



## Japan and India Relations: A Counterweight to China?

**OE Watch Commentary:** Chinese expansion into the South China Sea and Indian Ocean are reportedly prompting stronger military, economic, and trade ties between India and Japan. The accompanying four excerpted articles, published in *Nikkei Asian Review*, *Jansatta*, *Gujarat Samachar*, and *Japan Times* respectively, offer some insight into the situation.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe have met with each other a dozen times since they have been in office. Three of the articles discuss the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC), a growth strategy plan introduced jointly in 2016. In the \$40 billion plan, according to the *Gujarat Samachar* article, Japan wishes to invest \$30 billion and India \$10 billion. Some observers see AAGC as a competitor to China's Belt and Road Initiatives, which is a huge concern for India. It is worth noting that China is currently Africa's biggest economic partner.

According to the *Nikkei Asian Review* article, in recent years, the Indo-Japanese defense relationship has expanded quickly. For example, both countries have conducted three-way naval exercises with the United States in both the Indian Ocean and the Pacific. Both sides are also cooperating in the exchange of intelligence information, according to the *Jansatta* article. They have also agreed to work on the research and development of unmanned ground vehicles and robotics.

India and Japan have also begun formal negotiations over an acquisition and cross-servicing agreement, which would allow the Japan Self Defense Force and the Indian military to use each other's bases for logistical support. However, with Japan possibly allowing India to access its base in Djibouti and Japan gaining access to India's Andaman naval base, the *Nikkei Asian Review* article cautions that, while such logistics arrangements would be geared toward peacekeeping missions, "it may prompt a reaction from China – especially from elements who see such moves as attempts to encircle the country."

All four articles clearly point to India's strengthening relationship with Japan as a perceived strategy to counter China's growing power. However, according to the *Japan Times* article, Tokyo officially denies that Japan is trying to keep China's growing economic and military power in check through such strategy. Shinzo Abe seems to be walking a fine line. According to the last article, Abe, who recently returned from Beijing, where he "succeeded in significantly improving Japan's ties with Beijing by meeting... (Chinese President) Xi Jinping," continues to "pursue his apparent favored policy of strengthening Japan's ties with India as a counterweight to China's growing power in the region." **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

*“After the Doklam dispute, continuous cooperation from Japan has become extremely important for India.”*

**Source:** Kiran Sharma, “Modi-Abe Summit to Pave Way for Closer Security Cooperation,” *Nikkei Asian Review*, 26 October 2018. <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-Relations/Modi-Abe-summit-to-pave-way-for-closer-security-cooperation>

*The two governments have already agreed to work on research and development of unmanned ground vehicles and robotics, and plan to continue discussions. Modi and Abe are likely to talk about a bilateral Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement, a military logistics pact that would allow access to each other's bases.*

*The Indo-Japanese defense relationship has expanded quickly in recent years. The countries conduct three-way naval exercises with the U.S. in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific.*

*Signing an ACSA would pave the way for their defense forces to share not only bases but also fuel, food, water and other supplies. Shamshad Ahmad Khan, a visiting associate fellow at the Institute of Chinese Studies, said the governments reached an understanding on signing such a pact when Japanese Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera visited India in August.*

*Khan said it is “likely that Japan will allow India access to its base in Djibouti and India in turn will allow access to Japan to its Andaman naval base.” But he warned that, although the logistics arrangement would be geared toward peacekeeping missions, it may prompt a reaction from China -- especially from elements who see such moves as attempts to encircle the country.*

**Source:** “साझेदारी का सफर (Partnership Journey),” *Jansatta*, 30 October 2018. <https://www.jansatta.com/editorial/jansatta-editorial-journey-to-partnership-about-indo-japan-annual-summit/804868/>

*After the Doklam dispute, continuous cooperation from Japan has become extremely important for India. Shinzo Abe has returned from China visit only last week. That's why this meeting between the leaders of India and Japan would also be helpful in understanding the stance of China. If the two countries talk to China together, it can be a more effective step. Then, if the two undertake strategic cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region, they can pose a challenge to China. Apart from this, with cooperation in the exchange of intelligence information, the security arrangement in this region will become more concrete. Japan has always been cooperating with India in the technology sector. It has been investing in several projects in the industrial sector.*

(continued)





## Continued: Japan and India Relations: A Counterweight to China?

**Source:** “ભારત અને જાપાનના સંબંધો નવી ઊંચાઈ તરફ અગ્રેસર (India and Japan’s Relationship Leading to New Heights),” *Gujarat Samachar*, 30 October 2018. <https://www.gujaratsamachar.com/news/news-focus/news-focus-30-october-2018>

*After the Modi government came to power in 2014, there has been a significant improvement in the relations between India and Japan... Japan has been at the forefront in participating in the Make in India campaign launched by Prime Minister Modi. The Mumbai-Ahmadabad bullet train project worth \$15 billion is an important step under this campaign. However, even now, the project is facing a lot of challenges. Japan is ready to help eliminate the lack of capability in India which is a part of the economic strategy between the two countries. India and Japan together are working toward development of Asia-Africa Growth Corridor. On the other hand, the strategies of both countries are the same for the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue created for security of India-Pacific region. The two countries will also work for the development of infrastructural facilities in Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka and in the energy sector. In reality, it is happening for the first time in the history of independent India that a country is ready to cooperate with India to save its reputation among its neighboring countries and South Asia, i.e. countries in the Indian Ocean region.*

