuta come un fattore rilevante del *rapprochement* strategico tra Giappone ed India, questo elaborato si propone di determinare in che misura questa valutazione è accurata. A tal fine, verranno identificate sinergie tra la FOIP del Giappone e la “Act East Policy” dell'India, la strategia regionale elaborata dal primo ministro indiano in carica Narendra Modi per migliorare la connettività e i rapporti tra l'India e l'Asia Orientale.

Attingendo da ricerche correnti, discorsi e comunicazioni politiche, e documenti ufficiali – e implementando la teoria dei complessi di sicurezza regionali illustrata nella prima parte– questa terza parte chiarirà le strategie diplomatiche adottate dal Giappone e dall'India nei confronti della Cina. Il periodo della seconda Amministrazione Abe (2012-2020) sarà soprattutto preso in esame, alla luce del suo personale investimento nel concetto stesso di “Indo-Pacifico” e della sua amicizia con Modi, sebbene questa analisi includa anche il periodo precedente (2006-2011).

Introduction

The security architecture in Asia is rapidly evolving. A confluence of economic and strategic interactions is reshaping the map of Asia and is fabricating a new “regional security complex.” As the “Asia-Pacific” construct is losing weight to the “Indo-Pacific”, new strategic challenges are emerging for key stakeholders in the region. Most notably, the gravity of economic power shifting from West to East has driven the rise of China and India as economic powerhouses and has intensified economic interdependence. As a rising superpower, China’s regional endeavours have particularly added to the perception of Beijing as a “revisionist” state and a “threat” to the *status quo* in the region. Therefore, the re-labelling of the “Asia-Pacific” into “Indo-Pacific” has been generally understood as an initiative to counterbalance the rise of China.

Yet, the “Indo-Pacific” concept encapsulates a broader power narrative. Originally hailing from former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe, the Indo-Pacific geopolitical construct attributes to India a prominent role, which is being increasingly recognised also by non-regional stakeholders. Against this backdrop, two questions have guided my analysis: How has the emergence of this Asian supercomplex influenced Japanese contemporary foreign policy? Why has Japan identified India as a pivotal player in its Indo-Pacific approach?

To understand in depth the shifting security dynamics of the Indo-Pacific and their impact on Japan’s strategic thinking, chapter 1 will provide with a theoretical framework to analyse the security architecture in Asia based upon the *regional security complex theory* (RSCT), elaborated by political scientist Barry Buzan between the 1980s and early 2000s. As the RSCT is based upon both the *securitization theory* and the *theory of the balance of power*, a brief explanation of these two theoretical frameworks will also be outlined. In fact, both theories will assist this analysis in determining the reasons why Japan has identified India as a trustworthy strategic partner as well as in establishing their choice of tactics vis-à-vis regional challenges, and China, in particular.

Consequently, chapter 2 will analyse the geopolitical history of Asia based upon the RSCT. The Cold War and post-Cold War periods will be concisely outlined as this chapter

will ponder on the rise of the contested “Indo-Pacific” concept to geopolitical discourses, along with the formation of an Asian supercomplex. Ultimately, this chapter seeks to clarify whether the Indo-Pacific is in fact a “regional security complex” in spite of differing Indo-Pacific narratives forging distinct Indo-Pacific regionalisms. Chapter 3 will then assess the influence of the Indo-Pacific in Japanese foreign policy, which produced Japan’s Vision for a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” (FOIP) and positioned cooperation with India at the core. Arguably, the FOIP is the most important organising idea of Japan’s contemporary foreign policy –originating from the Abe Administration.

Yet, the FOIP is also an ambiguous concept in constant evolution. As such, it is important to firstly determine what the nature and objectives of the FOIP are and whether it is part of Japan’s National Security Strategy. Secondly, this chapter will analyse how Japan’s India diplomacy under Abe has been influenced by China. As the China factor is generally considered as an important driver of Japan-India relations, this chapter additionally aims to determine to what degree this is in fact accurate, along with identifying the other variables that prompted the Japan-India strategic rapprochement. Drawing on existing scholarship, policy speeches and official documents, this section will identify the synergies between Japan’s Vision for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific and India’s Act East Policy as well as their changing diplomatic strategies.

The scope of this analysis is the period between the first Abe Administration (2006-2007) and the retirement of Abe from political life (2020), which is divided into three timeframes, each depicting ground-breaking key events:

1. Pre-2006: this period includes Japan’s “discovery” of India as a valuable strategic partner –which led to the establishment of the Japan-India strategic partnership –as well as the rise of China’s regional assertiveness
2. 2007-2015: this period is characterized by Japan’s foreign policy shift towards a values-based diplomacy and rising interest towards India as a like-minded partner; difficult Sino-Japanese and Indo-Chinese relations largely attributed to conflicts over the contested Senkaku/Diaoyu islands and the India-China border dispute; rapidly advancing Japan-India defence cooperation; and China’s

increasing influence through the full-fledged implementation of its Belt and Road Initiative

3. 2016-2020: this period witnessed the evolution of the FOIP from a “strategy” to a “vision” as well as the opening of Japan towards cooperation with China; India’s unveiling of its own Indo-Pacific approach; rapid diversification of Japan-India strategic cooperation within the Indo-Pacific framework influenced by key international events, such as the victory of Donald Trump in the U.S. presidential election and subsequent protectionism prompted by his “America first” policy; the amplifying of the U.S.-China rivalry in the South China Sea and trade war; the North Korean nuclear détente; the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chapter 1 - Theory and Methodology

Introduction: A Regional Approach to Global Security

Asian security architecture is best understood through the lenses of the regional security complex theory (RSCT) which is attributed to political scientist Barry Buzan, one of the initiators of the Copenhagen School of political thought. Buzan first formulated the RSCT in his 1983 book titled *People, States and Fear*. He then updated his theory over the years in light of the increasing regionalization of the post-Cold War international system and subsequent diminishing levels of globalisation. In 2003, Buzan co-authored the book *Regions and Power: The Structure of International Security* with his colleague and political scientist Ole Wæver to analyse regional security based upon a securitization approach. Thus, the RSCT is strictly linked to the *securitization theory*.

Indeed, a new, multi-sectoral framework for security studies was unveiled in 1998 by Buzan, Wæver and Jaap de Wilde in response to the expanding agenda of non-military security issues. The elaboration of a new approach, to explain the formation of new trends of security relations, was prompted by the dynamics intrinsic to the end of the Cold War such as the weakening of military rivalries, the shift from a bipolar to a unipolar international world system, the intensification of globalisation, and propagation of the market economy (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998).

This brought to the forefront new threats arising from non-political sectors, which traditional security complex theories disregarded as they primarily identify security exclusively with the military and political sectors (Buzan, et. al 1998). Within these sectors, threats travel more easily over short distances rather than long ones, thereby constituting primary cause of concern for units belonging to the same regional complex, such as neighbouring states (Buzan 2003). As a result, security interdependence, processes of securitization and desecuritization are strictly intertwined with one another and security issues cannot be tackled separately (Buzan 2012).

In the field of international security, three theoretical perspectives are most influential when analysing the dynamics of the post-Cold War international structure: *neorealism*, *globalism*, and *regionalism*. The approach chosen for this analysis of Japan-India strategic relations is regionalism since it is the theoretical approach which the regional security complex theory is built upon. However, regionalism contains elements of both neorealism and globalism.

The neorealist theory was coined by Kenneth Waltz in 1979 and is a *state-centric* theory which considers power polarity as the most important aspect of post-Cold War international relations, whether be it unipolar or multipolar (Waltz 1979). In fact, neorealism acknowledges the primary role played by global level dynamics and examines the ways in which the distribution of capabilities across nations affect balancing behaviours (Waltz 1979). Further, neorealism is built around a *two-system-level* security structure –systems and units– with a tendency to prioritize the system level (Buzan, et. al. 1998). The neorealist perspective depicts international politics as a competitive system where balances of power are continuously disrupted and reformed (Waltz 1979).

Conversely, the globalist theory is rooted in cultural, transnational, and political economy approaches and focuses on the *detrterritorialization* propelled by globalization, thereby rejecting a state-centric approach to international politics (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998). Global markets, transnational corporations, governmental and non-governmental organizations are understood to be the driving forces of the international structure, within which states and governments are merely bystanders (Clark 1998). Nevertheless, globalisation is thought to incentivize states to pursue more cooperative security policies, especially at the regional level (Guehenno 1998; Cha 2000). Further, states can securitize globalization if perceived as an existential threat, *inter alia*, to their cultures, languages, or identities (Buzan, et. al 2003).

Indeed, non-liberal perspectives on globalisation focus on securitizing threats arising from non-military areas of security, such as the unequal relation between the “centre” of the world and its “periphery” (Buzan and Wæver 2003). By contrast, during the 1990s, the globalist approach identified threats in the political-military sectors (Buzan, et. al.

2003). Processes of globalisation such as the intensification of transnational interactions can either strengthen the dependency of the periphery for the benefit of the centre, as in the case of Iraq, or aid in overcoming inequalities by triggering economic transformations as was the case for South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore (Buzan and Wæver 2003). Ultimately, the advent of globalisation propelled the re-emergence of geo-economic regionalism which further challenges the primacy of nation-states (Bouchard, Doyle, and Rumley 2019).

With the post-Cold War security architecture being reshaped by autonomous regional dynamics, both neorealism and globalism fail to comprehensively capture regional interactions either with unipolar, multipolar, or uni-multipolarity labels as well as globalisation (Buzan, et. al. 2003). As a result, this chapter aims to provide with a theoretical framework to analyse the security architecture in Asia, as well as Japan-India interactions, based upon the *regional security complex theory*.

1.1 Why adopt a regional approach to international security?

Differently from neorealism and globalism, regionalism emphasizes the regional-level structure, despite also giving importance to the global, interregional, and domestic levels (Buzan and Wæver 2003). According to Buzan's theory, it is the circumstances of time and place that determine which level is predominant and not the theory itself (Buzan, et al. 2003). Similarly, it is not the theoretical framework that establishes whether the world is state-centric or not, as such a decision is left to the course of history (Buzan, et al. 2003). In particular, the regionalist approach treats the distribution of power and patterns of amity and enmity as independent variables since processes of securitization are influenced by multiple factors (Buzan 2003:10-13).

Therefore, Buzan's theory of regional security complexes rejects the general view of the uniqueness of Asian security dynamics and focuses on the security interplay between the national and global levels, which is most apparent at the regional level (Buzan, et al. 2003). Nevertheless, regionalism also combines elements of neorealist, globalist and constructivist approaches. Indeed, according to Buzan, "on the materialist side [...] ideas

of bounded *territoriality* and distribution of power [...] are close to [...] neorealism” (Buzan 2003:145; italics added). Opposite views concern the concepts of multipolarity and unipolarity, which, from a regionalist perspective, are more problematic to determine; with regionalism’s advocacy for the decreasing relevance of the global level since the end of the Cold War; and with non-military and political security sectors (Buzan, et al. 2003).

On the globalist side, the securitization of global issues is what links the two theories. As many aspects of regionalisation –increased regional geo-economic cooperation, in particular– are understood to be a response to globalization (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998), regional-driven securitization processes are triggered by threats originating at the global level. In fact, many securitisation processes are generated by globalization, such as supply of weapons in the black market, terrorism in Europe, and the Americanization intrinsic to globalisation processes, which shape regional responses to globalization itself (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 2003).

However, the core idea of regionalism lies in the strong territoriality of dynamics which accommodates non-state actors, besides considering threats arising from deterritorialised sectors, such as the economic and environmental ones (Buzan, et. al. 2003). Ultimately, territoriality remains a defining feature of regional security dynamics. With both neorealism and globalism devaluing the role of the regional level in favour of the global level, the regionalist perspective fills in this gap, as “a regional approach gives [...] a much clearer empirical picture and a theoretically more coherent understanding of international security dynamics” (Buzan and Wæver 2003:30).

Finally, on the constructivist side, regionalism builds on the securitization theory, which is intrinsic to the regional security complex theory (Buzan, et. al. 2003). Before proceeding with outlining the securitization and RSCT theories, an explanation of the theory of the balance of power will firstly be drawn. As the most fundamental theory in the study of international relations, the theory of the balance of power will support this analysis in deciphering states’ choice of tactics and, particularly, Japan and India’s vis-à-vis China.

1.2 The Theory of the Balance of Power

The concept of the balance of power is as old as history (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2020). The term was probably introduced by the ancient Greeks but especially came into use towards the end of the 19th century.¹ The balance of power is based upon Kenneth Waltz's structuralist realism and denotes the posture and policy of a nation which seeks to match its power to another nation (or groups of nations) in order to protect itself from perceived threats (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2020). Despite being a relevant concept, the theory of the balance of power is still very debated in the academic world as many scholars disagree on its core propositions.

Nevertheless, there are two key concepts all scholars agree upon: state strategies and sustained hegemonies (Paul, Wirtz and Fortmann 2004). In fact, *balancing* is widely accepted as a state strategy, or foreign policy behaviour, and *balances of power* as "conditions of power equilibrium among key states" (Paul, Wirtz and Fortmann 2004:2). Balancing intends to prevent states from rising in power, and thereby aims at diminishing or matching states' capabilities (Paul, Wirtz and Fortmann 2004). When the balancing effort is indeed successful, a balance of power ensues. Traditional balancing behaviours concern the formation of alliances and/or military build-ups (Paul, et. al. 2004). However, balancing behaviours manifest themselves into three other forms: hard balancing, soft balancing, and asymmetric balancing (Paul, et. al. 2004).

Hard balancing is usually adopted by states engaging in interstate rivalries. These states focus in expanding their military capabilities, along with forming alliances and counter alliances to match their opponents. *Soft balancing* is linked to formal alliances and is frequent when states mature mutual security understandings to balance a potential threat. Soft balancing is also based upon the expansion of military capabilities, as well as cooperative exercises, or cooperation in regional institutions (Paul, Wirtz and Fortmann 2004). *Asymmetric balancing* refers to the containment of non-traditional security threats, such as terrorism.

¹ More specifically, between the end of the Napoleonic wars and World War I.

Interaction capacity and global polarity also influence balancing behaviours. In a bipolar regional security complex (RSC), states will likely balance through internal military build-up, while in multipolar distributions of power (an RSC dominated by more than three powers) balancing behaviours will manifest through counterbalancing alliances (Lobell 2014). Conversely, in a balanced multipolar distribution of power, states will likely *buck-pass*, or pass their balancing responsibility to other states (Lobell 2014). Debates concerning a unipolar distribution of power are either in favour of soft balancing or no balancing (Lobell 2014).

The regional level is not exempted from the balance of power dynamics. In RSCs, either rising powers (such as China) or regional coalitions (such as the QUAD) are the main source of problems as, according to the RSCT, top-notch economic and military capabilities within the region denote the rising rank of states (Buzan, et. al. 1998). However, this might lead to aggressive and predatory behaviours towards adjacent states. In riposte, coalitions of regional states can form balances in conjunction with external great powers, along with modernizing their military apparatus (Paul, et. al. 2004). Regional balancing behaviours are bolstered with the underlying aim of generating an equal distribution of power to maintain peace, or *balance of power* (Paul, et. al. 2004).

Balancing can occur either against superpowers (which are normally external powers) or against regional states pursuing revisionist policies (Paul, Wirtz and Fortmann 2004). Revisionist powers are especially perceived as threatening by local and regional states, as well as great powers, as their behaviour is expected to destabilize the region (Paul, et. al. 2004). The situation becomes more aggravating when revisionist states possess NBC warfare.² However, as argued by realist political scientist Stephen Walt, states tend to balance against states they perceive as potential threats and not necessarily against power (Paul, et. al. 2004). Walt calls this behaviour *bandwagoning* and describes it as an unnatural reaction of states, which align with rising powers to either protect themselves, or acquire security and economic gains (Paul, et. al. 2004).

² Weapons of mass destruction

However, balancing is widely recognized as more common than bandwagoning, as it is more logical to seek to preserve the status quo, rather than submit to a potential hegemonic power. Additionally, this theory considers peace to be more durable when great powers' influence represses the attempts of weaker states to initiate conflicts. Hence, the *status quo* is preserved through *relative power*, and not the balance of power (Paul, et. al. 2004). Nonetheless, failures in predicting balance of power situations foment the debates about the accuracy of this theory and are further complicated by the difficulty of measuring power itself.

Recently, the concept of *hedging* has also been gaining traction. Hedging refers to a national security or alignment strategy, which is characterized by both cooperative and confrontational elements (Ciorciari and Haacke 2019:367). Despite the blurred lines among hedging, bandwagoning and balancing, the concept of hedging was developed to capture the nuances that both balancing and bandwagoning failed to express. Primarily, hedging strategies aim to mitigate potential security-related risks and focus therefore on risk management (Ciorciari and Haacke 2019:370). Some scholars locate hedging between balancing and bandwagoning as a third strategic choice states might implement, especially secondary powers. This is best illustrated by Japan's security hedging vis-à-vis the risk of the reduction of U.S. commitment to East Asia (Koga 2018).

1.3 The Securitization Theory

The securitization theory was first coined by Ole Wæver in 1993 and mostly gained currency within the constructivist studies of international relations. It was unveiled with the book *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, in which security is described as “the move that takes politics beyond the established rules of the game and frames the issue either as a special kind of politics or as above politics” (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998:23). Thus, according to the securitization theory, an issue becomes *securitized* when “it is presented as posing an *existential threat* to a designated *referent object*” (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998:16), which is one of the units of security analysis.

As illustrated by Wæver, a referent object has *security legitimacy*, or a legitimate claim to survival, and varies depending on the sectors analysed (Buzan, et. al. 1998). For

instance, in the military sector, the referent object has traditionally been the state, while in the societal sector, the referent object is a collective identity functioning independently from the state, such as religion (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998:36). Wæver also distinguishes between *securitizing actors* and *functional actors*. Securitizing actors securitize issues on behalf of a collectivity such as political leaders, governments, or lobbyists, by claiming that an existential threat menaces the very existence of a referent object, most notably a nation, a community, or a system (Buzan, et. al. 1998).

By contrast, functional actors significantly influence the security dynamics of a sector but do not hold the power to move an issue above politics (Buzan, et. al. 1998). For instance, the functional actors in the military sector range from mercenary companies to the arms industry, while in the environmental sector, economic actors greatly affect the environment by exploiting the ecosystem but do not intend to securitize their activities (Buzan, et. al. 1998). Nonetheless, the securitization theory places emphasis on referent objects. Indeed, amid the “constellation of security concerns” (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998:43), threats are normally perceived to arise from other referent objects which, within the security complex “are the more [...] enduring [...] features on the security landscape” (Buzan, Wæver, de Wilde 1998:43).

To paraphrase Wæver’s words, the politics of existential threats is the core of security studies (Buzan, et. al. 1998). Since existential threats endanger the survival of individuals, when a security issue is accepted as such –consensually or coercively– by an audience, emergency measures can be legitimized (Buzan, et. al. 1998). In the absence of consensus, issues cannot be securitized, and the attempt of presenting a specific issue as an existential threat is simply a *securitizing move*, which, in the extreme case, could nonetheless lead to war (Buzan, et. al. 1998). The key to a successful process of securitization –or *speech act*– resides in constructing a shared understanding of an existential threat; creating a sense of urgency in the audience to convince it of the importance of the threat; and ultimately obtain the legitimate right to adopt exceptional measures to override the rules (Buzan, et. al. 1998).

Facilitating conditions also contribute to a successful speech act. Facilitating conditions are the conditions under which the speech act works (Austin 1975:34) and can be categorized into internal and external conditions. While internal conditions are mainly linguistic-grammatical, external conditions are contextual and social (Buzan, et. al. 1998). A successful speech act is therefore a combination of the two (Buzan, et. al. 1998). For instance, rivalry between states is usually a facilitating condition that leads to successful securitization. In fact, the articulation of a threat usually focuses on specific actors rather than on the series of events from which the threat originated, thereby amplifying the threat perception towards a specific strategic actor (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998).

In the case of recurring or persisting threats, securitization can be institutionalized as exemplified by the military sector of contemporary states, which develops along bureaucracies and military establishments (Buzan, et. al. 1998). Wæver also emphasises the fact that securitization should not be exposed to *politicization*, which indicates that an issue is “open, a matter of choice [...] something that it is decided upon” (Buzan, Wæver, de Wilde 1998:29) and fall therefore within political jurisdiction. By contrast, securitized issues require to be tackled with urgency.

With the risk of threat instrumentalization to legitimize undemocratic and less-constrained measures being high, “security should be seen as [...] a failure to deal with issues as normal politics” (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998:29). Nonetheless, securitization is intrinsic to politicization as the choice to securitize or desecuritize perceived threats is political (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998). Conversely, *desecuritization* processes entail decreasing the urgency of a matter and “move it out of this threat-defence sequence and into the ordinary public sphere” (Buzan, et. al. 1998:29).

Security approaches can also be *objective*, *subjective*, or *intersubjective*. On the one hand, an objectivist approach can be adopted in the presence of a “real” threat. However, since threat perceptions, and their degree of securitization, vary from one referent object to another, it is no easy feat to establish threats objectively (Buzan, et. al. 1998). On the other hand, a subjectivist approach considers that threat perceptions are determined by

individuals (Buzan, et. al. 1998). Since the securitization of a threat is successful when it is the audience that accepts the existence of an existential threat, and not the securitiser, security lies among groups of individuals and, for this reason, security is best defined as intersubjective as well as socially constructed (Buzan, et. al. 1998).

To understand regional security complexes, which are at the basis of the regional security complex theory, it is first necessary to also discern among *levels of analysis*, *sectors* and *regions*. According to Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, levels of analysis are “locations [...] ontological referents [...] for where things happen” (Buzan et. al. 1998:5). In IR theory, the most used levels of analysis are (i) *international systems*, the largest constellation of units interdependent upon each other; (ii) *international subsystems*, groups of units inside the international system with specific characteristics, such as territorial coherence, as in the case of the EU or ASEAN; (iii) *units*, such as states, organizations, or communities, which are cohesive and independent from others; (iv) *subunits*, groups of individuals capable of influencing units, such as lobbies; (v) *individuals* (Buzan, et. al. 1998).

The types of interactions among these units can be analysed in *sectors*, which are “views of the international system [...] that highlights one particular aspect of the relationship and interaction among all of its constituent units” (Buzan, Charles and Little 1993:31). While traditional theories identify security exclusively with the military and political sectors, Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde expand the range to the economic, societal, and environmental sectors (1998). Sectors are therefore the focus of the securitization theory.

Regions are normally defined in terms of geography or history and are not affected by security policies (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998). However, for security analysis purposes, *regions* are defined as “a spatially coherent territory composed of two or more states” (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998:18). Additionally, the authors differentiate between *subregions*, which are one part of the region, such as a mix of states, and *microregions*, which are “subunit level within the boundaries of a state” (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998:18).

According to political scientists Rumley and Chaturvedi, regions are social constructs which are delimited, *inter alia*, by academics and policy makers for either organizational functions or statistical, security and ideological purposes (2015). Some states are founder members of the regional construct while others are excluded from the complex, thereby affecting regional cooperation (Rumley and Chaturvedi 2015). In more recent studies concerning the place of regions in international relations, regions are best described as “artifacts” to paraphrase human geographer Rogerio Haesbaert’s work, who advocates for the “artificial” and “factual” nature of regions (arti-fact) (Da Silva 2017). Hence, as artificial constructs, regions are also “objects of social and political disputes” (Haesbaert 2010a: 95-6).³

Regions have always been part of the international system structure but re-emerged with the spread of globalization (Bouchard, Doyle, and Rumley 2019). Regional formations have been shaped by the end of the Cold War, especially in Europe and East Asia, which expanded the importance of regional relations and brought regions to the frontline as “more important venues of conflict and cooperation than in the past” (Lake and Morgan 2007:7). In fact, as argued by constructivist political scientist Peter Katzenstein:

International politics [...] is increasingly shaped by regional, as well as national and local, dynamics [...] Distinctive world regions are shaping national politics and policies. But these regions are indelibly linked to both the larger international system of which they are a part, and to the different national systems which constitute them (1996:123).

Therefore, regions are crucial concepts for understanding and describing social and political life (Paasi 2002), despite challenging the primacy of the nation-state in world politics. Consequently, a renewed interest in the study of regions emerged in the post-Cold War period in response to the shifting regional constructs that the end of the Cold War especially induced in East Asia (Buzan, et. al. 2003). Thenceforth, theoretical concepts such as “regional security complex”, “regional order”, and “security community” have been central for scholars studying regional security dynamics (Adler and Barnett

³ Translation from Portuguese found In de Oliveira, Jessica da Silva C. "The Place of the Region in IR." *Contexto Internacional* 39.1 (2017): 97-115

1998; Buzan and Wæver 2003; Katzenstein 2005; Morgan 2007; de Oliveira Jessica da Silva C. 2017).

This outline concerning the main considerations of the securitization theory has laid the foundation for an in-depth understanding of the regional security complex theory. Nevertheless, as the RSCT is a regionalist approach, it finds unipolar and multipolar perspectives of international security oversimplified (Buzan and Wæver 2003). For this reason, it is necessary to additionally clarify what is the classification of power and view of the post-Cold War global structure according to the RSCT.

1.4 Rethinking Polarity: Superpowers, Great Powers and Regional Powers

Depending on the capacity of a state to influence one or more regional security complexes, Buzan and Wæver distinguish among *superpowers*, *great powers*, and *regional powers*. They propose a “definitional criteria for a three-tiered scheme” which places superpowers and great powers at the global level and regional powers at the regional level (2003). The first criterion for *superpower status* concerns top-notch military, political and economic capabilities, which allow states to exercise their influence across the whole international system (Buzan, et. al. 2003).

Hence, superpowers must actively participate in international securitization/desecuritization processes, whether as threats, allies, or interveners (Buzan and Wæver 2003). Normally, superpowers embody the “universal values” they advocate, which are accepted in rhetoric and behaviour by other states (Buzan and Wæver 2003). During the Cold War, the U.S. and the Soviet Union were the two superpowers, which split the world into two ideologically demarcated camps, while, after the Cold War, this rank was solely held by the United States (Buzan, et. al 2003).

Similarly, *great power status* implies a recognition by other major powers of the state’s economic, military, and political capabilities and its potential to ascend to the rank of superpower (Buzan, et. al. 2003). Great powers are not required to showcase great capabilities in all sectors and need not be present in all international securitization processes (Buzan and Wæver 2003). Great powers usually consider themselves above

regional powers as their influence reaches more than one region –albeit with limited global military capabilities (Buzan, et. al. 2003).

Therefore, while great powers usually rise in rank, they can also decline from superpower status (Buzan and Wæver 2003). In the post-Cold War period, Britain, France, Germany, Japan, China, and Russia were the designated great powers. Russia was entitled to great power status as a declining superpower after its defeat in the Cold War, while Britain, France, and Germany, along with China and Japan, were treated as superpower candidates. For a short period, Japan was considered as a potential challenger to the U.S. but its economic stagnation, coupled with constitutional constraints, inhibited its superpower potential (Buzan and Wæver 2003).

By contrast, *regional powers* have large capabilities in their regions but not at the global level (Buzan, et. al. 2003). Consequently, they are excluded from higher-level calculations, in spite of their own beliefs of belonging to a higher rank, as in the case of India (Buzan, et. al. 2003). According to Buzan, “regional powers define the polarity of any given RSC” (Buzan and Wæver 2003:37). Regional powers are nonetheless involved in global power rivalries, as illustrated by Vietnam in the Cold War period, and are momentarily treated as countries of global relevance as principal theatres of superpower conflicts (Buzan, et. al. 2003).

This three-tiered scheme allows to comprehensively capture the post-Cold War international security structure. Indeed, according to the RSCT, Cold War bipolarity was followed by a “1 + 4 + regions” system structure “that has no modern historical precedent [...] such a system cannot be adequately captured by simple designation as either unipolar or multipolar” (Buzan and Wæver 2003:39-40). Hence, the RSCT classification of the global system revolved around one superpower, four great powers and many regions. Against this backdrop, all levels of security dynamics and their interplay require to be fully analysed to explain or anticipate events occurring in a designated regional security complex (Buzan, et. al. 2003).

According to the Asia Power Index –an analytical tool measuring resources and influence to assess the relative power of states in Asia– the U.S. and China are currently

the two superpowers, while Japan is the sole great power. India, Russia, Australia, South Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, New Zealand, Taiwan, Pakistan, Philippines, and North Korea follow suit in this order as middle powers. By contrast, Bangladesh, Brunei, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Laos, Mongolia, Nepal, and Papua New Guinea are all minor powers (figure 1).

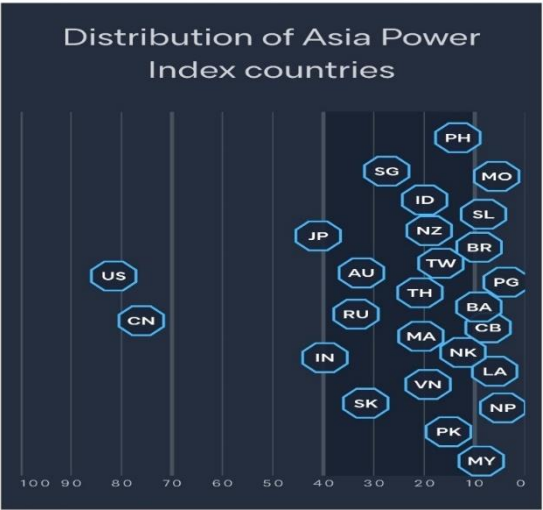


Figure 1. Lowy Institute Asia Power Index 2020 Edition

(Source: The Interpreter)

However, despite Japan and India being classified in theory as great power and middle power, respectively, they are in practice on the same level. Differences reside in their economies, soft power influence and approaches to power (Leng 2020). While Japan is a mature and advanced economy, India is an emerging market with the youngest population (Leng 2020). Japan’s efficiently exerts soft power with netizens and travellers, while India has a strong media influence in South Asia as well as a large regional (and global) diaspora (Leng 2020). Finally, Japan’s power influence is rooted in its broad diplomatic relationships as well as in the defence and economic dimensions, while India is more internally focused, with stronger military capabilities and resilience (Leng 2020) (figure 2).

Japan vs India

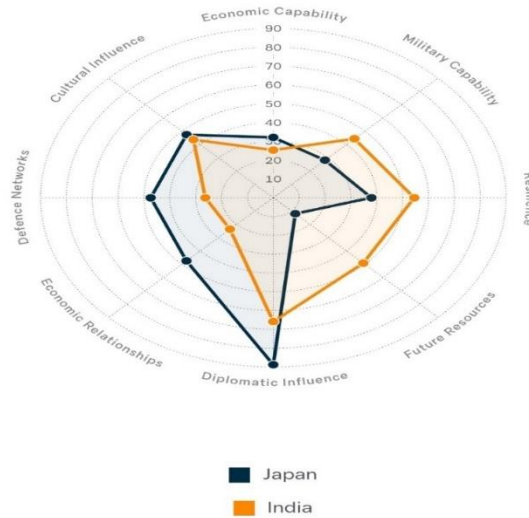


Figure 2. Japan and India's power and resources

(Source: The Interpreter)

As a region in constant evolution, power play dynamics in Asia are much more complicated today than they were in the immediate post- Cold War period (Leng 2020). Hence, while the U.S. remains a superpower, China is quickly reaching the same rank. Among the plethora of middle and minor powers, Japan fluctuates between great power and middle power status, while India is rapidly ascending to great power status. As already mentioned in previous paragraphs, the regional security complex theory focuses on levels of analysis –the regional level in particular– and is linked to the securitization theory through speech act processes (Buzan and Wæver 2003).

The RSCT was invented to incorporate the analysis of the regional level in a field principally dominated by the analysis of the national and global levels, which did not adequately capture security dynamics (Buzan and Wæver 2003). In fact, “both the security of the separate units and the process of global power intervention can be grasped only through understanding the regional security dynamics” (Buzan and Wæver 2003:43).

As illustrated by Buzan, the core idea of the regional security complex theory concerns security interdependence which “is normally patterned into regionally based clusters: *security complexes*” (Buzan and Wæver 2003:46; italics added). With RSCT aiming to provide with an organising framework for regional security studies to predict future regional scenarios, RSCT comprises descriptive and predictive frameworks. The following sections will be dedicated to cover the descriptive aspect of the RSCT, which principally outlines the nature of the regional security complex. Producing predictive RSC scenarios will be possible only after having introduced this descriptive framework.

1.5 Regional Security Complexes

As regional security complexes (RSCs) are the main protagonists, it is essential to understand what a security complex is according to the RSCT. *In primis*, regional security complexes are analytical concepts, socially constructed, and dependent on securitization processes (Buzan and Wæver 2003). They are defined as “a set of units whose major processes of securitisation, desecuritisation, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analysed or resolved apart from one another” (Buzan and Wæver 1998: 201). In other words, speech act processes in the international system usually have a regional focus (Buzan, et. al. 2003). However, subsystems are also present within security regions, where states interact among each other (Buzan and Wæver 2003).

Borders between regions are unsteady zones and are usually occupied by an *insulator*, which is a location where one or more units separate larger regional security dynamics (Buzan and Wæver 2003). This is the case of Afghanistan, which, during the Cold War, isolated the South Asian RSC from the Middle East. The concept of insulator –unveiled with the RSCT itself– is different from the traditional concept of *buffer state*, which is part of the theory of the *balance of power*, and refers to states located between two hostile powers, and thereby mitigate their rivalry (Buzan, et. al. 2003).

Regional security complexes are characterized by patterns of *amity* and *enmity*. Indeed, RSCs are generated by the security interplay among countries in geographical proximity, and are thereby affected by history, culture, religion, politics, along with distribution of

power and material capabilities (Buzan and Wæver 2003). Variations in amity and enmity also produce *conflict formation*, *security regime* or *security community* (Wæver 1989; Buzan 1991: 218). The concept of security regime was coined by political scientist Robert Jervis to refer to “those principles, rules, and norms that permit nations to be restrained in their behaviour in the belief that others will reciprocate. This [...] implies [...] a form of cooperation” (Jervis 1982:357). By definition, security regimes are examples of international cooperation in the anarchic structure of international relations (Jervis 1982).

Instead, the definition of security community is “a group of people which has become integrated” (Deutsch et al. 1975:5) and jointly agreed that “common social problems must and can be resolved by processes of peaceful change” (Väyrynen 1984:345). Thus, the idea of security community revolves around a group of states that enjoy peaceful relations with institutionalized procedures (Väyrynen 1984), namely, the European Union. Conversely, a conflict formation has many forms: civil and border wars, interventions into other countries, external military interventions by major powers in conflict (Väyrynen 1984).

