

The Geoeconomics and Geopolitics of Japan's 'Indo-Pacific' Strategy

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David Scott¹

Abstract

This article seeks to trace, explain and evaluate Japan's shift towards the 'Indo-Pacific'. It argues that Japan's Indo-Pacific strategy is one that explicitly seeks to (a) expand Japan's presence across Indo-Pacific in order to (b) openly and explicitly gain greater energy security and in order to (c) tacitly and implicitly restrain China. Stephen Walt's 'balance of threat' logic is of relevance, given its focus on 'geographic proximity' and 'perceived offensive intentions' posed by China to Japan and other states in the region. The structure of the article is threefold: (a) Indo-Pacific strategic discourse in Japan, (b) Japan's Indo-Pacific actorness, with regard to its role in regional structures and its own maritime projections across the region and (c) Japan's Indo-Pacific diplomacy, with regard to the various bilateral, trilateral and quadrilateral partnerships, strategic geometry, that Japan has fashioned. The article concludes with overall evaluation of the effectiveness of Japan's Indo-Pacific strategy.

Keywords

Japan, Indo-Pacific, China, geopolitics, geoeconomics, balancing

Introduction

In September 2017, Kenji Hiramatsu (2017c), Japan's ambassador to India, emphasised that the term 'Indo-Pacific' (*Indoyo-Taihei*) was 'the key word for Japan's strategic thinking'. High stakes are involved. As one Japanese observer noted, 'it is on the Indo-Pacific region that Japan has staked its future' (Shiraishi, 2016; also 2018), in what he considered was this 'Indo-Pacific era' (Shiraishi, 2014; also Tanaka, 2015). In another speech, on the changing geopolitics of

¹ NATO Defense College Foundation, Cornwall, UK.

Corresponding author

David Scott, NATO Defense College Foundation, 7 Barrepta Close, Carbis Bay, St. Ives. Cornwall TR26 2LL, UK.

E-mail: davidscott366@outlook.com

Asia, Hiramatsu (2017d) reflected that ‘we used to discuss strategic issues with a focus on the Pacific Ocean’, but since ‘that focus has shifted to India and the Indian Ocean, thus, it is becoming more fitting to refer to the broader “Indo-Pacific” region nowadays’. This article seeks to trace and explain Japan’s shift in strategic focus with Japan ‘expanding its strategic horizons’ (Tsuruoka, 2018) from a traditional focus on East Asia and the Western Pacific through a ‘south-west pivot’ (Nagao & Collin, 2017) into the South Pacific, South China Sea and Indian Ocean (Akiyama, 2014; Oba, 2018; Wallace, 2018).

The reasons for this shift are twofold and interlinked, namely, energy security and China. Energy security considerations mean that maintaining energy flows through secure Sea Lanes of Communications (SLOCs) coming from the Middle East across the Indian Ocean and South China Sea is a key geoeconomic imperative for Japan. China’s increasing presence across the Indo-Pacific is a growing threat to Japanese interests, both geopolitically in terms of China’s immediate push across the East China Sea to Japan’s Ryukyu chain, but also more widely into securing the South China Sea and operating in strength in the Indian Ocean, which geoeconomically potentially threatens Japan’s energy security flows. Japan is already responding to China’s push through the Ryukyu chain (the so-called ‘first island chain’) by moving forces from the north-facing Russia to the south-west-facing China. China’s push into the South China Sea and Indian Ocean is bringing Japan’s own greater naval presence and shaping the security partnerships and infrastructure initiatives with other China-concerned states there.

Its theory application is evident with Stephen Walt’s ‘balance of threat’ logic. His considerations of general socio-economic ‘aggregate power’ and ‘military capabilities’ when aligned with ‘geographic proximity’ and ‘perceived offensive intentions’ make China the clear geoeconomic and geopolitical threat for Japan (Walt, 1985, pp. 8–13). Consequently, Japan’s Indo-Pacific strategy is twofold in terms of balancing theory. First, it seeks to build up its military assets and deploy them accordingly more widely across the Indo-Pacific—which is a matter of *internal balancing*. Second, it seeks security partnerships with various other Indo-Pacific powers similarly concerned about China’s growing maritime Indo-Pacific presence—which is a matter of *external balancing*. In this vein, it is no surprise that the Chinese state media considered ‘Japan’s “Indo-Pacific” concept another platform for containing China’ (Lu, 2014), although a better term would be ‘constraint’. Japan’s success in strengthening security links with Vietnam and above all India are precisely because Walt’s *balance of threat* logic (particularly the criteria of ‘geographic proximity’ and perceived ‘offensive intentions’) operates equally well with those two states and ensures a sympathetic response by them to Japan’s Indo-Pacific push.

Japan’s Indo-Pacific strategy is then one that explicitly seeks generally to (a) expand Japan’s economic, military and diplomatic presence across the Indo-Pacific in order to (b) openly and explicitly gain greater energy security and in order to (c) tacitly and implicitly restrain China. The article seeks to evaluate how successful Japan has been in achieving these three Indo-Pacific goals. Since this article is a study in strategic discourse and application, it deliberately concentrates

on primary source raw material from Japan ‘around’ the government from the strategic community and ‘in/by’ government from the official strategic formulations, policy declarations and state actions. The article follows a ‘back to basics narrative’ (Suganami, 2008) approach in international relations with regard to where and when this Indo-Pacific strategic discourse is circulated in Japan, and from that how far it has been realised in government aspirations and application. The structure of the article is threefold; it looks, first, at the Indo-Pacific strategic *discourse* in Japan, second at Japan’s Indo-Pacific *actorness* and third at Japan’s Indo-Pacific *diplomacy*.

Indo-Pacific Strategic Discourse

Two Indo-Pacific formulations surfaced in Japan in the early 2000s in the shape of the *Indi-Asia & West-Pacific* and the *Japan-India-Arabian Sea Route*. The former arose at the Okazaki Institute, where its Director Vice-Admiral Hideaki Kaneda made the argument that ‘there is a need to consider these East-Asia and West-Pacific region and Northern Indian Ocean region as an integrated region called the “Indi-Asia & West-Pacific” region in the future’ (Kaneda, 2004, p. 71). From 2005 to 2007, discussions were held among the Okazaki Institute, the United Service Institution of India and the Institute of Taiwan Defense Strategic Studies. The Ocean Policy Research Foundation (OPRF) went on to coin the phrase ‘Japan-India-Arabian Sea Route’ running from Japan through the East and South China Seas, the Straits of Malacca and the northern Indian Ocean (OPRF, 2006, p. 38). The context for this was the five rounds of *Dialogue on Ocean Security* conducted by the OPRF with its Indian counterparts.

Japan’s Indo-Pacific discourse has been driven from the very top via Shinzo Abe’s formulations during his time as a prime minister (2006–2007 and 2012–date). Abe has formulated and pushed three specific Indo-Pacific frameworks, namely, the ‘Confluence of the Two Seas’ (*futatsu no umi no majiwari*) in 2007, the ‘Security Diamond’ (*sekyuriti daiyamond*) in 2012 and the ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific’ (*jiyude opun’na indo-taiheiyo*) in 2016.

