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INDIA - JAPAN : FORGING STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

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Till 2006, India-Japan relations were driven by economic factor. A 'strategic' factor crept in the relationship when the two countries signed a 'strategic partnership'^{1,2}. With North Korea threatening Japan by its nuclear capable ballistic missiles and India just overcoming an impasse with successful disengagement over Doklam from China, India and Japan have very responsibly displayed heightened trust that has not only caught an eye but grabbed the attention in the geo strategic realm because of their bold moves and confident outcomes.

The article analyses some recent developments between the two

countries, firstly, in political-diplomatic-military domain combined (Doklam Standoff, North Korea's nuclear pursuit, Pakistan's support to terrorism, Defence Cooperation) and secondly, in economic domain (Civil nuclear deal, High Speed Rail, Space Cooperation) which are genuine transformation of the historical friendship and bonhomie we have enjoyed. These recent activities are strikingly noticeable in view of support, respect and friendship bond between India and Japan. A bold, direct, confident, and unswerving response from the Japanese recently is welcome and a must for delivering results by converting thoughts and words into meaningful actions.

India-China Stand-off over Doklam.

In the twomonth long stand-off at Doklam over India-China-Bhutan tri-junction, Japan lauded India's persistence & resilience and confronted Chinese expansionist behaviour. Japan's unequivocal support to India and Bhutan through diplomatic channels on Doklam impasse is tacit, unprecedented and strong indicator of trust it attaches to India and how it values the relation. Bhutan also enjoys very positive relations with Japan. This development is noteworthy in contrast to the Kargil Conflict in 1999 when there was no mention of support from the Japanese. It is noteworthy that Japan was the only major country to publicly articulate its unequivocal support to India during the border crisis.

Pakistan Based Terror Groups.

India got Japan to name Pakistan based terror groups in the joint statement issued after the 2017 Annual Summit. This followed the 2017 BRICS Declaration (Xiamen Declaration) which named the same groups while expressing concern over terrorism³. After the visit of PM Abe in Sep 17, specific mention of Pakistan based and Pakistan sponsored terror groups Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) in the joint

statement for the first time by the two prime ministers signifies the shift in stance from generic to specific, targeting Pakistan as sponsor of terrorism by Japan. The 2016 joint statement had not named these groups but had called for Pakistan to bring the perpetrators of terrorist attacks, including 26/11 and 2016 Pathankot strike to justice. It was a lot more direct, sharper and harsher for Pakistan this time.

North Korea's Missile Programme and Nuclear Test.

North Korea first lobbed a nuclear capable missile over Northern Japan on 29 August 2017 and on 03 September 2017, tested a hydrogen bomb with a yield over five times that of the weapon dropped over Nagasaki in 1945. North Korea's new capability dramatically imperils the security of non nuclear East Asian states like Japan and South Korea⁴. India condemned the North Korean actions in the strongest terms and supported the Japanese in their call for stronger sanctions against North Korea. This served Japan's interests by getting India, North Korea's second largest trade partner, to abandon it, possibly for good⁵. Japanese PM's foreign policy adviser, Katsuyuki Kawai, before the visit of Japanese PM in Sep 2017, in India said that the security environment around

Japan had moved to a decidedly different phase and North Korea's nuclear test was unacceptable and unpardonable. He mentioned the three messages sent to the US from Japan - first, there should be no talks with DPRK now, only '*effective pressure*', second, Japan welcomed Trump's announcement that '*all options were on the table*' and third, every action by DPRK should have a reaction. Nuclear weapons and missiles are common to the convergence of a two-front security threat that India and Japan are seeing through the Pyongyang-Beijing-Islamabad axis. While India faces a two-front situation with Pakistan and China, Japan has an unpredictable North Korea and China⁶.

Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC). In November 2016, PMs Modi and Abe announced the AAGC, it is widely seen as an attempt to provide an alternative to Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative, which New Delhi has boycotted. AAGC calls for the two countries to develop quality infrastructure in Africa and digital connectivity to link the two continents. It is primarily a maritime route linking Jamnagar with Djibouti, Madurai with Zanzibar and Kolkata with Sittwe⁷. Both countries have a strong commitment

to ensuring unhindered commerce and trade through the India-Pacific region with the convergence of India's interests with Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy offering an alternative vision to China's OBOR. The strategic aligning of India's '*Act East Policy*' with Japan's '*Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy*' initiative and an Asia-Africa Growth Corridor is more pronounced articulation of countering Chinese sphere of influence and its attempt to increase its strategic footprint in the region. Both are looking to provide an impetus to shared initiatives like AAGC, Tokyo's participation in development of Chabahar port project and the commitment to ensuring free and open Indo-Pacific. Both countries believe Japan's generous financing and India's presence and goodwill it enjoys in parts of Africa can help improve connectivity between the two continents. The fact that African Union has 54 members – one third of UN total membership can even help India and Japan achieve their long desire of permanent membership of the UNSC^{8,9,10}. China is already expanding its economic and strategic influence in the resource rich continent. Its new military base in Djibouti¹¹, the first in the region has raised concerns over Xi Jinping Governments design

on Africa¹². In May 2017, the governors of the African Development Bank met in Ahmedabad and outlined a strategy for cooperation between India, Japan and Africa. Unlike OBOR, AAGC is an open and inclusive strategy envisaging triangular cooperation between Japan, India and African country concerned. Japan has set aside \$ 200 billion while India has earmarked \$ 2 billion for such assistance¹³.

Joint Military Exercises and Defence Cooperation¹⁴.

The Malabar naval exercises have evolved from a Indo-US naval exercise into a strong display of geopolitical force joining Indo-Pacific's three most powerful democracies after Japan joined as a permanent participant in 2015¹⁵. Mr Arun Jaitley as Defence Minister during the annual defence ministerial dialogue in Sep 2017 at Tokyo decided with his counterpart Itsunori Onodera to further ramp up defence cooperation with more bilateral combat exercises, exchanges and collaboration in military and dual use technologies. India welcomed Japan's proposal to field its state-of-art military assets, including the P-1 Maritime patrol aircraft with potent anti-submarine warfare capabilities for the Malabar Exercise in 2018^{16,17}. The US-2I amphibious aircraft and the

Soryu class submarines deals are under consideration by both countries for some time now¹⁸. In April 2014, the Abe government allowed its industries to export arms¹⁹. It triggered off optimism in New Delhi. That optimism hasn't been backed by any sales of military hardware, technology or joint ventures. But, the annual summit in Sep 2017 decided ramping up cooperation in production of equipment such as surveillance and unmanned systems.

Civil Nuclear Deal. The deal signed in July 2017, adds a new dimension as it could scarcely be imagined in the wake of 2011 Fukushima tragedy. The journey traversed by two nations over the past six years reflects growing confidence and depth of strategic partnership. Japan and India signed a MoU for civil nuclear cooperation in Dec 2015 over reservations of India's status as a non-signatory to Non Proliferation Treaty. This was transformed into a deal in 2016. Subsequently, the Japanese Govt got the approval from the Diet and the landmark deal came into force in July 2017²⁰. This will enable Japan to export nuclear power plant technology as well as provide finance for nuclear power plants in India. Besides, Japan will assist India in nuclear waste management²¹. While,

the US civil nuclear deal was done in four stages, the Japan pact compressed all four stages (123 Agreement, reprocessing, administrative arrangements and NSG) into one. Although, India signed nuclear deal with the US, it very much needed a similar deal with Japan to actually realise the deal. India commissioned six EPR reactors from Areva and another four from Toshiba-Westinghouse²². Both companies use Japanese components which would not be forthcoming in the absence of a nuclear deal with Japan. In particular, Japan Steel Works is the global leader for manufacture of the reactor vessel, which is a core component.

Economic Relations and Mumbai-Ahmedabad High Speed Rail Project.