With the end of the Cold War and the redistribution of power, trends of regional integration reemerged, thereby also encouraging regional conflicts (Buzan, et. al. 2003). A specific feature of regional conflict formations is that “these conflict formations [...] have become more complex and more entangled in the sense that they cannot be easily decomposed into individual conflicts” (Väyrynen 1984:345) as regional conflicts are “a complex mixture of intranational, intraregional and extraregional conflicts of violent character” (Väyrynen 1984:345).

As threats travel more easily across short distances rather than long ones, states have historically been primarily concerned with the actions of units operating in the same complex rather than with those operating outside it (Buzan 2003). Thus, physical *adjacency* generates stronger security interdependence between neighbouring states, especially in regards with the military, political, environmental, and societal sectors (Buzan and Wæver 2003). Amity and enmity relations can be comprehensively understood only at the regional level (Buzan, et. al. 2003). Yet, superpowers are not

constrained by geography or adjacency and their influence ranges across the globe, whilst great powers can easily penetrate adjacent regions, but small states' range of influence is enclosed within their zone (Buzan and Wæver 2003).

According to Buzan and Wæver, *penetration* is what allows external powers to link with states within a regional complex (2003). This is exemplified by the secular rivalry between India and Pakistan, India's alignment with the Soviet Union, and Pakistan with the U.S. and China during the Cold War period. Despite penetration influencing regional security complexes, regional level dynamics have relative autonomy, as demonstrated by the end of the Cold War. Indeed, according to the RSCT, the format of regional complexes primarily involves amity, enmity, and balance of power among the powers within the region (Buzan, et. al. 2003).

Briefly stated, a group of states qualify as an RSC when their degree of security interdependence is strong enough to link them together as well as differentiate them from adjacent security regions (Buzan, et. al. 2003). More precisely, "RSCs define themselves as *substructures* of the international system by the relative intensity of security interdependence among a group of units, and security indifference between that set and surrounding units" (Buzan and Wæver 2003:47). As substructures of the international system, RSCs can also be studied in terms of polarity: unipolarity, bi- or tripolarity, and multipolarity; they can additionally mediate among great powers, regional powers, and local states (Buzan, et. al. 2003).

Further, the regional security complex theory envisages four levels of analysis, which are concurrently active and constitute the *security constellation*: (i) *domestic level*, which is characterized by the strong/weak spectrum of states⁴ in regards with national security and defines the vulnerabilities of a state as well as its foreign policy approaches; (ii) *regional level*, where interstate relations occur; (iii) *interregional level*, which concerns the interactions between neighbouring RSCs; (iv) *global level*, which focuses on the

⁴ According to Buzan and Wæver, states are placed along this weak/strong spectrum, which is not about power, but rather concerns the level of socio-political cohesion between civil society and governmental institutions. Therefore, strong states are more internally cohesive and will thereby perceive threats coming from outside their borders, while weak states' threat perception will originate from inside their borders.

interplay between the global and regional levels (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998: 201ff.).

Overlapping claims between regional security complexes are avoided by using *subcomplexes* (Buzan, et. al. 2003). Subcomplexes differ from regional complexes for the fact that they are enclosed within a larger RSC, such as the Middle Eastern RSC, within the which distinct subcomplexes can be identified in the Levant (Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria) and in the Gulf (Iran, Iraq, and the Members of the Gulf Cooperation Council) (Buzan, et. al. 2003).

Finally, subcomplexes are especially common where there are many states, who securitize one another. Buzan and Wæver also outline four variables inherent to the structure of a regional security complex: (i) boundary, which separates different regional security complexes; (ii) *anarchic structure*, which entails that RSCs ought to be composed of two or more autonomous units; (iii) *polarity*, which concerns the distribution of power among the units; (iv) *social construction*, which involves patterns of amity and enmity (2003).

Accordingly, a regional security complex may develop into three possible scenarios:

1. *Maintenance of the status quo*, which concerns no essential changes in the structure of a complex
2. *Internal transformation*, which refers to essential changes occurring within the structure that could potentially lead to anarchic structure (triggered by regional integration); polarity (due to a merger); dominant patterns of amity/enmity, such as ideological shifts
3. *External transformation*, which concerns transformations of the essential structure of an RSC as in the case of mergers or splits (Buzan and Wæver 2003).

1.5.1 Types of Regional Security Complexes

Within the criteria just outlined, it is also possible to classify different types of RSCs in *standard* and *centred RSCs*, *great power RSCs* and *supercomplexes* (Buzan and Wæver 2003). According to the RSCT (2003), *standard RSCs* are anarchic in structure, usually contain two or more powers, and their security agenda is driven by politico-military issues. Polarity is established by regional powers, and could shift from uni- to multipolar, depending on whether it comprises one or more regional powers (Buzan and Wæver 2003). In terms of amity/enmity patterns, they can be conflict formations, security regimes or security communities, while regional dynamics are therefore shaped by patterns of rivalry or alliance, balance, and concert of friendships (Buzan and Wæver 2003).

Centred RSCs potentially have three forms (Buzan and Wæver 2003). Contrary to standard RSCs, the first two forms envisage a unipolar RSC, where the principal powerhouse is either a great power or a superpower (Buzan and Wæver 2003). Thus, the superpower is expected to dominate the region, thereby inhibiting potential regional powers, such as the North American RSC whose core actor is the United States (Buzan and Wæver 2003). The third form of centred RSC regards regions integrated by institutions rather than by single powers, as best exemplified by the European Union, as the EU lies between the form of a security community and a great power with actor quality at the global level, albeit politically constrained (Buzan and Wæver 2003:58). These three types of centred RSCs are interlinked through the idea that regional security dynamics “are dominated from a centre located within it” (Buzan and Wæver 2003:58).

Nevertheless, cases of global powers distributed all over the globe lead to RSCs that do not fit into the categories of standard or centred RSCs (Buzan and Wæver 2003). Indeed, great power regional security complexes and supercomplexes fall between these categories (Buzan and Wæver 2003). At the time of *Regions and Powers. The Structure of International Security*, the international security system could be described as a “1+4+regions” system, where these two RSC forms were most apparent in Asia, with China and Japan being the core actors of a bipolar *great power RSC* (Buzan and Wæver 2003). Great power RSCs are a combination of the global and regional levels, as their

polarity is established by more than one global level power contained within it and their internal security dynamics, while patterns of amity/enmity influence global level balancing estimations (Buzan and Wæver 2003).

In addition, the presence of great powers will be apt to disregard the rule of weak interregional dynamics and will cause *spillovers* into adjacent regions (Buzan and Wæver 2003). This is best illustrated by China, which, during the Cold War, was present in both the great power RSC in Northeast Asia and in the standard RSCs in South and Southeast Asia. In South Asia, China supported Pakistan in its rivalry against India, and was thereby engaging India to divert New Delhi into balancing Beijing. In Southeast Asia, China was also an active player through its confrontation with Vietnam. Ultimately, the main difference between standard RSCs and great power RSCs is the ability of the latter “to generate a sustained and substantial level of interregional security dynamics” (Buzan and Wæver 2003:60).

Intense spillovers could either link or divide RSCs into *supercomplexes* and complicate the security constellation (Buzan and Wæver 2003). Supercomplexes revolve around one or more great powers which interact not only at the domestic, regional, and global levels, but also at the superregional level (Buzan, et. al. 2003). A clear example was the interplay between Northeast and Southeast Asia in the Cold War period. Normally, superregional interactions do not inhibit the regional level but, if such a scenario were to materialize, as was the case of Northeast and Southeast Asia during the 1990s, the spillover would trigger an external transformation and merge the two RSCs into a larger RSC (East Asia) (Buzan, et. al. 2003).

1.5.2 The Absence of Regional Security Complexes

The RSCT also envisages a failure in the functioning of regional dynamics when local states do not produce patterns of security interdependence. This is exemplified by the presence of *overlay* and *unstructured* (Buzan and Wæver 2003). *Overlay* occurs when regional complexes are dominated by extra-regional dynamics, as best exemplified by the European colonisation of Africa, Asia, and the Americas, and the situation of Europe itself during the Cold War, which entailed long-term stationing of armed forces and the

alignment of the local states along the two sides of the superpower rivalry (Buzan and Wæver, 2003).

In these cases, regional dynamics were overlaid by outside powers, thereby leading to the deactivation of local patterns of security relations (Buzan, et. al. 2003). Overlay is more apparent when great powers dominate by force and have deployed armed forces in the territories they occupy (Buzan and Wæver 2003). Buzan describes overlay as a non-RSC situation as what follows overlay might be a diverse RSC or no RSC at all (2003). The main problems with overlay concern differentiating between penetration and overlay as well as “semi-voluntary acceptance of overlay” to put it into Buzan and Wæver’s words (2003).

On one hand, penetration leaves regional patterns active, as illustrated by the security structure of East Asia during the Cold War, while, on the other hand, a semi-voluntary acceptance of overlay occurs when local states accept to subdue to an external power by accepting the stationing of its military forces on their territories (Buzan and Wæver 2003). This best describes Europe during the Cold War. Conversely, *unstructured security regions* are determined by either or both the following two reasons:

1. Local states have such low material and political capabilities that their influence does not go beyond their boundaries
2. Geographical insulation impedes any kind of interaction (as in the case of island-states separated by oceans) (Buzan and Wæver 2003).

Geographical insulation additionally reduces the capabilities of strong states whose borders are delimited by seas, mountains, or open plains (Buzan and Wæver 2003). In this case, there is no RSC, since states have not enough power to become a concern to neighbouring states which, in turn, do not securitize their neighbours (Buzan and Wæver 2003). Security dynamics mainly occur at the domestic level and, possibly, at the interregional and global levels (Buzan 2003). Thus, unstructured security regions can be thought of as RSCs under development (Buzan and Wæver 2003). For this reason, Buzan and Wæver further distinguish among *pre-complexes* and *proto-complexes*. While pre-complexes have yet to achieve cross-linking among the units but show potential to form

an RSC (such as the Horn of Africa), proto-complexes delineate security regions but their dynamics are too weak to form a region in their own right (West Africa) (Buzan and Wæver 2003).

1.6 Predictive RSCT: Anticipating Future Scenarios

RSCT can help predict possible future scenarios about the structure of the international system. However, the materialization of such scenarios ultimately depends upon politics and structural compatibility (Holm 1992; Wæver 1994). Until scenarios become concretely possible, they will continue to influence the status quo as *structural pressures* (Buzan and Wæver 2003). A clear example of structural pressures provided by the RSCT is the role played by *integration* and *fragmentation*⁵ in the EU (Buzan and Wæver 2003).

Scenarios are usually logically deduced but the following general observations hold true:

1. *Unstructured* regions can either transform into an *RSC* or *overlay*
2. *Standard RSCs* experience either *internal* or *external transformation* or even *overlay*. They could move towards *unstructured* (as in the case of environmental disasters) or *integration*, but the RSCT deems these options highly unlikely
3. An RSC in *security community* form can either transform into a *centred RSC* or a *new actor* by creating institutions (namely, the EU)
4. A *centred great* or *superpower RSC* and a *unipolar standard RSC* could digress to *standard multipolar mode* (Soviet Empire) or could become a *new actor* by transforming into an empire
5. RSCs containing *subcomplexes* might *split* if the ties linking the subcomplexes were to disappear
6. *Overlaid* security regions can potentially take any form
7. *Integrated actors* can disintegrate into new *RSCs* or *internally/externally transform* existing RSCs⁶ (such as the Soviet Union and ex-Yugoslavia). It is

⁵ According to the RSCT, “integration” is the replacement of RSCs with a global level power, while “fragmentation” derives from the return of the balance-of-power logic.

⁶ The secession of Bangladesh from Pakistan is a special case as a large power (Pakistan) disintegrated without influencing the structure of the RSC.

highly unlikely that such disintegrations would lead to unstructured regions, while it is possible for *overlay* or *annexation* to ensue (Buzan and Wæver 2003).

Interaction capacity and *global polarity* also highly affect security regions (Buzan and Little 2000). Buzan and Little describe interaction capacity as “the technological capabilities [...] the shared norms, rules, and institutions, on which the type and intensity of interaction between units in a system, or within units, depends” (Buzan and Little 2000:97). Therefore, interaction capacity shapes the concrete actions of states and identifies the sectors where the dominant forms of interactions will take place (Buzan and Little 2000). While high levels of interaction capacity are fundamental for the construction of RSCs, low levels of interaction capacity within the region are a precondition for unstructured security regions (Buzan and Wæver 2003). Instead, overlay can occur when interaction capacity levels are low at the regional level but high at the global level (Buzan and Wæver 2003).

Similarly, “*Global polarity* is among the conditions that enable or constrain various possible polarities regionally” (Buzan and Wæver 2003:69). A region located nearby bipolar rivalries will likely be overlaid by one of the two powers (Central America), while a region that is in between can be divided into different parts (Cold War Europe), and a strategically peripheral region is left on its own (South America) (Buzan and Wæver 2003). These possibilities additionally perform structural pressures on the states as made clear by demands for the EU to act as a great power or the pressures of the international community to prevent the disintegration of Yugoslavia (Buzan and Wæver 2003).

Chapter 2 - A Confluence of Two Seas: Japan-India Strategic Partnership in the Era of the “Indo-Pacific”

Introduction

After having outlined the theoretical framework for analysing the security architecture in Asia and its influence on Japan-India relations, this chapter aims to provide with an analysis of the history of Japan-India interactions based upon the RSC. We will start by pondering on the rise of the contested “Indo-Pacific” concept to geopolitical discourses. What part played Indo-Japanese interactions in the formation of the Indo-Pacific and how were they affected by Indo-Pacific dynamics?

2.1 The “Indo-Pacific”: Conflict Formation or Security Regime?

In 2003, Buzan and Wæver excluded both unstructured and overlay as possible future scenarios for the Asian security architecture. At that time, only China was regarded as a possible hegemonic candidate. Nevertheless, Beijing’s lack of coercive and soft power resources, together with the presence of other powers within the emergent tripolar Asian supercomplex, dismissed the possibility of Chinese overlay (Buzan and Wæver 2003:172). By definition, a supercomplex is composed by “a set of RSCs within which the presence of one or more great powers generates relatively high and consistent levels of interregional security dynamics” (Buzan 2012:331-344).

The Asian supercomplex hosted indeed Japan and China as the two great powers of the East Asian RSC. Interregional security dynamics between East and South Asia became consistent with India’s “Look East” policy, which resulted from New Delhi’s diminishing levels of threat perception of its neighbours, specifically Pakistan (Buzan, et. al. 2003). In addition, China’s expanding interaction capacity was a prelude to a rivalry between China and the principal superpower, the U.S. This also led to the growing perception of the U.S. as an external superpower (Buzan and Wæver 2003).

Against this backdrop, Buzan and Wæver expected either a conflict formation or a security regime to materialize in Asia (2003). A conflict formation would have been propelled by the lack of shared cultural values; the presence of strong nationalisms, along with nuclear states; weak regional institutions; and a difficult historical legacy, exemplified by Japan's imperialism and the division of Korea and China, with North Korea transforming into an authoritarian regime, and, China, a national socialist regime (Buzan and Wæver 2003:174).

Additionally, a conflict formation envisioned more localised conflicts over Taiwan, the South China Sea, and Korea, as regional states were restrained by the presence of nuclear weapons and the possibility of trade blockages a war would cause (Buzan and Wæver 2003). This scenario was expected to take shape only if the U.S. were to reduce its security engagement in East Asia and if China adopted an aggressive foreign policy posture (Buzan and Wæver 2003).

On the other hand, a security regime (which implies that states learn to cooperate to avoid wars) was dependent upon another set of conditions. Firstly, China would have had to either fail to develop into a hegemonic power, or to ascend to the rank of a benign great power (Buzan and Wæver 2003). Secondly, East Asian states would have had to substantially recover from the 1997-1998 economic crisis, and economic and institutional regionalisation would have had to be consistent (Buzan, et. al. 2003). A security regime could have developed with the U.S. continued security involvement within East Asia, considering that Washington's role in defusing escalation of regional conflicts was broadly deemed pivotal (Buzan, et. al. 2003). This is best exemplified by the U.S. mediation efforts in pacifying nuclear crisis with North Korea.

Buzan and Wæver concluded that the most likely RSCT-based scenario would be a weaker form of either these two scenarios (2003). They further attributed to the U.S.-China competition the role of determining the future of Asian security, as Japan leaned towards complying with the status quo, and India's probabilities of ascending to the rank of great power lied with the outburst of a rivalry between China and the U.S., as Washington would then seek India's alliance to contain China (Buzan and Wæver 2003:177). Until the early 2000s, there were no attempts at trying to balance against

China, despite Beijing's growing nationalist government and assertive neighbourhood policy in the South China Sea, Taiwan, Pakistan, and Burma (Buzan and Wæver 2003). Buzan and Wæver provide with four possible explanations for the lack of credible balancing against China, which, approximately from the end of the 1990s until the 2010s, can be resumed as follows:

1. China was not perceived as a credible threat to its neighbours, which did not consequently securitize Beijing
2. Considering China's overtly military pressures on India⁷, ASEAN⁸ and Taiwan⁹, it was Chinese diplomacy that succeeded in restraining them from formally responding to its provocations
3. The Westphalian-based Asian international subsystem was conditioned by "hierarchical behaviours" typical of Asian cultures, thereby resulting in bandwagoning attitudes
4. As the principal security provider in the region, Asian states perceived that the role of balancer should therefore be performed by Washington (Buzan and Wæver 2003).

The state of play in Asia during this period appears considerably different when compared to the present circumstances. Almost ten years after having written *Regions and Powers. The Structure of International Security*, Buzan noted that "reactions to the ongoing rise of China [...] generated a weak but definite Asian supercomplex" (Buzan 2012: 331-344). Recent studies further confirm Buzan's statement. For instance, Bouchard, Doyle, and Rumley underscore the central role played by U.S.-China relations in determining whether the area becomes either "a region of peace or war" (Bouchard, et. al 2019:5) by observing that:

Since the Cold War, there has been a political and economic race between the great regional powers for control over the middle powers of the Indo-Pacific. These powers

⁷By claiming territory and helping Pakistan's nuclearization.

⁸By occupying the Paracels and Spratlys in the South China Sea.

⁹By threatening with military interventions.

have been competing to form a *regional middle power coalition in opposition to either China or the U.S.* (Bouchard, et. al. 2019:4; italics added).

This is best illustrated by China’s Silk Road Economic Belt and 21-st Century Maritime Silk Road, and the numerous Indo-Pacific approaches. Of all the versions, the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy is the most opposed to China. This implies that China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy represent competing visions endorsing different security, political, and economic structures for the region (Demir 2018).

At the time of writing, it is commonly understood that China’s economic and military prowess strongly shapes the power narrative of the Indo-Pacific. However, academic debates about the core objectives of both China’s BRI and the Indo-Pacific strategies are based upon broader perspectives. One must not narrow the formation of an Indo-Pacific region down to the emergence of a balancing act against China, as this is only one of the key trends that propelled the formation of an Asian supercomplex. This is demonstrated by the fact that the power narrative of the Indo-Pacific has taken multiple forms among both regional and external countries.

In addition to the U.S. relative decline and China’s rise, the construction of the Indo-Pacific Region was also influenced by the rise of India as an economic powerhouse and the contest over the definition of an Asian regional identity (Buzan 2012). To these trends ought to be added the fact that the Indo-Pacific has become the new economic centre of gravity as the world’s most important transportation corridor of the 21-st century. Before proceeding with analysing the principal trends characterizing the Indo-Pacific as a geopolitical construct, it is necessary to first delineate the general idea pertaining to the “Indo-Pacific” concept.

2.1.1 A Geopolitical Construct of Contested Interpretation

The use of the term “Indo-Pacific” has gained currency within and outside the region as leaders and policymakers from Japan, Australia, India, Indonesia, the United States, and, more recently, Europe have increasingly been referring to “Indo-Pacific” rather than

“Asia-Pacific” in their policy communiqués and foreign policy approaches. The growing popularity of the “Indo-Pacific” concept is also illustrated by the fact that it is being used by states that did not officially adopt Indo-Pacific approaches, namely South Korea (Medcalf 2018).

As an imagined space, political contestation over this geopolitical construct abounds, revealing that “this Indo-Pacific tendency is much more than a matter of superficial or semantic difference” (Medcalf 2018:10). In terms of geo-spatiality, the Indo-Pacific is broadly understood as a *continuum* across the Indian and Pacific Oceans, with its expanse being debated to range from Eastern Africa to the Western Coast of the United States (Das 2019). Hence, the Indo-Pacific is usually classified as “an amalgam of the Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean Region” (Bateman et al. 2017:7), or “a confluence of two, great, geo-oceanic systems” (Bouchard et al 2019:5). According to Rory Medcalf, the “Indo-Pacific” can be considered as “a maritime super-region with its geographical centre in Southeast Asia” (2018:10).

The idea of an Indo-Pacific region rests upon acknowledging that the rapidly interlinking economic, political, geopolitical and security dynamics between the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean regions are creating a single security complex (Medcalf 2018). However, constructions of oceanic space classify the “Indo-Pacific” “simultaneously as a *non-region* and as a *super-region* –as a universal and non-differentiated space” (Bouchard, et al. 2019:26; italics added). This perspective is based upon realist, non-realist, and universalist theories.

On one hand, non-realist interpretations of the Indo-Pacific endorse the concept of a “shared oceanic neighbourhood”, which transcends the traditional hegemony of nation-states (Bouchard, et. al. 2019). On the other hand, realist theories aim to prove the existence of “natural and legitimate” relationships among regional states (Bouchard et al. 2019). At the same time, the universalist view of oceanic space considers the Indo-Pacific region as a *non-space* or *liquid continuum* (Bouchard et al. 2019). This is due to the presence of outside superpowers in the region, namely the United States, whose neo-liberalist and neo-mercantilist views have reshaped the oceanic perspective of the Indo-Pacific as a deterritorialised space (Bouchard et al. 2019).

As such, the “Indo-Pacific” endorses a non-regional narrative, thereby refuting the notion of *mare liberum*, while favouring that of *mare nullis*, to enable neo-colonial powers to protect vital sea lanes of transport, trade, communication, and security by exerting control upon the sea lanes (Bouchard et al. 2019:24). This is the reason why the Indo-Pacific would be more appropriately described as a liquid-continuum through which free movements bypass national and regional borders (Bouchard et al. 2019:23).

The works of Ellen Frost additionally support this theorization of the Indo-Pacific. Frost notably remaps the Asian oceanic space into *Maritime Asia* and *Asia Major* to underscore “spontaneous cross-border flows of goods, services, capital, technology, knowledge, ideas, cultures, and people [...] These flows account for much of Asia’s success” (Frost 2008:22). Frost’s reconceptualization of Asia also links the western Indian Ocean and the east Pacific Rim, while including south and coastal India, along with coastal Australia and maritime Russia (Frost 2008: 31). At the same time, she maintains the unity of the Bay of Bengal but both Eastern Africa and the Middle East are excluded from her calculus (Bouchard et. al. 2019).

Nevertheless, this theorization of the “Indo-Pacific” as one interconnected region holds its limits due to the presence of subregional complexes (Medcalf 2018). Therefore, tensions between India and Pakistan are generally perceived as a Southeast Asian matter, just as much as frictions in the East China Sea, between Japan and China, are principal concern of Northeast Asian countries (Medcalf 2018). Despite the merger that linked Northeast Asia to Southeast Asia into a single East Asian security complex at the end of the 1990s, it is likely that “the subregions of Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia and South Asia will [...] retain their own distinct security dynamics” (Medcalf 2018:13).

Surprisingly, the Indo-Pacific concept as one connected region is not new to geopolitics. Scholars retracing the evolution of the Indo-Pacific construct observed that, in practice, the understanding of Asian geography as the “Indo-Pacific” has been more enduring than the 20th-century separation of East Asia and South Asia (Medcalf 2018). For instance, during the European colonization of Asia, European maps of that time conceived the geographical expanse of Asia to be ranging from the Indian Ocean rim and

Southeast Asia to China, Korea, and Japan (Medcalf 2018). In fact, the British Indian Empire was highly dependent upon the routes that linked Singapore to China and Australia, as well as Africa and Suez (Medcalf 2018:15).

The emergence of geopolitical disciplines bolstered this trend, with both American sea-power theorist Alfred Thayer Mahan and British geographer Halford Mackinder considering Asia as a fully integrated region (Medcalf 2018). As the “Indo-Pacific” terminology was increasingly used in marine sciences, German geographer Karl Haushofer extended it to geopolitics and conceptually divided the region into four main spheres of influence, to be dominated by one single power (Haushofer 1924). Haushofer’s theoretical influence became more apparent during World War II when the Allied Powers coined their strategic operational planning against Imperial Japan as the “Indo-Pacific” (Medcalf 2018).

This terminology persisted and was shared in usage by countries in the region until the 1960s (Medcalf 2018). By contrast, the “Asia-Pacific” labelling was a result of Cold War dynamics, which served the primary purpose of solidifying U.S. strategic and economic role in the region, as well as fostering the industrialization and economic success of East Asian economies, as U.S. trading partners (Medcalf 2018).

In the late 1980s, the “Asia-Pacific” framework began its institutionalization process with the establishment of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), along with ASEAN and its security dialogue, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). These institutions soon reflected the expanding boundaries of the Asia-Pacific construct by welcoming India and other Southeast Asian countries. By 2005, the establishment of the East Asia Summit (EAS) incarnated the first regional institution of “Indo-Pacific” nature. Indeed, Indonesia's former foreign minister Marty Natalegawa described the summit as “a conscious act of Indo-Pacific diplomacy by Southeast Asian states” (Natalegawa 2013).

Hence, since the 2000s, the “Indo-Pacific” has been re-entering the foreign policy lexicon. Technically, this concept of mega-region building has been reintroduced to policy discourses by former Japanese Prime Minister (PM), Shinzō Abe, when he delivered a speech before the Indian Parliament, in August 2007. PM Abe's 2007 Indian

Parliament speech titled 'Confluence of the Two Seas' (*futatsu no umi no majiwari*)¹⁰ clearly acknowledged the impact of economic and strategic occurrences between the Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean on Japanese security and prosperity, along with the increasing weight of India's influence in the region.

Notwithstanding, in 2010, former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton became the first to use the label in policy speeches. This led to the U.S. "pivot" or "rebalance" to Asia strategy during the second Obama Administration, as exemplified by President Obama's 2015 speech held during his historic visit to India, which implicitly promoted the Indo-Pacific concept (Medcalf 2018). However, it was only during the Trump Administration that the terminology of the "Asia-Pacific" has been formally replaced.

Since 2012, India's former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh also began utilising this nomenclature to refer to India's relations with Japan and Australia, as has done incumbent Prime Minister Narendra Modi. As the term began to rapidly gain traction among regional policymakers, in 2013, Australia became the first regional stakeholder to officially substitute "Asia-Pacific" with "Indo-Pacific" in its White Defence Paper, thereby initiating a trend that is still in flux.

2.1.2 The Rise of China and the Relative Decline of the U.S.

In recent years, terms like "the rise of China" and "the U.S. relative decline" have been dominating academic and media discourses. The U.S. prioritization of the Middle East in its foreign policy during the George W. Bush Administration, the resulting costly wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the 2008 financial crisis created the perception of a lack of U.S. commitment to multilateral governance in Asia. This accentuated China's surge of power, thereby amplifying the U.S-China rivalry and contributing to the emergence of a balancing against Beijing.

¹⁰Abe was inspired by a book authored by the Mughal prince Dara Shikoh in 1655 titled "Confluence of the Two Seas".

Hints of China's rapid economic growth have been apparent since 1978 when China's market reforms transitioned the country from a centrally planned to a socialist-market economy. Beijing's economic rise is illustrated by its annual GDP steadfast growth as well as increasing percentage share of global exports, which represent "the fastest sustained expansion by a major economy in history" (Bouchard et al 2019:144). In 2008, the financial crisis originating from the U.S. accelerated the shift of economic power from the U.S. to China, which, in 2009, became the world's largest car market and leading exporter, and replaced the United States and Germany, respectively (CITECO).

Thenceforth, China has continued its climb to the top when she surpassed Japan's GDP in 2010 –at that time, the second largest economy after the United States. Furthermore, in 2011, China became the world's largest manufacturing country, "a status held by the U.S. for more than a century" (Bouchard et. al. 2019:144). Finally, China's GDP – calculated on a purchasing power parity (PPP) basis¹¹– exceeded the United States' in 2014 (CITECO).

By August 2015, Chinese foreign exchange reserves became the largest in the world (Morrison 2015: 20). Hence, according to the 2017 economic survey conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, China is expected to remain the principal driver of global economic growth and, by 2030, she will likely be one of the world's three main economic powers, along with India and the U.S. (OECD 2017).

China's economic rise is also accompanied by an increasing defence budget expenditure. In 2017, China constituted the 13 per cent of the world's share of military expenditure but represented only 37 per cent of that of the U.S.' (Tian et al. 2018). It is generally assumed that China's military capabilities will further increase along with its material capabilities, thereby disrupting the power of balance in the Indo-Pacific region. In addition, the Indo-Pacific region contains more than half of the world's highest military spenders (Bouchard et al. 2019).

¹¹ GDP expressed in PPP measures is considered to provide with a better comparison of the real wealth of nations as it cancels differences in price levels.

Apart from Japan and Australia –which rank ninth and thirteen in the military expenditure list– the U.S. (ranking first), China (second), India (third), Russia (fourth), and South Korea (tenth) spend more than the world average GDP on military expenditure (SIPRI 2019). Figures clearly demonstrate that the U.S. will likely remain the most relevant global power for the foreseeable future (figure 3).

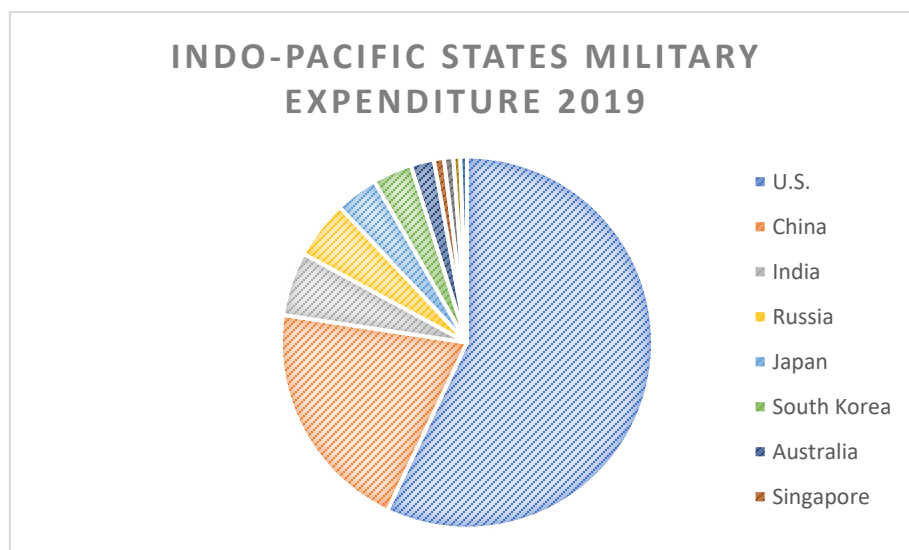


Figure 3. Military Expenditure in Asia in 2019

(Data retrieved from SIPRI 2019)

Some scholars also observed that China’s rise cannot be contained. This is expected to have long-term global geopolitical and institutional impacts, thereby altering the nature of U.S.-China relations (Woodward 2017); along with relations among Indo-Pacific states (Bouchard et al 2019); and ultimately lead to the “end of Western universalism” (Jacques 2012:565). China’s great interaction capacity also supports its revisionist tendencies. Indeed, the Western perspective about the intentions of great powers assumes that rising powers ultimately tend to have revisionist aims (Mearsheimer 2001). However, the debates over China as a “revisionist state” also consider that China might have yet to reach such a level (Bouchard et al. 2019:150).

In fact, President Xi Jinping has frequently called for a new model of great power relations “with win-win cooperation at the core” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China 2013), in accordance with the “peaceful rise” Chinese views

advocate. Especially during his 2013 speech in Moscow, President Xi Jinping denounced the mindset characterising the Asian region which is constrained by zero-sum Cold War logic. However, China's model for the Asia-Pacific region is generally perceived to undermine the U.S.-led system of alliances (Bouchard et al. 2019).

Washington's concerns over China not being a "status quo" power were further accentuated by China's Silk Road Economic Belt and 21-st Century Maritime Silk Road, unveiled in 2013 in Kazakhstan and Indonesia, respectively. Most notably, this flagship development initiative was promoted by the Chinese Communist Party and is arguably the most ambitious project in geo-economic and geopolitical terms since the 1944 Bretton Woods Institutions (EU Chamber of Commerce in China 2020). The "New Silk Roads" involve basic infrastructure development (mostly on pre-existing projects), such as ports, airports, railways, pipelines and highways along six principal corridors connecting all of Asia to Africa and Europe: The Silk Road Economic Belt, or Belt and Road Initiative, and the Maritime Silk Road (Bouchard et al. 2019).

Official descriptions of the Belt and Road Initiative depict the BRI as an umbrella initiative and mention five areas of cooperation through which China could interlink with 65 countries: policy coordination, facility connectivity, trade and investments, financial cooperation and people-to-people exchanges. The principal advantages of this initiative concern increased interconnectivity, a potent driver *per se* for global growth and redistribution of wealth; reduction of transportation costs and time; decrease in the risks of trade flows, such as blockages caused by outbreaks of conflicts or terrorism; and the creation of a free flow of economic resources and cooperation. As such, this initiative holds considerable economic and political gains for China as the BRI could potentially redirect a large part of the world economy towards Asia.

On the other hand, the securitisation of BRI projects by China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) could lead to the militarization of the region, thereby triggering conflicts between state and non-state actors (Kumar 2018). In fact, some American critics regard the BRI not as a mere economic initiative, but rather as a geopolitical strategy "to create a Sino-centric ecosystem of trade, technology, finance, and strategic strongpoints" (U.S. Department of Defense 2018). The first case of China's "debt-trap diplomacy" within the

BRI framework concerned the Hambantota port in Sri Lanka, which was granted to China Merchants Port Holding Company for 99 years. The funds gained from this lease were used by the Sri Lankan government to service its real balance of payment issues (Chen 2020).

As reported by Chen, the ultimate ownership of the port remained unchanged but perceptions within media and policy circles added to the fears of similar “debt-traps” in other BRI-led infrastructure projects. Besides debt sustainability, other concerns related to BRI projects have been raised over the environment, human rights standards, transparency, and open procurement involving strategic national infrastructure. Contrasting views concerning the BRI are also present among Chinese scholars and officials. Bouchard, Doyle, and Rumley cite a speech by General Qiao Liang at China’s Defence University, who describe the BRI as “a hedging strategy against the eastward move of the US pivot to Asia” (Bouchard et al. 2019:156). Finally, China was notably the most critical of the U.S. “rebalancing” to Asia as Chinese military strategists perceived the Obama Administration’s East Asia policy to target China (Shambaugh 2013).