Abe’s speech in August 2007, titled *The Confluence of the Two Seas*, represented Indo-Pacific rhetoric and strategic geometry; he said, ‘at the confluence of the two seas of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, I feel that it is imperative that the democratic nations located at opposite edges of these seas deepen the[ir] friendship’ (Abe, 2007). The setting was the Indian Parliament, and Abe pushed for a closer security relationship with India. This outreach by Abe has been particularly successful, indicated in 2006 by their first-ever bilateral Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA), followed later in 2006 by their relationship being elevated to a formal ‘Strategic and Global Partnership’. The outreach to India also makes Japan less reliant on just its bilateral relationship with the United States. Abe also pushed the Quadrilateral Alliance (Quad) of democracies with Australia, India and the United States during 2006–2007. In that vein, Abe authorised the participation of the Japanese navy in the *Malabar* naval exercise held in the Bay of Bengal, alongside

the United States, Indian, Australian and Singaporean units. The Quad was a short-lived initial success, as Australian and Indian hesitations in the wake of Chinese criticisms (a mark of its potential impact on China) led to its quiet suspension in 2007, and no further quadrilateral naval exercise was held.

Although Abe resigned the premiership in September 2007 due to ill health, he was returned to power in December 2012 (Abe, 2013b), complete with his *security diamond* proposal. He described this as ‘a strategy whereby Australia, India, Japan, and the US [...] form a diamond to safeguard the maritime commons stretching from the Indian Ocean region to the western Pacific’ (Abe, 2012; also Taniguchi, 2011; Suzuki, 2016). This would represent a return of the Quad, with a focus on maritime security—under threat from piracy in the Indian Ocean but also from China’s increasing push from the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean.

Alongside Abe’s return to office was an increasing embrace of Indo-Pacific terminology by Japanese think tanks after 2011. The Okazaki Institute and the OPRF have already been mentioned in this context. It was no coincidence that the OPRF and the Okazaki Institute co-sponsored the workshop on *Navigating the Indo-Pacific Arc* in November 2011 alongside other think and research institutes from Singapore, South Korea and the United States. Another trilateral setting to note was the meetings in 2012 and 2013 between the Tokyo Foundation, the Korean National Diplomatic Academy and Indian Institute for Defense Studies & Analyses. Their second trilateral meeting in December 2013 meeting was explicit in discussing ‘the Indo-Pacific security environment’ (Tokyo Foundation, 2013).

The Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIIA) has been a continuing Indo-Pacific voice during Abe’s second premiership. JIIA initiatives have focused on maritime security, maritime partnerships and the South China Sea—with China being prominent in their considerations:

- *Security order in the Indo-Pacific and Japan’s foreign policy* conference, March 2013.
- *Japan-India global strategic partnership in Indo-Pacific*, dialogue, co-hosted with India’s Observer Research Foundation, December 2013.
- *Japanese diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific age*, symposium, February 2015.
- *Maritime security and issues involving the rule of law in the Indo-Pacific*, task force, April 2015 to March 2016.
- *The South China Sea in the broader maritime security of the Indo-Pacific*, conference, co-hosted with the Australian Defense Force Academy and the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam, September 2016.
- *Japan-Malaysia maritime cooperation: Shaping security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific*, workshop, co-hosted with the Maritime Institute of Malaysia, November 2017.
- *India-Japan Indo-Pacific forum*, co-hosted with Delhi Policy Group, October 2018.
- *Rule of Law and Maritime Security in the Indo-Pacific: Japan’s Foreign Policy for Enhancing Global Public Goods*, symposium, February 2019

In addition, the JIIA, along with the Okazaki Institute, has pursued ongoing discussions since June 2006 with India’s Aspen Institute India and America’s

Center for Strategic and International Studies—an Indo-Pacific framework in its very membership. The format was repeated in December 2009, 2011, 2012 and 2013, by which time, it was being officially termed the *Japan-India-US Trilateral Strategic Dialogue on Security Issues in the Indo-Pacific Region* (JIIA, 2013). Its 11th meeting was held in May 2017. This Track-2 format paved the way for the official Track-1 Japan-India-US (JIUS) strategic dialogue that first met in December 2011.

Abe's final contribution to the official discourse was the *Open and Free Indo-Pacific Strategy*, surfacing in August 2016 at the sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD). Abe's pledge there was that 'Japan bears the responsibility of fostering the confluence of the Pacific and Indian Oceans [...] the union of two free and open oceans' as 'a place that values freedom, the rule of law, and the market economy, free from force or coercion and making it prosperous' across 'peaceful seas that are governed by the rule of law' (Abe, 2016; also Mitsugi, 2016). The TICAD Ministerial meeting in October 2018 reiterated this vision that 'Japan is promoting proactively to realize a free and open Indo-Pacific, to connect Africa [...] through Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean', for which 'we must maintain a free and open maritime order and freedom of navigation based on the rule of law' (Kono, 2018). Japan's Indo-Pacific strategy has a clear China-related geoeconomic element, including infrastructure connectivity projects (Government of Japan, 2018h), but also has clear geopolitical nuances that have undertones of China-related balancing. Hence, Abe's analysis concerning 'this region that stretches from Asia to the Pacific Rim and still beyond to the Indian Ocean, linked with Japan by the seas' that 'Japan is determined to shoulder a major role and responsibilities as a member of the region, under its "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy"', involving particular 'cooperation among countries that share fundamental values and strategic interests: Japan and Australia, as well as the U.S., and India' (Abe, 2017a). The resurrection of the Quad in 2017 represents a success for Abe's quadrilateral call in his *security diamond* formulation in 2012 and *Free and Open Indo-Pacific* formulation in 2016.

Consequently, the Indo-Pacific has become the standard strategic term employed in Japanese foreign policy, with the 'Free and Open Strategy' immediately appearing as a 'Special Feature' in the official *Diplomatic Blue Book 2017* issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA, 2017; also Sonoura, 2017) and the *Diplomatic Blue Book 2018* (MOFA, 2018a; also Aizawa, 2018). MOFA went on in December 2018 to set up a specific foreign policy webpage titled 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' (MOFA, 2018b). Meanwhile, whereas the *Basic Plan on Ocean Policy* guidelines issued by the government in 2008 focused on marine environmental protection in the Pacific, the version released in April 2018 emphasised sea lane security within an explicit 'Indo-Pacific' setting. Japanese development aid has also now been targeted into specific Indo-Pacific direction (Kitaoka, 2018), including infrastructure initiatives with other countries concerned about China's Maritime Silk Road (MSR) initiative. Abe went on to allocate \$50 billion in infrastructure projects from 2019 to 2021 via the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) over the 'confluence of the two seas',

namely, the Indian and Pacific Oceans ‘to assist in the building of high-quality infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific region (Abe, 2018a; also Japan, 2018h).