The mutual admiration between the leaders of India and Japan is a well-known fact, as is the fact that Modi has been a vociferous admirer of Abenomics ever since he was Chief Minister of Gujarat. Trade relations between the two countries have been growing steadily. Japanese exports to India rose from about Rs 22,900 Crore in 2005 to Rs 57, 800 crores in 2015²³. Currently, about 1305 Japanese companies have branches or divisions in India²⁴. Japan has been at the forefront of India's small car revolution and has also played a significant role in the

establishment of the Delhi Metro. Today, it is working towards helping India build a dedicated freight corridor and bring high speed rail to the country²⁵. The Rs 1.10 Lakh Crore bullet train project, is being executed under a tripartite agreement, signed in 2016, among Ministry of Railways, High Speed Rail Corporation of India Limited (HSRC) and funding agency Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)²⁶. 81 percent of the project cost component is to be funded by Japan, through a soft loan that will be repaid by the Ministry of Railways at 0.1 percent per annum interest over 50 years including 15 years grace period^{27,28}. Japan attaching special importance to the high-speed rail project should be seen in the context of China pushing Japan out of contention for a similar project in Indonesia in 2015, the collapse of talks for a project in Thailand and Vietnam's National Assembly rejecting a Japanese high-speed project in their country. For Japan, the success of the Indian project has wider regional and global ramifications²⁹.

Open Sky Pact. Open skies is an international policy concept that calls for the liberalisation of the rules and regulations of the international aviation industry – especially commercial

aviation – in order to create a free market environment for the airline industry³⁰. With the aim of boosting air travel and tourism, the two countries signed an Open Sky Agreement, enabling airlines to operate as many flights as they want between India and Japan³¹. At present, Air India and the Japanese carriers Japan Airlines and All Nippon Airways offer bilateral flights. Last year, India had signed an open sky agreement with Greece, Jamaica, Guyana, Czech Republic, Finland, Spain and Sri Lanka³².

Space Cooperation.

TeamIndus, a Bengaluru based private aerospace company, has joined hands with Japan to launch India's first private space craft to moon in March 2018³³. This feat so far has been achieved only by the US, Russia and China. The PSLV-XL launch from Sriharikota will carry Japanese rover Sorato and Indian rover ECA to undertake the robotic space exploration mission³⁴.

With the global balance of power gradually shifting towards Asia, a strengthened India-Japan Partnership is poised to have a major impact on the twenty first century. India and Japan will need to ensure that they play a significant part in shaping the contours of

the twenty first century. A strong India-Japan partnership has immense potential and will be able to accomplish a great deal together and for themselves.

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(Endnotes)

- 1 Shamshad Ahmad Khan, *Changing Dynamics of India-Japan Relations - Buddhism to Special Strategic Partnership*, (New Delhi, Pentagon Press, 2017), "India-Japan Relations : Evaluating the Impact of Strategic Partnership" p 63.

The relationship, however, acquired a "strategic dimension" when Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi signed a global and strategic partnership agreement in 2006.

- 2 Rajaram Panda, “India and Japan: Exploring Strategic Potential,” *Journal of Defence Studies*, Vol 4, No 4, October 2010.

The canvas of a “strategic relationship” is much larger than a mere “political relationship.” While a political relationship means maintaining periodic dialogue on bilateral, regional and global issues, a strategic relationship goes beyond mere political dialogue and encompasses defence, economic and security dimensions impinging in the bilateral ties, in the region and in the world.

- 3 Similarly, naming of LeT and JeM by BRICS was seen as a significant achievement as China in 2016 had blocked India’s move to include their names in the Goa Declaration.
- 4 Sandeep Unnithan, “Concert of Democracies”, *India Today*, September 18, 2017, pp 60.
- 5 AbhijitIyerMitra, “Here’s the Real Sashimi”, *The Economic Times*, New Delhi, September 2017.
- 6 Ibid

- 7 Ibid, p 62.
- 8 Jayath Jacob, “Key Schemes to get Japan’s Push”, *Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, 13 September 2017.
- 9 Rohan Mukherjee and Anthony Yazaki, *Poised for Partnership-Deepening India-Japan Relations in the Asian Century*, (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2016), “Japan-India Relations from the Perspectives of Global Governance and International Institutions” by Shinichi Kitaoka and Naoko Kumagai, p216.

Japan has long been the second largest donor to the UN’s regular and peacekeeping operations (PKO) budgets (10.83 per cent of the UN peacekeeping budget as of March 2014) and has served as a non-permanent member of the UNSC 10 times, the highest number along with Brazil.