2.1.3 The Emergence of a Balancing Against China

In 2007, Abe promoted the idea of a “Quadrilateral Security Dialogue” (QUAD), based upon the successful experience of collaboration among Japan, Australia, India and the U.S. in responding to the Indian Ocean tsunami that hit Indonesia in 2004 (Tsunami Core Group). The QUAD expressed Abe’s political will to create a quadrilateral grouping of like-minded democracies to deter China’s unilateral actions in Maritime Asia (Koga 2020). However, as the forum jointly occurred with military exercises of unprecedented scale –*Exercise Malabar*¹²– in a contended geopolitical spot, such as the Bay of Bengal, China formally contested the initiative as it perceived the arrangement as an “embryo of a regional security alignment” (Medcalf 2018:18) comparable to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

¹² The exercises included the participation of India, the United States, Japan, Australia, and Singapore.

China's economic leverage on Australia led to the withdrawal of the latter in 2008 from the QUAD and to its very own dissolution. Nonetheless, the idea of connecting the Indian and Pacific regions increased in subsequent years and, in 2012, Abe relaunched, with his essay *Asia's Democratic Security Diamond*, the concept of a democratic coalition among Japan, Australia, India and the United States. To preserve the status quo in the region, another attempt to revive the QUAD was made at the ASEAN 2017 Summit in Manila (Koga 2020). However, as an informal strategic dialogue, the QUAD takes the shape of a forum for diplomatic consultation rather than a full-fledged military and information-sharing alliance (Hanada 2018) and it has been especially gaining traction in media discourses only during 2020.

ASEAN has also recently elaborated an Indo-Pacific approach. Indeed, despite beginning to mention the Indo-Pacific as early as 2013, ASEAN did not use the term in official ASEAN statements and documents until June 2019, when they adopted an "Outlook on the Indo-Pacific" (AOIP). Akin to the other regional stakeholders, ASEAN's AOIP was also designed to address the shifting geopolitical and geo-economic dynamics of the region. Some scholars argue that ASEAN felt compelled to launch their own Indo-Pacific approach to challenge the competing ideas of order promoted by China's BRI, and Japan and U.S.' FOIP (Goh 2008; Heiduk and Wacker 2020).

However, it is precisely to guard against escalations of the U.S.-China rivalry, as well as avoid to overtly side with one of the two powers, that ASEAN emphasised its central role in the Indo-Pacific, being virtually located at its core. As a result, ASEAN's Outlook endorses a less controversial narrative and primarily focuses on renewing momentum for ASEAN-led mechanisms, such as the EAS, in order to better exploit opportunities deriving from the current regional environment (ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific 2019). ASEAN additionally represents an attractive strategic partner for the European Union, as the EU's third largest trading partner.

Indeed, "ASEAN centrality" seems to be one of the main pillars not only for Japan's FOIP Vision, but also for EU Member States France, Germany and the Netherlands' Indo-Pacific approaches. Between 2018 and 2020, the concept of the Indo-Pacific has also gained prominence within EU circles. In 2018, France was the first EU Member State to

officially acknowledge the challenges and opportunities inherent to the Indo-Pacific and to craft an Indo-Pacific strategy. French President Emmanuel Macron's 2018 speech, at the Garden Island naval base in Sydney, emphasized the China dimension, in terms of security matters as well as economic and trade relationships (Élysée 2018).

Like Germany, France's concept of the Indo-Pacific included nuclear security and safety and insisted on tackling climate change along with the numerous non-traditional security challenges arising in the region. As stated by President Macron in his speech on the island of La Réunion, in October 2019, the IPR is of the utmost importance for Paris as "France is a maritime and island Indo-Pacific country anchored to the Indo-Pacific space through La Réunion" (Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères 2019). Due to its colonial past, France still administers territories outside Europe, which are classified as a group as "Overseas France" (Territoires d'Outre-Mer) and five of its domains are located in the IPR.¹³

As these territories represent more than two thirds of the French Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), the world's second largest after the United States, the French advocacy for a "free, open and inclusive" Indo-Pacific space is supported by a strong military presence contributing to regional security. Therefore, France would welcome an increased involvement of other European Member States as well as increased cooperation with the QUAD countries and greater intra-EU coordination vis-à-vis the IP region. More recently, Germany and the Netherlands also launched Indo-Pacific strategies. While the Dutch Government has yet to publish an official English translation of its IP guidelines, Germany's approach underscores the relevance of the Indo-Pacific as the area where "more than anywhere else [...] the shape of the international rules-based order of tomorrow will be decided" (German Federal Office 2020). Unlike France, both Germany and the Netherlands are key stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific region while not claiming membership.

In fact, their reasons for acknowledging the shifting geopolitical power structures of the Asia-Pacific is the impact of Asian security on their economic and political security.

¹³New Caledonia, French Polynesia, Wallis and Futuna, Reunion Island and Mayotte.

Notably, Berlin brings to the forefront the security-policy sector as a special focal area. Strengthening the rule of law (by supporting a legally binding South China Sea code of conduct between China and ASEAN member states), human rights, and the diversification of economic partnerships “to avoid *unilateral dependency*” (German Federal Office 2020) are among the many domains identified by the German government to cooperate with the countries of the Indo-Pacific. As the release of the document occurred one day after Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi left Berlin to continue his five-nation European trip, some analysts suggest that German’s announcement signals Europe’s reassessment of its China approach (Albert 2020).

2.1.4 The South China Sea Strategic Dilemma

As noted by Bouchard, Doyle, and Rumley, the principal hinderance to stability and sustainable security in the Indo-Pacific region is the persistence of Cold War “logic” (2019:45). This is evidenced by unresolved territorial and maritime disputes, which additionally prevent regional countries from finalizing peace treaties, as in the case of Japan and Russia’s diplomatic stalemate over the Kuril Islands. China’s expansion into the South China Sea also attests to lingering Cold War attitudes (Bouchard et al. 2019). As such, strategic postures expressing, *inter alia*, “expansionism”, “sphere of influence”, “containment”, “territorial competition”, “counterbalance” amplify conflicts and constitute a legacy of the Cold War, which still obstructs regional security cooperation (Bouchard, et. al. 2019).

Ultimately, geopolitical concepts such as “pivot” and the Indo-Pacific strategies themselves further foster the “new” Cold War dynamics in the region (Bouchard et al. 2019). Bouchard, Doyle, and Rumley go as far as arguing that the very same concept of the “Indo-Pacific’ has returned as a central element of the new Cold War” (2019:45). As endorsed by the Indo-Pacific strategies, the stability and security of the Indo-Pacific region has been notably put in jeopardy by overlapping territorial claims and China’s assertive stance vis-à-vis the East and South China Seas. Particularly, the South China Sea is regarded by China as a “Chinese Lake” (Green 2016:19) as well as a vital “buffer region” against the U.S. and allies (Bouchard et al. 2019:158).

Against this backdrop, Japan, at the frontline of Asian security as historical ally of the U.S., has become increasingly concerned about China's defence posture and behaviour and was therefore compelled to revisit its relations with China to diffuse tensions caused by its historical revisionism (Koga 2020). In 2008, Japan and China reached an agreement regarding joint development in the East China Sea. Notwithstanding, China unilaterally undertook natural gas explorations, adding tensions to the existing dispute in the zone. Indeed, both China and Japan have been quarrelling over the Senkaku/Diaoyu archipelago of uninhabited islands situated in their overlapping economic zones in the East China Sea for over a century.

The contested islands hold great economic significance for both countries, since they potentially contain oil and natural gas reserves, along with rich fishing areas, and lie along prominent shipping routes. In fact, the East China Sea is connected to the South China Sea through the Strait of Taiwan, which China deems a less vulnerable transportation hub as it avoids narrow choke-points, differently from to the Strait of Malacca. Nonetheless, in China's perspective, their strategic importance exceeds their use as commercial routes and source of natural resources (Buszynski and Do Thanh Hai 2019:4). The East China Sea hosts the Bashi Channel and the Miyako Strait, two strategic points of the "first island chain" and constitutes a crucial passage for Chinese military operations (Buszynski and Do Thanh Hai 2019).

The waterways provide the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) with an entryway into the Pacific Ocean as well as a passageway to international waters and airspace through Japan's EEZ. For this reason, in 2013, the Chinese government unilaterally declared the establishment of the East China Sea Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ), which was rapidly neutralized by international criticism (Buszynski, et al. 2019). Nonetheless, such an attempt attested to China's ambitious strategy through political and military means in the South China Sea (Koga 2020). The strategic importance of the first island chain is further confirmed by the fact that it is being formed by the eastern and southern banks of the SCS, thereby preventing the Chinese Navy from reaching the Pacific or Indian Oceans undetected by littoral states (Yoshihara 2012).

The SCS is the only easily accessible sea with relatively deep water suitable for extensive Chinese submarine operations (Buszynski, et. al 2019:4). As the first island chain idea stimulates China's fears of strategic encirclement, ensuring control of the sea is a prerequisite for the successful projection of its military power to open oceans (Buszynski, et. al. 2019). Economic and strategic factors might be the drivers of China's assertiveness in the IPR but Beijing's sense of a changing balance of power in its favour, together with the expansion of its national interests to the maritime domain through its Maritime Silk Road, and the growth of its military power to pursue maritime claims, encouraged the regime to consolidate control of the sea by militarizing the area.

In fact, territorial disputes and claims mar the South China Sea security environment as sovereign possession of land features in the sea would lay ground for maritime rights to territorial waters and EEZs (Buszynski, et. al. 2019:4). Therefore, overlapping claims over the Spratly and Paracel islands¹⁴ and the Scarborough Shoal¹⁵ brought the SCS to the spotlight as a region of geopolitical contestation. Among the contenders, China's claims attract the most attention due to its growing political, economic, and military power. This behaviour adds to the perception of China as a maritime aggressor in disputed waters. This is exemplified by the China-Philippines conflict over the Spratly Islands, and China's refusal to abide by the Hague Permanent Court of Arbitration's ruling in favour of the Philippines, despite China being a signatory of the very treaty that established the tribunal. The decision taken by The Hague significantly clarified the legal nature of the maritime rights in the SCS by ruling that Chinese maritime claims stemming from "historical rights" are not in line with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS).

In addition to maritime claims, China has also been engaging in extensive island-building and base construction activities in the Paracels and Spratlys consisting of sea walls, airfields, radar towers, ship docks and helicopter bases, which, *inter alia*, could potentially serve as air and naval bases (U.S. Congressional Research Service 2020). The Fiery Cross Reef is notably China's base for military power projection as it offers better access to the deep waters of the South China Sea. In fact, the reef is the second most

¹⁴ Claimed by China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Brunei.

¹⁵ Disputed among China, Taiwan, and the Philippines.

southern post controlled by China and its position at the heart of the SCS makes it a strategic location close to most of the trade traffic while also being equidistant between mainland China and the Malacca Strait (Buszynski, et. al. 2019).

China's increasing assertiveness in such a relevant economic hub has caused concerns among U.S. observers of Chinese possible threats against the sea lanes of communication (SLOCs), thereby affecting the economic interests of the U.S. and allies in the Indo-Pacific region (U.S. Congressional Research Service 2020). This threat perception has particularly heightened in recent months due to China's naval manoeuvres amid the coronavirus pandemic due to the PLA's aggressive manoeuvres against littoral countries.

In parallel, the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command cancelled *Exercise Balikatan 2020* scheduled for May, in the Republic of the Philippines, due to concerns for the health and safety of the participating forces and local populations. Joint naval exercises with littoral states were inaugurated in 2019 to demonstrate the U.S. commitment to a "free and open" Indo-Pacific and counter China's military drills in East Asian waters. As the main security provider, the U.S. dominance of the oceans has also made its Navy a guarantor of global trade despite not being a signatory of the UNCLOS (Masters 2019).

2.1.5 The Rise of India

The rise of India as an economic powerhouse is another factor that propelled the formation of an Asian supercomplex (Buzan 2012). India is a sought-after partner by most regional stakeholders due to the general expectation of New Delhi becoming the fourth-largest economy in the Indo-Pacific –after China, the U.S. and Japan. Indeed, according to a 2003 report published by the investment bank Goldman Sachs, Indian economy will likely grow the fastest by 2050 due to a "structural increase in India's potential growth rate" (Wilson and Purushothaman 2003). For this reason, India is expected to surpass the American economy as the second-largest global economy after China by 2042 (Pardesi 2007).

In addition, the U.S. National Intelligence Council had predicted in 2004 that the rise of both China and India would have altered the geopolitical landscape by 2020 (National Intelligence Council 2004). As demonstrated by the Indo-Pacific approaches crafted in reaction to China's growing economic and military relevance, this prediction has certainly come true. India's rise is not only imminent in economic and military terms, but also in terms of know-how (Pardesi 2007). Furthermore, differently from China, India's rise has not alarmed Western nations, which have been continuously supporting a stronger Indian role in the Indo-Pacific, as India is perceived as a like-minded democracy. With India's nuclear weapon state status being resolved by its nuclear deal with the U.S., New Delhi has been seeking to be accepted as a great power through reinforcing ties with the U.S. (Pant 2009: 276).¹⁶

Analysts consider China to be the driving force behind India's Indo-Pacific concept (Heiduk and Wacker 2020). Indeed, India's rivalry with China, which firstly emerged in 1962, is also one important aspect that gave impetus to the power narrative of the Indo-Pacific. The economic rise of both China and India expanded their strategic interests into each other's primary zone of influence, the Indian and Pacific Oceans respectively. In spite of China becoming India's largest trading partner in 2008, and strengthening strategic ties, the border dispute between the two countries is yet unresolved. As a result, tensions between China and India encompass the economic and political domains and regularly escalates into military conflicts, as attested by the latest incident along the Sikkim-Tibet border, the deadliest clash in 45 years.

China's strategic partnership with Pakistan, funding of separatist groups in Northeast India, along with Beijing military incursions into Indian territory and strong presence into the Indian Ocean, enhance India's fears of a Chinese "strategic encirclement". Notwithstanding, India's policy vis-à-vis China has been often described as "evasive balancing" (Rajagopalan 2020). Akin to other regional middle powers, India seeks to reassure China that no balancing act is being enacted against Beijing, while combining "strategic hedging" with the U.S. and "economic bandwagoning" with China (Bouchard

¹⁶ Citation found in Amitav and Buzan (2019)

et al. 2019:111), as well as reinforcing security cooperation with other states in the region, such as Japan.

2.1.6 A Melting Spot of Global Interests

The Indo-Pacific has recently replaced the Atlantic Ocean as the world's most important economic hub of the 21-st century. With the gravity of economic power shifting to Asia, economic interconnection and mutual interdependence among nations have been rapidly developing. Therefore, the formation of a single interconnected supercomplex has been further generated by the high level of trade and economic exchanges occurring in the Indo-Pacific. Indeed, the Indo-Pacific can be described as a melting spot of global interests, as disruptions of commercial shipping lanes via a military blockade, or escalation of conflicts, would likely precipitate a global crisis.

According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) estimates, 60 percent of the world's maritime trade passes through Asia, with the South China Sea, in the Pacific Ocean, carrying 30 percent of global maritime shipping, primarily constituted by energy resources (China Power 2017). The South China Sea is a major transport lane especially for East Asian economies. After the Strait of Hormuz, by the Arabian Peninsula, the Strait of Malacca, located between Singapore and Malaysia, accounts for the second busiest transit oil choke-point towards Asian markets (Cunningham 2018). The Strait also virtually represents the nexus between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, with more than 90 percent of crude oil volumes leaving the Middle East and crossing the Malacca Strait to reach Singapore, as well as the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia, to be refined as petroleum products (Cunningham 2018).

Petroleum is then shipped to China, Japan, and South Korea, the three major oil importers in Asia, which collectively account for 80 percent of annual crude oil imports (EIA 2018). The latest international trade statistics, elaborated by the Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC), confirm that, in 2018, crude petroleum was the world's most traded product, with China, the U.S., India, South Korea, and Japan ranking as the top five importers, and Saudi Arabia, Russia, Iraq, Canada, and the United Arab Emirates, as principal exporters (OEC Crude Petroleum statistics 2019). In the same

year, refined petroleum resulted to be the third most traded product with the U.S., Russia, Singapore, the Netherlands as well as South Korea recording the most exports, and the U.S., Singapore, the Netherlands, Mexico and China as principal importers of refined petroleum (OEC Refined Petroleum statistics 2019).

In addition, almost 40 percent of global Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) trade crosses the South China Sea annually (EIA 2017). The U.S. Energy Information Agency (EIA) estimates that 34 million barrels of crude oil and petroleum are transported per day from the Middle East towards Asia and Europe. In 2018, the main exporters of LNG were Qatar, Australia, Malaysia, Nigeria and Indonesia, and China, South Korea, Japan, India, and Chinese Taipei their main buyers (OEC LNG statistics 2019). The economic interdependence among Asia and the rest of the world has become more pronounced since the 2008 economic and financial crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic crisis irrefutably proved the world's dependence upon China's global supply chains. International trade statistics further exemplify this interrelationship.

China mainly exports to the United States, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea and Germany, while its principal imports of crude petroleum, petroleum gas, integrated circuits, iron ore, and cars originated from South Korea, Japan, the United States, Germany and Chinese Taipei (OEC China profile statistics). China is also strongly dependent upon the shipping lanes in the region and has long acknowledged the relevance of this geographic space for its economic and geo-strategic interests, as its territorial claims and artificial island building in the South China Sea best exemplify.

China's Maritime Silk Route can also be interpreted as Beijing's response to the growing economic and strategic relevance of the region. As such, the "Indo-Pacific" can be seen as "a single integrated geopolitical theatre" (Mohan 2012:212-15) as well as a diverse strategic space (Bouchard et al. 2019:7), which is gradually and partially evolving (Brewster 2012:158). Within the framework of the RSCT, it can be concluded that within the Asian supercomplex a strong American presence, acutely perceived as an outside power, blends Asian regional security dynamics across regional and global levels (Buzan 2012). How have Indo-Pacific dynamics affected Japan-India relations?

2.2 The “Discovery” of India in Japan’s Geopolitical Thinking

Despite Abe being the first to reintroduce the Indo-Pacific as a geographical vision, the term was first incorporated into official documents by the Rudd Administration. Indeed, in 2013, Australia formally acknowledged the “Indo-Pacific” as its zone of strategic interest, thereby adapting its foreign policy strategy to the changing security landscape in Asia. In fact, Australia’s 2016 White Defence Paper reports that “the Indo-Pacific is in a period of unprecedented transformation as the distribution of economic and political power shifts to our region” (Australian Government Department of Defence 2016). Consequently, an entire chapter has been dedicated to the concept of the “Indo-Pacific”. Australia’s comprehensive assessment of the six strategic drivers shaping the regional security environment to 2035 brings to the forefront the relationship between the United States and China, the challenges to the stability of the rules-based global order, and the increasing pace of military modernisation in Asia.

The White Paper further illustrates the close ties between Australian security and prosperity and the maintenance of a rules-based order in the region, destabilized by “the coercive use of economic or military power [which] diminish the freedom of [...] Australia to take independent action in [our] national interest.” As a result, Australia has been actively shaping the regional security environment, as growing concerns about U.S. capabilities to act as a strategic balancer paved the way for Canberra to establish a “strategic umbrella” (Kuper 2020) to cooperate more closely with other stakeholders in the region, namely Japan and India. Notwithstanding, Australian foreign policy traditions envisaging Canberra as a “middle power” as well as a “dependent ally” of the U.S. remain unchanged (Brendan 2020).

In 2017, the Trump Administration also unveiled an “Indo-Pacific” strategy, which, along with Washington’s trade war with Beijing, provoked renewed accusations from China concerning the U.S. plans of concocting a “China-containment” initiative. It is generally assumed that the United States launched its own strategy based upon a “free and open” Indo-Pacific narrative to contain China’s increasing geo-economic and strategic influence in the region, as attested by China’s Belt and Road and claims in the East and South China Seas. The 2019 Indo-Pacific Strategy Report explicitly underlines

the nature of the U.S. initiative when it states that “the geopolitical rivalry between *free and repressive world order visions* is the US’ primary security concern in the Indo-Pacific. (...) In particular, the People’s Republic of China [...] seeks to reorder the region to its advantage” (U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy Report 2019:21; italics added).

This additionally led to the renaming of the U.S. “Asia-Pacific” Command into “Indo-Pacific” Command, in 2018. The U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy is notably the most upfront against the Chinese Communist Party as Washington suspects China’s BRI projects of harbouring “debt-traps” and geopolitical aims and condemns its unfair trade practices, intellectual property theft, aggressive military postures, violation of human rights against Muslim minorities (the Uighurs) and, more recently, its disinformation war and influence on the World Health Organization. Indeed, the U.S. Indo-Pacific report describes China as follows:

The People’s Republic of China (PRC) practices repression at home and abroad. Beijing is intolerant of dissent, aggressively controls media and civil society, and brutally suppresses ethnic and religious minorities. Such practices, which Beijing exports to other countries through its political and economic influence, undermine the conditions that have promoted stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific for decades (U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy Report 2019:21).

However, as previously mentioned, it was former Japanese PM Abe 2007 landmark speech that reintroduced the Indo-Pacific concept to political discourses. Tokyo’s aim of endorsing a “rich and stable region based upon universal values” (MOFA 2006) such as openness, transparency, democracy, freedom and human rights, across an “immense network spanning the entirety of the Pacific Ocean, incorporating the U.S. and Australia” (MOFA 2007) incarnated the values-based diplomacy initially promoted by Asia’s “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity”, Japan’s initiative to broaden Tokyo’s diplomatic activities. The ending of the Cold War greatly reshaped East Asian security dynamics. After its defeat in World War II, Japan’s post-war Constitution prevented Japan’s military resurgence.

In fact, Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution constrains the use of force to endorse “pacifism”. As a result, Japan was reportedly considered to be “passive” in international affairs, thereby lacking an international security strategy (Green 2001). As such, Tokyo’s foreign policy was mostly dictated by Washington. Japan’s passivity was additionally reinforced by its consensus-oriented political system (Green 2001:1). As the U.S. linchpin in East Asia, Japan’s relationship with the United States was (and still is) broadly viewed as “the cornerstone of Asia-Pacific security” (Carter 2016:69). In 1960, the U.S. and Japan concluded a security treaty, which has granted Washington the right to maintain military bases on Japanese territory¹⁷ in exchange for defending Japan in the event of attacks.

Thus, since the 1990s, Japanese governments have been trying to “reinterpret” Article 9. It was only under the Abe Administration that normalization processes have been accelerated. This is proved by the 2014 New Security Policy framework (the “Legislation for Peace and Security”) which formally acknowledges Japan’s right to resort to “collective self-defence” to proactively contribute in the fight against internationally-recognized security threats (MOFA 2016a). The new security legislation also provided with the foundations for the implementation of the 2015 U.S.-Japan defence guidelines, thereby legitimating enhanced support to U.S. international endeavours. However, as the security legislation significantly expanded the scope of the JSDF missions overseas, scholars, law experts, Japanese public opinion, as well as neighbouring countries, have been highly critical of the law as they retain it openly violates Japan’s “pacifist” identity (The Japan Times 2016).

Yet, Japanese foreign policy apathy enabled Tokyo to focus on national self-interests and to rapidly recover its economic power. Japan’s foreign policy model incorporated “techno-economic security interests –including [...] those associated with military security” (Green 2001:1). This allowed Japan to carve out for itself a great power role as well as increase its influence in the region through foreign direct investments (FDIs) and overseas development assistance (ODA).¹⁸ In fact, Japan’s legendary economic growth

¹⁷Around 50,000 U.S. troops are stationed in Japan (Okinawa).

¹⁸ Prime Minister Nobosuke Kishi (Abe’s grandfather) launched the very first post-war ODA programs. India was the first country that accepted Japanese aids.

of the 1960s, which expanded in the 1980s with the appreciation of the yen, not only transformed Japan into an economic superpower, but also led the economic integration of East Asia.

Simultaneously, Japan's economic rise raised arguments about Japan's inevitable shift into a military superpower as, normally, growing material capabilities increase expenditures in defence budgets. These fears were reinforced by the perceived emergence of a multipolar balancing against China, thereby generating "a reappraisal of the security strategy that Japan has followed for the past 50 years" (Menon 1997:34). Andrew Oros observes that regulations for Japan's enhanced military capabilities were already being implemented between 2006 and 2012 (2017).

Indeed, in 2010, Japan produced new National Defence Program Guidelines (NDPG), which, according to analysts, did not introduce "a radical qualitative departure of from decade-long defence and security policies" (Berkfosky 2012), but nonetheless represented an initial response to China's growing militarization and assertiveness vis-à-vis the Indo-Pacific region. The NDPG increased the JSDF capabilities, thereby enabling a proactive Japanese participation to counterpiracy operations; ensuring Japan's continued funding of Afghan reconstruction; and leading to more pronounced tensions in the East China Sea (Oros 2017). As a result, security cooperation with regional stakeholders, such as India and Australia, reached unprecedented levels.

Japan's securitisation of China formally began in 2006, when, for the first time, Japan's Diplomatic Bluebook indicated China's rapid militarization as a source of uncertainty by reading that: "The situation related to modernization of Chinese military power and increases in its national defence expenditures is also still partially unclear" (MOFA 2006a). Interestingly, China's defence paper already expressed concerns over the loosening of legal constraints of Japan's military forces resulting not only from the new NDPG, but also from its alignment with the U.S. after the 9/11 attack, and on its implications for regional stability in Northeast Asia (Bush 2009). A 2006 report published by the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations described Japan's behaviour as follows:

East Asia for the first time manifested the strategic configuration of Japan and China both standing up and competing at the same time. *China's economic rise created a challenge for Japan and fostered psychological defensiveness [...]* The China-Japan contradiction grew, and *Japan regards China as its principal strategic adversary* (Guoji Zhanlue yu Anquan Xingshi Pingku 2006; italics added).

Fast-forward fourteen years, Japan's 2020 White Defence Paper underscores the role of China's increasing influence in the shifting regional balance of power. Admittedly, China's rise fosters regional interdependence, but also interstate competition. This has led to the adoption of "hybrid warfare" and the formation of "gray-zone" situations (Japanese Ministry of Defence 2020). Hence, military modernization and technological advancement enhance threat perception levels of regional countries, thereby ensuring the continued securitization of neighbours as per the RSCT framework.

The challenges of the post-Cold War environment brought to the fore a new realism that required a more assertive diplomatic agenda to compensate for Japan's relative decline in economic power (Green 2001). As argued in 2001 by political scientist Michael J. Green, Japan's increasing independence was the catalyst for a new strategic view. In fact, Japan shifted its foreign policy from "commercial liberalism" to "reluctant realism" (Yadav 2002), which is shaped by global level dynamics, insecurity about national power resources, and Japanese aspirations for a national identity free from the legacy of the war (Green 2001). Indeed, Japan's constitutional constraints, which deny normalization to the Japanese state, together with Tokyo's inability to conduct effective neighbourhood diplomacy concerning wartime crimes¹⁹ and overlapping territorial claims, undermine Japan's "confidence about strategic convergence within the region" (Green 2001:270).

As a matter of fact, some scholars argue that the Cold War has yet to end for Japan (Bouchard et al 2019). Japan's awareness of the shifting power of balance in favour of China came together with a series of events that marked Japan's "lost" decades (*ushinawareta nijyūnen*). In the 1990s, Japan had yet to come to terms with its Gulf War trauma when the collapse of the bubble economy ensued along with collisions with China over nuclear testing. While North Korea rapidly developed its own nuclear

¹⁹ This is further exemplified by Japan's various disputes over history textbooks

armaments, Japan's strategic dependence on the U.S. only increased at a time when Washington solely focused on its wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Thus, Japan abandoned its "passivity" in order to develop "much more consciousness about the integrity and dignity of the nation-state" (Green 2001:271). This evolutionary shift is characterized by elements of continuity. In 2001, Green observed that the United States remained the pillar of Japan's foreign policy approach.²⁰ In addition, in spite of declining material resources, economic aid still characterized Japan's external relations especially with Southeast Asian states as inaugurated by the Fukuda Doctrine in 1977. Further, Japan's pacifist constitution prevented escalation of conflicts between Japan and North Korea as well as China. In parallel, Green discerned the emergence of a new consensus based upon higher ambitions about Japan's international identity. Gradually, Japan began to shift from exclusive bilateralism to modest minilateralism (Mulgan 2008).

With the dynamics of the Asian regional security complex treading the path towards the broader Indo-Pacific construct, Japan was propelled to expand its strategic horizon to include India. At the global level, the impetus for closer Japan-India ties was given by the U.S.-India strategic rapprochement. The 2008 U.S.-India Civil Nuclear deal significantly reassessed the strategic role of India, thereby encouraging Japan to explore opportunities for cooperation with the latter. Secondly, the U.S. relative decline in Asia opened a window for China to expand its regional influence and toughen its neighbourhood policy.

In fact, much of the literature on Japan-India relations indicates China as the catalyst for their closer security cooperation, especially in the initial phase of their rapprochement, despite other variables characterizing the Japan-India relationship. As most experts widely agree that "the most dramatic change in the India-Japan relationship [...] happening at the systemic level" (Basrur and Kutty 2018:30) was Chinese hegemonic expansion, this suggests that, until the 2000s, Japan was not

²⁰ In accordance with the post-war Yoshida Doctrine which led the Japanese economic reconstruction while depending on the U.S. for national defence.

seriously considering India as a partner –strategically as well as economically. In fact, from the 1960s, India seemed to be lost in oblivion in Japan’s strategic thinking.

At the regional level, former Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao’s “Look East” policy (LEP) provided with the momentum to reinvigorate economic relations (Basrur and Kutty 2018). In fact, India’s LEP designed a new political map generally known as an “extended neighbourhood” (Scott 2009:107-143) which reflected India’s primary national objective (economic development) and constitutes a legacy of Modi’s “Act East” Policy (Mathur 2017:339). Consequently, at the domestic level, India’s post-war economic liberalization gradually promoted the growth of its market economy. More recently, Japanese and Indian policy-makers also played a crucial role in advancing bilateral ties. Indeed, Abe’s efforts in promoting Japan-India relations were notably met with enthusiasm by incumbent Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi as well as former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

Both Japan and India also developed “like-minded” approaches on global and regional issues. Yadav construed Indo-Japanese commonalities and explained that, at the global level, Japan and India endorsed peace and disarmament as well as demanding an expansion of the UN Security Council to obtain a permanent seat (2002). At the regional level, besides cooperating militarily with the United States, they supported regional security institutions such as the APEC and the ARF. Bilaterally, Japan established the South Asia Forum in the Ministry of External Affairs. Furthermore, India’s liberalisation programme attracted Japanese FDIs, thereby bolstering trade and joint ventures. This partly occurred in rescue of India when the latter was in the grips of the worst foreign exchange crisis it ever experienced at the end of the Cold War.

At the same time, major setbacks in bilateral relations occurred with the burst of the bubble, thereby significantly decreasing Japan’s material capabilities. Second, Tokyo maintained neutrality on the 1999 Kargil conflict between India and Pakistan and refused to condemn Pakistan’s violation of the Line of Control in Kashmir. Japanese decision-makers were perceived to be especially harsh when Japan strongly condemned India’s nuclear tests in May 1998. It was not lost on India that Japan’s response to China and France’s 1995-1996 nuclear testing had been milder (Basrur and Kutty 2018).

However, the Japanese government rapidly acknowledged the counterproductive economic regime it had imposed on New Delhi and followed the U.S. lead in lifting the sanctions in 2001. This led to renewed criticism about Japan's lack of independence in international affairs, especially within Indian policy circles (Basrur and Kutty 2018).

Between the 1970s and the 1980s, Japan began to rank as one of the major import partners and export destinations for India (Basrur and Kutty 2018). By 1986, Japan became India's principal aid donor. Japan's "Maruti" car²¹ success further laid the foundations for enhancing economic ties. However, according to Basrur and Kutty, until 2003, Japan's financial assistance to India was a consequence of Japan's self-image as a "great economic power," as well as "a matter of honour,"²² rather than be driven by India's economic potential (2018). As a country with a large population but underdeveloped economy, India's attractiveness for Japan was not very high.

Greater ODA loans were delivered to India only when the bank Goldman Sachs published its 2003 report on the economic potential of the BRICs countries, thereby encouraging Japan to reassess India's potential as an economic partner. Directly after, India notably emerged as one of the world's fastest growing economies. Strategically, after the 9/11 terrorist attack, Japan was reportedly appreciative of India's geographic location "in between East Asia, Central Asia and the Middle East" (Pillalamarri 2016).

Japan began gravitating towards India after the recovery of a Japanese vessel *M/V Alondra Rainbow* in 1999 in the Strait of Malacca (Richardson 1999). Indeed, in 2001, for the first time after 1945, the Japanese Navy had re-entered the Indian Ocean and resupplied and refuelled at Indian ports to support U.S. operations in Afghanistan (Garver 2016:752). In practice, Japan "discovered" India thanks to New Delhi's strategic location in the Indo-Pacific, which is additionally crossed by major sea lines of trade and communication connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans with the Middle East and Europe. As such, Tokyo has identified India as a core strategic partner especially in the maritime domain.

²¹ A joint collaboration between Suzuki and the Indian government

²² Speech Confluence of the Two Seas

India's strategic location was emphasized in Japan's 2011 Defence Paper, which reads that India is an "extremely important country in the geopolitical sense for Japan" (Joshy 2020:11). As about 80 per cent of Japan's energy resources cross the Indian Ocean, closer Japan-India ties would ensure the protection of Japanese imports (Joshy 2020:11). However, India's idyllic strategic location is not a new concept. Erstwhile British viceroy of India, Lord George Curzon, had already underscored India's assets in 1909:

The central position of India, its magnificent resources, its teeming multitude of men, its great trading harbours, its reserve of military strength, supplying an army always in a high state of efficiency and capable of being hurled at a moment's notice upon any given point either of Asia and Africa – all these are assets of precious values (Pillalamarri 2016).

Once the chief military and political force in the Indian Ocean basin (and Asia), India lost its importance in Asian security after gaining independence in 1947. According to Indian analyst Akhilesh Pillalamarri, ideological and geopolitical reasons led to India's strategic demise. Ideologically, India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, envisaged a bigger role for India as a non-aligned nation, thereby rejecting power politics (Pillalamarri 2016). Geopolitically, independent India had no reason to maintain the same position as British India. In fact, Pillalamarri observes that most of the African and Middle Eastern countries that Britain had colonized served as a wall of protection for the trading routes between Britain and India.