Indo-Pacific advocacy from Japan’s political leadership has been matched by Japan’s naval leadership, which is not surprising given the maritime character of the Indo-Pacific and the maritime issues in these waters affecting Japan in the form of energy security and China’s maritime and naval expansion. A particularly strong Indo-Pacific message was given in July 2015 by Admiral Tomohisa Takei, the then Chief of Navy Staff. In his speech to the Carnegie Institute, the ‘Indo-Pacific’ was mentioned 13 times and the ‘Asia-Pacific’ only once. His focus was on increased cooperation with the United States; ‘many of the challenges of the Indo-Pacific region’s security have occurred at sea’ in which ‘the U.S.’s presence is required now and in the future for peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region’ (Takei, 2015).

Former naval figures have been ready to be explicit about China’s maritime challenge in the Indo-Pacific. At the Okazaki Institute, its Vice President, retired Admiral Sumihiko Kawamura, explained his mooted *Naval Cooperation Scheme in the Indo-Pacific*, as being ‘to serve as countermeasures to check China’s ambitions’ (Kawamura, 2012. p. 209), and ‘to deter Beijing’s aggressive plan to undermine the stable maritime order in the entire Indo-Pacific region’ (Kawamura, 2012, p. 212). Another retired vice-Admiral Hideaki Kaneda argued at the Okazaki Institute that because of Chinese power assertion in the East China Sea, the South China Sea, the Western Pacific, the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean, ‘regional maritime players in the Indo-Pacific region should nevertheless seek to counter or deny China’s hegemonic maritime expansion effectively and in a collective manner’ through a ‘chain of maritime security coalitions across the Indo-Pacific region’ (Kaneda, 2016. p. 76) underpinned by the United States, Japan, India and Australia. This is precisely the Quad format, which was successfully revived in 2017, to China’s discomfort.

The current position of the Japanese navy is simple, its job is ‘ensuring the security environment and free and open sea in the Indo Pacific region’ (Murakawa, 2018). Given Japan’s drive for strengthened maritime partnerships, it was no surprise to find Admiral Kawana, Chief of Staff, stressing at the Raisina Dialogue in January 2019 ‘the importance of multinational cooperation based on universal values such as rule of law and freedom of navigation’ and a ‘strong solidarity among Japan, the US, Australia, India and France in order to realise “Free and Open Indo-Pacific”’ (Government of Japan, 2019b; also Takei, 2017a)—South China Sea-related issues for China-concerned partners of Japan. The Japanese navy has also adopted Indo-Pacific rationales for its deployment decisions. The official navy explanation for the three-month long extended Indo-Southeast Asia Deployment, *ISEAD* 2018, of the powerful *Kaga* carrier group in the South China and Indian Ocean from August to October 2018 was twofold: ‘seeking active contribution to the peace and stability in Indo-Pacific region’ with successful joint exercises carried out with the Philippine, Indonesian, Singaporean, Sri Lankan, Indian and the UK navies ‘to promote cooperation and interoperability with our partner navies’ (Government of Japan, 2018). This points to Japan’s increasing involvement, its ‘actorness’ in the Indo-Pacific.

Indo-Pacific ‘Actorness’

Indo-Pacific actorness can be taken in various ways. It includes Japan’s growing involvement in the various Indo-Pacific structures and mechanisms, as well as Japan’s own growing maritime and naval projection across the region.

Institutional Activity

In terms of institutional activity, Japan was an early member of the Indo-Pacific Fisheries Council in the 1950s, before the organisation changed its name, but not existing memberships, to the Asia-Pacific Fishery Commission in 1994. Japan has joined other new initiatives which have memberships spanning the Pacific and Indian Oceans, namely, the ASEAN Regional Forum in 1994, the Asia-Pacific Submarine Conference in 2000, the Asian Security Summit/Shangri-La Dialogue in 2002, the East Asia Summit (EAS) in 2005 and the ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) in 2010. China-related comments are embedded in Japan’s Indo-Pacific rhetoric at such venues, particularly with regard to China’s refusal to accept the adverse 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) ruling on the South China Sea. Japan’s participation in the 2018 ADMM-Plus centred on pushing the need for establishing ‘the rule of law in the Indo-Pacific region’ (Government of Japan, 2018g), while similarly at the 2018 EAS, Japan argued that ‘a free and open maritime order based on the rule of law is the cornerstone of the peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region’ (Government of Japan, 2018j). Japan has been successful in publicly putting such implicit China-related comments into the regional domain, but unsuccessful in getting China to actually comply with such ‘rule of law’ calls.

Japan is also involved in various Pacific Ocean and Indian Ocean bodies. In the Pacific, Japan was an original member of the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council mechanism set up in 1988, and of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation mechanism set up in 1989, as was China. Japanese success has been most evident with the arrival of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership that almost collapsed in 2017 when Trump withdrew the United States from participation, but in which Japan took up a leadership role to successfully implement in 2018. The successfully reconstituted Trans-Pacific partnership (TPP) includes Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam. Significantly, it does not include China and thus gives Japan an easier economic breathing space in the region.

In the Indian Ocean, Japan has successfully maintained parity with China’s increasing regional presence. Thus, Japan became a dialogue partner of the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation in 1999, with the organisation renamed as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) in 2013. Japan is using IORA to develop economic links with the African rim countries as part of its Indo-Pacific strategy (Hosoya, 2019). Japan gained observer status at the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium in 2014, alongside China.

Within the Pacific, Japan has enjoyed membership from the outset of the West Pacific Naval Symposium set up in 1988, and Dialogue Partner status with the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) in 1989, alongside China. Japan's message is clear in this PIF setting that 'based on the 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy' [...] Japan would like [...] to realize a free and open maritime order based on [...] the rule of law' (Horii, 2018). This implicitly was aimed at China, both with regard to the sustainability criticisms of China's MSR initiative for the South Pacific and with regard to China's disregard of the rule of law shown in its rejection of the July 2016 PCA ruling against it over the South China Sea.

Japan has set up some very successful sub-regional platforms, giving it an extension of influence ahead of China. The Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM) mechanism, running since 1997, brings Japan together with the Pacific basin states. This has given Japan a decade of advantage over the China-Pacific Island Countries Economic Development and Cooperation Forum set up in 2006. In Southeast East Asia, another Japanese initiative is the Japan-Mekong Summit (JMS) set up in 2009, with Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam, which again has given Japan almost a decade advantage over China's Lancang-Mekong Cooperation set up in 2016.