- 10 Ibid, p 217.

As a former permanent member of the League of Nations Council, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) of Japan began to express its desire

to be a permanent member of the UNSC in the latter half of 1960s, when Japan's economic power surpassed that of three permanent members of the UNSC: the republic of China, the United Kingdom and France. Tokyo's effort to become a permanent member began in earnest with Japan's rapidly growing personnel and financial contribution to UNPKOs starting in 1992 after the end of the Cold War. While Japan is currently the second largest financial contributor to PKOs, this budget is decided at the UNSC in the absence of Japan.

- 11 Brig Ranjit Singh, "Encircling India Strategically", *Indian Military Review*, Vol 8, No 5, May 2017, p 32.

China is constructing its first overseas military base in Djibouti, just few miles away from Camp Lemonier, one of the largest and most important US overseas bases. Even though China plays down the strategic significance of the base, saying it will largely support anti-piracy operations in the region, it is a sign of Chinese growing military influence to play a larger role in

the global power play. China has obtained 10 years lease of land for the base and pays \$ 10 billion a year as rent, a high cost, probably to entice Djibouti decision makers to accept the proposal.

- 12 Jayath Jacob, "Key Schemes to get Japan's Push", *Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, 13 September 2017.
- 13 Aftab Seth (India's former ambassador to Japan), "A Confluence of Interests", *India Today*, 18 September 2017, p 67.
- 14 Devsena Mishra, "India-Japan Defence and Economic Cooperation", *Indian Military Review*, Vol 8, No 5, May 2017, p 40.

In today's defence industry, robotics and electronics capabilities are crucial and Japan has got a strong base in them. The Japanese defence industry designs and manufactures a wide variety of weapons ranging from tanks to submarines and their naval and air force capabilities are world known. Japan's Manoeuvre Combat Vehicle (MCV), Type 3 Chu surface-to-air missile (SAM),

Izumo and Hyuga-class helicopter destroyers, F-15 J/DJ, Akizuki-class destroyers, Type 10 Main Battle Tank (MBT), Kawasaki P-1, Mitsubishi F-2 and Atago-class destroyers, etc, are some of shining examples of the tremendous capabilities that Japanese defence industry has got. With its advanced indigenous defence technology base and manufacturing capabilities, Japan is now in a position to increasingly meet its own defence needs and also export its products in a major way. Japan started this drive with a bid to sell submarines to Australia and the Shinmaywa US-2 amphibious planes to India. Japan lost the Australian deal but is still hopeful about the amphibious planes deal with India. India would do well to establish deeper defence ties with Japan and encourage cooperation in terms of developing its own military-industrial base in a manner that leverages upon Japan's considerable skills, experience and innovative capabilities.

- 15 Shubhajit Roy, "India, US to explore trilateral navy exercise expansion", *The Indian Express*, New Delhi, 26 September 2017.

- 16 Times News Network, "Wary of China, India, Japan will boost Def ties", *Times of India*, New Delhi, 7 September 2017.

- 17 Shamshad Ahmad Khan, *Changing Dynamics of India-Japan Relations - Buddhism to Special Strategic Partnership*, (New Delhi, Pentagon Press, 2017), "Conclusion and Policy Suggestions" p 180.

The Indian defence companies are especially interested in Japan's US-2 amphibious aircraft, the only one of its kind available in the world for advanced air-sea search and rescue operations, as well as the Soryu submarine, which is one of the world's largest conventional submarines that is not nuclear-powered, and is one of the best in terms of the depth of undersea cruising and range.

- 18 Sandeep Unnithan, "Concert of Democracies", *India Today*, September 18, 2017, p 62.

A 2013 offer from Japan to sell a dozen US-2I amphibious aircraft for the Indian Navy has figured in joint statements. But defence

ministry officials are believed to have raised objections over price - \$ 2.8 billion or Rs 16,800 Crore – and the limited indigenous options under Make in India. Japan’s Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, which makes the Soryu class submarines, was one of six global firms the Indian Navy sought proposals from to build a new line of Project 75I diesel-electric submarines. The nearly \$ 8.3 billion project will be executed by an Indian private sector shipyard under the defence ministry’s strategic partnerships programme. Mitsubishi has not tied up with any Indian defence firm, one of the prerequisites for strategic partnerships, so it’s unclear if they would be in the reckoning for the contract.