Hence, ensuring freedom of navigation was in the best interests of the British Empire. After the Second World War, the U.S. replaced Britain as the main security provider and guarantor of navigational freedom. Additionally, India was depauperated in economic resources. The remaining resources were mainly invested into domestic spending and development rather than international security (Pillalamarri 2016). After 1947, Pakistan and China were India's principal security threats. Pakistan's rise had deprived India of a direct land route to the Middle East and Central Asia, which New Delhi is seeking to regain by investing in Iran's Chahabar Port. China mostly opposed India at their disputed border.

Thenceforth, India has tried to consolidate its regional position by promoting integration and cooperation in South Asia, thereby attempting to increase Pakistan's dependence on India so that it would be discouraged to block Indian land trade (Pillalamarri 2016). Secondly, India expanded its focus to the maritime domain and to the empowerment of its navy. As India aimed to expand its influence beyond its neighbourhood, New Delhi adopted a hedging strategy by forging strategic partnerships and identifying Japan as a "natural partner" with whom New Delhi shares common interests and values. Japan and India formally established diplomatic relations in 1952 (Treaty of Peace).

Bilateral ties were elevated into a strategic partnership in August 2000 when then Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori and Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee jointly agreed to establish a global and strategic partnership. The agreement was later signed in December 2006 by Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Strategic partnerships are a characteristic of the post-Cold War global order for both economic and geopolitical reasons (Bouchard et al. 2019:59). As the post-war world is characterized by (military and economic) interdependence, states engage in multiple forms of cooperation ranging from intelligence exchanges, arms transfers, strategic dialogues, and economic exchanges (Basrur and Kutty 2018:6-7).

Additionally, Basrur and Kutty (2018) observe that states engage in security partnerships in order to (i) increase their military capabilities in case of military confrontations; (ii) exercise politico-psychological pressure against hostile states; (iii) obtain political support in international institutions; (iv) avoid (economic) dependence on controversial partners; (v) decrease conflict-of-interests-related risks by tying the adversary into a cooperative relationship. According to Zhongping and Jing (2014: 7), the concept of strategic partnerships was developed by China's post-Cold War multidimensional diplomacy with the purpose of increasing trade exchanges and reshaping post-conflict alliances (Bouchard et al. 2019).

Bilateral strategic partnerships are assumed to promote regional stability by providing with mutual support on strategic issues (Bouchard et al. 2019). India also embraced this

trend by agreeing to its very first strategic partnerships with South Africa (1997), France (1998) and Japan (2000) during the post-Cold War period. This classifies India as “multialigned” within Asia’s “new Cold War matrix” (Bouchard et al. 2019:65). In fact, India is the only regional state “that possess a strategic partnership with all other regional great powers” (Bouchard et al. 2019: 65). India’s shift from Cold War “non-alignment” to post-Cold War “multialignment” was prompted by New Delhi’s greater involvement with multilateral organisations.

India’s new strategy of multialignment focuses on a “policy of ‘normative hedging’” (Bouchard et al 2019:65); the use of strategic partnerships to bolster both its economic development and national security; the projection of its influence in the wider Indo-Pacific area as well as promotion of Indian values (Hall 2016). Washington also encouraged closer Indo-Japanese strategic ties to reduce its costs as the main security provider in Asia (Basrur and Kutty 2018) as well as advance liberal values. In fact, Richard Fontaine reported that:

By balancing China and ensuring that it rises in a region where the democratic powers are also strong and working together, closer ties between Tokyo and New Delhi [...] demonstrate that, contrary to Beijing’s claims, the story of Asian security is about much more than an American fixation with “containing” China. And at a time of declining U.S. military resources and rising commitments in the Middle East and Europe, *Indo-Japanese cooperation helps reduce gaps that would otherwise emerge in the rebalance of U.S. policy toward Asia* (2015; italics added).

Thus, uncertainties pertaining to Washington commitment to Asia, coupled with Japan and India’s strategic locations at the opposite sides of China, incentivized Japan to prepare for a U.S. abandonment (Atanassova-Cornelis and Sato 2019). As such, India naturally represents the ideal partner for mitigating China’s military risks (Yoshimatsu 2019). Additionally, India’s increasing military power in the Indian Ocean and Japan’s realization of the value of India’s assistance in the protection of the SLOCs bolstered maritime security cooperation (Yoshimatsu 2019). This was made clear through Japan’s participation in the International Fleet Review organized in Mumbai, in 2001. Shortly after, a squadron of the JMSDF visited the Port of Chennai. In practice, Japan’s

proactiveness in advancing bilateral ties, with the aim of balancing China, drew the two countries closer (Joshy 2020).

Yet, the role that cultural affinity played in Japan-India relations should also not be underestimated. As previously mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, India's LEP provided with the opportunity for bolstering economic ties but also reinforced respective positive perceptions. Unlike many other countries in Asia, India holds no historical grudges deriving from Japan's wartime aggression. With the exception of the Cold War period, the Japan-India relationship has steadily grown from the Meiji era (1868-1912) onwards due to their shared cultural affinity –India as the cradle of Buddhism (Horimoto 2019).

Descriptions of Japan-India relations in both Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) attest to the cordial sentiments between the two countries since the introduction of Buddhism to Japan in the 6th century AD, which greatly impacted Japanese culture and thought (MOFA 2020a). India's MEA brief concerning India's relationship with Japan depicts bilateral ties as “singularly free of any kind of dispute” as well as “unique and one of warmth emanating from generous gestures and sentiments of standing by each other at times of need” (MEA 2018a). On the one hand, India's positive image of Japan further improved with Japan's exemplary post-war economic reconstruction and ability to preserve its traditions amid technological advancement.

At the same time, India's iron ore exports to Japan assisted Japanese economic recovery and remains a constant component of bilateral relations (MOFA 2021a). Throughout the years, Japan consistently ranked as the most admired nation in Indian newspaper polls (MEA 2018a). In 1956, a cultural agreement ensued the establishment of diplomatic relationships, along with numerous cultural exchanges that concurrently boosted people-to-people diplomacy (MEA 2018a).

Chapter 3 - Indo-Pacific Visions Aligned: Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific and India's Act East Policy

Introduction

After charting the evolution of Indo-Japanese relations, this last chapter aims to highlight synergies between Japan's Vision for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific and India's Act East Policy from 2016 to 2020. However, as a common vision for the Indo-Pacific can be identified beginning from the early 2000s, the 2005-2015 period has also been tackled. Since this analysis ultimately aims to underscore the role of the "Indo-Pacific" construct in advancing Japan-India bilateral ties and the type of tactic they are jointly implementing in respect with China's rise and the U.S. disengagement to Asia, this chapter will begin by outlining the evolution of Japan's FOIP Vision and the role played by India in the achievement of the FOIP's objectives. India's Act East Policy will also be dealt with in respect to its alignments with Japan's FOIP Vision. Finally, we will attempt to hypothesize the future of Japan-India relations under the Suga Administration.

3.1 Japan's Value-Oriented Diplomacy: Factoring India In

In the same year that Japan formally securitized China, Japan-India relations were officially elevated into a "Global and Strategic Partnership" which particularly underpins "shared democratic values." Indeed, India's Ministry of External Affairs described the strategic partnership as follows:

Shared democratic values and commitment to human rights pluralism, open society, and the rule of law underpin the global partnership between the two countries. [and] reflects a broad convergence of their long-term political, economic and strategic interests, aspirations, objectives and concerns. Japan and India view each other as partners that have responsibility for, and are capable of, responding to global and regional challenges in keeping with their global partnership (MEA 2018a; italics added).

As characteristic of strategic partnerships, the Japan-India strategic rapprochement included non-traditional security sectors, such as environment, energy, disarmament, non-proliferation, thereby “taking advantage of, and further building on, their strategic convergences” (MEA 2018a). Nevertheless, in 2006, the focus was on “urgently” reinforcing economic ties (MEA 2018a). Abe’s 2007 visit to New Delhi was also propelled by the economic necessity of politically engaging with India as trade and economic ties between Japan and India (the third and fifth world’s largest economies respectively) were not as strong as expected (Pajon and Saint-Mezard 2018). Despite India being Japan’s largest recipient of ODA, economic relations presented untapped market potential (Pajon, et. al.).

As a result, in 2011, Japan and India also concluded a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which was especially significant for India, which, at the time, was mostly excluded from regional initiatives and fora such as the RCEP, ASEAN + 6, the proposed East Asian FTA among Japan, China and South Korea and the TPP (Das 2014). As the Japan-India economic rapprochement is political in nature, and principally driven by geopolitical considerations, Japan’s support of India’s long-term development and economic growth through ODA loans, encouragement of Outward Direct Investments (ODI) and infrastructure development to improve connectivity, such as the Mumbai-Delhi-Kolkata high speed railway, served the primary purpose of empowering India as an essential pillar for the maintenance of a “*free and open*” Indo-Pacific region (Pajon, et. al. 2018).

As such, in 2007, Abe chose India to announce the new values-oriented diplomacy that Japan was determined to pursue. Yet, despite believing in democratic values, Japan had never prioritized their protection differently from the United States. The reason has been partly attributed to the “American-written” Constitution, which, in 1947, introduced in Japan a Western-style liberal democracy. In addition, according to Thomas Berger, Japan has shifted the focus towards the promotion of liberal values to legitimize the expansion of its strategic partnerships as well as gather domestic consensus (Berger, Mochizuki, Tsuchiyama 2007).

As elaborated in chapter 1, speech act processes cannot be considered successful unless an audience accepts an issue as posing an existential threat to a referent object, thereby authorizing the adoption of emergency measures. By establishing a framework where the protection of such fundamental values has absolute priority, and transmitting these values to the population, the Japanese government is then legitimized by the people to scale up its role in international security (Berger, et. al.). On this premises, Abe confidently unveiled Japan's new diplomacy based upon "fundamental values" such as freedom, democracy, and respect for basic human rights, which was none other than the precursor of the FOIP: *The Arc of Freedom and Prosperity*. To this end, Abe considered the Japan-India Strategic Global Partnership "pivotal for such pursuits to be successful" (MOFA 2007a).

Japanese fascination with the Indian culture also accompanied Abe's first visit to New Delhi as Prime Minister with Abe's 2007 landmark speech underscoring the academic, spiritual, and scholarly exchanges shared by Japan and India throughout history. A case in point is the relationship among Swami Vivekananda, Tenshin Okakura and Sister Nivedita. Additionally, Abe quoted the title of the 1655 book written by the Mughal prince Dara Shikoh, which gave impetus to the narrative of the "Confluence of the Two Seas." Abe's speech suggested that India's increasing regional influence has generated the union of geographical boundaries, "spanning the entirety of the Pacific Ocean, incorporating the United States of America and Australia," thereby giving shape to a "broader Asia" or *kakudai Ajia* (MOFA 2007a).

Abe also conveyed an underlying message, which has been broadly interpreted as having counter-China implications, by emphasizing that "Our two countries have [...] the responsibility– [...] to nurture and enrich these seas to become *seas of the clearest transparency*" (MOFA 2007a; italics added). Thus, Abe's reintroduction to policy discourses regarding the idea of a *kakudai Ajia* had the twin goal of reviving Japan's role in international security as well as encouraging India's greater involvement within the Asian security framework (Matsuda 2018).

Few months prior to Abe's Indian Parliament speech, then Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs Asō Tarō had already publicly inaugurated Japan's Arc of Freedom and

Prosperity. After Abe's visit to New Delhi, in November, Asō delivered another speech pertaining to the Arc. Asō expressed that Japan's diplomatic initiative was designed to expand Tokyo's diplomatic horizons while seeking to enhance its alliance with the U.S. as "the cornerstone of Japanese diplomacy" (MOFA 2007b). Against this backdrop, "freedom and prosperity" were deemed fundamental to the thriving of civilizations within the Arc. Asō's November speech describes and interlinks these concepts as follows:

The freedom to move about as one pleases, the freedom to state one's opinions, and the freedom to forge one's own future [...] I believe that this is something that hits home quite hard for the people of the former socialist nations within this Arc. However, we must remember that *if such freedoms are not secured to some degree, the economy will also surely fail to thrive* (MOFA 2007b; italics added).

Similarly to Abe's Indian Parliament speech, Asō additionally stated that "the market economy with regard to economic systems and democracy for political systems [...] values [such as] *the rule of law and basic human rights*" (MOFA 2007b; italics added) are the "ideal" economic and political system "for advancing freedom and prosperity" (MOFA 2007b). In essence, the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity entailed "a strategy to extend financial and technical assistance to democracies in an arc from Eastern Europe to [...] Southeast Asia" (Jaishankar 2018:53). Such an emphasis on liberal values and basic human rights occurred amid China's increasingly repressive treatment of the Muslim minority of the Uighurs (UHRP 2007).

Notwithstanding, one of Abe's advisors observed that Japan's new policy was "not designed to hold back Beijing [but] initially focused on making *the Russians* aware that Japan's footprint could extend right up to their doorstep" (Taniguchi 2010:1-2; italics added). In the end, both options cannot be excluded since Minister Asō's speech acknowledged the strategic competition with China and Russia. The pivotal role of India, as a like-minded democracy, in Japanese diplomacy is also discernible in the following passage of the speech:

At the same time, there is the possibility that we could work together with [...] Russia and China. In addition to Japan, the United States, and Europe, Russia and China are major powers that have the ability to affect the shape of the world order. [...] as for India, popularly referred to as the largest democracy in the world, there is ample opportunity from the Japanese perspective for cooperation [...] as two major nations sharing common values” (MOFA 2007b).

As if prelude to the second evolution of Japan’s “Free and Open Indo-Pacific”, the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity aimed to be an “open and flexible” concept (MOFA 2007b). As a result, the year 2007 was one of contradictions between actions and statements in regards with Japan’s strategic intent towards China, while being very resolute towards India. As a result, since 2007, Japan and India have been scaling up security cooperation. For instance, in April 2007, a PASSEX exercise²³ involved the deployment of four Japanese destroyers and three Indian warships. Shortly after, Japan and India held a naval exercise off the coast of Okinawa (Joshy 2020:11) and, in September, Japan participated to the landmark Malabar Exercise entering the Indian Ocean for the first time.

3.1.1 Japan and India Testing the Waters in the Indo-Pacific (2008-2014)

In 2008, another exercise was conducted near Mumbai with Japan’s frontline guided missile destroyers (*Asagiri* and *Umagiri*). In the same year, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Abe’s successor, Asō Tarō, concluded a landmark Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation, which was based upon:

1. Information exchange and policy coordination on regional affairs and long-term strategic and global issues
2. Bilateral cooperation within multilateral frameworks, namely the EAS, ARF and the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP)
3. Cooperation between Coast Guards

²³ In naval terminology, a PASSEX ensures the ability of two navies to communicate and cooperate in times of need, such as humanitarian relief.

4. Safety of transport
5. Fight against terrorism and transnational crimes
6. Sharing of experiences in peacekeeping and peacebuilding
7. Disaster management
8. Disarmament and non-proliferation (MOFA 2008).

To this end, Japan and India have been conducting, *inter alia*, Foreign Offices consultations, such as strategic dialogues at Foreign Minister-level and meetings between Defence Ministers; dialogues on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation; Military-to-Military talks as well as Navy-to-Navy staff talks; exchanges of service chiefs and of students and researchers for respective defence institutions (MOFA 2008). In light of their common interest in the safety of the sea lines of communication, a Shipping Policy Forum was also conducted between Maritime Authorities and private sectors, along with cooperation on maritime security through joint exercises. As a result, in 2009, based upon the Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation, an Action Plan was concluded to advance security cooperation and institutionalise annual bilateral naval exercises, thereby consolidating the strategic partnership (MEA 2009).

In 2011, after the visit of the Indian Defence Minister AK Tony to Tokyo, Japan and India agreed to launch bilateral exercises and the maiden JIMEX²⁴ was held off Sugami Bay, in 2012, while the second round was conducted in Indian Ocean waters, in 2013 (Indian Ministry of Defence 2013). Thenceforth, Japan and India have regularly conducted annual bilateral exercises along with increasing anti-piracy cooperation in the Gulf of Aden (Joshy 2020). In fact, since the early 2000s, combined anti-piracy and search & rescue operations have been conducted between the two coast guards. Piracy in the Indian Ocean has construed a relevant security issue in the non-traditional sense particularly since 2009 (Joshy 2020). This is demonstrated by the increase of Somali piracy hijackings of ships off the coast of Somalia and the Horn of Africa between 2005 and 2012 (Teo 2019).

²⁴ JIMEX stands for “Japan-India Maritime Exercise”

As international law was not applicable to piracy in territorial seas and was burdening weaker coastal states with combating piracy, in 2008, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1816 (renewed in 2020) to enable countries to enter the territorial waters of Somalia to suppress armed robberies (Teo 2019). Various mechanisms were also adopted to facilitate the seizing of vessels associated with piracy (Resolution 1846), along with a call for states to suppress said endeavours at sea by establishing “an international cooperation mechanism as a common point of contact for counter-piracy activities near Somalia [...] including the judicial capacity to prosecute pirates” (Resolution 1851). As a result, in 2009, the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS) was established among a total of 33 countries and organizations, including Japan, China and India.

As previously mentioned, Japan’s anti-piracy involvement notably originates from the compelling need to ensure the freedom and security of the shipping lanes from the Middle East, home to Japan’s major energy suppliers,²⁵ to East Asia. In fact, since the 1990s, piracy attacks have also occurred nearby the Strait of Malacca, in the South China Sea. After the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, and Japan’s decision to reduce the production of nuclear power, Japan’s reliance on energy imports increased by around 10 percent (Teo 2019:167). Needless to say, India is also reliant on the trading routes and the Indian Navy constitutes an important presence in the region between the Straits of Hormuz and the Straits of Malacca (Borah 2012) (figure 4).

Since 2008, the Indian Navy has been constantly deploying warships in the Gulf of Aden to fight against piracy (Borah 2012). In fact, in 2008, pirates attacked the Takayama, a 150,000-tonne Japanese oil tanker. As a result, since 2009, the JMSDF has deployed two destroyers and two P-3C aircraft off the coast of Djibouti (Borah 2012). Rupakjyoti Borah also indicates maritime terrorism as a major shared threat (2012). For instance, in the case of the 2004 Mumbai terrorist attacks, the terrorists had reached India by sea.

²⁵ International trade statistics indicate that Saudi Arabia (33%), UAE (25%), Qatar (8%), Kuwait (8%), Iran (5%) and Iraq (2%) are Japan’s largest oil suppliers.



Figure 4. Indian Navy's presence in the Indian Ocean

(Source: The Indian Express)

Initially, the JSDF were deployed on UN peacekeeping operations to Angola (1992), the Golan Heights (1996-2012), Sudan (since 2012) as well as in international humanitarian relief operations in Rwanda (1994), Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003). As Japan's contributions were increasingly assuming a non-military nature, its operations in the Gulf of Aden cannot be separated from its diplomatic and security strategy (Teo 2019:180). As such, conducting naval operations under the guise of "providing a public good in an area outside their traditional area of influence" (Kaufman 2009) would considerably expand Japanese regional influence. Prior to 2009, legal constraints prevented Japan to play a bigger role due to the lack of a specific anti-piracy law (Teo 2019).

The JSDF operational efficiency had to be enhanced with the passage of the "Anti-Piracy Law", which enabled the JSDF to escort foreign commercial ships as well as confront pirate vessels (Teo 2019). These normalization efforts are largely attributed to the Asō Administration despite Japan's Democratic Party (DPJ) considerably accelerating deployments since 2009 (Teo 2019). As further denoted by Victor Teo, "the deployment of Japanese forces to the Gulf of Aden to fight piracy is marketed under the auspices of assisting the U.S. in their military operations [and] presented [...] as one of fulfilling Japan's [...] international obligations" (2019:168). This strongly suggests that "Japan is indeed a rejuvenated global power" (Teo 2019:169).

These efforts were categorized as “proactive contribution to peace” by Japan’s first ever National Security Strategy (NSS), which was published in 2013, together with the NDPG and the Mid-Term Defence Programme for 2014-2019 (Teo 2019). The NSS primarily underscored Japan’s strengthening “hard power” capabilities required the nation to play a leading role in “maintaining open and stable seas” by ensuring the safety of the SLOCs (Kantei 2013). In addition, the NSS indicated “the maintenance and protection of international order based on rules and universal values” as one of Japan’s national priorities (Kantei 2013). Increases in military spending subsequently ensued (Atanassova-Cornelis 2014) (figure 4). In 2013, Abe was also supposed to deliver “The Bounty of the Open Seas” speech, in Indonesia, where he would have reiterated freedom of navigation not only in the Asia-Pacific but also in the Indian Ocean (MOFA 2013).

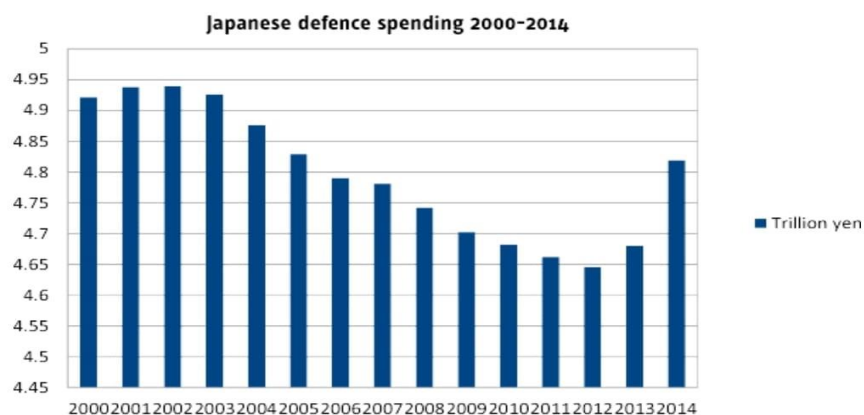


Figure 5. Japanese Defence Spending 2000-2014

(Source: Atanassova-Cornelis 2014:2)

Arguably, Japan’s contributions can also be attributed (indirectly) to its global power competition with China (Teo 2019). As many experts repeatedly observe, China has been Japan’s main security concern particularly over the last two decades. As illustrated by the securitization theory, as Japan’s geographical neighbour and a rising superpower, China is destined to occupy a significant position in Japan’s foreign policy. Yet, former Japanese Prime Minister Abe has stated multiple times that Japanese foreign policy decisions are not exclusively China-oriented. The dominant narrative ascribing to China a markedly negative image should not predetermine the trend of future relations as

Japan and China, as well as India and China, are able to collaborate to tackle common threats. This is indeed exemplified by the piracy issue.

With the number of piracy attempts exponentially increasing, many countries became involved with anti-piracy efforts. Victor Teo reports that naval task forces in the region were led either by the EU or the U.S., while China and India established independent mandate missions (2019:184). With the establishment of the SHADE multilateral forum initiated by the coalition task force to conduct “bottom-up” informal discussions about counter-piracy operations, Japanese, Indian and Chinese military forces collaborated for the first time ever (Teo 2019). Within the SHADE framework, in 2012, Japan and China jointly launched anti-piracy efforts. When India joined, the grouping formed the Joint Escort Convey Coordination group.

Besides coordinating their warship patrols (a no small feat *per se*), relevant intelligence on piracy was also shared (Gokhale 2012). South Korea also joined the coordination which resulted in the rescue operation code-named “Dawn of Gulf of Aden” (Roehrig 2015). Clearly, the most important outcome of the forum was that it allowed “antagonist” parties to jointly work together (Teo 2019). Nevertheless, as trust requires time to build, Japan-India maritime security exercises continued. Besides Malabar 2007, Japan participated in the Malabar naval exercises of 2009 but had to desert the one planned in 2011 because of the Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami which devastated Japan.

However, it is worth recalling that, initially, India’s anxieties pertaining to Chinese reactions to New Delhi’s cooperation with Tokyo refrained the Indian government from including Japan to the Malabar Exercises as well as endorsing Abe’s proposal of a security diamond architecture (Joshy 2020:12). Upon returning to power in 2012, Abe revived the idea of the QUAD with his essay *Asia’s Democratic Security Diamond*, where he reiterates the pivotal role of India by describing Japan and India as the “guardians of navigational freedom across the Pacific and the Indian Oceans” (2012). Abe’s aims of counterbalancing China emerge throughout his opinion piece:

I must confess that I failed to anticipate that China’s naval and territorial expansion would advance at the pace that it has since 2007. The ongoing disputes in the East

China Sea and the South China Sea mean that *Japan's top foreign policy priority must be to expand the country's strategic horizons*. Japan is a mature maritime democracy, and its choice of close partners should reflect that fact. I envisage a strategy whereby Australia, India, Japan, and the US state of Hawaii form a diamond to safeguard the maritime commons stretching from the Indian Ocean region to the western Pacific. I am prepared to invest, to the greatest possible extent, Japan's capabilities in this security diamond (Abe 2012; italics added).

As written by Abe himself, Japan's anxieties were ignited by China claiming the South China Sea as a "Lake Beijing", which would enable the PLA's navy "to base their nuclear-powered attack submarines, capable of launching missiles with nuclear warheads," (Abe 2012) and, especially, by China's actions in the East China Sea. This is evidenced by a PLA Navy nuclear submarine entering Japanese territorial waters near Okinawa, in 2004. In 2005, a naval destroyer threatened to shoot at a Japanese P3-C surveillance aircraft in the vicinity of the disputed East China Sea. In fact, since 2008, Beijing has additionally regularized naval exercises in the Pacific from the first island chain to the second island chain, which notably constitute China's defence line (Nagao 2018:66).

Hence, China's military power projection put Japan in a position of "relative strategic vulnerability" enhanced by Japan's growing economic dependence on China (Koga 2020:52). Yet, in 2006, then Chinese President Wen Jiabao invited Abe to Beijing, and the two released a joint press statement, which, among other things, reiterated the "peaceful development" of both China and Japan (MOFA 2006b). Additionally, both sides agreed that the East China Sea needed to become a "Sea of Peace, Cooperation and Friendship" (MOFA 2006b), thereby concluding to expedite consultations to reach a satisfying resolution. Frictions in the East China Sea over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands is a classic example of the divisions in Japan-China relations.

Until 2010, Tokyo was "confident on its ability to maintain a strategic advantage over China and of its capacity to ensure its own security through territorial defence by itself and the United States" (Koga 2020:54). By 2012, Abe was clearly preoccupied with Japan's defence capacity vis-à-vis the Senkaku islands in light of "the Chinese government's daily exercises" despite "only Chinese-law enforcement vessels with light

weaponry, not PLA Navy ships, [entering] Japan's contiguous and territorial waters" (Abe 2012). One year later, in 2013, five Chinese warships participated in the Russia-China joint exercise and navigated for the first time around Japan.

Abe expressed his anxieties by underscoring that in the event of a Japanese surrender to China's actions, "the South China Sea would become even more fortified. Freedom of navigation [...] would be seriously hindered. The naval assets of the US, [and] Japan, would find it difficult to enter the entire area, though the majority of the two China seas is international water" (Abe 2012). After 2014, China started construction programs, at an unprecedented speed, to build a "String of Pearls" in the South China Sea and erect a "Great Wall of the Sea" for defence purposes. In chapter 2, we already identified the reason why, as a transport corridor, the South China Sea is such a contested geopolitical spot and how it serves China's PLA strategic operations. Hence, China has been seeking to close the distance with the shipping routes in the SCS as well as with the emerging markets of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

The "String of Pearls" allows China to increase its access to ports and airfields, develop special diplomatic relationships, and modernize military forces beyond the Strait of Malacca, across the Indian Ocean, and to the Arabian Gulf (Pehrson 2006). Indeed, China's artificial islands enable Beijing to expand its influence into the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) by establishing military and naval facilities in South Asia, thereby triggering India's fears of a potential Chinese naval encirclement (Gosh 2008:294). As reported by Indian Navy Captain Gurpreet Khurana, China's geopolitical aims in the IOR are mostly related to economic reasons, which are the main drivers of China's regional strategy (2016:2-4). This is best exemplified by China's Maritime Silk Road (MSR), which Xi Jinping unveiled in 2013.

Since the launch of the BRI, China's politico-diplomatic and economic engagements with the Indian Ocean Rim countries, and especially with India, Pakistan, Indonesia, Iran, and Sri Lanka, have steadily increased (Khurana 2016). Consequently, China has secured a position as "dialogue partner" in IORA and as an "observer" in IONS. Geopolitically, China has increased its naval forays in the IOR in response to the U.S. "rebalance" strategy, which, in Chinese perspectives, aims to contain China's "strategic

depth in the western Pacific” (Khurana 2016:6). As China also prioritizes “open seas protection”, and especially aims at seizing control of the SLOCs, the PLA Navy actively seeks to dominate the Oceans (Khurana 2016). As the Indian Ocean is within India’s sphere of influence, India’s competition with China is the most apparent in the maritime domain.

This state of affairs has additionally led India to increase its military expenditure, thereby becoming the fifth major country for military spending as well as the second largest arms importer between 2015 and 2019 (SIPRI 2020). Additionally, the unveiling of the Belt and Road Initiative, which has extended geopolitical competition to the connectivity domain, ignited a series of regional initiatives. For instance, in 2014, China proposed the establishment of the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) to facilitate projects under the banner of the Belt and Road. The promise of massive financing from the China-backed AIIB particularly attracted regional states, namely, Malaysia, Pakistan, and Indonesia (Koga 2019).

This led to “the incorporation of the BRI into regional foreign policy narratives by 2016, illustrating China’s increasing economic and political influence in Asia.” (Koga 2019) While Japan has yet to join the AIIB, as it primarily influences the Asia Development Bank (ADB), India is the second-largest stakeholder in the AIIB. Since 2013, China has been financing the construction of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to allow Chinese goods to bypass the contested waters of the South China Sea and shorten land routes to the Arabian Sea. As this move heightened India’s fears of a land encirclement from Pakistan and China, Modi launched India’s “Cotton Route” at the 2015 International Conference on the Indian Ocean held in the ancient city of Bhubaneswar (Bouchard, et. al. 2019). The Cotton Route was broadly understood as a response to China’s Belt and Road Initiative.

As its title anticipates, the conference primarily aimed at renewing the "Maritime Trade and Civilisational Linkages" between India and the Indian Ocean Rim countries. Akin to China's New Silk Routes, India's 1,000-year-old concept rediscovers India's ancient trade routes (Bouchard, et. al. 2019). At present, in narrative terms, the Cotton Route seems to have been lost in oblivion despite its projects remaining active. India’s revival

of its ancient Silk Routes is but one of the initiatives launched by Narendra Modi since he assumed office as Prime Minister.

3.2 India's Act East Policy and the "Special" Partnership with Japan

In 2014, newly-elected Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi unveiled India's Act East Policy at the 2014 East Asia Summit in Myanmar, by announcing that "Since entering office six months ago my government has moved with a great sense of priority and speed to turn our 'Look East Policy' into 'Act East Policy'" (MEA 2014a). However, the input for such a shift originated in 2011 from former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who encouraged India "not just to look East, but to *engage* East and *act* East" (Kandavel and Scaria 2011; italics added). Due to various elements of continuity between Narasimha Rao's Look East Policy (LEP) and Modi's Act East Policy (AEP), some analysts simply consider the AEP as a rebranding of the LEP. The LEP reflected India's willingness to engage with the world by substantially liberalizing and integrating India into East and Southeast Asian economic markets (EFSAS 2020).

In this context, ASEAN emerged as one of India's key trading partners. Thenceforth, bilateral relations have been institutionalised with India becoming ASEAN's dialogue partner in 1996, a summit level partner in 2002, and a strategic partner in 2012. Additionally, India became a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (1996) as well as a founder member of the East Asia Summit (2005). However, according to former Ambassador of India to Kazakhstan, Sweden, and Latvia, Ashok Sajjanhar, "the AEP has gone well beyond what LEP could achieve in 20-plus years" (2016). Indeed, while the LEP furthered economic cooperation between India and East Asian countries, resulting in the growth of bilateral trade, especially with ASEAN, the financial economic crisis abated this trend (Sajjanhar 2016).

Only with the inauguration of the AEP "greater vigour and dynamism" could be recovered (Sajjanhar 2016). In general, the AEP is a strategy that addresses the shortcomings of its predecessor as well as the geopolitical challenges inherent to the Indo-Pacific, and, notably, China's rise (EFSAS 2020). Amidst China's increasing economic and strategic influence in the region, H.E. Ashok Sajjanhar identified some

major AEP-induced changes which occurred between 2014 and 2016 (2016). As reported by India's MEA, India has focused on advancing relations with the 10-nation ASEAN grouping based upon Commerce, Culture and Connectivity (3 Cs) (Manish 2014).

This evidently took into account the fundamental pillars of ASEAN community building process: the ASEAN 2025 Forging Ahead Together, endorsing a more cohesive community (ASEAN 2015a); the Master Plan for Connectivity (ASEAN 2016a); the ASEAN ICT Master Plan 2020 to promote economy-wide growth and innovation (ASEAN 2015b); and the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) Work Plan III, which was designed to reduce the development gap among its members (ASEAN 2016b). Thenceforth, ASEAN has become a key cornerstone of India's foreign policy (Manish 2014).

In addition to boosting economic relations, the unveiling of the AEP added new momentum to the India-ASEAN strategic partnership, which encompasses security, strategic and defence cooperation, as well as non-traditional security sectors, such as piracy, nuclear proliferation and, particularly, trans-national terrorism. Within the AEP, the South China Sea also occupies a relevant position. To curb China's claims, India has consistently supported freedom of navigation; insisted on a resolution of all maritime territorial disputes in accordance with the UN Law of the Seas (Manish 2014); and is in favour of developing a Code of Conduct to resolve conflicts in the resource-rich waters. On the other hand, Modi also focused on normalizing ties with China by inviting President Xi Jinping to New Delhi in 2014 as well as visiting Beijing in 2015. Sajjanhar denoted that, during this period, no Chinese cross-border incursions occurred (2016).

In an infrastructure-deficient Asia, the (physical) connectivity domain experienced the most advancement, thereby becoming the dominant narrative in Indian policy making (Pulipaka, Singh and Sircar 2017). This is reflected in the construction of the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway, which is expected to bolster trade and commerce in the ASEAN-India Free Trade Area (AIFTA), established in 2010, and particularly in the Northeast Indian states recording the highest poverty levels.

Other regional infrastructure development projects initiated in this period comprise the Kaladan Multi-modal Transport project, the Rhi-Tiddim Road Project to India's East, and Chabahar Port, the Trilateral Transport and Transit Corridor, and the International North South Transport Corridor (Pulipaka, Singh and Sircar 2017), which is being jointly developed with Russia. In 2015, at the India-ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur, Modi designated USD 1 billion to connectivity (Manish 2014).