Maritime Activities

In terms of maritime activities, Japan's maritime involvement in the Western Pacific brings it into close security cooperation with the United States, Australia and more recently France and the United Kingdom. These are to be contrasted with the lack of maritime security cooperation between Japan and China, where maritime confrontation is more noticeable in the East China Sea. Not only are Japan's bilateral defence relations with the United States and Australia strengthening still further in recent years (and with it, bilateral exercises in the Western Pacific), but it has also been working with those two allies in a trilateral setting through the trilateral strategic mechanism operating since 2005. This has been an ongoing success, moving on from diplomatic discussions to trilateral military exercises, as with the *Cope North* air force exercises at Guam in which Japanese forces have participated since 1999, and naval deployments in the South China Sea in July 2011. Trilateral formats for Japan have been successfully extended. Amphibious landing exercises were also held among the Japanese, French and the US navy in the Western Pacific in July 2017, and anti-submarine exercises were held among the Japanese, UK and US navies in the Philippine Sea in December 2018. Such activities have China tacitly in mind and have some effect, given that China protests against their nature as containment shows of force.

Japan has also been cooperating with India in the Western Pacific. Bilateral Japan-India maritime exercises were initiated in June 2012, off the coast of Tokyo. At the trilateral level, this has further involved the Japanese navy carrying out naval exercises with the American and Indian navies in the *Malabar* exercises in the Western Pacific. The first trilateral format was in April 2007, the second was in April 2009, the third was agreed in April 2011 (though Japan pulled out due to

its Great Earthquake disaster), and were resumed in July 2014, in the North Philippine Sea in June 2016 and in the waters off Guam in June 2018.

Japanese involvement in the South China Sea, the middle link of the Indo-Pacific between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, is of rising significance given Chinese claims to most of its waters. Faced with increasing Chinese claims over most of these waters, which leaves Japan open to have its energy imports from the Middle East being squeezed by China, Japan has restated its own security interests in recent years in keeping the South China Sea open and free (Koda, 2016). Consequently, the Japanese navy has started to be successfully deployed into these waters, which is also a sign of Japan's increasing blue water naval capability, and which brings it directly up against China (Sato, 2018). Trilateral naval exercises in July 2011 off the coast of Brunei among Japanese, Australian and American naval vessels represented Japan's first military deployment to the South China Sea since its forces withdrew in 1945. The South China Sea has been central in the maritime security talks between Japan and Vietnam that were initiated in May 2013, where both share common concerns over Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea. October 2015 witnessed bilateral naval exercises in the South China Sea between the Japanese and US navy, repeated in August 2018 between the *Kaga* and *George Washington* carrier groups. Vietnam has also offered berthing facilities at Cam Ranh Bay to the Japanese navy. Naval exercises with the Philippines in May 2015 involved the dispatch of two Japanese destroyers, which represented a further extension of Japanese presence, with more bilateral exercises repeated in summer 2018.

Japan has been deploying in greater strength into the South China Sea. The 24,000-ton helicopter carrier JS *Izumo*, Japan's lead ship, was dispatched into the South China Sea waters in 2017. The *Izumo* deployment in the South China Sea had further significance, since it was joined there by a Japanese submarine, the first time for Japanese submarine deployment into these waters since 1945. This was followed by the deployment of the newly commissioned helicopter carrier JS *Kaga* to these same waters in summer 2018, in ISEAD 2018, alongside supporting destroyers and the submarine JS *Kuroshio*. China was suitably offended (China Military, 2018), which indicates it had the desired effect of sending a message to Beijing.

Japanese involvement in the Indian Ocean, evident since the late-1990s, has been a growing feature of Japan's Indo-Pacific positioning (Horii, 2017; Kishi, 2016). Japanese interests in the Indian Ocean are been significantly shaped by its energy imperatives of securing oil flows from the Middle East. However, these have now been joined by concerns about China's growing naval presence. Sumio Kusaka, the ambassador to Australia, warned 'we would certainly not like to see what has happened in the South China Sea happen in the Indian Ocean, because this is a vital sea lane for both Australia and Japan' (Kusaka, 2017; also Kusaka, 2016). JS *Izumo*, Japan's lead carrier was deployed into the Indian Ocean in summer 2017 as was JS *Kaga* in summer 2018, where it carried out port calls and bilateral military exercises with the Indian, Sri Lankan, Singaporean, Indonesian, and US navies. Japan was also acting on key infrastructure projects in the Indian Ocean. One is to provide infrastructure upgrades on the Andaman and Nicobar

Islands, the key Indian position at the head of the Malacca Straits. Another is involvement in Sri Lanka's deep-water port of Colombo, in competition with China's presence at Hambantota. Other successful Japanese-sponsored port projects since 2016 are at Toamasina (Madagascar), Nacala (Mozambique), Mombasa (Kenya), Providence (Seychelles), Duqm (Oman), Chabahar (Iran), Mumbai (India), Matarbari (Bangladesh), Yangon (Myanmar) and Dawei (Myanmar). Japan's involvement across the Indian Ocean can be followed with specific regard to the Bay of Bengal, the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

With regard to the Bay of Bengal, the Japanese Coast Guard carried out exercises with their Indian counterparts in November 2000 off Chennai. Since then, these joint coast guard exercises have alternated between the Bay of Bengal and Japanese waters. The latest such exercise was held in January 2018 in the Bay of Bengal off Chennai. A Memorandum of Cooperation signed between the two Coast Guards on 24 November 2006 stipulated that the heads of the two organisations meet alternately in India and Japan to discuss maritime issues of mutual concerns and formulate a cooperative approach to address these. The Japanese navy also participated in the six-nation military exercises (*MALABAR-2*) in the Bay of Bengal in September 2007, alongside the host India and the United States, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand. A series of milestones have successfully anchored the Japanese navy back into the Indian Ocean. The first bilateral navy exercise with India was held in the Bay of Bengal in December 2013. Overall, 2 years later, Japan joined in the trilateral *Malabar* exercise with India and the United States held in the Bay of Bengal in October 2015 and July 2017. The 2017 exercise was significant as Japan deployed its helicopter carrier JS *Izumo* and warship JS *Sazanami*; for the first time, its most powerful vessel the *Izumo* had been deployed with other foreign navies. Japan's ambassador to India was clear on its purposes; 'Malabar-17 demonstrates enhanced interoperability among the navies of Japan, India and the US — and a shared determination to safeguard a free and open Indo-Pacific' (Hiramatsu, 2017b).

With regard to the Arabian Sea, the Japanese navy appeared there in November 2001 in a limited operation which ran until January 2010, providing delivery escort/refuelling support for multinational operations being undertaken in Afghanistan. Further westwards, there has been an ongoing deployment of Japanese destroyers to the Gulf of Aden since March 2009. Government contextualisation was that its purpose was 'maintaining the rule of law in the important sea lane of the Indo-Pacific, including off the coast of Somalia. Therefore, Japan will continue to make efforts to achieve a free and open Indo-Pacific' (Takei, 2017b; also Sekiguch, 2014). This has been successful insofar as the piracy incidents have markedly declined in these waters. Deployment into the Gulf of Aden led to an agreement in June 2011 for military basing facilities for Japan at Djibouti, a significant development as it was the first of its kind outside of Japan and enables easier long-range Japanese naval deployments. Plans for its expansion in 2019 are seen as China-related (Fujiwara, 2018), and in some cases, as a competition to China's own moves into Djibouti. Japan's naval presence in Djibouti has also generated further support from Djibouti for Japanese foreign policy. Thus, their foreign ministers' meeting in 2018 witnessed close agreement;

‘both Ministers stressed the importance of maintaining and strengthening a free and open maritime order based on the rule of law’, that ‘from this point of view, Minister Youssouf welcomed the Japanese efforts in the framework of the “Strategy for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific” to ensure the peace, stability and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region’ and expressed ‘his country’s interest in cooperating in this initiative with the Japan’ (The Minister of Foreign Affairs & International Cooperation of the Republic of Djibouti, 2018). This points to the success of Japan’s Indo-Pacific diplomacy.

