



India-Japan Relations: Suggestions to further deepen bilateral strategic and global partnership

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India-Japan relations have been moving in an upward trajectory ever since both the Asian democracies signed a strategic partnership agreement in 2006. As part of the strategic partnership, both the countries have identified a number of areas of bilateral interests where they are cooperating mutually. These include trade, economics, infrastructure, security and defence and energy security. During Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi's Japan visit this year, the existing strategic partnership has been elevated to a "special" strategic and global one. The up-gradation of the partnership is not merely a change in the nomenclature of bilateral relationship, rather it is an indication that India attaches utmost importance to its ties with Japan and, in the coming decades, Tokyo will remain on the top of New Delhi's foreign policy priorities. Japan also accords similar priorities in its relationship with India. However, to make the "special and strategic partnership" more relevant, both should take practical steps to make it more substantive. This policy brief offers some suggestions which would add more substance to India-Japan special and strategic and global partnership and will help deepen the bilateral relations further.

Explore possibilities of joint defence production

The strategic partnership signed between other democracies, such as Japan and Australia and Japan and the US, has been driven by their defence and security interests. However, in India-Japan strategic partnership, economic cooperation has been the dominant factor and security and

defence issues have found lesser priorities. It is partly because Japan, due to its pacifist policies, had been averse to selling its defence equipments overseas; hence, stringent domestic laws were put in place on Japanese companies to export arms and arms related technologies. Also, both India and Japan wanted to keep their defence and security partnership low profile in an attempt not to affront China. However, domestic changes in both Japan and India have provided new opportunities for them to cooperate in defence and security areas. Recently, Japan has eased the restrictions on arms and arms related technologies' export and the Japanese companies have started entering into joint ventures with Australian and British companies. India, on its part, has also raised the Foreign Direct Investment cap from 26 to 49 per cent in its defence sector. Indian defence companies had been eager to undertake joint defence production with Japanese companies, as they have cutting edge defence technologies. India should take cognizance of the internal changes in Japan and should facilitate joint defence production between Indian and Japanese companies to help cut defence expenditures.

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 undersea cruising and range. A section of Japanese defence manufacturers are also interested in Indian market given its vast potential. However, some others are very cautious in sharing these technologies. Their concern is that if these technologies are leaked to a third country, Japanese companies' competitive edge in the global market would be compromised. To assuage these concerns, India should assure Japan that these technologies would be protected and the government will take all necessary measures to prevent the leakage of these technologies to a third country.

Upgrade the existing 2+2 dialogue to ministerial level

The strategic dialogue between Japan and Australia and Japan and the US has been steered by their Defence and Foreign Ministers, commonly known as 2+2 dialogue. However, in India-Japan strategic partnership, this dialogue has been taking place at the level of defence and foreign securities and their Japanese counterparts. Japan is eager to upgrade the existing 2+2 dialogue between the two ministries, apparently to expedite the decision making process. India,

in principle, is amenable to “intensify” strategic dialogue between the two governments. However, it is treading cautiously, apparently due to China’s concerns regarding a growing India-Japan strategic tie, who views these measures as “encircling” China. It has similar concerns about the US-Japan and Japan-Australia 2+2 mechanisms. All the three countries have deep economic interests with China; however, it has not stopped them from institutionalising their bilateral strategic dialogues and discussing global security threats and issues related to their security interests. India and Japan should also do some groundwork to institutionalise a 2+2 dialogue at the ministerial level, keeping the two countries’ bureaucracy involved. The elevation of the 2+2 dialogue at the ministerial level will not only expedite the decision making process, but will also bring India-Japan 2+2 strategic dialogue at par with Japan-Australia and Japan-US strategic dialogues.

Prepare ground to sign ACSA to make the partnership a truly global partnership

India and Japan, following their Defence Ministers’ meeting in 2009, had expressed commitments to jointly work in the UN Peacekeeping missions, peace building and disaster relief works. Both Japan and India reiterated similar commitments following their Defence Ministers’ meeting in 2011. Recently, both the countries have expressed their desire to transform the strategic partnership into a global partnership. In cases, such as Indian troops’ participation in disaster response and cooperation with Japanese troops in these areas, both would require sharing of resources and logistics jointly. There is a general practice of signing of Acquisition and Cross-Service Agreement (ACSA) among the two governments desiring to mutually cooperate during natural disasters and rescue operations. Despite commitments that the contingents of the two countries’ security forces will mutually cooperate in PKOs and disaster response, India and Japan are yet to start negotiation on a bilateral logistics sharing agreement or the ACSA. Given the increasing opportunities for both the countries’ troops to participate in UNPKOs and disaster relief operation overseas, India and Japan should consider signing an agreement for reciprocal supplies and mutual cooperation during such activities. The signing of ACSA between India and Japan will certainly promote closer cooperation between the two strategic partners, who are keen to play an active role in the promotion of peace and security of the international community.

Seek greater inter-operability in Maritime Security

Both India and Japan depend on Sea Lanes of Communication for their export and imports through Indian Ocean which is directly linked to their economic security. The Indian Navy and Coastguards have been safeguarding the Indian and Japanese vessels from pirate attacks and have used force to repel the incidence of piracy, while the Japanese Maritime Self Defence Forces have not been undertaking these activities citing legal restraints on Japanese troops in exercising the use of force. Thus, the entire India-Japan maritime cooperation, so far, has been uni-dimensional. However, Japan has recently lifted the ban and has allowed its defence forces to exercise the right of collective self-defence. Moreover, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has stated that Japanese naval forces would be able to undertake anti-piracy and minesweeping activities from the Straits of Hormuz to Malacca Straits. India should take note of these internal changes in Japan and review the bilateral maritime security mechanism to make India-Japan maritime cooperation inter-operable.

Undoubtedly, India-Japan relationship has touched new heights over the last few years. However, there are areas, such as defence and security where vast opportunities remain untapped. Both the countries should take steps to tap these potentials, which will help deepen India-Japan bilateral relations.

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