In addition to economic advantages, enhancing physical connectivity also enables India to curb political insecurity and improve relations with neighbouring countries (Constantino 2020). In the maritime security field, building connectivity across the Indian Ocean through the doctrine of Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR), which seeks “a climate of trust and transparency; respect for international maritime rules and norms by all countries; sensitivity to each other's interests; peaceful resolution of maritime issues; and increase in maritime cooperation,” underscores India's transformation by developing blue economy along with capacity building to tackle traditional and non-traditional security threats alike (India Writes Network 2016). Indeed, this vision focuses on strengthening economic and security cooperation.

Another case in point is India's SAGARMALA programme aimed at reducing logistics costs by modernizing and enhancing port connectivity, port led industrialization and coastal community development (Indian Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways 2020). In geo-spatial terms, the AEP significantly expanded the scope of India's foreign policy and considerably increased India's number of strategic partnerships (Sajjanhar 2016). In fact, despite the LEP comprising Northeast Asia, in practice, it exclusively focused on ASEAN. By contrast, the AEP includes other East Asian and Pacific countries, namely Japan, South Korea, Mongolia, Australia, New Zealand, the Fiji, and other Pacific islands.

However, within the framework of the AEP, relations with Japan especially assumed a “special” dimension. This was also made clear by Modi's first visit outside India's immediate neighbourhood as Prime Minister to Japan, in 2014. PM Modi himself explained that such a choice reflected Japan's importance in India's foreign policy and economic development. However, it was not lost on the public that the elevation of

bilateral ties to a “Special Strategic and Global Partnership”²⁶ was also due to the good personal relationship between the two prime ministers.

3.2.1 The Value of Friendship: Abe and Modi Advance Japan-India Ties

Around that time, several articles were published pertaining to Modi and Abe’s similarities, which were also intent on setting their differences apart. For instance, Hornung and Tekwani observed that “the two gentlemen [are] conservative nationalists, speak tough against historical rivals, and oppose China’s growing assertiveness in the region” (2014). As an ultra-Hindu nationalist of the far-right BJP party, Modi’s tendencies of excluding Muslim nationalists in favour of *Hindutva*²⁷ was also reflected in the BJP’s manifesto promoting the construction of a Hindu temple where the demolished 16-th-century mosque at Ayodhya once stood (Hornung and Tekwani 2014). Further, as this was associated with ultranationalist sentiments, the authors have compared it to Japan’s Yasukuni Shrine.

Similarly, a member of the far-right, Abe has notably supported the revision of Japanese history and glorification of Imperial Japan through his numerous visits to Yasukuni, despite not openly proclaiming himself a nationalist (Hornung and Tekwani 2014). At the same time, Abe has consistently attempted to mend ties with both China and South Korea. Yet, Abe and Modi’s backgrounds are on the opposite end of the spectrum. Admittedly, Abe rose through the ranks of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) thanks to his own efforts, but both his maternal (Kishi Nobusuke) and paternal (Abe Kan) grandfathers were prominent politicians, who had served as Japan’s Prime Minister and in the House of Representatives, respectively. Abe’s father, Abe Shintarō, also served as Foreign Minister under Nakasone.

On the other hand, PM Modi comes from a humble family of tea-sellers and personally rose to his country’s highest political position. Regardless, it has been clear that Abe and Modi hold one another in high esteem. In fact, Hornung and Tekwani report that,

²⁶ The term “special” had only been used for Japan-Australia partnership and India-Russia

²⁷ Hindu nationalism

between 2007 and 2012, both Abe and Modi broke protocol several times to congratulate and support one another (2014). This is illustrated by Abe's 2007 visit to India when, as premier, protocol precluded him to meet with then-Chief Minister Modi. In 2012, Modi visited Japan and Abe met with Modi, despite being part of the opposition. Finally, when Abe won the 2012 elections, Modi congratulated him despite only being Chief Minister of Gujarat. Clearly, Abe and Modi value Japan-India relations on a personal level.

In 2007, Abe published his notorious book *Utsukushii Kuni E (Toward a Beautiful Country)*, which clearly expressed Abe's sentiments for Japan and India when he writes that "in another decade, Japan-India relations [might] overtake Japan-U.S. and Japan-China ties." For his part, in 2012, Modi also wrote on his blog that "both India and Japan believe in liberal societies and democratic governance. Thus, it is hardly surprising that "India and Japan have become extremely close" (Modi 2012a). Additionally, in his speech to the JETRO, Modi stated that Japan and India "are connected through our cultural heritage, historic events and belief in humanity. We can change not only Asia's but world's future together" (Modi 2012b). Hence, the personal relationship between Modi and Abe was evidently the catalyst that upgraded the Indo-Japanese "Global Strategic Partnership" to a "Special Strategic and Global Partnership."

3.2.2 Soft-Balancing Against China (2014-2015)

In 2014, Abe and Modi set the foundations for enhanced cooperation in the defence and security sectors, along with civil nuclear energy, non-proliferation and export control, science and technology, and connectivity. As if to affirm the importance of defence relations, defence and security are the first items described in the partnership's document. In fact, at a time of increasing tensions and turmoil, stronger strategic ties between India and Japan were deemed "indispensable for a prosperous future for their two countries and for advancing peace, stability and prosperity in the world, in general, and *"in the interconnected Asia, Pacific and Indian Ocean Regions"* (MEA 2014b; italics added), in particular. *In primis*, the inauguration of "a new era in India-Japan relations" focused on strengthening maritime security, thereby leading to (MEA 2014b):

1. The institutionalization of bilateral maritime exercises and continued participation of Japan in the India-U.S. Malabar exercises
2. A Memorandum of Cooperation and Exchanges in the Field of Defence
3. The continuation of joint Coast Guard-to-Coast Guard exercises.

As a result, Japan and India affirmed their commitment to “maritime security, freedom of navigation and overflight, civil aviation safety, unimpeded lawful commerce, and peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with international law” (MEA 2014b). This statement clearly reflected the tensions affecting the region. In April 2014, the Philippines were seeking international arbitration over the Spratly Islands and concluded a ten-year defence pact with the U.S., which, however, was not a deal “aimed at containing China” (CFR 2020). At the same time, Japan successfully implemented external balancing by obtaining from then U.S. President Barack Obama a public statement confirming that the Senkaku islands were covered by the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty and that military incidents could lead to the involvement of American forces²⁸ (Yoshimatsu 2019:10).

These occurrences partly contributed to Abe’s success in winning the cabinet’s approval for the new security law (Hawksley 2020:250). In May, China attempted to establish an oil rig near the Paracel Islands, thereby prompting Vietnam to dispatch naval vessels to halt this move. Beijing also sent forty ships to protect the rig, which led to the collision of Chinese and Vietnamese vessels (CFR 2020). It was not without reason that, at the Shangri-La Dialogue, Abe announced the Three Principles on the Rule of the Law at Sea: (i) making and clarifying states’ claims based upon international law; (ii) avoid the use of force or coercion; (iii) settlement of disputes by peaceful means (MEA 2018a).

In November, Abe and Xi Jinping met for the first time since the beginning of their terms to reach a four-point agreement to improve diplomatic and security relations as well as prevent escalation of conflicts in the East China Sea (Perlez 2014). Few months earlier, Indian and Chinese troops had engaged in yet another confrontation along their border

²⁸ For the first time this was affirmed on paper in 2017 during the Trump Administration.

at Chumar (Burke and Branigan 2014). Thereafter, Japan and India began collaborating on several issues, and, especially on space and defence (Jaishankar 2018). Indeed, Japan and India institutionalized 2+2 Ministerial Dialogues, along with other bilateral arrangements to regulate New Delhi and Tokyo's coordination in terms of security, defence, energy, counterterrorism, cyber strategy, and maritime cooperation (EFSAS 2020).

Furthermore, India showed support of Japan's normalization "quest" by approving Tokyo's liberalization of arms transfers along with the new security legislation regarding collective self-defence, as reported by their Special Strategic and Global Partnership (MEA 2014b). The report further reads that convergent interests, along with complementary skills and resources, are essential to build a strong partnership and promote economic, social and infrastructure development and capacity building also in other regions (MEA 2014b). The 2014 Special Partnership also condemned terrorism, thereby calling for "sustained international commitment" to endorse Afghan-led economic recovery in order to free Afghanistan from "extremism, terrorism and external interference" (MEA 2014b).

Japan and India have a shared interest in achieving stable and peaceful Middle East, West Asia and Gulf regions as their energy security greatly depend upon these areas. For this reason, Modi and Abe underscored the importance of closer coordination within regional economic and security fora (namely, the EAS). Considering both Japan and India's economic dependence on the SLOCs, in 2015, the Indian Navy published its Maritime Security Strategy (MSS), which was a revision of the 2007 "Freedom to use the Seas: India's Maritime Military Strategy." The revision was prompted by two key factors:

1. The rise in "sources, types and intensity of threats, with some blurring of traditional and non-traditional lines"
2. The need to ensure economic prosperity by maintaining secure and open seas (MSS 2015).

As such, the revised strategy focused on:

1. The safety and security of seaborne trade and energy routes
2. Freedom of navigation and strengthening of the international law of the sea (UNCLOS)
3. Cooperation with other navies to tackle common threats at sea (MSS 2015).

This was also made clear through the MSS's geographical scope, which primarily included the Indian Ocean Region, ranging from its coastal areas, internal, territorial and contiguous zones, Exclusive Economic Zone and continental shelf, to the Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal, Andaman Sea, Persian Gulf, Gulfs of Oman and Aden, Red Sea, and African littoral regions, to the choke points leading to the Pacific Ocean; the South China Sea, the East China Sea, the Western Pacific as well as the West Coast of Africa, Antarctica and the Mediterranean are indicated as “secondary areas” of interest (figure 6).



Figure 6. Areas of Maritime Interest of the Indian Navy

(Source: 2015 Indian Maritime Security Strategy, p.36)

The strategy acknowledges threats arising from both the traditional and non-traditional security sectors. Traditional security threats are described as follows:

The traditional sources refer to states with organised military capability and resources, *which harbour adversarial posture and inimical intent towards India*. Hostile actions by such states, in terms of scale, scope and intensity of force that may be applied, would potentially be of a higher order. Traditional sources, therefore, pose a higher level of threat to India's national security interests (MSS 2015:33; italics added).

Throughout the document, the India-Pakistan enmity relation implicitly emerges when the strategy condemns the 2008 and 2014 terrorist attacks conducted by Pakistani citizens. By contrast, China is never mentioned. Yet, it is possible to identify that China is the primary source of threat in traditional security terms when the strategy reads that:

The likely sources of traditional threat would be from states with a history of aggression against India, and those with continuing disputes or maintaining adversarial postures to India's national interests. The traditional sources of threat could also extend to nations that have the capability to harm Indian interests and display inimical intent against India. [...] There can also be issues of wide divergence, including in security perceptions, with nations that may be traditional friends. This could emanate from their policies concerning a third country, which may maintain postures that are inimical to India's security interests. [...] There has been continued militarisation of the region and proliferation of weapons (MSS 2015:37).

Despite "countering traditional maritime security threats [...] remain the *raison d'être* of the Indian Navy" (MSS 2015:37). India's MSS largely focuses on tackling non-traditional security threats, such as maritime terrorism, piracy and armed-robbery, unregulated activities at sea (illegal and unreported fishing and proliferation of private armed security), climate change and natural disasters. Among the many deterrence strategies adopted by the Indian Navy, "to shape a favourable and positive maritime environment, for enhancing net security in India's areas of maritime interest" particularly envisions enhanced maritime engagement.

This implies conducting occasional, passage and institutionalized exercises with foreign navies, maritime assistance “to friendly nations”, anti-piracy cooperative mechanisms, capacity building, and high-level maritime strategic interactions. In particular, the MSS mentions the institutionalization of the JIMEX exercises with Japan. Thenceforth, by 2015, maritime cooperation had especially become a major area of cooperation in defence ties, thereby exceeding “that which India achieved even with the Soviet Union at the height of their partnership in the 1970 and 1980s” (Shashank 2015:135). In October, Japan’s Maritime Self-Defence Force (JMSDF) vessels joined the naval exercise held in the Bay of Bengal.

In addition, the two partners began including in their secretary/vice-minister level dialogues Australia to discuss common regional security interests, such as the tensions in the East and South China Seas and North Korea. This was the first case of trilateral cooperation where Washington was not involved (Yoshimatsu 2019). According to Yoshimatsu Hidetaka, the soft-balancing nature of Japan-India partnership during the 2013-2015 period was also apparent in their partnership for the production of rare-earth elements (REE), as a result of Chinese restrictions of REE exports to Japan in retaliation of a maritime incident within the East China Sea dispute (2019).

Thus, Japan-India balancing in the maritime domain expressed their concerns on the maintenance of a peaceful maritime region, which led to the “Vision Statement on Special Strategic and Global Partnership” (Yoshimatsu 2019). The South China Sea issue was described in the “Vision for Peace and Stability” passage as follows:

In view of critical importance of the sea lanes of communications in the South China Sea [...] the two Prime Ministers noting the developments in the South China Sea called upon all States *to avoid unilateral actions* that could lead to tensions in the region. They were of the view that full and effective implementation of the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea and early conclusion of the negotiations to establish a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea by consensus will contribute to peace and stability of the region (MOFA 2015; italics added).

At the same time, the U.S.-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region, followed by the U.S.-Japan Vision, similarly underscored the relevance of the South China Sea and emphasized the necessity to ensure maritime security as well as freedom of navigation and overflight (White House 2015). In such a fashion, Japan, the U.S., and India expected to mitigate China's behaviour in the maritime domain (Yoshimatsu 2019). In this period, Japan and India also focused on assisting littoral states, notably Vietnam, on capacity-building to hedge against China's non-transparent manoeuvres (Yoshimatsu 2019). Indeed, in 2014, Japan's aid grant to Vietnam was accompanied by 6 Japanese used vessels and equipment such as radars to enhance Vietnam's maritime patrol capabilities (Yoshimatsu 2019:12).

Similarly, Modi concluded an agreement with Vietnam to construct offshore patrol boats along with lending a USD 500 million line of credit, thereby strengthening defence cooperation with Hanoi (Yoshimatsu 2019:12). In 2015, Abe's visit to India also resulted in the bilateral civilian nuclear agreement, which came into force in 2017, and offers of a low-interest loan as well as technical assistance to develop India's first high-speed railway Shinkansen technology connecting Mumbai to Ahmedabab (Jaishankar 2018). To this end, Modi and Abe also signed a memorandum of cooperation on high-speed railways. Their agreement was also propelled by the fierce competition between China and Japan to gain construction contracts. Notably, Japan had been seeking to export its Shinkansen technology to Indonesia since 2008.

However, Japan lost in the bid for the construction of the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed railway, which was assigned to Chinese contractors under the framework of the BRI. Nonetheless, this gave impetus to the revision of yen loan procedures, which resulted in the successful bid on the first high-speed railway project in India, thereby significantly boosting exports of Japanese infrastructure systems (Yoshimatsu 2019:11). At the same time, security agreements, concerning the transfer of defence equipment and technology, along with security measures to protect classified information, were also concluded. Prime Minister Modi defined these steps as "decisive [...] in our security cooperation [and] our decision to expand staff talks to all three wings of the Armed Forces and make Japan a partner in Malabar Naval Exercises" (PIB 2015).

These types of agreements were the first that Japan concluded as Tokyo's transfer of defence equipment with the U.S., U.K., Australia, and France as well as NATO, were the military information-sharing type (Yoshimatsu 2019:7).

Abe and Modi's political agendas similarly converged on economic development. On the one hand, Abe launched a clearly defined economic initiative in 2012, which is known as *Abenomics* and that comprised three arrows aimed at reviving economic growth. Briefly stated, the first arrow aimed at promoting inflation by printing additional currency and bolster Japanese exports (Kenton 2021). The second arrow involved government spending to stimulate demand and consumption, while the third arrow comprised a series of reforms and regulations to increase Japanese businesses competitiveness and encourage investments from and in the private sectors (Kenton 2021). In particular, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) was defined by Yoshizaki Tatushiko as "the linchpin of Abe's economic revitalization strategy" (2013).

On the other hand, India's *Modinomics* has no clear vision for the Indian economy. Based upon the "Gujarat Model" of development, it has been criticised for its focus on three main sectors, namely infrastructures, investments and e-governance, while neglecting public health, education, infant mortality and women's literacy" (Hornung and Tekwani 2014). Furthermore, with most of India's population being young, Modi launched the ambitious project "Make in India" aimed at incentivizing investments into manufacturing to generate more jobs. To this end, *Modinomics* intended to attract foreign investors and *Abenomics* represented the most suitable solution.

Indeed, in 2014, during Modi's visit to Japan, Abe and Modi jointly concluded to double Japan's Direct Investments (including ODA) and the number of Japanese companies in India by 2019 by finding synergies between *Abenomics* and *Modinomics* (MOFA 2021). As a result, Japanese FDI into India almost tripled between 2014 and 2017 (EFSAS 2020). Yet, Japan-India ties did not grow so unabatedly during the 2010-2015 period. In fact, Japanese Prime Ministers Fukuda, Hatoyama, Kan and Noda had been less interested in developing relations with India than Abe and Asō and sought to rather mend ties with China (Kiyota 2015:178).

In addition, the Indian Defence Minister at the time of the Singh Government reportedly attempted to prevent the Indian Navy from holding joint exercises in the Indian Ocean with the U.S. and allies (Mohan and Chauhan 2016:194). This further attest to the role of Modi and Abe in accelerating bilateral cooperation. It is from this state of affairs that, in 2016, Japan unveiled its Strategy for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific.

3.3 Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific: From "Strategy" to "Vision"

3.3.1 Japan's Strategy for a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific": FOIP 1.0

Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP) is broadly recognized as the most important organising idea of Japan's contemporary foreign policy under the Abe Administration. Formally inaugurated as a strategy in 2016 at the 6th Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD VI) in Nairobi, Japan's FOIP has been stimulating questions about its nature particularly in respect with its perceived China-containment aims. Yet, since Abe Shinzō began purporting this foreign policy doctrine, the Japanese government has frequently expressed Tokyo's intentions of collaborating with the other democracies of the Indo-Pacific region, thereby making cooperation the defining core of the regional order (Hosoya 2019:18-20). As exemplified by Minister Asō's 2007 speech, China was also (theoretically) included.

However, the FOIP has underwent three conceptual evolutions. Between 2016 and 2017, the FOIP has been described as "FOIP 1.0." A second evolution occurred between 2017 and 2018, thereby leading to its reconceptualization as "FOIP 2.0" (Hosoya 2019; Koga 2019). To put it in Rossiter's words, there is indeed "little consensus as to what the FOIP actually entails [and] the ways in which it may influence future Japanese foreign policy" (2018:114). As a result, he adds that the FOIP is regarded as an "amorphous concept." According to Koga, the FOIP incarnates Japan's strategic choice defined as "tactical hedging" which was adopted to "cope with the rise of strategic uncertainty caused by China's growing economic power, military might and political influence [...] and America's uncertain commitment to the region under Trump" (2019).

Tactical hedging differs from normal hedging as it utilizes “temporal strategic ambiguity” to further assess the efficacy of long-term strategies (Koga 2019:5). Thus, differently from conventional hedging, tactical hedging can complement existing strategic choices and is characterized either by exclusive or inclusive behaviours (Koga 2019). This is partly the reason why, since the beginning, FOIP has been deemed a “vague” and “amorphous” concept in continuous evolution, which cannot simply be ascribed to cultural factors. Besides the FOIPs, other examples in Asia include the U.S. “pivot to Asia” strategy (2009-2016), Indonesia’s “Global Maritime Fulcrum” (launched in 2014) and China’s Belt and Road (Koga 2019).

Koga identifies four factors at the basis of FOIPs’ conceptual vagueness (2019). Firstly, the FOIP’s principles concerning the respect for international rules-based norms are anything but new, thereby stemming confusion and ambiguity pertaining to the nature of the FOIP (Koga 2019). Secondly, the FOIPs has expanded Japan’s geographical scope to strengthen collaboration with like-minded countries, and, primarily, with India and Australia, which also share similar perceptions on the rise of China (Koga 2019). As such, since 2012, Abe has consistently insisted on reviving the quadrilateral cooperation among the U.S., Japan, India, and Australia.

Thirdly, the Indo-Pacific concept forged distinct Indo-Pacific narratives and regionalisms. As Japan’s narrative failed to indicate concrete actions for political and security collaboration, the FOIPs’ geographical scope differed from that of Japan’s partners (Koga 2019). Finally, during its initial phase as FOIP 1.0, despite being geographically located at the core of the Indo-Pacific construct, the role of ASEAN had been highly dismissed (Koga 2019). These ambiguities demonstrate the lack of clear objectives, which strategies inherently possess (Koga 2019). As a result, experts argued that, rather than a strategy, the FOIPs would be better described as a strategic “vision” (Koga 2019; Kitaoka 2019; Hosoya 2019; Rossiter 2018).

At the heart of FOIP 1.0 rested Abe’s Confluence of the Two Seas and Asia’s Democratic Security Diamond, which are broadly understood as a response to China’s rise. As noted by Hosoya Yuichi, in its initial phase, the FOIP was more competitive in nature rather than cooperative, despite including both nuances (2019). This is clearly illustrated by

Abe's 2016 TICAV VI speech. Generally, Abe's speech expressed his willingness to advance Japan and African ties based upon the achievement of a "resilient and stable Africa" through the implementation of Japan's *kaizen* to sustain the "quality and empowerment" of African development as well as increase production of goods (MOFA 2016b).

Abe particularly emphasised the need for Africa to develop "quality infrastructures" with the help of Japan as the bearer of "the responsibility of fostering the confluence of the Pacific and Indian Oceans and of Asia and Africa into *a place that values freedom, the rule of law, and the market economy, free from force or coercion*" (MOFA 2016b; italics added). In other words, Abe's speech launched a long-term strategy hinging on:

1. Maintaining the Indian and Pacific Oceans as two "free and open seas"
2. Connecting Asia to Africa through the Middle East
3. Endorsing a "free and prosperous" Indo-Pacific maritime region characterized by the rule of law, the market economy, high quality, and transparency.

Such objectives also transpire from Japan's Diplomatic Bluebook published in 2017. Great emphasis is indeed given to connectivity, economic and human development, trade and investments, liberal values, and proactive contribution to peace (MOFA 2017a). The fundamental role of India in Japan's FOIP clearly emerges as the document reads that "to make the 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy' into shape, Japan will strengthen strategic collaboration with India" (MOFA 2017a). This was further supported by the 2017 report by Japan's MOFA International Cooperation Bureau (ICB) which located FOIPs primarily under "Developing an environment for international peace, stability and prosperity" (MOFA 2017a). Between 2016 and 2017, the FOIP's objectives were also consistent with the pillars of Tokyo's national security strategy (MOFA 2016a):

1. Strengthening and expanding Japan's capabilities and roles, including, *inter alia*, diplomacy, protecting territorial integrity and ensuring maritime security
2. Enhancing the Japan-U.S. Alliance

3. Strengthening diplomacy and security cooperation with Japan's partners for peace and stability in the international community (namely, India, Australia, ASEAN, and South Korea)
4. Enhancing cooperation based on universal values to resolve global issues, i.e. support democratization through proactive and strategic use of ODA, respond to development challenges and global issues, mainstream the concept of human security, strengthen free trade frameworks.

These pillars strongly suggest a strategic re-evaluation prompted by the hardening of the U.S.-China rivalry. As a result, Japan reassessed “the utility of the existing political and security frameworks in East Asia, including regional institutions led by [...] ASEAN [...] and the US-Japan alliance” (Koga 2019:3), thereby ultimately leading to the reconceptualization of the FOIP.

3.3.2 Engaging the U.S. and ASEAN amid the “China Challenge”

In 2016, the U.S. elections brought the victory of Donald Trump and an uncertain American foreign policy in the region. Unsurprisingly, Abe was the first foreign leader to meet with then President Trump, thereby showcasing “to the rest of the world a new Japan –a Japan that is an active shaper of the U.S.-Japanese relationship rather than a passive player” (Fodale 2020). Abe's efforts to forge a personal relationship with former President Trump served the purpose of ensuring that the Japan-U.S. Alliance remained solid as well as advance Japanese interests on several topics, such as the Free and Open Indo-Pacific. In this context, FOIPs aimed to ensure a continued U.S. commitment to Asia (Koga 2019).

This goal has been achieved when the U.S. Trump Administration formally launched the U.S. version of the FOIP in the APEC summit meeting held in Vietnam, in November 2017 (White House 2017). Despite the Indo-Pacific strategy representing a constant of U.S. foreign policy for its focus on building collective security through “spokes” of regional partners, along with endorsing democratic values and economic prosperity, it also expanded U.S. engagement with smaller nations such as the Indian and Pacific Islands regions (Ford 2020). Yet, considering Japan's strong influence on the U.S. Indo-

Pacific strategy, the Indo-Pacific has been equalled to a joint effort between Tokyo and Washington to counterbalance Beijing (Thornton 2018).

Additionally, the Trump Administration launched a series of projects aimed at enhancing regional transparency, anti-corruption, digital infrastructure, and energy cooperation. A case in point is the Japan-U.S. Mekong Power Partnership established “to uphold sovereignty, transparency, good governance, ASEAN centrality, and a rules-based order, in conjunction with our Mekong partners” (U.S. Embassy 2019). Washington’s open criticism of China’s coercion of regional allies also bears the signature of the Trump Administration. Indeed, since 2016, it has been conducting naval and air Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) in the South China Sea to enforce UNCLOS and reaffirm rights and freedoms challenged by the excessive maritime claims of all regional states.

As Asia’s main security provider, the U.S. Navy dominance of the world’s oceans has also made Washington a guarantor of global trade despite not being a signatory itself of the UNCLOS (Masters 2019). In fact, trust upon the U.S. role as defender of the rules-based international order and free trade justifies the U.S. military forces’ deliberate transit in a manner inconsistent with innocent passage²⁹ to oppose China’s illegal requirements that ships obtain permission before transiting through another state’s territorial sea.³⁰ For example, in October 2015, the U.S. Destroyer *USS Lassen* entered 12 miles from the side of China’s artificial island in the SCS, while US B-52 strategic bombers flew within 12 miles from the islands (Nagao 2018:69).

Nagao has deemed such a projection of U.S. power effective in opposing China’s regional assertiveness in the short-term (2018:70). He additionally denotes that, despite not possessing enough military power, the U.S. is a pivotal player in maintaining the military balance in the region (2018:69). Indeed, as previously mentioned, the end of the Cold

²⁹ The right of innocent passage is the main restriction imposed by international law over coastal state’s territorial seas. Both military and civilian vessels enjoy the right to freely navigate territorial seas of other states. However, innocent passage requires that vessels move directly through the territorial sea, thereby refraining from activities which impede expedite passages. During the FONOPs, the U.S. Indo-Pacific Fleet zigzags across the contested waters.

³⁰ According to the provisions of the UNCLOS, ships of all countries are entitled to innocent passage within 12 nautical miles without prior notification.

War considerably reorganized the military balance in Asia, especially in the South China Sea, with China occupying the Paracels and Spratlys between the 1970s and 1980s. The race to militarization particularly heightened between 2000 and 2016 with the procurement of submarines which are particularly useful to collect crucial information about the opponent to destroy their ships (Nagao 2018).

In this period, China acquired 43 submarines, while Vietnam and Singapore acquired only 5 submarines and 2 submarines respectively (Nagao 2018). Despite being higher than Vietnam and Singapore, Japan's acquisitions totalled 16 submarines, thereby ranking significantly lower in quantity compared to China's (Nagao 2018:69). In 2016, Vice Admiral and Deputy Chief of naval operations for capabilities and resources Joseph Mulloy denoted that, as of February 2015, China had more diesel and nuclear-powered submarines than the United States (Reuters 2015). This needs to be put in perspective with the U.S. preoccupations in the Middle East.

The year 2016 also witnessed the largest naval exercise nearby Okinawa, about 400 kilometres from the Senkaku Islands (Joshy 2020). Indeed, more than 100 warships, fighters and surveillance aircrafts were deployed, and, as a result, the Malabar 2016 was not only viewed as a multilateral naval exercise among the U.S., India and Japan, but also as a combined display of strength to China (Joshy 2020:12). Against this backdrop, Japan's need for enhancing its alliance with the U.S. also derived from the Hague's Tribunal South China Sea ruling³¹ which, in spite of being in favour of the Philippines, failed to constrain China's breach of sovereignty of the former as Beijing refused to participate in the legal proceedings.

In this context, Japan's best strategic choice consisted of underscoring the rule of law as well as strengthening diplomatic and security cooperation with neighbouring countries as "an important basis for making the environment surrounding Japan stable" (MOFA 2017a). From 2013 to 2020, former Prime Minister Abe visited all ASEAN Member States multiple times. In 2016, Japan adopted the Vientiane Vision as the guiding

³¹ The International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea concluded that China's claims of historic rights within the nine-dash line had no legal foundation and that Beijing's activities within the Philippines 200 nautical mile EEZ (illegal fishing) infringed the sovereignty of the former.

principle of Japan's defence cooperation with ASEAN Member States (Japanese Ministry of Defense 2016). In this period, Abe also guaranteed ASEAN that Japan would respect the institution's unity and centrality as "the further integration, prosperity, and stability of [...] ASEAN [...] is vital for the peace and stability of the region" (MOFA 2017a). Indeed, besides India, the FOIPs also envisaged to empower ASEAN.

Nonetheless, ASEAN economic dependence on China, coupled with its inability to form a united China policy, led ASEAN to adopt a softer approach on Beijing, thereby rejecting the FOIP's narrative. Therefore, in 2016, Japan also sought to improve its relations with China and deal with the "repeated intrusions by Chinese government-owned vessels into Japan's territorial waters around the Senkaku Islands and its unilateral resource development in the East China Sea" (MOFA 2017a). Japan continued to expand defence cooperation with external countries such as the U.K., France, Germany, and Italy as well as Central Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Islands countries. Accordingly, the Abe Government advanced economic diplomacy to strengthen "a free and open international economic system," thereby reinforcing "the open, stable and rules-based international economic order" (MOFA 2017a).

With the increasing pressure of protectionism, particularly conducted by the Trump Administration, Japan appealed to free trade and inclusive growth within the frameworks of the WTO, APEC, and OECD. In conclusion, the FOIP was launched as an attempt "to shape a regional order, rather than be shaped by China" as China's assertiveness was proving to be an important challenge to Japanese intentions of establishing cooperative relations (Hosoya 2019:20). Yet, in its initial phase, the FOIPs was a rather ambiguous initiative as its focus on connectivity to foster regional economic prosperity, peace and stability, and the rule of law, combined with maritime security, were already part of Japan's strategic considerations (Koga 2019).

3.3.3 FOIP 1.0 and Act East Policy: A Confluence of Strategies

From 2016-2017, it is possible to observe Japan's changing strategy towards China. After the 2010 and 2012 incidents over the Senkaku Islands, relations between Japan and China had stalled and began warming up only in 2017 with the looming nuclear threat

of North Korea and the Trump Administration's foreign policy (Schreer 2017). Nonetheless, in this period, China's intrusions in Japan's EEZ as well as strengthened Chinese control³² over contested waters and maritime features in the South China Sea persisted (Schreer 2017:6-7). In other words, Japan and China "did not have the luxury to be passive nor avoid disrupting the status quo" (Satake and Sahashi 2020:20). Yet, from 2016, Japan-China relations also recorded a slight improvement. Japanese Foreign Minister Kishida Fumio's meeting with his Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi, along with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and State Councillor Yang Jiechi, attested to Japan's renewed efforts to salvage bilateral security relations.

In the same year, Abe also met with President Xi Jinping during the G-20 Hangzhou summit in China. With China's Belt and Road showing its first signs of implementation, the year 2017 witnessed Abe's willingness to find synergies between the FOIPs and China's Belt and Road under a set of conditions. This also occurred because of the U.S. Trump Administration's protectionism, which led Japan to reconsider its China policy. In 2017, Abe participated to the China's National Day's ceremony and the 45th anniversary of normalization of Sino-Japanese relations held at the Chinese Embassy in Tokyo. It was the first time in seven years that a Japanese Prime Minister attended the ceremony (MOFA 2018b).

According to Yoshimatsu Hidetaka, by pursuing positive relations with China, Japan implemented soft balancing (which included considering participating in the BRI) while still being pressured by Beijing in the East China Sea (2019:17). Therefore, in 2016-2017, Japan's soft balancing strategy shifted to tactical hedging (Koga 2019), which, however, comprised other policy options, such as engagement and economic-pragmatism (Yoshimatsu 2019). As a result, Japan dampened its criticism of China's assertiveness as attested by the 2015 joint statement with India concerning the South China Sea. Japan's new China posture can also be attributed to heightening tensions between North Korea and the U.S. throughout 2017 and 2018.

³² China upgraded land-based capabilities on Fiery Cross, Mischief, and Subi Reefs in the Spratly Islands

By implication, Japan's changing attitude towards China greatly benefited Japan-India relations. The year 2016 was especially relevant in bilateral ties as it laid the foundations for strengthening political, security and economic relations, through regular bilateral meetings. Indeed, India's key role for the success of Japan's FOIP explicitly emerges in Japan's 2017 Diplomatic Bluebook:

To realize this strategy [FOIP], Japan intends to further strengthen its strategic cooperation with countries such as India, which has a historical relationship with East Africa, and the U.S. and Australia [...] Particularly, during Prime Minister Modi of India's visit to Japan in November 2016, the two leaders shared the view to take the initiative for the stability and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region *by enhancing the synergy between Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" and India's "Act East Policy" through collaboration* (MOFA 2017a; italics added).

In fact, the 2016 Japan-India summit meeting elevated the Indo-Japanese partnership to new heights. Abe and Modi recognized the potential for cooperation in areas such as science, technology, disaster management and risk reduction, and healthcare (MEA 2016). Further, they reaffirmed their ambition to expand bilateral defence cooperation from the "2+2" Dialogue, Defence Policy Dialogue, Military-to-Military Talks and Coast Guard-to-Coast-Guard collaboration, to cover exchange of observers in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) exercises, and exchange and training of personnel in other fields (MEA 2016). Overall, in 2016, Abe and Modi forged comprehensive institutional ties covering land, maritime and air services (Yoshimatsu 2019:14).

This is illustrated by the first bilateral talks that the Japan's Air Self-Defence Force (JASDF) and the Indian Air Force held in February 2016. The 2017 Japan-India summit meeting led to strengthened cooperation between the JMSDF and the Indian Navy in the anti-submarine domain. This also gave impetus to the first India-Japan Annual Defence Ministerial Dialogue in 2019. At the 2016 summit meeting, Modi and Abe once again stressed the fundamental role of liberal values, along with connectivity, in shaping "an inclusive growth in the region" (MEA 2016). Hence, they further identified "synergy" between India's Act East Policy and Japan's "Expanded Partnership for Quality

Infrastructure”, which is broadly understood as Japan’s “Belt and Road Balancing Act” (Brînză 2018).