Indo-Pacific Diplomacy

Under Abe, Japanese diplomacy has worked hard to develop Indo-Pacific underpinnings, the defence minister stressing ‘the importance cooperating with allied countries and a diverse range of partners to realize a free and open Indo-Pacific ocean’ (Onodera, 2018). Japan has made a point of reiterating its ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy’ in its bilateral meeting during 2017–2018 with other states across the Indo-Pacific like Kenya, Madagascar, Djibouti, Oman, Comoros, the Maldives, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Singapore, Vietnam, Brunei, Papua New Guinea, New Zealand, Chile and Canada. Sub-regional forums like the JMS, PALM and PIF have also had Japan’s Indo-Pacific strategy noted and indeed welcomed. Particularly significant Indo-Pacific underpinnings have been pursued with India, Australia, France and the United States. It is not surprising that the Chinese state media has denounced ‘Japan’s “Indo-Pacific” as another platform for containing China’ (Lu, 2014), although ‘constraintment’ would be a more nuanced and accurate term.

With regard to India, Japan rightly stresses that ‘India is the most important partner to realise a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific”’ (Government of Japan, 2019a), precisely because India is the leading security partner available to Japan in the Indian Ocean. Japan’s Indo-Pacific outreach was visibly demonstrated with Abe’s already-noted keynote speech at the Indian Parliament on *The Confluence of the Two Seas*, and the immediately following naval exercises between the two countries in 2007 in both the Western Pacific and Bay of Bengal. This led to a formal *Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation* with India in October 2008, based on their ‘common interest in the safety of sea lines of communications’ (Japan-India, 2008). Renewed stronger links with India were a particular feature of Abe’s second administration since 2012. Abe reiterated the shared values between Japan and India; ‘it is the task for the maritime democracies to safeguard our vast oceans. India from the west, Japan from the east, the confluence of the two most deep-rooted democracies’ (Abe, 2013c; Hiramatsu, 2016). Reinforced Indo-Pacific underpinnings were pursued with the election of the Modi government in India in May 2014.

In December 2014, Abe’s second visit to India brought further specific Indo-Pacific underpinning in their joint statement subtitled *Special Strategic and Global Partnership Working Together for Peace and Prosperity of the Indo-Pacific Region*

and the World, replete with invocation, eight times, of the 'Indo-Pacific' as the 'region' within which they would cooperate (India-Japan, 2015b). Kishida's trip as a Foreign Secretary in January 2015 brought his keynote address titled *Special Partnership for the Era of the Indo-Pacific* (Kishida, 2015). Japan's 'Indo-Pacific' linkages with India have also been pushed in the economic sphere. In April 2015, Yoichi Miyazawa, the Trade Minister, signed the *Action Agenda for the India-Japan Investment and Trade Promotion and Indo-Pacific Economic Integration* with his Indian counterpart Nirmala Sitharaman. This came complete with hopes that 'Indo-Pacific economic linkages through cooperation [...] is essential for the further development and prosperity of not only both the countries but also of the region' (India-Japan, 2015b). A sustained advocate of Japan-Indian explicit 'Indo-Pacific' cooperation in terms of maritime security, economic and infrastructure cooperations has been Japan's ambassador in India Kenji Hiramatsu (2017a, 2017e, 2018).

Abe has continued to drive Japanese links with Modi's India. Abe's trip to India in September 2017 brought their joint statement deliberately titled *Toward a Free, Open and Prosperous Indo-Pacific*, stressing 'enhancing maritime security cooperation, improving connectivity in the wider Indo-Pacific region [...] and enhancing exchanges in expanding maritime domain awareness (MDA) in the Indo-Pacific region' (Japan-India 2017). Finally, the *Vision Statement* drawn up in October 2018 between Abe and Modi recorded 'their unwavering commitment to working together towards a free and open Indo-Pacific' and 'expanding maritime domain awareness (MDA) in the Indo-Pacific region' and affirmed that 'the two leaders' vision for the Indo-Pacific is based on a rules-based order that respects sovereignty and territorial integrity of nations, ensures freedom of navigation and overflight as well as unimpeded lawful commerce' (Japan-India, 2018b).

Abe has successfully steered ever stronger security relations with India, signalled with their DCA signed in September 2014. Since then, defence discussions between the two countries continue to reiterate explicit 'Indo-Pacific' maritime focus between the two naval powers (Japan-India 2015; Japan-India 2016, Government of India 2018a). The military cooperation deepened in 2018. The joint naval exercises in 2012, 2013 and 2018 have been supplemented by joint army and air force exercises in 2018. Abe's summit meeting in Autumn 2018 with Modi included the signing of an Implementing Arrangement for Deeper Cooperation between the Japanese and Indian navies. Already in the pipeline is an Acquisition and Cross-servicing Agreement (ACSA), due for signing in 2019. Such a logistics support arrangement will be a significant step forward to open up their bases in the Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean to each other's navies and to facilitate more extensive military exercising. This will supplement the infrastructure support given by Japan for the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Since 2016, Japan has also moved to give joint support with India for an Africa-Asia Growth Corridor (AAGC). Perhaps not surprisingly, but also not inaccurately, the Chinese state media denounced the AAGC as 'an oppositional vision intended to counterbalance China's "Belt and Road" initiative' (Xiao, 2017). However, it remains more rhetorical than substantial, with lack of any specific established AAGC mechanism for funding. Japan has though moved onto

other joint infrastructure projects in Northeast India (to link up India with Southeast Asia), in South Asia, and also at Chabahar.

Japanese diplomacy has reached out in Southeast Asia multilaterally and bilaterally. Success has been enjoyed with Japan increasingly being seen locally as a generally benign potential counterweight to China. Multilateral involvement has been partly through ASEAN, with whom Japan has been a dialogue partner since 1977, and where economic and infrastructure cooperation has been complemented in 2016 by Japan's Defense Cooperation Initiative with ASEAN, otherwise known as the *Vientiane Vision* (Government of Japan, 2016). This more than matches China's relationship with ASEAN. It was significant that Singapore's leader went on record at the 33rd ASEAN Summit in November 2018 to judge that 'the core principles of Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy align well with Singapore and with Asean's priorities' (Yi, 2018). This is in successful contrast to Singapore's coolness towards US Free and Open Indo-Pacific formulation.