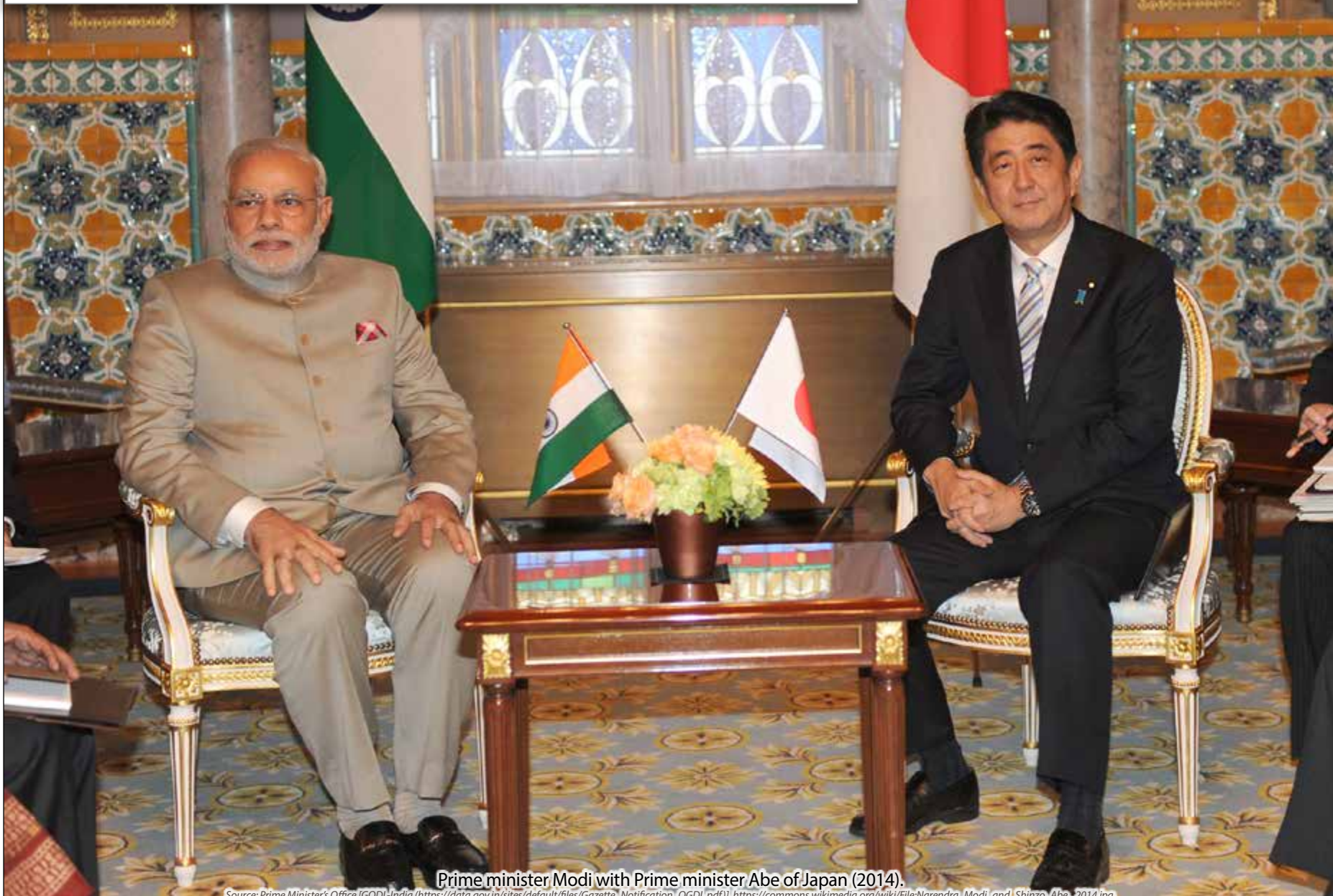
*As such, friendly relations have existed between India and Japan since 1958 but the chain of events taking place in the Asia-Pacific region for the past few years has made these two countries natural partners. China is the greatest factor in bringing the two countries on the same platform. In reality, China, increasingly becoming a bully in the Asia zone, is dangerous for the two countries. China is increasing its movements in the South China Sea that is equivalent to danger for other Asian countries including Japan and Indonesia. So, the way China is increasing its intrusion in the Indian Ocean is also akin to a warning for India.*

**Source:** Reiji Yoshida, “Modi and Abe Agree to Boost Ties as Tokyo Pledges Huge New Yen Loans for India,” *Japan Times*, 29 October 2018. <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/10/29/national/politics-diplomacy/modi-abe-agree-boost-ties-tokyo-pledges-huge-new-yen-loans-india/#.W-x9EvZFzZs>

*The concept is often seen as part of Japan’s effort to keep in check China’s growing economic and military power in the region, although Tokyo officially denies this.*

*Abe, who returned from Beijing on Saturday, has recently succeeded in significantly improving Japan’s ties with Beijing by meeting his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping there.*

*Still, Abe has continued to pursue his apparent favored policy of strengthening Japan’s ties with India as a counterweight to China’s growing power in the region.*



Prime minister Modi with Prime minister Abe of Japan (2014).

Source: Prime Minister’s Office [GODL-India ([https://data.gov.in/sites/default/files/Gazette\\_Notification\\_OGDL.pdf](https://data.gov.in/sites/default/files/Gazette_Notification_OGDL.pdf))], [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Narendra\\_Modi\\_and\\_Shinzo\\_Abe,\\_2014.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Narendra_Modi_and_Shinzo_Abe,_2014.jpg).