In fact, infrastructure building plays a leading role in both Japan’s FOIP and India’s Act East Policy. Capacity-building assistance to littoral states was extended to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, which are located nearby vital sea-lines of the Malacca Strait (Yoshimatsu 2019). Japan engaged in the development of power plant facilities, while India, for the first time, requested foreign support for the economic development of the islands (Yoshimatsu 2019:14). A 2016 report suggested that Japan and India aimed to install surveillance sensors in the Bay of Bengal and were undertaking projects to provide littoral countries with the means to upgrade their naval air bases and intelligence stations along the Andaman and Nicobar chain of islands (Singh 2016).

Tokyo’s plans revolved around financing an undersea optical fibre cable from Chennai to Port Blair (India), which would have been added to the existing U.S-Japan “Fish Hook” SOSUS network, aimed at monitoring China’s PLA Navy’s submarine activity in the Indo-Pacific (Singh 2016). Tokyo further economically empowered India by assisting in the development of India’s poorest states in the North-Eastern Region (NER). As reported by Yoshimatsu, Tokyo was the only country which obtained India’s permission to engage in development projects in the NER (2019:14). As a result, in 2017, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) extended ODA loans to the Indian government to specifically build a North East Road Network Connectivity Improvement Project, comprising, *inter alia*, the construction of roads and water supplies (JICA 2017).

The construction of this land gateway allows India to increase trade with Myanmar and Thailand as well as contributing to strengthening the contested NER border (Yoshimatsu 2019:14). The 2017 joint statement ensuing Abe’s September visit to India, titled *Toward a Free, Open and Prosperous Indo-Pacific*, developing India’s NER was “a concrete symbol of developing synergies between India’s Act East policy and Japan’s Free and Open Indo Pacific Strategy” (MEA 2017a). In 2017, Japan-India cooperation on building connectivity in India’s neighbourhood, and beyond, was further exemplified by their joint investments into Iran’s Chabahar Port, which notably represents India’s shortcut to Afghanistan and Central Asia. This can be easily perceived as a counter-move

to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor transiting the disputed Kashmir region between India and Pakistan, which ultimately reaches Gwadar Port.

Additionally, it was a Chinese state-owned enterprise in charge of developing and managing the port. Modi's criticism of the CPEC emerged at the Second Raisina Dialogue³³ in New Delhi when he stated that:

We appreciate the compelling logic of regional connectivity for peace, progress and prosperity. In our choices and through our actions, we have sought to overcome barriers to our outreach to West and Central Asia, and eastwards to Asia-Pacific. [...] However, equally, *connectivity in itself cannot override or undermine the sovereignty of other nations*. Only by respecting the sovereignty of countries involved,³⁴ can regional connectivity corridors fulfil their promise and avoid differences and discord (MEA 2017b; italics added).

Following Modi's statement, at the Second Belt and Road Forum, held only a month later, India did not to send an official delegation (Soyen and Singh 2017). Similarly, Japan and Indian investments in the Trincomalee Port (Sri Lanka) and unveiling of the idea of an Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) were also considered as providing with an alternative to China's BRI (Jaishankar 2018:64). The AACG also constituted one of the fruits of the 2016 Japan-India summit. To top it all off, in 2017, the Act East Forum was also launched to "provide a platform for India-Japan collaboration under the rubric of India's 'Act East Policy' and Japan's 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy'" (MEA 2017d). In other words, the Forum aims to identify specific projects for the development of India's NER pertaining to the connectivity domain as well as industrial linkages and tourism (MEA 2017d).

While Japanese official contestation of China considerably diminished, Tokyo enhanced political and economic assistance to New Delhi regarding her own tensions with Beijing (Yoshimatsu 2019). In fact, Japan contributed to "a strategy of dominance denial, in preparation for increasing China risk, as a part of its hedging strategy" (Yoshimatsu

³³ India's multilateral flagship conference on geo-politics and geo-economics regularly held once per year.

³⁴Modi was notably referring to Pakistan.

2019:20). At the same time, Japan also pursued “economic pragmatism through participation in BRI projects, and India deepened economic engagement with China through the AIIB” (Yoshimatsu 2019:21). Further, in order to hedge against the risk of China dominating the infrastructure market, both Japan and India reinforced soft balancing in infrastructure development (Yoshimatsu 2019:21).

Indeed, besides representing another milestone in bilateral policy developments, the Agreement for Cooperation in the Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy between Japan and India supported India’s energy security needs at a time when China allegedly rejected India’s entry into the Nuclear Suppliers Group to maintain its good relationship with Pakistan (Jingxi 2016). The agreement, which was signed in 2016 during Modi’s visit but entered into force in 2017, aimed to pave the way for enhanced cooperation in clean energy between Japan and India (MEA 2017c). In other words, the agreement allowed Tokyo to export nuclear power plants (built by France and the U.S.) as well as its own atomic technology to India.

As the only country to have ever suffered a nuclear attack, Tokyo has been actively endorsing non-proliferation of nuclear armaments. Hence, its decision to sell nuclear facilities to India, which had yet to sign the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear weapons, raised controversies in the public (Agence France-Presse 2016). Therefore, a separate document had to be issued to enable Japan to cease cooperation in the event of India resuming nuclear testing. In 2017, India’s rivalry with China escalated at Doklam following China’s PLA engineers reportedly initiating construction works of a road from Dokola toward the Bhutan Army Camp at Zempelri. Fearing a crossover into Indian territory, the Indian Army intervened to halt the constructions.

It was during this military stand-off that India, Japan, and the U.S. participated for the first time with the nuclear-powered USS Nimitz, India’s IND Vikramaditya, and Japan’s JS Izumo (aircraft carriers) to the Malabar 2017 joint naval exercises in the Bay of Bengal (Joshy 2020). After 2007, this was the first time that Japan participated in the Malabar in the Indian Ocean. Since 2017, Japan-India maritime security cooperation (and multilateral) has scaled up, thereby representing a decisive factor in the security dynamics of the Indo-Pacific (Joshy 2020).

3.3.4 A Conceptual Evolution: Towards FOIP 2.0

In October 2017, the FOIPs entered its second phase. According to Koga, three key factors induced the shift towards FOIP 2.0 (2019). Firstly, the adoption of the “Indo-Pacific” nomenclature by the Trump Administration was the reason that brought the FOIP to the spotlight. Secondly, during the 2017 U.S.-Japan summit, the U.S. and Japan agreed on three principles:

1. Promotion and establishment of fundamental values
2. Pursuit of economic prosperity
3. Commitment to peace and stability (MOFA 2017b).

Additionally, both the U.S. and Japan agreed to cooperate with any country that would adopt the FOIPs Vision. This clearly indicated that, in theory, FOIPs was indeed an “open and inclusive” concept. Thirdly, the FOIPs found its institutionalization in the QUAD. Yet, the U.S. explicit antagonism towards China discredited both the QUAD and the FOIP which was aggravated by the missing common Indo-Pacific approach among the QUAD countries (Koga 2019). At a time when Japan was attempting to mend its relationship with China, Tokyo would have preferably avoided siding with the U.S. amid the intensifying U.S.-China rivalry in the Indo-Pacific. Despite Abe’s 2012 opinion peace frankly stating the need to counterbalance China, the Abe government has fore and foremost emphasized its ambition to expand its economic interest as well as contribute to peace and stability in the region.

To paraphrase Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, China disparaged the FOIP as an idea that would “dissipate like foam” (2018). Hence, China seemed to mock the preference of reimaging the geopolitical map of Asia as the “Indo-Pacific” (Bouchard et al. 2019; Medcalf 2018). Chinese scholars have been highly debating about the nature of the FOIP and, regardless of different interpretations of the Indo-Pacific, described the latter as “a preliminary idea for the United States [and allies] to constrain China’s rise from a geopolitical perspective, and to safeguard its own leadership and interests in the region” (Dingding 2018). More recently, Chinese scholars and media have also begun using the

term and conferences with the Indo-Pacific as theme are more frequently held (Saran 2019).

In this context, Beijing primarily aims to neutralize any China-containment language as well as seek to convince other countries, such as India, to decouple the QUAD (Saran 2019). As a result, since 2016, Chinese state representatives have been endorsing an inclusive narrative in relation to the Indo-Pacific region, a term that, however, they avoid adopting, despite clearly acknowledging the interconnectedness of the region. This is further attested by the speech of the leader of a Chinese delegation visiting India in 2019, Yang Yanyi, who declared that:

Any regional initiative needs to be open, inclusive, rules based, guided by the principles of respect of sovereignty, non-interference, and mutual trust. [...] Indo-Pacific should be about addressing issues like poverty alleviation and not about creating divisions. [...] The rhetoric and narrative to my ears have been quite confrontational. [...] The Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean region should not be viewed as contiguous territorial space but as clearly integrated and inter-connected regions (Saran 2019).

In addition to Chinese protests, ASEAN reluctance in accepting FOIP as Abe firstly proposed it in 2016, constitutes a major factor that led to the reconceptualization of FOIP. In fact, ASEAN Member States' location at the heart of the Indo-Pacific region, along crucial sea lines of communication in the South China Sea, appoints them as a vital part of the Indo-Pacific construct. Gaining the recognition of ASEAN regarding the Indo-Pacific concept by ensuring its "centrality" was a necessary step for Japan to diffuse its initiatives within the framework of FOIP. However, it could also be argued that underscoring ASEAN centrality is also not a new element in Japanese foreign policy but rather constitutes a legacy of the Fukuda Doctrine (Haddad 1980).

Additionally, in the aftermath of the Cold War, ASEAN has inaugurated multilateral institutions within which all the major regional powers estimate the role of ASEAN vital for the maintenance of regional peace and stability (Koga 2019). Therefore, Japan was concerned about whether ASEAN would reject the FOIP concept, thereby causing the

fall of Japan's political legitimacy in Southeast Asia (Koga 2019). Thus, Japan has conducted bilateral diplomacy vis-à-vis ASEAN to hedge this risk (Koga 2019). According to Koga, Japan has adopted a cautious approach towards ASEAN as a regional institution, while seeking support with each individual Member State (2019). A case in point is the Japan-Philippines dialogue.

Between 2016 and 2019, Japan and the Philippines held around 14 rounds of bilateral dialogues and yet the FOIPs was never subject of debate (Koga 2019:302). Considering the Philippines accommodating posture vis-à-vis China under President Rodrigo Duterte, it is understandable that Manila exerts caution in endorsing the FOIPs. Yet, both countries consistently improve areas of cooperation covered by the FOIPs itself, such as capacity building (Koga 2019). Similarly, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Myanmar, and Laos have yet to clearly express their views on the matter. Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam were of different opinion. Cambodia was the first ASEAN country to welcome Japan's FOIPs which was supported by Prime Minister Hun Sen in 2017 and reaffirmed by Cambodian Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn in 2018 (Koga 2019).

On the one hand, Cambodia has been attracted by Japan's connectivity projects within the country, such as the Southern Economic Corridor and Sihanoukville Port (MOFA 2018c). On the other hand, democratic values such as respect for human rights and democracy remain in the shadows at the table of discussions. With Japan failing to clarify ASEAN's role in the FOIPs, in 2016, and ASEAN's economic dependency on China, ASEAN showed mild enthusiasm in the initiative. Indeed, FOIPs was only briefly mentioned during the 2017 ASEAN-Japan Summit and no future collaboration on the subject was discussed (ASEAN 2017). This was also due to ASEAN's uncertainty about Chinese perspectives on the vision as well as to the confusion ignited by the different Indo-Pacific concepts endorsed by the QUAD members (Koga 2019).

Consequently, in 2018, ASEAN developed its own Indo-Pacific narrative with the aim of identifying synergies with other regional initiatives, such as FOIPS and Belt and Road, along with endorsing openness and transparency, connectivity and inclusivity, peace and economic cooperation to ultimately enhance mutual trust and transform the region from patterns of enmity to amity based upon the respect of ASEAN centrality (ASEAN

2018). In such a fashion, ASEAN aimed to prevent regional powers, namely the U.S., to engage in great power politics in Southeast Asia (Koga 2019).

Receptive to the regional dynamics, in 2017, Abe publicly expressed Japan's willingness to find synergies between FOIPs and China's Belt and Road. At the Banquet of the 23rd International Conference on The Future of Asia, Abe delivered a speech titled "Asia's Dream: Linking the Pacific and Eurasia." For the first time, Abe mentioned the One Belt, One Road and Japan's cooperative attitude which, however, seemed to hold specific conditions:

This year a landmark change occurred on the map of the Eurasian continent. This year marked the first time that the city of Yiwu, China and the United Kingdom were connected by a freight train, which crossed the English Channel. The "One Belt, One Road" initiative holds the potential to connect East and West. [...] I would expect that the "One Belt, One Road" will incorporate [...] a common frame of thinking, and come into harmony with the *free and fair* Trans Pacific economic zone, and *contribute to the peace and prosperity* of the region and the world. *Japan is ready to extend cooperation from this perspective* (Kantei 2017; italics added).

Abe continued his speech by promoting "High Quality Infrastructure Partnership." Abe's underlying requirements emerge in the following sentences, along with his friendship with Modi guaranteeing India's support of Japan's FOIP:

We Japanese are very particular about some aspects of infrastructure. *It must be safe, and it must be environmentally friendly.* [...] Prime Minister Modi said that, "Bringing in a Japanese bullet train –"the Shinkansen"– will not just realize high-speed rail but serve as a major catalyst for the modernization of India's rail system overall." Mr. Modi was well aware that Japan's cooperation does not stop until technologies and skills, including those for maintenance, take root in the area where the infrastructure is being developed (Kantei 2017; italics added).

Shortly after this Conference, Japan and China held a bilateral summit meeting in July 2017. One of the items of discussions concerned "the stability and prosperity of the region and the world, including the One Belt, One Road initiative" (MOFA 2017c). In

fact, at the ASEAN 2017 Summit in Manila chaired by Japan, Abe revived the idea of the QUAD while denoting the key role of China in peacefully resolving the North Korean nuclear deterrence. This further hinted at Japan's shifting strategy towards China. Nonetheless, at the occasion of the second U.S.-India-Japan Trilateral Ministerial Dialogue in New York, Japan proposed the establishment of a quadrilateral framework which materialized shortly after in the first Australia-India-Japan-US Consultations on the Indo-Pacific on the side-lines of the East Asia Summit in November (Yoshimatsu 2019).

Reminiscent of the experience of the QUAD in 2007, this meeting had an exploratory nature (Yoshimatsu 2019). Indeed, the consultations soon demonstrated that each participant underscored different aims. While the U.S. insisted on democratic values to characterize the QUAD 2.0, India focused on inclusiveness. Nevertheless, the revival of the QUAD added new momentum to Japan-India relations with Australia and the U.S. as illustrated by the Malabar 2017 naval exercise, which welcomed the JMSDF as a formal member for the first time after 2007 (Yoshimatsu 2019).

India's participation in this quadrilateral meeting subtly indicated New Delhi's policy change from neutrality to a more aligned position (Yoshimatsu 2019). As the FOIP 1.0 might be summarized as "US IN, China DOWN, Australia/India/ASEAN UP" (Koga 2020), concerns with the counter-China implications inherent to FOIP 1.0 re-morphed Japan's Indo-Pacific approach, thereby hinting at Tokyo's resolutions of inducing China to conform with existing international norms through engagement rather than confrontation as well as further expanding its diplomatic relations.

3.4 FOIP 2.0: A Vision for a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific"

In January 2018, Abe's speech to the National Diet formally proclaimed the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" under the banner of "Proactive Contribution to Peace." At this occasion, Abe reiterated the cooperative nature of the FOIP with China "to work [together] to meet the growing infrastructure demand in Asia" (Kantei 2018). Abe additionally focused on the necessity of ensuring "Freedom of navigation and the rule of law [as] public good that brings peace and prosperity to all people without

discrimination into the future. To this end we will promote the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy” (Kantei 2018). Hence, the FOIP remains maritime security-oriented. Consequently, in July 2018, at the joint press conference with Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad, former Prime Minister Abe delivered a speech which officially described FOIP as a “vision” as the term “strategy” was increasingly becoming a reason of concern.

The President of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) Kitaoka Shinichi is one of the scholars who supports this re-labelling. In his article *Vision for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific*, Kitaoka deems the term “vision” to be the most accurate as strategies are policy-based methods usually employed to achieve higher-level objectives (2019:7). Before and after its evolution, Japan’s Free and Open Indo-Pacific is better understood as a “guiding principle for other policies” (Kitaoka 2019:7). Rossiter further adds to the debate by observing that “the extent to which the FOIP can be viewed [...] as guiding Japan’s strategic approach to the Indo-Pacific, remains hidden for most analysts” (Rossiter 2018:114), while Tsuruoka Michito confirms that “many people have only a vague idea about what the [FOIP] strategy actually means” (2018).

These perceptions still linger around the FOIP. Admittedly, in its initial phase, the FOIP sought to achieve two different objectives: shaping the regional order in the Indo-Pacific and ensuring the defence of Japan (Koga 2020:50). This would have implied that the aim behind the FOIP was to overtly contain China, thereby becoming analogous to Washington’s Indo-Pacific strategy (Matsuda 2018). Considering the increasing threat perception vis-à-vis North Korea, which propelled Abe to define the regional environment as “the most severe since World War II” (Kantei 2018), experts expected the FOIP to be strongly associated with national security. Yet, the 2018 evolution decoupled national defence from the concept of the FOIP (Koga 2020).

Indeed, absent is the topic of the place of the FOIP in Japan’s evolving national security in academic discussions (Rossiter 2018). Nonetheless, Rossiter argues that, as a trading nation, Japan cannot possibly separate its seaborne economic agenda from security concerns as free movement across international waters is what ensures its very own survival (2018:115). For the same reason, Kitaoka observes that the Free and Open Indo-

Pacific concept is indeed crucial for the survival and development of Japan (2019). Kitaoka also denotes that, while either China, Russia, the United States, or Britain, France and Germany could survive even if the Indo-Pacific does not remain free or open, “for Japan [...] it is a vitally important task” (2019:7). For this very reason, Japan signed the UNCLOS in 1983.

In a recent article, Satake and Sahashi emphasize Japan’s dependence on an open, inclusive, and rules-based international order sustained by a strong U.S. leadership and relative military presence (2020). They add that it is precisely thanks to such an environment that Japan was able to pursue constructive policies towards China. Kei Koga also observes that Japan has gained the most from the U.S.-led international order and thereby seeks to maintain it (Koga 2020:57). Were this order to collapse, Japan would likely be forced to review the core of its post-war foreign policy: its pacifist identity and the U.S.-Japan security alliance (Satake and Sahashi 2020). Thus, by morphing the FOIP into a flexible concept, the Japanese government secured the survival of this “vision”.

Indeed, its re-labelling and unveiling at the summit with Malaysia “was decided after considerable debate” (Tajima 2018). However, in order to prevent perceptions moulding the FOIP as a China-containment initiative, the FOIP primarily intends to shape and consolidate regional order in the Indo-Pacific “on the basis of the existing rules-based international order” (Koga 2020:50). While Japan’s security strategy has focused on strengthening the U.S.-Japan security alliance as well as transforming strategic partnerships with like-minded states, such as India and Australia, into potential military alignments, Tokyo implemented tactical hedging to expand its diplomatic relations to propagate the concept of the FOIP (Koga 2020).

Hence, the FOIP’s third evolution began in 2018 when the Abe Cabinet internally consolidated its principles (Koga 2019). The FOIP has been drafted by the same personnel who designed the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity: Former National Security Advisor to Prime Minister Shotaro Yachi, who was also Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs in Abe’s first administration (2006-2007), and Nobukatsu Kanehara, who was then the Director at the Policy Coordination Division in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and

retired from government service in 2019. In the 2019 Diplomatic Bluebook (which covers the calendar year 2018), a “special feature” section was dedicated to the FOIP. The document describes the objectives of the FOIP as follows:

Japan is promoting the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy” in order to develop the Indo-Pacific region as “*international public goods*” that bring stability and prosperity for any country. This *vision* involves maintaining and strengthening a free and open maritime order based on the rule of law across the region [...], as well as through enhancing connectivity within the region by developing quality infrastructure in accordance with international standards (MOFA 2019a; italics added).

As such, the three pillars of the FOIP focused on (MOFA 2019a):

1. Promoting and strengthening the rule of law, freedom of navigation, and free trade
2. Pursuing economic prosperity by enhancing connectivity, including through “quality” infrastructure development in accordance with international standards
3. Ensuring peace and stability through assistance for capacity building of maritime law enforcement, disaster risk reduction, anti-piracy and non-proliferation of nuclear armaments.

Clearly, the emphasis on “human rights”, which had characterized the FOIP 1.0, disappeared in exchange for principles such as ASEAN centrality and inclusivity. This is further illustrated by the Special Advisor to the Prime Minister Sonoura Kentarō’s speech acknowledging ASEAN as a key player in Japan’s FOIP, thereby assuring that ASEAN centrality and unity would not be put in jeopardy (MOFA 2018d). As illustrated by the official document purporting the FOIP, Japan modified the FOIP’s narrative in order to focus on developing the Indo-Pacific as “international public goods” to “enhance ‘connectivity’ between Asia and Africa [...] and with ASEAN as the hinge of two oceans” (MOFA 2018d) (figure 7).

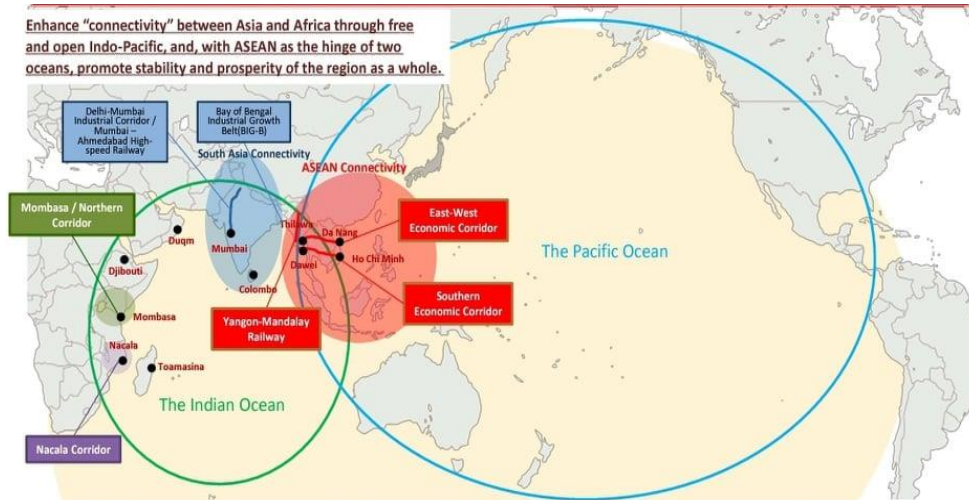


Figure 7. Japan's FOIP Vision

(Source : MOFA 2018d)

Additionally, contrary to the 2016 version, the FOIP 2.0 fails to mention the key role of Japan-India strategic cooperation in realizing the FOIP. Conversely, since 2017, India has proven to be reluctant to fully endorse the FOIP. To achieve an FOIP, the MOFA underscores Japan's non-exclusivity clause to facilitate cooperation "with any country that supports this idea" (MOFA 2018d), thereby not limiting its collaboration with India (and the rest of the QUAD). As such, Tokyo began seeking potential synergies with external powers which are both Indo-Pacific stakeholders and like-minded democracies: France and the U.K. Accordingly, in 2019, then Japanese Foreign Minister Kōno Tarō underscored the importance of Japan's relationships with China and South Korea along with ASEAN in institutionalizing the FOIP (Koga 2020).

As illustrated by this analysis of Japan-India relations, between 2007 and 2018, Japan has increased the number of bilateral defence exchanges beyond the U.S. In this timeframe, Japan's defence exchange partner was principally Australia, while South Korea ranked first in terms of joint trainings and exercises. Besides India, Japan has increasingly institutionalized defence arrangements, along with maintaining security engagement with both Russia and China and expanding security cooperation with ASEAN Member States (Satake and Sahashi 2020). Indeed, Satake and Sahashi also

argue that Japan's FOIP vision is aimed at shaping an inclusive regional order that incorporates all regional countries into a common framework (2020).

For this reason, Tokyo is strengthening its coalition-building efforts also with the EU as exemplified by the EU-Japan Partnership on Sustainable Connectivity and Quality Infrastructure, the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) and the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA). In 2020, Japan's Diplomatic Bluebook showed the state of play of the FOIP 2.0 which is clearly more articulated and defined as a Vision. "Japan's Vision for FOIP" reiterates:

1. The maintenance and strengthening of the *international rules-based* order to ensure continued stability and prosperity, which cannot be brought about by force or coercion, and crafting new rules to address the challenges of a changing world
2. The Indo-Pacific as *international public good* which entails fostering economic growth (connectivity)
3. FOIP as an *open and inclusive* concept which does not intend to create new institutions, or compete with existing ones, but rather seeks to maintain/enhance the international order through cooperation: "no country is excluded from partnership" (MOFA 2020a).

Yet, experts also observe that Japan needs to address some FOIP key challenges if it intends to sustain this initiative in the long-term. Rossiter, Satake, Sahashi, and Koga indicate that constitutional constraints on the use of force as well as limited economic and security resources are the main limitations to Japan's efforts of maintaining open seas (2018; 2020; 2020). In addition, Satake and Sahashi denote that there is still a lack of regional consensus on the FOIP (2020). As ensuring freedom of navigation is a priority of the FOIP, Rossiter questions how this aim can be achieved if Japan (together with India and Australia) is unwilling to conduct FONOPs across the South China Sea alongside the U.S. (2018:119). This is an important implication of Japan's legal constraints that even the 2015 security legislation could not entirely solve.

As a result, the JSDF cannot be involved in conflicts unless the *kuni no sunritsu*, or “survival of the nation,” is directly threatened. Nonetheless, the JSDF can provide with logistical support prior authorisation from the Diet (Rossiter 2018). Indeed, in addition to advancing the QUAD, Japan’s MSDF and ASDF have been frequently deployed across the Indo-Pacific also jointly with French and British forces. This is exemplified by the first Japan-Australia-France-US multilateral exercise, *La Perouse*, in the Indian Ocean, in 2019. Hence, Satake and Sahashi argue that, within its legal constraints, Japan has nonetheless been strengthening collective (and individual) efforts to secure open and free sea lines of communication (2020).

On the other hand, efficient regional governance is not only threatened by traditional security threats, but also by increasingly emerging unconventional challenges ranging from natural disasters to cybercrime. Therefore, Japan has enhanced counter-terrorism and peace-keeping operations, cyber and space security, and capacity building assistance (CBA). Notably, CBA throughout the Indo-Pacific region and beyond has been conducted in cooperation with like-minded countries in order to strengthen nations in strategic locations vis-à-vis China, namely, Vietnam (Satake and Sahashi 2020). Yet, Satake and Sahashi stress that Japan’s CBA projects are not aimed at China, as they principally focus on non-traditional sectors, and attempt rather “to create a region that is resilient enough *to accommodate* the rise of China” (2020:28; italics added).

At the same time, it is being argued that Japan’s defence equipment and technology cooperation with regional countries is as important as strengthening regional resiliency (Satake and Sahashi 2020). This is also one of the major goals of CBA which has been impelled by the lifting of Japan’s arms embargo under the Abe Government in 2014 (Satake and Sahashi 2020). Indeed, the introduction of the new Three Principles on Transfer of Defence Equipment and Technology, along with the new 2015 Development Cooperation Charter, enabled Japan to export arms (undergoing to a rigorous screening process) “to proactively contribute to peace and international cooperation.” In addition, Japan has also focused on empowering regional countries through ODA loans as evidenced by Japan’s connectivity projects.

According to Rossiter, another area where the SDF could play a significant regional role within the FOIP framework is in humanitarian assistance/disaster relief (HA/DR) (2018). In fact, besides constituting a non-military domain, HA/DR missions “are short, visible, and safe” both “politically and in terms of safety of personnel” (Rossiter 2018:122). Sustaining a FOIP vision on the long-term requires greater economic and security resources. Yet, Tokyo’s participation to joint military exercises has been modest despite procurement decisions hinting at Japan’s intentions of acquiring larger military capabilities as deterrence to national defence (Rossiter 2018). The Indo-Pacific as a region is imbued with different kinds of narratives.

This strongly suggests a lack of regional consensus and policy coherence even among strategic partners sharing the same principles and objectives. For instance, India’s Indo-Pacific approach is different from Japan’s due to their different perceptions pertaining to the regional order as well as relations with China (Satake and Sahashi 2020). As such, FOIP’s conceptual flexibility is increasingly been put at risk by differing positions towards China (Koga 2020). Most importantly, China rejects the idea of the Indo-Pacific and, from a Western perspective, Beijing is instead leading the region towards a future which fails to entail freedom, democracy, and transparency.

Furthermore, China perceives that, as secondary states, the strengthened Japan-India partnership is simply “a strategic tool used by the U.S. to counter China” (Weijia 2018). Thus, with the U.S.-China rivalry escalating in the IPR, Japan finds itself in a strategic dilemma between the U.S., its most important ally, and ASEAN, the leading force of Asian multilateralism (Koga 2020). Koga clearly illustrates that by aligning more firmly with the U.S., Japan would put in jeopardy its relations with ASEAN as well as China, which would, in turn, prove the FOIP to be a balancing act (Koga 2020).

3.4.1 FOIP 2.0 and Act East Policy: Sharing a Common Vision

3.4.1.1 India's Indo-Pacific Vision

In analysing the evolution of Japan-India relations within the framework of the Indo-Pacific, this research has primarily focused on Japan's Indo-Pacific regionalism. The reason partially lies in the fact that India has only recently adopted the "Indo-Pacific" terminology due to its reluctance in explicitly antagonizing China. To date, the Indian government has issued few official documents pertaining to the Indo-Pacific. The documents that refer to the "Indo-Pacific" multiple times are the 2015 Indian Maritime Security Strategy, which mentions the shifting focus from the "Euro-Atlantic" to the "Indo-Pacific" and additionally connects the Indo-Pacific concept to India's "Act East" policy (MSS 2015); and the 2019 National Security Strategy which emphasises the importance of harmonising the various regionalisms (NSS 2019) (Heiduk and Wacker 2020).

Despite showing cautiousness in endorsing an Indo-Pacific narrative, India did nonetheless adopt an Indo-Pacific approach in its foreign policy. This is made clear by India's 2007 maritime strategy as well as its 2015 revised edition (Heiduk and Wacker 2020). As previously illustrated, under Modi, India has emphasized its views multiple times but especially during his meetings with Abe in 2015, which resulted in the Joint Declaration on India's and Japan's Vision for 2025 (the "special" strategic and global partnership), and in the 2017 Joint Declaration "Toward a Free, Open and Prosperous Indo-Pacific", which explicitly aligned India's AEP to Japan's FOIP on matters such as maritime security, connectivity and cooperation with ASEAN. Yet, analysts consider Modi's 2018 speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue the touchstone of India's Indo-Pacific regionalism. In fact, Modi clearly outlined the six pillars of India's Indo-Pacific approach as follows:

The Indo-Pacific is a *natural region*. [...] I am increasingly convinced with each passing day that the destinies of those of us who live in the region are linked. Today, we are being called *to rise above divisions and competition to work together*. [...]

One

It stands for a free, open, inclusive region [...] It includes *all nations* in this geography as also others beyond who have a stake in it.

Two

Southeast Asia is at its centre. And, ASEAN has been and will be central to its future [...]

Three

We believe that our common prosperity and security require us *to evolve, through dialogue, a common rules-based order for the region*. And, it must equally apply to all individually as well as to the global commons. Such an order must believe in *sovereignty and territorial integrity*, as well as *equality of all nations*, irrespective of size and strength. These rules and norms should be based on the consent of all, not on the power of the few. This must be based on faith in dialogue, and not dependence on force. [...] This is the foundation of India's faith in multilateralism and regionalism; and, of our principled commitment to rule of law.

Four

We should all have equal access as a right under international law to the use of common spaces on sea and in the air that would require freedom of navigation, unimpeded commerce and peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with international law. When we all agree to live by that code, our sea lanes will be pathways to prosperity and corridors of peace. [...]

Five

This region, and all of us, have benefitted from globalisation. [...] But, there is growing protectionism –in goods and in services. [...] What we seek is a level playing field for all. India stands for *open and stable international trade regime*. We will also support rule-based, open, balanced and stable trade environment in the Indo-Pacific Region, which lifts up all nations on the tide of trade and investment. [...]

Six

Connectivity is vital. It does more than enhance trade and prosperity. It unites a region. India has been at the crossroads for centuries. [...] There are many

connectivity initiatives in the region. If these have to succeed, we must not only build infrastructure, we must also build *bridges of trust*. And for that, these initiatives must be based on respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, consultation, good governance, transparency, viability and sustainability. They must empower nations, not place them under impossible debt burden. They must promote trade, not strategic competition. On these principles, we are prepared to work with everyone. India is doing its part, by itself and in partnership with others like Japan – in South Asia and Southeast Asia, in the Indian Ocean, Africa, West Asia and beyond. And, we are important stake-holders in New Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. [...]

In conclusion, let me say this again: India's own engagement in the Indo-Pacific Region –*from the shores of Africa to that of the Americas*– will be inclusive. [...] That is the foundation of our civilizational ethos –of pluralism, co-existence, openness and dialogue. The ideals of democracy that define us as a nation also shape the way we engage the world (MEA 2018b; italics added).

On the one hand, Modi's speech clearly emphasized India's multi-aligned position in the Indo-Pacific. Most importantly, it clarified that the Indo-Pacific is a "natural" region, not an initiative aimed at excluding specific countries. Indeed, attesting to China's accusations concerning the Indo-Pacific relabelling hiding China-containment aims, Modi added that "by no means do we consider it [the Indo-Pacific] as directed against any country. A geographical definition, as such, cannot be. India's vision for the Indo-Pacific region is [...] a positive one" (MEA 2018b).

As such, India officially endorses multilateralism which is a historical legacy of India. Attesting to India's strategic autonomy in a multipolar world order, Modi also mentioned New Delhi's strategic partnership with Moscow (Heiduk and Wacker 2020). On the other hand, Modi's heavy criticism of China's revisionist endeavours, "debt trap diplomacy" and non-transparent practices, conducted through its Belt and Road Initiative, also transpires through his speech. Apparent is also the convergence between Japan and India's Indo-Pacific approaches which, from 2018, further complemented each other's interests. This is best exemplified by the 2018 Japan-India Vision which ensued their annual bilateral meeting.