Another successful point of entry for Japanese diplomacy in South-east Asia was the Japan-Mekong Forum, set up in 2009. Its Indo-Pacific focus was explicitly solidified in 2018 with their affirmation that 'Leaders of the Mekong countries welcomed Japan's policy to realize a free and open Indo-Pacific [...] a free and open order based on the rule of law' (Japan-Mekong, 2018). Their 'welcome' to Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific was a significant success, while their reiteration of the need for 'a free and open order based on the rule of law' was an implicit reference to China and its unwillingness to accept PCA ruling on the South China Sea. Infrastructure cooperation was high on the agenda, as an implicit counter to China's MSR scheme. Japan has sought out ASEAN, signing up to 'ASEAN centrality' in any Indo-Pacific regional process, and talking about its Indo-Pacific 'vision' rather than Indo-Pacific 'strategy' (Tajima, 2018)

Bilateral relations have been most strongly pursued with Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines and Malaysia. With regard to Indonesia, Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy (FOIPS) is one then that explicitly seeks generally to (a) expand Japan's economic, military and diplomatic presence across the Indo-Pacific in order to (b) explicitly gain greater energy security and in order to (c) implicitly restrain China. Under Abe, Japan has sought convergence with Indonesia's own 'maritime fulcrum' Indo-Pacific focus spearheaded by President Widodo. This was made explicit at their Strategic Dialogue in June 2018, where 'both Ministers expressed concern with the recent [Chinese] militarisation in the South China Sea' and 'both Ministers agreed to synergize Indonesia's Indo-Pacific concept with the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy (FOIPS) from Japan' (Indonesia, 2018), including Japanese economic assistance for Indonesia's holdings in the Natuna archipelago. This was a particular success for Japan as Indonesia had been cooler towards the US FOIPS. With regard to Vietnam, Japan has moved to closer security and economic links and security involvement in the South China Sea within an Indo-Pacific frame of reference. Hence, the 2017 Summit focused on their 'deep concern over [Chinese] militarisation' in the South China Sea, from which 'they underlined the importance of ensuring a stable, free and open, rules-based order across the Indo-Pacific region' (Japan-

Vietnam, 2017). This opened the way for Japanese naval use of Cam Ranh Bay. With the Philippines, security cooperation has been developed, according to Abe because 'Japan intends to further strengthen its cooperation with the Philippines in order to maintain and strengthen a free and open maritime order based on the rule of law and make the Indo-Pacific into a global commons' (Abe, 2017b). This has been a comparative success insofar as the Philippine security relations with the United States have been pricklier under Duterte. The rationale for the DCA made with Malaysia was 'in order to contribute to realizing a free and open Indo-Pacific that is based on the rule of law' (Government of Japan, 2018d). Again, Japan has managed to shape a stronger defence relationship, within its Free and Open Pacific strategy with Malaysia, than the United States despite the United States' own FOIPS.

With regard to Australia, links have been strengthened in a decidedly Indo-Pacific fashion. Abe's visit to Australia in January 2017 saw Japan–Australia partnership set into an Indo-Pacific framework, including cooperation with the United States and India 'to maintain the rules-based international order and support a peaceful and stable Indo-Pacific region', on which it recorded their common 'serious concern' (MoFA Japan, 2017) over militarisation of South China Sea outposts. Abe's view on his summit meeting with the Australian leader in January 2018 was Indo-Pacific centred, whereby 'as countries located in the Indo-Pacific region, Japan and Australia have an important responsibility to ensure the peace and prosperity of this region' and that 'in particular, as stabilizing forces in the seas, both our countries must further work together to create a free and open Indo-Pacific region' (Government of India, 2018a). Abe's trip to Australia in November 2018, including a highly symbolic trip to Darwin, the scene of the Second World War bombing by the Japanese air force, brought their declaration that 'our common vision is of a free and open Indo Pacific, in the area of security we agreed to deepen our security and defense cooperation' (Abe, 2018b). Common Indo-Pacific agreements are now the pattern at the 2 + 2 ministerial meetings, for example, in 2018 to 'maintain and promote a free, open, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific region founded on the rules-based international order', on which they also reiterated that 'Ministers remained seriously concerned about the situation in the South China Sea' (MoFA Japan, 2018). Throughout 2018, explicit 'Indo-Pacific' underpinnings were pushed by Japan's ambassador Sumio Kusaka (2018a, 2018b, 2018c).

With regard to France, a formal strategic partnership was proclaimed in 1994. A Japan–France Foreign Ministers strategic dialogue mechanism was set up in 2012 and expanded into a 2 + 2 Foreign and Defence Ministers mechanism in 2014. Across the Indo-Pacific, successful cooperation has already included the Japanese and French navies cooperating together in the Gulf of Aden anti-piracy operations where they have both been deployed since 2009, with the Japanese navy joining in since 2012 in the biannual *Croix du Sud* (Southern Cross) humanitarian and disaster relief exercises run by France from New Caledonia. Japan sees its partnership in very Indo-Pacific terms. For Foreign Secretary Kishida, it was a question that 'Japan sees extensive possibilities in further cooperation between Japan and France

in security and defense areas, including protection of sea lane safety, with the Indo-Pacific region in mind' (Kishida, 2017).

Common Indo-Pacific ground has become explicit in 2018. The 2 + 2 meeting in January 2018 recorded their joint support of a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' and the decision to initiate regular bilateral joint naval exercises, starting with the dispatch of the French frigate *Vendémiaire* from New Caledonia to Japan in February 2018. The 2 + 2 meeting in January 2018 recorded their specific convergence, 'recognising that both countries are Pacific nations, they have committed to continue and strengthen their cooperation in the maritime domain, especially in this region, and confirmed that it was in their mutual interest to work, in connection with their partners, in favor of a peaceful free and open Indo-Pacific' and 'to reinforce connectivity in the Indo-Pacific' (Japan–France, 2018). Japanese–French convergence was also reflected in Japan's invitation for France (in the shape of its possessions New Caledonia and French Polynesia) to attend the PALM in May 2018. Abe's talks with New Caledonian leader Philippe Germain echoed Japan's links with Paris: 'Prime Minister Abe stated his intention to work together with New Caledonia for the stability and prosperity of the region under the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy"' and 'in return, President Germain expressed his support for Japan's position toward realizing a free and open Indo-Pacific' (Government of Japan, 2018b). July 2018 saw a significant success, the ACSA, while Abe's summit meeting with Macron in October 2018 saw an agreement 'to further amass specific cooperation between Japan and France toward realizing a free and open Indo-Pacific' (Government of Japan, 2018e). Maritime momentum was maintained with naval exercises with France's *Charles de Gaulle* aircraft carrier group in the Indian Ocean in Spring 2019.

Japanese links with the United States have been the bedrock of Pacific security since 1950. Japan welcomed the US 'rebalance/pivot' announced by the Obama administration in 2012; 'today the United States is shifting its focus to the confluence of the two oceans, the Indian and the Pacific' and 'from now on the Japan-US alliance must effect a network, broad enough to ensure safety and prosperity encompassing the two oceans (Abe, 2013a). This was a prominent role, in which, Abe argued that 'Japan and the U.S. together should lead the Indo-Pacific Century to make it one that cherishes freedom, democracy, human rights, and rules-based order' (Abe, 2013d).