- 19 Devsena Mishra, “India-Japan Defence and Economic Cooperation”, *Indian Military Review*, Vol 8, No 5, May 2017, p 40.

In April 2014, Japan reviewed its policy guidelines for overseas transfer of defence equipment and technology. The ‘Three Principles on Transfer of Defence Equipment

and Technology’ lifts Japan’s self-imposed ban on arms exports, which was in place since 1976. Japan also enunciated a Strategy on Defence production and Technological Bases in June 2014, and in September 2015, Japan approved the military legislation that enabled it to exercise the right of collective self-defence’ for allies.

- 20 Dipanjan Roy Chaudhary, “N-Deal Opens Up New Vistas of Cooperation”, *The Economic Times*, New Delhi/Gurgaon, 12 September 2017.
- 21 Rohan Mukherjee and Anthony Yazaki, *Poised for Partnership - Deepening India-Japan Relations in the Asian Century*, (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2016), “Towards a Co-beneficial Energy Partnership” by Nobua Tanaka and Anthony Yazaki, p 118-119.

As of 2013, there were 31 countries around the world (including Taiwan) generating nuclear power. Of the 439 nuclear reactors operating in these countries, roughly 85 per cent were variations of the Light water reactor (LWR). However,

the LWR is also the design that is responsible for most of the concerns associated with nuclear power. The lack of passive safety features was acutely highlighted by the Fukushima disaster, when the failure of the plant's cooling system due to the tsunami led to a core meltdown. Moreover, LWRs create the dilemma of how to deal with spent fuel. Although, the waste can be reprocessed back into usable fuel, this process cannot be carried out at all LWR-operating plants, meaning that fuel must oftentimes be reprocessed off-site, which in turn can lead to nuclear proliferation concerns. On the other hand, if fuel cannot be reprocessed, it must be safely stored, which raises a plethora of related issues. Therefore, moving towards so-called Generation IV reactor that is more advanced and sustainable than the current generation of LWRs appears to be a sensible goal in which both Japan and India have an interest. There are a number of available options within the Generation IV family of reactors, but the reality is that Japan-India collaboration does not hinge on any particular reactor type. The larger

imperative is that the two countries should work to see which one is the most sustainable and operationally efficient. At the moment, India is working on a thorium-based reactor (due to abundance of thorium in India), which is an area where Japan could potentially act as partner.

- 22 'Japan will cease cooperation if India conducts nuclear tests', *The Times of India*, New Delhi.
- 23 Shweta Punj, "Bullet Trains and Beyond", *India Today*, 18 September 2017, p 52-53.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Aditi Raja, "The bullet train route, mostly overhead, a stretch undersea", *The Indian Express*, New Delhi, 13 September, 2017.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Times Special, "What the Bullet Train Project Brings to India", *The Times of India*, New Delhi, 13 September 2017.

- 29 Aftab Seth (India's former ambassador to Japan), "A Confluence of Interests", *India Today*, 18 September 2017, p 67.
- 30 https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_skies accessed on 10 Oct 2017.
- 31 'With unlimited flight services, 'opensky' pact may help reduce fares', *The New Indian Express*, 15 Sep, 2017, accessed via www.newindianexpress.com on 10 Oct 2017.

The agreement was signed in accordance with the National Civil Aviation Policy (NCAP), 2016. NCAP permits the government to enter into an 'open sky' air services

agreement on a reciprocal basis with SAARC nations as well as countries with territory located entirely beyond a 5000 Km radius from New Delhi.

32 Ibid.

India also signed a bilateral open sky agreement with the US in 2005. In 2003, India had signed an open sky agreement with the 10-member Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN).

33 Dipanjan Roy Chaudhary, "Abe Booster for Mission to Moon", *The Economic Times*, New Delhi/Gurgaon, 12 September 2017.

34 Ibid.



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