3.4.2 The FOIP as the Cornerstone of India's AEP

Ten years after the 2008 Japan-India Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation, defence ties additionally gained momentum with a series of agreements concerning military cooperation and regional and global security. Indeed, at the 2018 annual bilateral meeting, which represents “the driving force of the rapidly-advancing Japan-India relationship” (MOFA 2018e), Abe stated that Japan-India ties would contribute “to the peace and prosperity of the region and the world” (MOFA 2018e). Prime Minister Modi responded by expressing his hopes for “the historical bilateral relationship” to broaden into new areas and strengthened exchanges (MOFA 2018e). Accordingly, the summit inaugurated tri-services exercises between the Indian Army, Air Force and Navy, and Japan's Ground, Air and Maritime Self-Defence Force, along with further elevating bilateral 2+2 defence and strategic dialogue to the ministerial level.

Another significant outcome of this summit included the launching of negotiations on an Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA). Ankit Panda has described this move as “crystallizing more than a decade of rapid strategic convergence between Japan and India amid mutual suspicions about China's rise” (2018). Additionally, Japan and India established the Japan-India Space Dialogue, thereby welcoming the technological collaboration in the Joint Lunar Polar Exploration Mission, and defence equipment cooperation. As a result, discussions on India's acquisition of Japan's ShinMaywa US-2 amphibian aircraft proceeded. The 2018 summit also introduced defence technology research and development as new areas of cooperation.

This was the first time that Japan and India agreed to begin cooperative research in the area of Unmanned Ground Vehicle (UGV), Robotics and Artificial Intelligence. This was additionally the first agreement, after the one concluded in 2016 on the transfer of defence equipment and technology, which fit within the FOIP's objectives towards “proactive contribution to peace” as well as Japan's Acquisition, Technology and Logistical Agency (ATLA)'s mission “to secure technological superiority under the increasingly severe security environment surrounding Japan” (ATLA 2021). In fact, in

2018, “rapid progress in technological innovation” and “unprecedented change in the balance of power” greatly affected Japan’s security environment (MOFA 2019a).

With the world undergoing a Fourth Industrial Revolution characterized by AI, robotics, Big Data, which are hastening cross border economic activities, “there is an increased need for the maintenance and formulation of an economic order based on rules” (MOFA 2019a). In this context, the U.S.-led protectionism, prompted by former U.S. President Trump’s “America First” policy and his trade war with China, severely undermined the credibility of the principles of the international rules-based order. Such credibility was further stricken by the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union (MOFA 2019a). Japan’s 2019 Diplomatic Bluebook adds to the picture by underscoring the challenges arising from the “unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion” as well as the spread of terrorism and violent extremism (MOFA 2019a).

In traditional security terms, North Korea represented Japan’s greatest threat. Suzuki Kazuto observed that “threat perceptions are greater over North Korea today, than the Soviet Union during the Cold War” (2018). This was due to the unpredictability of Kim Jong-un’s decisions (as attested by the frequent ballistic missiles flying over Japan), fears of a massive refugee crisis, a potential de-coupling between the U.S. and Japan, and the possibility of increased Chinese regional influence in case of war (Suzuki 2018). As the DPRK is not generally perceived as a rational actor, ballistic missiles could either intentionally or unintentionally hit Japan. Pyongyang’s alleged fast-developing nuclear capabilities could even push the regime to test its long-range capabilities as far as the U.S. military bases (Suzuki 2018).

In this worst-case scenario, then President Trump would have probably been unwilling to commit to defend both South Korea and Japan as the priority would have been the defence of the American West Coast (Suzuki 2018). To top it all off, in March 2018, Washington did not spare Japan from stiff tariffs on steel and aluminium imports. This would have likely led to the decoupling of the U.S-Japan security alliance and serious self-defence difficulties for Japan due to its legal constraints and self-imposed “Three Non-Nuclear Principles” which prevent Tokyo from either producing or importing nuclear weapons (Suzuki 2018). Given North Korea’s geographical proximity, China

would most certainly have dispatched its military in the event of conflict, thereby increasing the chances of clashing with the U.S. troops.

In this context, “the extension of Chinese power would put Japan in a difficult dilemma: increase its defence capability or balance China and the United States” (Suzuki 2018). South Korea would find itself in the same situation, as Seoul lives in a constant strategic dilemma “between” its major trading partner, China, and its principal security provider, the U.S. With incumbent South Korean President Moon Jae In notably seeking to reunite the two Koreas, South Korea has been working on linking its New Southern Policy (NSP) with China’s Belt and Road Initiative to facilitate infrastructure building that would reconnect Seoul to both North Korea and the Eurasian continent. Thus, in the event of conflict, it could not be excluded that South Korea would rather side with China (Suzuki 2018).

With these perspectives, the DPRK represented both a tangible and intangible threat questioning historical alliances and Abe’s political credibility due to the stalling of the abductees issue (Suzuki 2018). These difficulties are indeed reflected in the agreements concluded by Modi and Abe during their 2018 summit. Considering the heightened North Korean nuclear threat, Japan reiterated its commitment to disarmament and Non-Proliferation along with the “prompt entry into force” of the Comprehensive Nuclear-test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). A concern which is also shared by India since the DPRK transferred the Nodong ballistic missile to Pakistan, where it was successively modified into the nuclear-capable Ghauri system.

Therefore, Abe and Modi underscored the necessity of a North Korea’s “complete and irreversible dismantlement of all weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles in accordance with the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions” (UNSCRs), along with mutually condemning terrorism and its universal reach. Notably, they called upon Pakistan to bring to justice the terrorists behind the November 2008 Mumbai and January 2016 Pathankot attacks, and consequently called for closer international partnership in countering terrorism such as intelligence-sharing. As the “champion of the abductees” (Harris 2020), Abe also succeeded in winning over Modi in jointly advocating for the resolution of the Japanese citizens abduction issue.

Seemingly responding to the decrease in popularity of the U.S. as champion of liberal values, unwavering commitment towards the establishment of a “free and open” Indo-Pacific was also a focal point of the summit. Indeed, akin to the 2017 Japan-India joint statement, the two prime ministers stated that “India and Japan must endeavour to work together for a rules-based and inclusive world order that fosters trust and confidence by enhancing communication and connectivity to ensure rule of law, unimpeded trade and flow of people, technology and ideas for shared prosperity” (MOFA 2018f). The 2018 Vision Statement unmistakably brought to the fore the deepening bilateral cooperation on maritime security and jointly affirmed the principles of their aligned Indo-Pacific approaches based upon:

1. ASEAN unity and centrality which is at the heart of the Indo-Pacific concept
2. A non-exclusive Indo-Pacific which promotes “universally recognized principles of international law”
3. Enhancement of concrete cooperation with the U.S. and other partners (MOFA 2018f).

In light of the frequent bilateral exercises, dialogues and training between the Indian and Japanese Coast Guards, Abe and Modi acknowledged the considerable progress in maritime security cooperation and additionally signed the Implementing Arrangement for deeper cooperation between the Indian Navy and the JMSDF which enabled the exchange of information in maritime domain awareness. A few weeks prior to the 12th Japan-India annual summit, the third edition of the Japan-India Maritime Exercise (JIMEX) was conducted in Visakhapatnam, Southern India. As the last JIMEX occurred in 2013, the resumption of the exercises hinted at the worsening Indo-Pacific scenario and the intensifying U.S.-China rivalry.

In addition, in 2018, the trilateral Exercise Malabar was held off Guam in June. In November, with the looming threat of terrorism, Japan and India also inaugurated the first counterterrorism exercise –*Dharma Guardian*– between the JSDF Ground Force (JGDF) and the Indian Army in Mizoram. Indeed, the converging perception of terrorism as a global threat, arising from Pakistan, in particular, led to a shift from

Japan's traditional balanced position on India-Pakistan relations into a firmer position in support of India (Gupta and Wadhwa 2020).

In both the East and South China Seas, China continued its “unilateral actions” by intruding into Japanese territorial waters and developing resources in the yet-to-be-delineated continental shelf, along with airspace activities and rapid, large-scale building of outposts allegedly for military purposes. Against this backdrop, Abe visited China and successfully concluded the ten-year-long discussions about the Maritime and Aerial Communication Mechanism between the defence authorities of Japan and China. In June, the Mechanism was finally launched. At the same time, negotiations between China and ASEAN concerning a Code of Conduct (COC) in the South China Sea were initiated with the support of both Japan and India. Japan also emphasized the importance of adopting such an initiative to demilitarize the SCS.

In the Indian Ocean, anti-piracy operations were successfully concluded. Indeed, the Annual Report titled “Japan's Actions against Piracy off the Coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden” reported that “not a single vessel has come to any harm from pirates and [...] all passed safely across the Gulf of Aden” (Cabinet Secretariat 2019). Counter-piracy exercises in communication were jointly conducted with the navies of the European Union Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) Somalia-Operation Atalanta. Throughout 2018, these operations were also joined by India and, for the first time ever, Italy. Overall, both Japan-China and India-China relations improved throughout 2018 (Varma 2018).

Tensions between India and China over the 73-day military standoff at Doklam and deadlock over China's BRI project in Pakistan, appeared to be partially resolved during the informal meeting between Modi and Xi Jinping in Wuhan (Varma 2018). Yet, while joint military drills were resumed and efforts towards enhancing mutual political trust, as well as cooperation in various fields, were promoted, India's position over Tibet, the delicate border issue, and concerns over the BRI remained. Nonetheless, the year 2018 was described as a “watershed” year in Sino-Indian relations which “moved from Doklam to Wuhan and beyond” (Varma 2018). As a vital pillar of both Japan and India's visions for the Indo-Pacific, connectivity was naturally tackled at the 2018 summit. Ongoing bilateral projects continued to be financed by Japanese ODA to India.

Hence, to facilitate the exchanges between Japanese and Indian businesses developing the industrial networks, Abe and Modi initiated discussions for the establishment of the “Platform for Japan-India Business Cooperation in Asia-Africa Region.” Among the projects aimed at interconnecting Asia, the development of India’s North Eastern Region through the India-Japan Act East Forum in sustainable forest and ecological management, disaster risk reduction and people-to-people exchanges, along with the advancement of the Mumbai-Ahmedabad High Speed Rail project, which is the symbol of Japan-India cooperation in the connectivity domain (figure 8). Japan successfully exported “quality infrastructure” initiatives such as the Western Dedicated Freight Corridor and the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor.

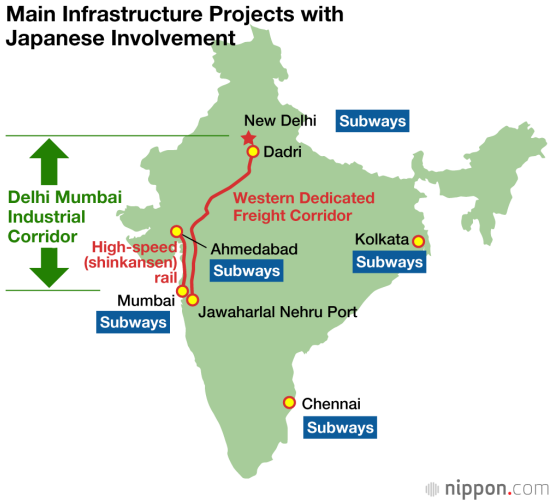


Figure 8. Japan’s Involvement with Infrastructure Projects in India.

(Source: Nippon.com)

As jointly maintaining a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific pivots to fostering economic prosperity, it was necessary to realise the true potential of the Japan-India economic partnership by “synergising India’s demographic dividend and Japan’s capital and technology” (MEA 2018c). As a result, Abe concretely supported, *inter alia*, Modi’s “Make in India”, “Skill in India” and “Clean India Mission” initiatives by providing with advanced technologies and expanding public and private investments under the India-Japan Investment Promotion Partnership. Among the many other initiatives that were

launched in 2018, the comprehensive India-Japan Digital Partnership was also in the spotlight for the development of AI and IoT solutions.

In order to achieve a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, Japan and India advocated for an “urgent reform” of the World Trade Organization (WTO) to reinforce free, fair, and open trade. In this regard, they also shared the aim of rapidly reaching an early conclusion of the negotiations for “a high-quality, comprehensive and balanced” Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement. Most importantly, the 2018 summit confirmed that “the Japan-India relationship has been transformed into [...] a cornerstone of India’s Act East Policy,” thereby advancing the “new era in Japan-India relations” (MEA 2018c).

3.4.3 Hedging Against China in a Pandemic World

As described by India’s MEA, the year 2019 was deemed an “eventful year for bilateral defence and security cooperation” (MEA 2020a). As per the agreements concluded the previous year, the first 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue was held in November 2019. The Dialogue provided with the opportunity to review bilateral efforts for achieving “the shared aims of peace, prosperity and progress” (MEA 2019). Notably, Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Japanese Defence Minister Takeshi Iwaya discussed the South China Sea, the Korean Peninsula, the Japanese citizens abduction issue, terrorism, and violent extremism, thereby reflecting the agenda of Abe and Modi’s 2018 meeting.

Considering that ASEAN adopted an Indo-Pacific Outlook, they reiterated the importance of supporting ASEAN centrality and unity “for promoting peace and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific” along with ASEAN-led institutions. As a result of the meeting, defence cooperation was boosted as follows:

1. *Exchanges between JGSDF and the Indian Army.* The second counterterrorism exercise Dharma Guardian to train Indian and Japanese troops in mountainous terrain was held in October 2019
2. *Exchanges between JMSDF and the Indian Navy.* In the same period, Exercise Malabar 2019 was held in cooperation with the U.S. A few months earlier, the

second Japan-India-U.S. trilateral mine-countermeasures exercise (MINEX) was also conducted

3. *Exchanges between the JASDF and the Indian Air Force.* As the first bilateral exercise between air forces held in December 2018 – Shinyuu Maitri 18 – was deemed a success, it was also held in October 2019 and focused on improving Joint Mobility and Tactical Interoperability. In addition, the JASDF joined in the India-U.S. bilateral exercise *Cope India* as observers
4. *Cooperation on Third Countries*
5. *Cooperation in Defence Equipment and Technology.* High-level exchanges between the Acquisition, Technology and Logistics Agency (ATLA) and the Department of Defence Production (DDP) were actively held. This included the visit of the Secretary of Defence Production to Japan in November 2018 and the visit of the Commissioner of ATLA to India in February 2019. The organization of the Fifth Joint Working Group on Defence Equipment and Technology Cooperation (JWG-DETC) was also accelerated. The Aero India 2019 and the Second Japan-India Defence Industry Forum were held in Bengaluru in February. The ATLA and the DDP also began promoting entry of Japanese defence industry into the market of Indian defence industry especially in the newly established Defence Corridors in India. As such, an invitation for the Japanese delegation to attend the DEFEXPO-2020 in India was extended (MEA 2019).

With the growing popularity of the Indo-Pacific in global discourses and Modi's unveiling of India's Indo-Pacific approach, India's Ministry of External Affairs established a new division for the Indo-Pacific in order to consolidate India's Indo-Pacific vision as well as provide policy support across Government's divisions (MEA 2020b). The new division primarily deals with India-ASEAN relations, EAS, IORA, ASEM, Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC), and Ayeyawadi-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS) (MEA 2020b). Shortly after, in November, India launched its Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) which has India's Act East Policy as a guiding framework. At the 14th East Asia Summit held in Bangkok, Modi outlined the IPOI as a project which draws on existing regional cooperation mechanisms to address seven main spheres (MEA 2020b):

1. Maritime security
2. Maritime Ecology
3. Maritime Resources
4. Capacity Building and Resource Sharing
5. Disaster Risk Reduction and Management
6. Science, Technology and Academic Cooperation
7. Trade connectivity and Maritime Transport

To promote this initiative, India has held various conferences on maritime security, connectivity, safety and blue economy, as illustrated by the Delhi Dialogue-XI with ASEAN; the 6th Indian Ocean Dialogue with IORA; the 4th EAS Conference on Maritime Security Cooperation held in Chennai in February 2020. However, some experts observed that India has been outlining its Indo-Pacific strategy through official statements throughout the years and the IPOI is simply the latest initiative through which India has been championing a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” in a multi-layered fashion (Saha and Mishra 2020). Although the IPOI cannot be considered a formal strategy such as the FOIP, it certainly attests to India’s heightening perception of China’s influence in the Indian Ocean as well as to the weakness of regional institutions (Saha and Mishra 2020).

As observed by Premesha Saha and Abhishek Mishra, India still lacks a clear Indo-Pacific strategy as little is known about what is the IPOI expected to achieve (2020). Yet, as a reflection of Japan’s FOIP, India’s IPOI appears to be “India’s way of developing a mechanism for cooperating with like-minded countries to pursue a ‘free, open, inclusive and rules-based’ Indo-Pacific” and builds upon India’s Act East and Act West policies³⁵ (Saha and Mishra 2020). What is certain is that the initiative aims to ensure a safe, secure, and stable maritime domain by expanding India’s partnerships (Saha and Mishra 2020). As such, the IPOI clearly resonates with Japan’s FOIP and adds further coaction between Japan and India vis-à-vis Indo-Pacific’s challenges.

³⁵ On maritime security terms, India’s Act East Policy focuses on the Eastern Indian Ocean and Western Pacific, while the Act West policy focuses on the Western part of the Indian Ocean.

In 2019, the annual bilateral summit was cancelled because of the outbreak of protests provoked by India's anti-citizenship amendment bill issued a few months later Modi's landslide victory in the May elections. As the summit was never rescheduled, in 2020, Modi and Abe held a virtual meeting –due to the COVID-19 pandemic– to move forward with the signing of the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement, which was concluded a few days after Abe left office. The agreement has been explicitly linked with the two governments' will of "realizing the vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific" and to further elevate "the Special Strategic and Global Partnership between Japan and India" (MOFA 2020b).

The ACSA intends to contribute to the achievement of two of the three pillars of the FOIP: Enhancing maritime security to ensure global peace and stability and consolidation of the international rules-based order. Notably, the Agreement aims to facilitate reciprocal provision of supplies and services between the JSDF and the Indian Armed Forces which will, in turn, enable better coordination in the following activities (Article 1):

1. Joint exercises and training
2. United Nations Peacekeeping Operations, humanitarian international relief operations, or operations to cope with large scales disasters either in Japan, India, or third countries
3. Protection measures, transportation and/or evacuation of nationals from overseas
4. Communication and coordination through the visits of ships and aircraft to facilities located in the other party's territory (this translates into greater access into the Indian Ocean for Japan, and the Pacific Ocean for India)
5. Any other activity pertaining to the provision of supplies and services permitted under the respective laws and regulations.

One analyst has summed up the ACSA as "a near-two decades process of strategic convergence between [...] India and Japan [which] anchor the two ends of the Indo-Pacific [...] particularly as concerns rise [...] about the sustainability of Asia's regional security architecture in the face of a rising and more ambitious China" (Panda 2020).

Clearly, despite leaving office with unresolved issues, former Japanese Prime Minister Abe was at any rate successful in strengthening Indo-Japanese defence ties in order to counterbalance Chinese influence. Hence, this Agreement is better understood “as an enabler of greater Indo-Japanese cooperation” (Panda 2020). In this context, Japan and India’s visions for a free and open Indo-Pacific can be surmised as their hedging strategy against China.

Yet, in terms of trade, India failed to join the largest free trade zone in the world, which, despite being described as “a relatively weak instrument [which] lacks the potential to [...] overcoming growing political tensions in the Indo-Pacific” (Dieter 2021), launched a clear message against protectionism. Established in 2020, it is generally understood that the RCEP³⁶ would have been a more incisive occurrence if India had not withdrawn in 2019. Dieter has highlighted that India’s scepticism towards globalisation makes New Delhi a special case in the international trade system for its lack of free trade agreements with any of the principal economic spaces, such as East Asia or the EU (Dieter 2021). This is in total contradiction with India’s support for multilateralism and “free and open” trade purported by its Indo-Pacific approach.

Moreover, since 2018, PM Modi has been highly critical of former US President Trump’s protectionism and has been even celebrated at the 2018 Davos World Economic Forum for calling upon globalisation and strengthening of international institutions such as the WTO (Dieter 2021). In addition, the Indian government’s recent attempts at liberalizing the agriculture sector suggest that, akin to China, India is focusing on its domestic economy (Supreet 2021). Briefly stated, with the laws failing to include a regulatory framework, millions of Indian farmers are protesting the move for fear that the big corporations will seize market control, thereby undermining free markets’ efficiency as well as the livelihood of the farmers (Supreet 2021).

To top it all off, the new agricultural laws were issued during the pandemic, which is being perceived as an existential threat prompting audiences to legitimize the governments to implement extraordinary measures. As a result, the laws did neither

³⁶ The RCEP is the first free trade agreement that includes China, Japan and South Korea, notably the three largest economies in Asia.

undergo a regular parliamentary procedure, nor included consultations with any of India's farmers organizations (Supreet 2021). Under the orders of the BJP party, the police are aggressively responding to the ongoing protests by implementing unspeakable repressive measures, such as beatings and sexual assaults, unbefitting of a true democracy. This is but the latest example of India's failed democracy. As the concept of the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" is built upon democratic values, it is a wonder that India's credibility in upholding such a vision has yet to be questioned.

This is easily explicable if we recall that India is a rising power which observes –and benefits from– fair international rules and that the Free and Open Indo-Pacific primarily intends to maintain the status quo in the region. Jagannath Panda denotes that "this universalist approach is opposed to unilateral ambitions China has for the Indo-Pacific" (2021:3). As this analysis has repeatedly highlighted, China is generally viewed as the global revisionist power and status quo changer. This perception was renewed in 2020. Amid the general confusion following the outbreak of the pandemic, Beijing has reportedly patrolled the area it claims as part of its "nine dash line"³⁷ and engaged in illegal fishing around the Natuna island chain (Nabbs-Keller 2020), which constitute part of Indonesia's exclusive economic zone.

China additionally conducted a survey near Malaysia's Petronas-operated West Capella, creating tensions with the Malaysian government by flanking its maritime militia and coast guard ships (Ananthalakshmi and Latiff 2020). In another incident, in April, Beijing violated Vietnam's sovereignty over the Hoang Sa archipelago as a Vietnamese fishing boat was rammed by a Chinese maritime surveillance vessel. In the same month, China's Ministry of Civil Affairs unilaterally announced the creation of two new administrative districts in the South China Sea: the Xisha³⁸ and the Nansha³⁹ districts, both of which are also claimed by Vietnam. Furthermore, China named eighty new geographical features including fifty-five submerged ones and has been increasing

³⁷ The "nine dash line" is a demarcation line that encompasses the southern province of Hainan, the Paracel and Spratly island chains, which China claims upon an old map published by the Republic of China (Taiwan) on December 1, 1947.

³⁸ Covering the Paracel Islands and Macclesfield Bank.

³⁹ Covering the Spratly Islands.

military activities around Taiwan in riposte to the closer strategic cooperation between Taipei and Washington, a clear signal of Beijing's commitment to its "one-China" policy.

As the ongoing health crisis is starkly affecting the global economy, along with scheduled plans, regional key maritime powers, namely Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam and the Philippines, cut their annual defence spending in anticipation of more economic shocks (Darmawan 2020). At the time of writing, tensions have escalated once again between Japan and China in the East China Sea. Indeed, Beijing has intensified its efforts to assert sovereignty over the disputed Senkaku islands, currently administered by Japan, by intruding into Japanese territorial waters and approaching some Japanese fishing boats. The sighting of the Chinese ships was already the ninth in 2021, and one of the incursions occurred right after the passing of a controversial legislation in January, which allows China's coastguard vessels to use weapons against foreign ships in waters not only controlled but also claimed by Beijing (Reuters 2021).

This fact *per se* suffices in increasing Japan's threat perception of China. Indeed, since 2019, Japan has reportedly been building an "island wall" to counter Chinese incursions by opening a new base on the island of Miyako to accommodate around 800 JGSDF, anti-ship, radars, and intelligence-gathering facilities (Rajagopalan 2021). Between 2019 and 2021, China has continued to expand its footprint also in the warm waters of the Indian Ocean. This is exemplified by its adventurous research vessel Shiyan 1 in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in 2019, which, according to Indian Navy Chief Admiral Karambir Singh, was by no means an isolated occurrence as research vessels and fishing boats have been repeatedly spotted in the Indian EEZ, as well as during the umpteenth military standoff on the Sino-Indian border in eastern Ladakh, in August 2020 (Rajagopalan 2021).

According to a recent research pertaining to India's changing posture in the Indian Ocean aimed at countering Chinese assertiveness, "these research vessels are used for surveying various parameters, including currents and salinity as well as mapping the ocean floor, which will assist the PLAN in undertaking submarine operations in these waters" (Rajagopalan 2021). The Indian Ocean is notably a major strategic spot not only crossed by the principal sea lines of communication but also by undersea cables. Hence,

China's increasing naval presence in the region is complemented by Beijing's increasing influence on IOR countries. To curb Chinese influence, on the side-lines of the Aero India Show 2021,⁴⁰ India has recently announced its willingness to share military hardware, such as missiles and electronic warfare systems, with Indian Ocean Region allies.

Australia's participation in Exercise Malabar 2020 can also be read as India's increased tolerance towards the presence of foreign navies in its zone of influence, which hints at India's changing China policy (Rajagopalan 2021). Indeed, in November, Exercise Malabar was held in two phases: in the Bay of Bengal and in the Arabian Sea. For the first time since 2007, all QUAD members participated in what has been defined as "the largest and most complex naval exercise the Indian Navy has ever participated in" (Unnithan 2020). The goal of the Exercise intended to enhance safety and security in the maritime domain and enable better coordination among warships, aircraft, and submarines to jointly target an enemy.

It is not by chance that Australia's re-joining coincided with unprecedented worsening relations with China, along with a defence pact with Japan propelled by shared concerns over the South China Sea. Australia's changing posture can also be attributed to the rising popularity of the QUAD, which promptly gathered in March 2020 for the second time⁴¹ to consult about the COVID-19 pandemic, and even opened its doors to other regional stakeholders, such as South Korea, Vietnam, and New Zealand. Indeed, the pandemic provided Japan, India, Australia, and the U.S. the opportunity to effectively promote a shared free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region and establish QUAD + frameworks.

France and Great Britain are also increasing their military commitment to the area and it would be unsurprising were they to be officially invited to join the QUAD in the recent future. Similarly, Germany has also sent a naval frigate in the Indo-Pacific in accordance with its Indo-Pacific strategy. In general, the few European countries that have adopted

⁴⁰ The Aero India Show 2021 was the 13th edition of Asia's largest air show and aviation exhibition, which took place between the 3rd and 5th of February, in Bengaluru. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic measures, few foreign aircraft were able to participate.

⁴¹ The first QUAD meeting was held in New York on 2019.

an Indo-Pacific approach endorse multilateralism and, therefore, intend to engage more with their economic partners in the region, namely India. It is also worthy of note that, at the end of January, Japanese Minister for Foreign Affairs, Motegi Toshimitsu, was invited to present Japan's FOIP Vision before the EU Council for Foreign Affairs, which led to the High Representative of the European Union Josep Borell's statement concerning the EU's intentions of elaborating its own Indo-Pacific approach (Borrell 2021a).

In 2020, Japan and India's robust maritime security cooperation has continued with their JIMEX and PASSEX around the Malacca straits. In 2021, while the India-China standoff at Ladakh appears to have come to an end, with China retreating its troops first, India has reinforced its maritime policy. In fact, in February, India has conducted its largest military exercise ever in the Indian Ocean Region: The Theatre Level Operational Readiness Exercise, or TROPEX-21. The TROPEX-21 –a biennial simulation begun in January– involved all three Commands of the Indian Navy (the Indian Army, the Air Force, and the Coast Guard) which practiced a scenario concerning confrontation with both the Chinese PLA and Pakistan's Navy.

Furthermore, strategic connectivity projects, development, and capacity building initiatives to improve regional economic linkages and integration have also gained momentum during the fourth Act East Forum, in January. In particular, the AEF provided guidance to accelerate the existing projects in India's Northeast, which is strategically important for the achievement of the FOIP, but also opened bilateral cooperation to new areas, such as healthcare, smart cities, bamboo value chain development, tourism and people-to-people exchanges.

Potentially, this could further extend the scope of bilateral cooperation to third countries, such as Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, the Pacific Islands, Russia's Far Eastern Region and Myanmar. Especially in Myanmar, Japan and India have increased their investments to tackle, *inter alia*, connectivity projects, humanitarian development, joint military exercises, and defence procurement in an attempt to surpass Chinese influence (Ichihara and Sahoo 2021). The recent coup d'état by the Tatmadaw, the Burmese military, extremely complicates this balance.

3.5 The Way Ahead: Japan and India After Abe

The unexpected resignation of Japan's longest-serving prime minister since World War II, on August 28, 2020, due to worsening health, propelled many observations concerning the legacy of Abe to Japan's foreign (and domestic) policy. While both positive and negative assessments divide experts' opinions, there is no denying that Abe greatly expanded Japan's capacity to influence international affairs by reviving its role as an *active* international security actor. The Vision for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific personifies this shift. Abe's Doctrine is therefore expected to endure. In this respect, the advancement of Japan-India ties after Abe attests to that legacy. Notably, Suga Yoshihide is set to continue Abe's work particularly when it comes to FOIP.⁴²

It is widely known that Suga was a key figure during both terms of Abe's Government⁴³ and was therefore elected as the new leader of the LDP party to serve out the remainder of Abe's term. That the Suga Government would be a government of continuity was anticipated from the start. This was also made evident by Suga's first overseas visits to Viet Nam and Indonesia, which echoed Abe's very first visits, in 2013, and by his endorsement of a "peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific" at the ASEAN Summit, in November 2020. Despite concerns over a weakening of the Indo-Pacific concept to accommodate China, Suga is unlikely to significantly change Japan's FOIP regional policy (Hughes, Patalano and Ward 2021:143). As such, Japan-India ties are expected to remain as strong as they were under Abe.

In fact, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi promptly reached out to PM Suga in late September and the two leaders expressed their intention to further strengthen the Japan-India strategic partnership which, to put it in Prime Minister Modi's words, is

⁴² PM's Office of Japan (@JPN_PMO), tweet, 18 October 2020, https://twitter.com/JPN_PMO/status/1317828835732201474

⁴³ Suga was chief cabinet secretary (2012-2020) and Minister for Internal Affairs and Communications (2006-2007).

best exemplified by the Mumbai-Ahmedabad high-speed rail project (MOFA 2021c). In the same vein, they already announced their plan to befittingly celebrate the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations falling in 2022 (MOFA 2021c). During their latest phone call, in March 2021, China's new Coast Guard law, Hong Kong's political crackdown, the Uighurs and Myanmar's military coup as well as the Japanese abductees issue (one of Abe's greatest regrets) were part of the agenda.

Furthermore, Modi and Suga reiterated that Japan and India would further pursue cooperation with the other two QUAD members as the achievement of a free and open Indo-Pacific is increasingly important (MOFA 2021c). In February, the first QUAD meeting of the year (and third since 2019) was held virtually and officially indicated the centrality of the Indo-Pacific even under Biden. In addition, it elucidated that the Biden's Administration is leaning towards "outcompeting" China rather than continuing Trump's hard balancing stance –or adopt a softer line (Rej 2021). The agenda of the meeting seemed to add nothing new to the existing narrative of the free and open Indo-Pacific, as the Ministers emphasized their commitment to upholding a rules-based international order, transparency, freedom of navigation in international seas, respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, along with upfront support for ASEAN cohesion and centrality.

Yet, the communiqué of the Indian Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that that the Indo-Pacific concept has been gathering international support especially in Europe (but also Canada). While France, Germany and The Netherlands are the only EU Member States with Indo-Pacific approaches, the European Union itself is set to unveil its Indo-Pacific strategy in April, according to EU sources. This was also made evident by the EU High Representative Josep Borrell's recent blog post pertaining to the necessity of the EU to adopt an Indo-Pacific strategy following Japanese Minister for Foreign Affairs Motegi's participation to the EU Council on Foreign Affairs (Borrell 2021a). More recently, PM Suga has held a phone call with his Italian counterpart, Mario Draghi, at the request of Japan.

Draghi also agreed with the need to realize a free and open Indo-Pacific and expressed concerns over North Korea, the abduction of Japanese citizens, and China's unilateral

attempts to change the status quo in the East and South China Seas (MOFA 2021b). However, in 2019, Abe had personally visited then Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte to draw links between Italy and the FOIP as Japanese concerns arose when Italy became the first big European economy to join China's Belt and Road Initiative. Conte indirectly acknowledged the relevance of the Indo-Pacific by concluding the India-Italy Joint Statement and Plan of Action 2020-2024, in November 2020. Together with France and Germany, Italy is one of the top EU countries whose economic security depends upon the free sea lanes in the Indo-Pacific, with 8.1 percent of Italian cargo volume transiting annually the South China Sea (Buszynski et al. 2019:4).

With the EU in the process of elaborating its own Indo-Pacific approach, all EU Member States will soon have to confront with the geopolitical environment of the Indo-Pacific. From Josep Borrell's words, it can be inferred that the EU's Indo-Pacific vision will much reflect that of its EU Member States as well as Japan's. As such, emphasis will likely be given to multilateralism as "Asia is big and diverse and should not be reduced to looking only at China" (Borrell 2021a). In addition, the strategy will probably assign to India a pivotal role, for its strategic position in the Indo-Pacific and for being the fastest-growing economy empowered by the youngest and largest population.

In fact, India is described as a key player not only by Japan, but also France, Germany, and The Netherlands, Great Britain, and other European countries such as Italy, which have not officially adopted the Indo-Pacific terminology. In turn, "India [...] has also decided to invest more in its relations with the EU, driven in part by China's growing assertiveness and Brexit, requiring New Delhi to no longer see London as its sole entry point into 'Europe'" (Borrell 2021a). Undoubtedly, both digital and physical connectivity will be the main protagonist of the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy as "a good example of geo-economics and geo-politics merging into one" (Borrell 2021a), as well as a principal area for the EU to concretely promote itself as a global actor, increase its presence in the region, and stimulate its post-pandemic economic recovery.

Considering that the economic, financial, and social impact of the pandemic has fomented the debate about reducing dependency on China for supplies of essential commodities, the necessity of supply chain resilience and diversification is shaping a

narrative in favour of enhanced economic and strategic cooperation with India. As a result, the Japanese government is financially incentivizing companies to shift production out of China to India –as well as ASEAN and Bangladesh. Thus, building connectivity in the Indo-Pacific will also provide the EU, Japan, and India the chance to diversify supply chains. At present, Japan is the only EU’s connectivity partner within the framework of the EU-Asia Connectivity Strategy, but India could ideally become the next EU strategic partner to join, in light of Japan’s relationship with India.