A particularly significant process has been the way in which the United States has adopted the Japanese formula of a 'Free and Open Pacific' in late 2017, a year after Japan started using the term, following multiple meetings between Trump and Abe during 2016–2017. The 2017 summit saw the United States adopting Japanese formulations that 'both leaders affirmed that Japan and the United States will work together to promote peace and prosperity in the region by developing the Indo-Pacific as free and open' (Japan-US, 2017), with the rule of law, freedom of navigation and infrastructure cooperation all specifically highlighted. The 2018 Defence Ministers' meeting between Takeshi Iwaya and James Mattis 'reconfirmed our awareness of the importance of a free and open Indo-Pacific area' (Government of Japan, 2018f; also Kanehera, 2018), and called for Japanese and US involvement

in the South China Sea to avert China's use of force to change the status quo there. In addition, economic infrastructure cooperation has been similarly set with the US–Japan joint statement on *Advancing a Free and Open Indo-Pacific Through Energy, Infrastructure and Digital Connectivity Cooperation*, signed in Tokyo on 13 November 2018. This is tacitly aimed as an alternative to China's infrastructure (*MSR*) and digital (*Digital Silk Road*) initiatives.

Japan has moved towards trilateral as well as bilateral Indo-Pacific formats, centred on the JAUS (Japan-Australia-US), JIUS and JIA (Japan-India-Australia) inter-governmental Track-1 mechanisms. The JIUS and JIA are Indo-Pacific by their very membership.

The JAUS trilateral emerged with the strategic dialogue between Japan, Australia and the United States which was upgraded to Foreign Ministers level in 2006. JAUS ongoing open discussion of South China Sea stability has made China nervous as have JAUS trilateral naval deployments into the South China Sea and their *Cope North* trilateral air force exercises at Guam since 2012. The participation of Japanese forces alongside the US and Australian forces in *Operation Jackeroo* was explained by the Japanese ambassador as 'vital for addressing the challenges emerging in the Indo-Pacific' (Kusaka, 2017a). Having previously discussed cooperation in 'Asia-Pacific' settings, it was significant that the 2013 JAUS trilateral starting talking about both the Indian Ocean and the Asia-Pacific. This explains Abe's (2014) subsequent comment that their 'trilateral cooperation [...] will make the "confluence of the two seas," that is the Pacific and Indian Oceans, peaceful and more prosperous'. By 2018, the language was explicitly with regard to the Indo-Pacific, of 'working together to maintain and promote a free, open, prosperous and inclusive Indo-Pacific region' (JAUS, 2018); the free and open reflecting Japanese and US emphasis, but the 'inclusive' reflecting Australian concerns not to openly antagonise China.

The JAUS has also moved to infrastructure cooperation. A Trilateral Partnership for Infrastructure Investment in the Indo-Pacific was announced at their trilateral meeting in July 2018 which was pushed forward at their November 2018 meeting where the JBIC in cooperation with Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the US Overseas Private Investment Corporation signed a memorandum of understanding. This was explained as 'a force multiplier in the Indo-Pacific' which 'represent a substantial new commitment from Australia, Japan and the United States to the economic development of the Indo-Pacific through principles-based, sustainable investment in infrastructure' (JAUS, 2018).

The JIUS trilateral emerged with the Japan, India and the United States strategic dialogue which first met in December 2011 between senior officials. Tokyo hosted the second JIUS trilateral in April 2012 and the fifth JIUS trilateral in November 2013. The decision to upgrade the JIUS trilateral to the ministerial level in 2015 brought their high-level agreement on 'the growing convergence of their respective countries' interests in the Indo-Pacific region', China-related constrains on the importance of international law, peaceful settlement of disputes, freedom of navigation 'in the South China Sea' and 'agreed to work together to maintain maritime security through greater collaboration' (JIUS, 2015). This focus has been maintained. Thus, at the 2017 meeting, 'the three foreign ministers

agreed to strengthen their cooperation in the fields of maritime security and regional connectivity in order to realize a free and open Indo-Pacific' (JIUS, 2017) and made a point of noting the successful trilateral Malabar format. It then was upped a level with the trilateral meeting between Abe, Trump and Modi in December 2018. Like Modi, Abe also underpinned it to the Indo-Pacific 'Japan, the U.S., and India share fundamental values and strategic interests. And I certainly hope to further reinforce our trilateral partnership and to continuing our close cooperation toward realizing a free and open Indo-Pacific' (JIUS, 2018; also Sasae, 2018).

This deepening JIUS strategic dialogue has been matched by deepening JIUS naval exercises. JIUS exercises have been held in both the Bay of Bengal (2007, 2015, 2017) and West Pacific (2009, 2014, 2016, 2018) in a de facto Indo-Pacific deployment pattern. The context for Japan was China-centric and Indo-Pacific wide, 'sending a message to China [...] it's very significant that we can do this drill with the U.S. and India, not only with a view to the Pacific Ocean but also the Indian Ocean, where our sea lanes stretch' (Takashi & Kayakey, 2014).

The Japan–India–Australia (JIA) trilateral was initiated in June 2015 when Akitaka Saiki, the Vice Foreign Minister, met with Australian and Indian counterparts in June 2015. This is an explicitly Indo-Pacific trilateral that did not have the United States in it, but which was implicitly China-concerned. Satoru Nagao argues that it was a 'key agreement in the Indo-Pacific' with 'substantial potential for maintaining the balance of power in the East and South China Sea, the Indian Ocean and the South Pacific' (2015, p. 1), maritime stretches that are under threat from China (Nagao, 2018b). The second JIA trilateral meeting took place in February 2016 and was attended by Sumio Kusaka, Japan's ambassador to Australia. The next JIA trilaterals in April 2017 and December 2017 were attended by Shinsuke Sugiyama, the then Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, where 'the three sides highlighted the growing convergence of their respective countries' interests in the Indo-Pacific region' and reiterated their 'shared commitment to peace, democracy, economic growth and a rules-based order in the region' and 'deliberated on strengthening regional connectivity' (JIA, 2017).

Japan's strengthening bilateral and trilateral relations with Australia, India and the United States have led it to enthusiastically support the re-emergence of the Quadrilateral Alliance of Democracies which Abe had first embraced in 2007 when officials met in April 2007 for an unofficial Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and proceeded to hold quadrilateral naval exercises in the Bay of Bengal in September 2007. Chinese criticisms led Australia and India to step back from such an overt China-concerned formation. Moves to revive the Quad were facilitated by the Track-2 Quad-Plus Dialogue (QPD) between the Tokyo Foundation, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, the Heritage Foundation (USA) and the Vivekananda International Foundation (India)—which met in December 2013, February 2015 and February 2016. The Tokyo Foundation's (2015) take on the format was that this represented an 'Indo-Pacific [...] management of the China challenge'.

This quadrilateral format was revived at the official level in November 2017. Japan was clear that the revived Quadrilateral's purpose was 'to ensure a free and

open international order based on the rule of law in the Indo-Pacific' and 'ensuring freedom of navigation and maritime security in the Indo-Pacific' (Government of Japan, 2017; Nagao 2018a; also Yuasa, 2017). China was not mentioned but was thought about. Indo-Pacific underpinnings were reiterated at its further meetings in June 2018 to 'strengthen the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific, with shared democratic values in mind', although the phrasing of their 'support for a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region' included the qualifier 'inclusive' in a nod to Indian concerns not to overtly antagonise China (Government of Japan, 2018c). The meeting in November 2018 reiterated this Indo-Pacific thrust of seeking 'a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific' and their 'support for a free, open, and inclusive region that fosters universal respect for international law, freedom of navigation and overflight, and sustainable development' (Government of Japan, 2018i). This was aimed at China, though the insertion of 'inclusive' was again this nod to Indian concerns about not overtly antagonising China.

Japan's diplomatic horizons were reaffirmed by the Foreign Secretary Taro Kono in his address to the Japanese Parliament in January 2019. In his section, outlining how 'we will continue efforts to realise a "free and open Indo-Pacific"', he stressed that 'we will closely cooperate with related countries including ASEAN countries, the United States, Australia, India and New Zealand' to 'to ensure that the freedom of navigation and the rule of law spread and take root' and 'to enhance connectivity through the development of quality infrastructure' (Kono, 2019). The Indo-Pacific diplomacy, of course, did not include China in the listing, with the focus on freedom of navigation and rule of law aimed at China's activities in the South China Sea, and the focus on infrastructure aimed at shaping alternatives to China's MSR.

Conclusions

The Indo-Pacific maritime region has lodged itself firmly in Japan's foreign policy and security considerations, with Abe's Indo-Pacific formulations providing the template. This strategic shift has been reflected in accompanying policies. The question arises of how effective has this geopolitical and geoeconomic Indo-Pacific strategy been?

At the start of this article, Japan's Indo-Pacific strategy was outlined in threefold terms as one that explicitly seeks generally to (a) expand Japan's economic, military and diplomatic presence across the Indo-Pacific in order to (b) explicitly gain greater energy security and in order to (c) implicitly restrain China. The main empirical raw data primary sources dealing with Japan's strategic discourse, actorness and diplomacy have already had evaluative and assessing comments attached to them, but in this conclusion, we can now wrap them up against the threefold aims in the introduction.

With regard to the first general aim, to expand Japan's economic, military and diplomatic presence across the Indo-Pacific, there has been substantial success. Japan has indeed expanded its zone of operations outside its traditional East Asia/West Pacific settings into the wider waters of the South Pacific, South China Sea,

South-east Asia and India Ocean. This expansion of operations has operated with regard to the various regional and sub-regional structures, with Japan being able to set up a leading position in the resurrected TPP and privileged position in its PALM (Pacific basin) and Japan-Mekong Forum mechanisms. This expansion of operations has also operated with regard to Japan's maritime presence, where ongoing deployments into the South China Sea and Indian Ocean for a blue water navy are now being further underpinned by the conversion of helicopter carriers into aircraft carriers. This feature of *internal balancing* is matched by *external balancing*. Japanese diplomacy has been successful in moving from a dependency on just bilateral relationship with the United States to shaping not only a strengthened Indo-Pacific focus with them, but also significant security and strategic partnerships with other major China-concerned powers like Australia, France and India in various trilateral and quadrilateral settings. Useful sub-regional strategic partnerships have been shaped in South-east Asia, particularly with Vietnam.

With regard to the second aim, achieving energy security, Japan has achieved success through its sustained naval deployments into the Gulf of Aden since 2009, which as part of wider multilateral efforts has helped to significantly curb the much higher risks from piracy that plagued these waters. However, Japan's energy security is potentially threatened by Chinese maritime push into the India Ocean, and the South China Sea, under its 9-dash claim line that enclosed most of the South China Sea. Such a push could disrupt the SLOCs along which Japan's energy imports from the Middle East flow. This potential future energy threat is still there, which leads us to consider China.

With regard to the third aim, constraining China, Japan has had limits as well as successes with its Indo-Pacific strategy. The limits are clear over the South China Sea. On the one hand, there have been sustained calls by Japan in various Indo-Pacific forums and settings that China observed the rule of law in the South China Sea and sustained Japanese criticisms of the militarisation of artificial islands by China in the South China Sea. On the other hand, despite such Japanese pressure, China has refused to comply with the PCA adverse ruling against varied aspects of Chinese claims in the South China Sea and shows absolutely no signs or likelihood of reversing the militarisation of the artificial islands.

Japan's aims of preserving open sea lanes through its continued operations in the South China Sea are also difficult to judge for effectiveness since China claims it is not threatening such sea lane trade flows, which it needs itself. However, certainly, Japan's presence in the South China Sea makes it more difficult for China to restrict such trade flows, if it ever intended to, so Japan's strategy of increased presence in these waters serves as an effective enough insurance policy by Japan. Japan's presence in the South China Sea also helps countries (like India) as an 'Asian' counterbalance to China, which help smaller Southeast Asia states resist China's otherwise power advantages. Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific message, precisely because of Japan's own Asian credentials, may be able to operate more effectively in gathering regional support than parallel US efforts. More generally, Japan's expanded presence in regional and sub-regional forums dilutes China's own push into such structures. A simple but important point is that

Japan's own strengthening (*external balancing*) security links with other China-concerned actors in the Indo-Pacific, particularly, India, Australia and France alongside, of course, the United States gives greater security to Japan, a safety in number factor.

Japan's infrastructure initiatives—unilaterally and bilaterally with India, and trilaterally with Australia and the United States—are also effective in providing a 'geopolitical counterbalance' (Kotani, 2018) and alternatives for other states in the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia to China's MSR initiative. Japan's infrastructure initiatives mean that China will not have a monopoly of infrastructure influence in the region.

Ironically, Japan's coolness and mistrust (Mifune, 2018) of Chinese infrastructure motives have increased Chinese attempts to seek Japan out. Indeed, the official visit to Japan by Li Keqiang in May 2018 prompted the setting up of an inter-ministry Committee on Japan–China Business Development and Promotion in the Third Country whose first meeting was held in September 2018 and which led to the announcement following Abe's visit to China in October 2018 of joint Japanese–Chinese funding of infrastructure projects in the future. Japan may be able to operate from a position of some strength, precisely because of the viable alternatives it has shaped. The suggestion is that Japan's balancing constraint strategy has pushed China to offer some mutually beneficial economic engagement opportunities.

Nevertheless, China still remains a threat to Japan. Walts' *balance of threat* criteria still point that way. Japan's Indo-Pacific strategy has reduced the level of threat from China, but the strategy needs to be maintained.

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