Adding the EU as a strategic player in the Indo-Pacific could also further advance Indo-Japanese relations. Indeed, despite the great progress in bilateral relations, their Special and Global Partnership has yet to reach its full potential. Under Abe, maritime security was the principal area of bilateral cooperation as one of the pillars of Japan’s FOIP aimed at maintaining stability and a rules-based order in the region (Hughes, et. al.). Under Suga, as a consequence of the structural changes sparked by the pandemic, maritime cooperation will probably be less emphasized in favour of digital and physical connectivity, cybersecurity cooperation and diversification of the supply chains (Hughes, et. al. 2021). In the long-term, this could also lead the Suga government to adapt Japan’s FOIP along these lines (Hughes, et. al. 2021).

Nonetheless, maritime security will retain its importance. This is exemplified by the increasing naval presence of France and Germany in the South China Sea, with the latest patrol being held in February 2021. Indeed, a French nuclear attack submarine and support ship patrolled the South China Sea, and naval assets from Germany, the United Kingdom, and France are planning to transit the area later in 2021 as well as participate in joint naval exercises with Japan and the U.S. (Kyodo News 2020). It would not come as a surprise if France –which is investing more on maritime security to safeguard its overseas territories compared to Germany or The Netherlands– would be invited to join as an official member of the QUAD in the near future.

As illustrated by the second QUAD meeting of the year occurring in March, manufacturing and distribution of safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines all over the Indo-Pacific are at the forefront of the “QUAD Vaccine Partnership.” On paper, the QUAD dialogue seems to be focusing on the goals to achieve rather than on countering

China's might. Notably, the fourth QUAD meeting concluded that India will be responsible for the manufacturing of the vaccines, as New Delhi is the world's vaccine top producer supplying 60 percent of the overall vaccines' needs, while Japan will provide concessional yen loans for the Indian government as well as cold-chain support (White House 2021).

On the other hand, Australia will also finance the provision of vaccines and "last-mile" delivery support particularly to Southeast Asia, the nine Pacific Island nations, and Timor-Leste, along with strengthening their health systems (White House 2021). Finally, the U.S. will leverage existing programs to bolster vaccination capability and all will be conducted in close coordination with the World Health Organization and its COVAX program (White House 2021). In addition, climate change and emerging technologies have also been identified as priority areas as "a free, open, inclusive, and resilient Indo-Pacific requires that critical and emerging technology is governed and operates according to shared interests and values" (White House 2021).

However, it has also become apparent that great power competition has given a political dimension to the production of vaccines and, in Asia, China, Russia and the U.S. are blatantly using vaccines as diplomatic tools. In spite of China not being mentioned during the latest QUAD meeting, Shamsad Ahmad Khan has recently observed that their commitment towards critical and emerging technologies is undeniably aimed at China as safeguarding sensitive technologies was also one of the issues during the Cold War (Sharma 2021). Under these circumstances, he also denoted that both China and the QUAD should tread carefully as the risk of the QUAD expediting a new Cold War is high (Sharma 2021).

In fact, with the Indo-Pacific terminology endorsing an "inclusive" narrative, albeit with a fundamental values conditionality, makes it a form of minilateralism. The Indo-Pacific is not unfamiliar with minilateral platforms,⁴⁴ and while minilateralism has been often praised as more effective than multilateralism in responding to specific issues, it

⁴⁴ Such as the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC) mechanism, water sharing construction assistance launched by China, Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam, in 2016; the Sulu Sea trilateral patrols by Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines; and "Our Eyes" Initiative, an intelligence sharing network comprising six ASEAN member states aimed at countering terrorism and radicalization.

nonetheless endorses exclusivity, thereby favouring a dominant player (Teo 2018). In the case of the QUAD, the U.S. is unequivocally the leader of the group. Despite being propelled by other factors, Japan's initial goal in popularising the FOIP was precisely to keep the U.S. engaged to Asia and increase American sphere of influence and this priority will not change under Suga. Symbolic of this fact will be Suga's visit to the White House, in April, the first foreign leader meeting President Biden.

With various mediatic and academic sources predicting that the two leaders will likely strengthen their commitment to the freedom of passage in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, following the U.S. and Japanese ministers' meeting in Tokyo, the FOIP will generally remain a strategic hedging strategy, while losing its ambiguity vis-à-vis China. In the same vein, EU's top diplomat Josep Borell's views pertaining to the necessity of reviving multilateralism in a multipolar world and forging alliances with like-minded states to promote liberal values are telling (Borrell 2021b).

As two of the biggest democracies in the world's fastest growing region, Japan and India's shared values provides momentum for the Japan-India strategic rapprochement, along with regional growth. However, the primary driving force behind redefining bilateral ties was the personal rapport between Abe and Modi. Nevertheless, from the very beginning, Japan and India's partnership was influenced by the foreign policy postures of the two regional superpowers, namely the U.S. and China. The current regional security environment will further advance bilateral cooperation in a growing number of areas of activity, which, however, will likely more often occur in concert with other regional powers.

Conclusions

This analysis of Japan-India strategic rapprochement in the dawning era of the Indo-Pacific was based upon the regional security complex theory as it is the most comprehensive framework to understand the Asian security architecture. The RSCT is attributed to political scientist Barry Buzan and was invented to incorporate the analysis of the regional level in a field principally dominated by that of the national and global levels, which did not adequately capture security dynamics. It was prompted by the increasing regionalization of the post-Cold War international system and subsequent diminishing levels of globalisation. Hence, differently from neorealism and globalism, regionalism emphasizes the regional-level structure.

In particular, the regionalist approach treats the distribution of power and patterns of amity and enmity as independent variables since processes of securitization are influenced by multiple factors (Buzan, et. al. 2003). Therefore, the RSCT rejects the general view of the uniqueness of Asian security dynamics and focuses on the security interplay between the national and global levels, which is most apparent at the regional level (Buzan, et. al. 2003). Despite also containing constructivist and globalist features, the core idea of regionalism lies in the strong territoriality of dynamics which accommodates non-state actors, besides considering threats arising from de-territorialised sectors, such as the economic and environmental ones (Buzan, et. al. 2003).

The RSCT brought to the forefront new threats arising from non-political sectors, which traditional security complex theories disregarded as they primarily identify security exclusively with the military and political sectors. Furthermore, Buzan explains that the core idea of the regional security complex theory concerns security interdependence, which is normally patterned into regional security complexes (2003). As such, the RSCT is strictly linked to the theory of the balance of power as well as the securitization theory. In fact, the regional level is not exempted from the balance of power dynamics. In

regional security complexes, either rising powers (such as China) or regional coalitions (such as the QUAD) are the main source of problems as, according to the RSCT, first-class economic and military capabilities within the region denote the rising rank of states (Buzan, et. al. 1998).

Regional balancing behaviours are bolstered with the aim of generating an equal distribution of power to maintain balance of power (Paul, et. al. 2004). Balancing can occur either against superpowers (which are normally external powers) or against regional states pursuing revisionist policies, as in the case of the QUAD against China. Revisionist powers are especially perceived as threatening by local and regional states, as well as great powers, as their behaviour is expected to destabilize the region (Paul, et. al. 2004). States can also engage in bandwagoning behaviours by aligning with rising powers or hedging by adopting both cooperative and confrontational attitudes. As this analysis has highlighted, Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific is a tactical hedging strategy vis-à-vis the risk of the reduction of U.S. commitment to East Asia (Koga 2018).

As a matter of fact, unease about continued U.S. engagement has propelled Japan to expand its diplomatic efforts towards India. It is in fact in the security dimension that the evolution of the Japan-India strategic partnership is most evident. With the RSCT aiming to provide with an organising framework for regional security studies to predict future regional scenarios, RSCT comprises descriptive and predictive frameworks concisely described in chapter 1 of this thesis. On the other hand, the regional security complex theory is linked to the securitization theory through securitization processes, which revolve around the politics of existential threats (Buzan, et. al. 2003).

Since existential threats endanger the survival of individuals, when a security issue is accepted as such –consensually or coercively– by an audience, emergency measures can be legitimized (Buzan, et. al. 1998). With threats traveling faster across short distances rather than long ones, states have historically securitized their neighbours, as in the case of Japan, China, and India. This is best exemplified by Japan's value-oriented diplomacy and 2015 security legislation. While the security legislation and the US-Japan defence guidelines expanded the scope of the JSDF missions overseas and legitimized enhanced Japanese support to U.S. international missions, Japan established a framework where

the protection of fundamental values has absolute priority, and transmitted these values to the population, in order to be legitimized by the people and scale up its role in international security (Berger, et. al. 2007).

Some experts have denoted that Japan shifted the focus towards the promotion of liberal values to legitimize the expansion of its strategic partnerships as well as gather domestic consensus. In this context, Japan's military rejuvenation efforts alarmed its Northeast Asian neighbours, such as China, still reminiscent of the atrocities that Imperial Japan committed during World War II. As a result, China securitized Japan much earlier than Japan did China, as regulations for Japan's enhanced military capabilities were already being implemented between 2006 and 2012. India also represents a security challenge to China (and vice versa) due to their emblematic 1962 Border War.

With the dynamics of the Asian regional security complex treading the path towards the broader Indo-Pacific construct, Japan was propelled to expand its strategic horizon to include India and encircle China, as Japan and India are geographically at the opposite sides of China. At the global level, the impetus for closer Japan-India ties was given by the U.S.-India strategic rapprochement. In addition, the perception of the U.S. relative decline to multilateral governance in Asia opened a window for China to expand its regional influence and toughen its neighbourhood policy. In fact, much of the literature on Japan-India relations indicates China as the catalyst for their closer security cooperation, despite other variables characterizing the Japan-India relationship.

As such, until the 2000s, Japan was not seriously considering India neither as a strategic nor economic partner. At the regional level, former Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's Look East policy provided with the momentum to reinvigorate economic relations, while being driven on security by their military cooperation with the U.S. as well as their support for regional security institutions such as the APEC and the ARF. At the global level, Japan and India endorsed peace and disarmament and demanded an expansion of the UN Security Council to obtain a permanent seat. Japan's strategically rediscovered India after the 9/11 terrorist attack, when the Indian Navy recovered the Japanese vessel *M/V Alondra Rainbow* in the Strait of Malacca, in 1999; and in 2001, when the Japanese

Navy re-entered the Indian Ocean for the first time after 1945 and resupplied and refuelled at Indian ports to support U.S. operations in Afghanistan (Richardson 1999).

Furthermore, India's increasing military power in the Indian Ocean and Japan's realization of the value of India's assistance in the protection of the SLOCs bolstered maritime security cooperation (Yoshimatsu 2019). As a result, Tokyo identified New Delhi as a core strategic partner especially in the maritime security area. India also expanded its influence in the maritime domain by empowering its navy and adopting a new strategy of "multialignment," which, according to experts, focuses on a policy of normative hedging, in order to bolster both its economic development and national security, as well as the projection of its influence in the wider Indo-Pacific area (Bouchard, et. al. 2019).

In the same vein, India identified Japan as a "natural partner" with whom New Delhi shares common interests and values. Washington has actively encouraged closer Indo-Japanese strategic ties to reduce its costs as the main security provider in Asia (Fontaine 2015). Yet, the role that cultural affinity played in Japan-India relations should also not be underestimated. Unlike many other countries in Asia, India holds no historical grudges deriving from Japan's wartime aggression (Horimoto 2019). The steady growth of Indo-Japanese ties was momentarily paused during the Cold War period. More recently, Japanese and Indian policymakers also played a crucial role in advancing bilateral ties. Notably, Abe's efforts in promoting bilateral relations were met with enthusiasm by incumbent Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi due to their personal rapport.

Against this backdrop, India naturally represents the ideal partner for mitigating China not only militarily but also economically (Yoshimatsu 2019). It is broadly agreed upon that Japan's proactiveness in advancing bilateral ties, with the aim of balancing China, propelled the two countries to first establish a strategic partnership, in 2006, and the elevate it to a "special" strategic relationship, in 2014, with Modi's rise to power and the unveiling of India's Act East Policy. The economic rise of China and India, the relative decline of U.S. engagement to Asia, China's regional assertiveness in the new centre of economic gravity of the 21-st century, and the subsequent emergence of a balancing

against China, are the main factors that propelled the formation of an Asian supercomplex –the Indo-Pacific.

Japan and India have been influenced by the ending of the Cold War –which greatly reshaped and interlinked East Asian security dynamics– but also actively invested in this new geopolitical construct. As a result, since the 2000s, the Indo-Pacific has been gaining currency within and outside Asia as leaders and policymakers from Japan, Australia, India, Indonesia, the United States, and, more recently, Europe and Canada are increasingly abandoning the “Asia-Pacific” labelling in their policy communiqués and national defence documents. The concept itself was first used by strategic thinkers in India and Australia (in 2005) but has been formally reintroduced to policy discourses by former Japanese Prime Minister, Abe Shinzō, with his landmark 2007 speech *Futatsu no Umi no Majiwari*.

Despite a consensus still being in the making concerning the expanse and the nature of the Indo-Pacific itself, the Indo-Pacific can be understood as an oceanic *continuum* across the Indian and Pacific Oceans, ranging from Eastern Africa to the Western Coast of the United States, with its geographical centre in Southeast Asia (Medcalf 2018; Bouchard, et. al 2019; Das 2019). Thus, experts have concluded that the idea of a single integrated geopolitical theatre rests upon acknowledging that economic, political, geopolitical and security dynamics between the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean regions are rapidly creating a single security complex (Mohan 2012; Buzan 2012; Medcalf 2018; Bouchard, et. al. 2019). As such, the Indo-Pacific has become an area of geo-strategic competition.

By implementing the predictive frameworks of the regional security complex theory, the Indo-Pacific can additionally be described as a *mélange* of a conflict formation and a security regime (Buzan, et. al. 2003). On the one hand, it is a conflict formation as the U.S. has reduced its security engagement in East Asia and China has both ascended to the rank of superpower with a perceived aggressive foreign policy posture. In addition, localised conflicts endure over Taiwan, the South China Sea, East China Sea, and North Korea, and there is a presence of strong nationalisms, nuclear states, and weak regional institutions. On the other hand, security regime traits can also be observed. A security

regime implies that states learn to cooperate to avoid wars, rather than completely end conflicts.

After the 1997-1998 economic crisis, economic and institutional regionalisation has been consistent. In addition, despite the perception of U.S. disengagement, Washington is still playing a role in defusing escalation of regional conflicts as the U.S. mediation efforts in pacifying nuclear crisis with North Korea illustrate. However, it is the U.S.-China competition that will further determine the future scenario of the Asian security supercomplex (Buzan, et. al. 2003). Since 2007, when Japan unveiled its values-based diplomacy under the banner of the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity, Japan and India have been scaling up security cooperation, notably in the maritime domain.

They have institutionalised PASSEX and JIMEX exercises and Japan has become a formal participant of Exercise Malabar, which has therefore allowed Japan to re-enter the Indian Ocean. In 2008, they concluded a landmark Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation, followed by a Shipping Policy Forum between Maritime Authorities and private sectors and an Action Plan to further consolidate the strategic partnership. To this end, Japan and India have been conducting, *inter alia*, Foreign Offices consultations, such as strategic dialogues at Foreign Minister-level and meetings between Defence Ministers; dialogues on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation; Military-to-Military talks as well as Navy-to-Navy staff talks; exchanges of service chiefs and of students and researchers for respective defence institutions.

They have also increased anti-piracy cooperation in the Gulf of Aden by combining anti-piracy, search & rescue operations between their coast guards. As they are both vitally dependent upon free and safe shipping lanes, combating piracy in the Indian Ocean has construed a relevant security issue in the non-traditional sense particularly since the implementation of Japan's Anti-Piracy Law (Teo 2019). These efforts were categorized as "proactive contribution to peace" by Japan's first ever National Security Strategy (in 2013) which primarily underscored that Japan's strengthening hard power required Japan to play a leading role in "maintaining open and stable seas" by ensuring the safety of the SLOCs, as well as the maintenance and protection of international order based on rules and universal values (Teo 2019).

In fact, upon returning to power, in 2012, Abe revived the idea of the QUAD in a notable essay where he emphasized the pivotal role of India and described Japan and India as the “guardians of navigational freedom across the Pacific and the Indian Oceans.” Frictions in the East China Sea over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands is a classic example of the divisions in Japan-China relations which particularly heightened around 2012. At that time, Abe clearly announced Japan’s intentions of counterbalancing China in light of the Chinese PLA’s forays in both the East and South China Seas, along with rapid construction of the String of Pearls to close the distance with the shipping routes in the SCS and with the emerging markets of the Indian Ocean Region.

In addition, China’s artificial island building enables Beijing to expand its influence into the Indian Ocean Region by establishing military and naval facilities in South Asia, thereby triggering India’s fears of a potential Chinese naval encirclement (Gosh 2008). Reportedly, China’s geopolitical aims in the IOR are mostly related to economic reasons, which are the main drivers of China’s regional strategy (Khurana 2016). This is best exemplified by China’s Maritime Silk Road, which Xi Jinping unveiled in 2013. Since the launch of the BRI, China’s politico-diplomatic and economic engagements with the Indian Ocean Rim countries, and especially with India, Pakistan, Indonesia, Iran, and Sri Lanka, have steadily increased in response to the Obama Administration’s “rebalance” strategy.

As China also prioritizes “open seas protection”, and especially aims at seizing control of the SLOCs, the PLA Navy intends to dominate the Oceans (Khurana 2016). As the Indian Ocean is within India’s sphere of influence, India’s competition with China is the most apparent in the maritime domain. It is not by chance that by 2015 maritime cooperation had especially become a major area of cooperation in Japan-India defence ties, exceeding that which India achieved even with the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Moreover, the two partners began including in their secretary/vice-minister level dialogues Australia to discuss common regional security interests, such as the tensions in the East and South China Seas and North Korea.

Analysts have observed that this was the first case of trilateral cooperation where Washington was not involved (Yoshimatsu 2019). Yoshimatsu highlighted that, during the 2013-2015 period, the soft-balancing nature of Japan-India partnership expressed their concerns on the maintenance of a peaceful maritime region (2019). Additionally, the unveiling of the Belt and Road Initiative, which has extended geopolitical competition to the connectivity domain, ignited a series of regional initiatives and, by 2016, began to be incorporated into regional foreign policy narratives, thereby increasing the threat perception of China's economic and political influence in Asia (Koga 2019). As a result, especially since 2015, connectivity has become the theatre of great power competition.

Ever since, Japan's infrastructure investments in the Indo-Pacific through bilateral ODA disbursement has been incremented by the Expanded Partnership for Quality Infrastructure launched in 2016; the inauguration of India's first high-speed railway Shinkansen technology connecting Mumbai to Ahmedabab; aid in the development of India's North-Eastern region; the Japan-India ambitious Asia-Africa Growth Corridor, in 2017; the establishment of the EU-Japan Connectivity Partnership, in 2018; and the joining of the Blue Dot Network initiative launched by the U.S. at the 2019 Indo-Pacific Business Forum. Hence, building connectivity in the Indo-Pacific through "quality" infrastructures compliant with international standards, to pursue regional economic prosperity, is one of the three pillars of Japan's Indo-Pacific approach.

In 2016, the Indo-Pacific officially entered the Japanese foreign policy lexicon when Abe crystallized the Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy at the 6th Tokyo International Conference on African Development. Since its inception, the FOIP's ambiguous nature has been stimulating questions particularly in respect with its perceived China-containment aims. To date, the FOIP has undergone three conceptual evolutions. Between 2016 and 2017, the FOIP can be defined as "FOIP 1.0" and had at its heart Abe's Confluence of the Two Seas and Asia's Democratic Security Diamond, which are broadly understood as a response to China's rise due to the prevalence of competitive nuances (Hosoya 2019).

The fundamental role of India in Japan's FOIP clearly emerged in the 2017 Diplomatic Bluebook. Besides India, the FOIP also envisaged to empower ASEAN. Nonetheless, ASEAN's economic dependence on China, coupled with its inability to form a united China policy, led ASEAN to adopt a softer approach on Beijing, thereby leading to ASEAN's rejection of the FOIP. Therefore, in 2016, Japan also sought to improve its relations with China. Despite the FOIP being considered rather ambiguous, as its focus on connectivity to foster regional economic prosperity, peace and stability, and the rule of law, combined with maritime security, were already part of Japan's strategic considerations (Koga 2019), the FOIP incarnated Japan's attempt to shape the regional order and accommodate China's rise (Satake and Sahashi 2020).

Between 2016 and 2017, it is possible to observe Japan's changing strategy towards China as bilateral relations recorded a slight improvement. By pursuing positive relations with China, Japan implemented soft balancing while still being pressured by Beijing in the East China Sea (Yoshimatsu 2019). Briefly stated, Japan's soft balancing strategy shifted to tactical hedging, which, however, comprised other policy options, such as engagement and economic-pragmatism (Koga 2019; Yoshimatsu 2019). As a result, Japan dampened its criticism of China's assertiveness. Japan's new China posture can also be attributed to heightening tensions between North Korea and the U.S. throughout 2017 and 2018, as well as the heightening of the U.S.-China rivalry.

Japan's changing attitude towards China greatly benefited Japan-India relations. The year 2016 was especially relevant in bilateral ties as comprehensive institutional ties covering land, maritime and air services were forged and laid the foundations for strengthened political, security and economic relations, through regular bilateral meetings. In this context, the 2016 Japan-India summit meeting elevated the Indo-Japanese partnership to new heights. Abe and Modi recognized the potential for cooperation in areas ranging from science, technology, disaster management and risk reduction, and healthcare, to Coast Guard-to-Coast-Guard collaboration to cover exchange of observers in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) exercises.

Joint capacity-building assistance to littoral states was extended to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, which are located nearby vital sea-lines of the Malacca Strait. Japan

and India also began to install surveillance sensors in the Bay of Bengal and undertook projects to provide littoral countries with the means to upgrade their naval air bases and intelligence stations along the Andaman and Nicobar chain of islands and allegedly monitor China's PLA Navy's submarine activity in the Indo-Pacific. In 2017, Japan-India cooperation on improving and building connectivity in India's neighbourhood, and beyond, was further exemplified by their joint investments into Iran's Chabahar Port, which notably represents India's shortcut to Afghanistan and Central Asia and the Act East Forum was also launched to provide a platform for collaboration under the rubric of India's Act East Policy and Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy.

At the same time, Japan also pursued economic pragmatism through opening to participation in BRI projects, while India deepened economic engagement with China through the AIIB in a mutual effort to hedge against the risk of China dominating the infrastructure market (Yoshimatsu 2019). In October 2017, the FOIPs entered its second phase. According to Koga (2019), three key factors induced the shift towards FOIP 2.0., such as (i) the adoption of an Indo-Pacific strategy by the Trump Administration; (ii) Japan and the U.S. availability to cooperate with any country that would adopt the FOIP, thereby making it an "open and inclusive" concept; (iii) the institutionalization of the FOIP in the QUAD.

Yet, the U.S. explicit antagonism towards China discredited both the QUAD and the FOIP which was aggravated by the missing common Indo-Pacific approach among the QUAD members. China's accusations of the FOIP hiding containment purposes and ASEAN's reluctance in accepting the FOIP also constituted major factors that led to its reconceptualization (Koga 2019). In fact, ASEAN Member States' location at the heart of the Indo-Pacific region, along crucial sea lines of communication in the South China Sea, appoints them as a vital part of both India and Japan's Indo-Pacific approaches. Gaining ASEAN's recognition of the Indo-Pacific concept by ensuring its "centrality" was a necessary step to ensure the success of the FOIP (Koga 2019).

Receptive to the changing regional dynamics, Abe publicly expressed Japan's willingness to find synergies between the FOIP and China's Belt and Road –albeit under a set of conditions. This hinted at Tokyo's resolution of engaging China to induce her to conform

with the existing international norms. Hence, in July 2018, at the joint press conference with Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad, former Prime Minister Abe delivered a speech which officially described FOIP as a “vision” as the term “strategy” was increasingly becoming a reason of concern. Thenceforth, Abe focused on the necessity of ensuring freedom of navigation and the rule of law as “public goods”, thereby underscoring that the FOIP principally remained maritime security-oriented.

While Japan’s security strategy has focused on strengthening the U.S.-Japan security alliance as well as transforming strategic partnerships with like-minded states, such as India (and Australia), into potential military alignments, the question remains about how can Japan effectively ensure freedom of navigation if it is unwilling to conduct FONOPs across the South China Sea alongside the U.S. (Rossiter 2018). This in an important implication of Japan’s legal constraints that even the 2015 security legislation could not entirely solve. As a result, the JSDF cannot be involved in conflicts neither in the South China Sea nor in the Indian Ocean, unless said conflicts directly threaten the survival of the nation (Rossiter 2018). India is also reluctant in conducting FONOPs.

Nevertheless, Japan’s MSDF and ASDF have been frequently deployed across the Indo-Pacific not only to participate in bilateral exercises with India, and the Malabar, but also jointly with French and British forces, especially since 2019. As such, within its legal constraints, Japan has been strengthening collective efforts to secure open and free sea lines of communication (Rossiter 2018). In analysing the evolution of Japan-India relations within the framework of the Indo-Pacific, this research has primarily focused on Japan’s Indo-Pacific regionalism. The reason partially lies in the fact that India adopted Japan’s FOIP equivalent between 2018 and 2019 due to its reluctance in explicitly antagonizing China. Yet, India did adopt an Indo-Pacific approach in its foreign policy since the early 2000s, as illustrated by India’s 2007 maritime strategy and the 2015 revised edition (Heiduk and Wacker 2020).

Notably, under Modi, India has especially endorsed an inclusive Indo-Pacific with the Joint Declaration on India and Japan’s Vision for 2025 and the 2017 Joint Declaration “Toward a Free, Open and Prosperous Indo-Pacific”, which explicitly aligned India’s AEP to Japan’s FOIP on matters such as maritime security, connectivity and cooperation

with ASEAN. Modi's 2018 speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue is generally viewed as the touchstone of India's Indo-Pacific regionalism. In fact, Modi clearly outlined the six pillars of India's Indo-Pacific approach (namely, respect for ASEAN centrality and territorial and sovereignty integrity as well as international law and focus on inclusivity and connectivity). On the one hand, Modi's speech clearly emphasized India's multi-aligned position in the Indo-Pacific. Most importantly, it clarified that the Indo-Pacific is a "natural" region, not an initiative aimed at excluding countries.

On the other hand, Modi's heavy criticism of China's revisionist endeavours, debt trap diplomacy and non-transparent practices, conducted through its Belt and Road Initiative, also transpired through his speech. Apparent is also the convergence between Japan and India's Indo-Pacific approaches which, from 2018, further complemented each other's interests. This is best exemplified by the 2018 Japan-India Vision which ensued their annual bilateral meeting. In 2018, bilateral defence ties additionally gained momentum with a series of agreements concerning military cooperation and regional and global security. The summit inaugurated tri-services exercises between the Indian Army, Air Force and Navy, and Japan's Ground, Air and Maritime Self-Defence Force, along with further elevating bilateral 2+2 defence and strategic dialogue to the ministerial level.

Another significant outcome of this summit included the launching of negotiations on an Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement, which crystallized more than a decade of rapid strategic convergence between Japan and India amid mutual suspicions about China's rise, according to analysts. They additionally established the Japan-India Space Dialogue, thereby welcoming the technological collaboration in the Joint Lunar Polar Exploration Mission, and defence equipment cooperation, and introduced defence technology research and development as new areas of cooperation. This was the first time that Japan and India agreed to begin cooperative research in the area of Unmanned Ground Vehicle, Robotics and Artificial Intelligence.

These new areas had to be taken into consideration due to the rapid progress in technological innovation, which led to unprecedented change in the balance of power, thereby greatly affecting the regional security environment. With the world undergoing

a Fourth Industrial Revolution characterized by AI, robotics, Big Data, which are hastening cross border economic activities, there is an increased need for the maintenance and formulation of an economic order based on rules. In this context, the U.S.-led protectionism, prompted by former U.S. President Trump's "America First" policy and his trade war with China, severely undermined the credibility of the principles of the international rules-based order.

In traditional security terms, in 2018, North Korea was perceived as Japan's greatest threat. Therefore, Abe and Modi underscored the necessity of a North Korea's complete and irreversible dismantlement of all weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles in accordance with the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions, along with mutually condemning terrorism and its universal reach. As the "champion of the abductees," Abe also succeeded in involving Modi in jointly advocating for the resolution of the Japanese citizens abduction issue. Furthermore, with the looming threat of terrorism, Japan and India also inaugurated their first counterterrorism exercise, the *Dharma Guardian*, between the JSDF Ground Force and the Indian Army in Mizoram.

However, both Japan-China and India-China relations considerably improved throughout 2018. This was made clear by Abe's visit to China to successfully conclude the ten-year-long discussions about the Maritime and Aerial Communication Mechanism between the defence authorities of Japan and China. At the same time, negotiations between China and ASEAN concerning a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea were initiated with the support of both Japan and India. In the Indian Ocean, anti-piracy operations were successfully concluded. As jointly maintaining a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific pivots to fostering economic prosperity, it was also necessary to realise the true potential of the Japan-India economic partnership by synergising India's demographic dividend and Japan's capital and technology (MEA 2018c).

As a result, Abe concretely supported, *inter alia*, Modi's "Make in India", "Skill in India" and "Clean India Mission" initiatives by providing with advanced technologies and expanding public and private investments under the India-Japan Investment Promotion Partnership. Among the many other initiatives that were launched in 2018, the comprehensive India-Japan Digital Partnership was also in the spotlight for the

development of AI and IoT solutions. In order to achieve a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, Japan and India advocated for an “urgent reform” of the World Trade Organization to reinforce free, fair, and open trade. In this regard, they also shared the aim of rapidly reaching an early conclusion of the negotiations for the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement, from which India withdrew in 2019.

Most importantly, the 2018 summit confirmed that the Japan-India relationship has been transformed into a cornerstone of India’s Act East Policy, thereby advancing a new era in Japan-India relations. As described by India’s MEA, the year 2019 was also very eventful for bilateral defence and security cooperation. In 2019, Modi launched India’s Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative, which has India’s Act East Policy as a guiding framework and draws on existing regional cooperation mechanisms to address seven main spheres, namely maritime security, ecology and resources, capacity building and resource sharing, disaster risk reduction and management, science, technology and academic cooperation, trade connectivity and maritime transport.

Although the IPOI cannot be considered a formal strategy such as the FOIP, it certainly attests to India’s heightening perception of China’s influence in the Indian Ocean (Saha and Mishra 2020). Experts have denoted that India still lacks a clear Indo-Pacific strategy as little is known about what is the IPOI expected to achieve. Yet, as a reflection of Japan’s FOIP, India’s IPOI appears to be India’s way of developing a mechanism for cooperating with like-minded countries to ensure a safe, secure, and stable maritime domain by expanding India’s partnerships (Saha and Mishra 2020). As such, the IPOI clearly resonates with Japan’s FOIP and adds further coaction between Japan and India vis-à-vis Indo-Pacific’s challenges.

In 2020, a few days after Abe left office, the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement was signed. The agreement has been explicitly linked with the two governments’ will of realizing the vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific as it aims to contribute to the achievement of two of the three pillars of the FOIP: (i) enhancing maritime security to ensure global peace and stability; (ii) consolidation of the international rules-based order. Notably, the Agreement aims to facilitate reciprocal provision of supplies and services between the JSDF and the Indian Armed Forces which will, in turn, enable

better coordination in the following activities. Clearly, despite Abe leaving with unresolved issues, strengthening defence cooperation with India vis-à-vis Chinese influence was not one of them.

Hence, this Agreement is broadly understood as an enabler of greater Indo-Japanese cooperation (Panda 2020). In this context, Japan and India's visions for a free and open Indo-Pacific can be surmised as their hedging strategy against China. As this analysis has repeatedly highlighted, China has been generally perceived as the global revisionist power and status quo changer. This perception was renewed throughout 2020 (and 2021) due to Beijing's endeavours against littoral states in the South China Sea amid the general confusion following the outbreak of the pandemic, as well as in the East China Sea and Indian Ocean. To curb Chinese influence, on the side-lines of the Aero India Show 2021, India has announced its willingness to share military hardware, such as missiles and electronic warfare systems, with Indian Ocean Region allies.

Furthermore, Australia's participation in Exercise Malabar 2020 can also be read as India's increased tolerance towards the presence of foreign navies in its zone of influence, which hints at India's changing China policy (Rajagopalan 2021). It is not by chance that Australia's re-joining coincided with unprecedented worsening relations with China, along with a defence pact with Japan propelled by shared concerns over the South China Sea. While the India-China standoff at Ladakh has formally come to an end, with China retreating its troops first, India has reinforced its maritime policy, as exemplified by the TROPEX-21, India's largest military exercise ever in the Indian Ocean Region.

Clearly, maritime security retains central importance due to the very same nature of the Indo-Pacific. It will also be an area of increased cooperation and coordination among several countries and not only Japan and India. As a matter of fact, the United Kingdom, France and Germany have increased their naval presence in the South China Sea and their naval assets are planning to transit the area later in 2021 as well as participate in joint naval exercises with Japan and the U.S. It would not come as a surprise if France – which is investing more on maritime security to safeguard its overseas territories compared to Germany or The Netherlands– would be invited to join as an official

member of the QUAD in the near future. The European Union would likely be welcomed, as well, as it is also in the process of elaborating its own Indo-Pacific approach.

Additionally, considering that the economic, financial, and social impact of the pandemic has fomented the debate about reducing dependency on China for supplies of essential commodities, the necessity of supply chain resilience and diversification is shaping a narrative in favour of enhanced economic and strategic cooperation with India. Thus, building connectivity in the Indo-Pacific will also provide the EU, Japan, and India the chance to diversify supply chains. Under Abe, maritime security was the principal area of bilateral cooperation as one of the pillars of Japan's FOIP aimed at maintaining stability and a rules-based order in the region (Hughes, et. al. 2021).

Under Suga, as a consequence of the structural changes sparked by the pandemic, maritime cooperation will probably be less emphasized in favour of digital and physical connectivity, cybersecurity cooperation and diversification of the supply chains (Hughes, et. al. 2021). In the long-term, Hughes, Patalano and Ward have denoted that this could also lead the Suga government to adapt Japan's FOIP along these lines (2021). The current regional security environment will further advance bilateral cooperation in a growing number of areas of activity, which, however, will likely more often occur in concert with other regional powers. This is clearly illustrated by the second QUAD meeting of the year, where manufacturing and distribution of safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines all over the Indo-Pacific are at the forefront of discussions.

While some experts have observed that, for the first time since its inception, the QUAD dialogue seems to be focusing on the goals to achieve rather than on countering China's might, great power competition has given a political dimension to the production of vaccines. In addition, the QUAD has prioritized climate change and emerging technologies. Against this backdrop, Japan-India bilateral and regional cooperation will surely further advance. New avenues for cooperation will particularly be found in third countries markets, physical and digital connectivity and in the field of information and communications technologies. While Abe may be missed, especially in India, his legacy will ensure that the Indo-Japanese Special Strategic Partnership will be reaching its full potential in the coming years.

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