



The Japan-India-Australia "Alliance" as Key Agreement in the Indo-Pacific

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Abstract

The first Japan-India-Australia Trilateral Dialogue was held in Delhi, on June 2015. The event was to be the first of its kind owing to the fact that the United States was not included. The circumstance leading to this exclusion is connected with the launch of a much-needed security framework in the region, which has been the goal of the United States. In face of the shift in the balance of power between the United States and China, the United States seeks from both allies and friendly countries alike that they play a more active role in the Indo-Pacific. But what, precisely, would such a trilateral cooperation be able to achieve with respect to maintaining security in the said region? The present paper argues that the tripartite cooperation tactics, namely, of information sharing, capacity building, and the demonstration of presence possess substantial potential for maintaining the balance of power in the East and South China Sea, the Indian Ocean and the South Pacific. There presently exists an opportunity to advance key relations and to ensure long-term cooperation.

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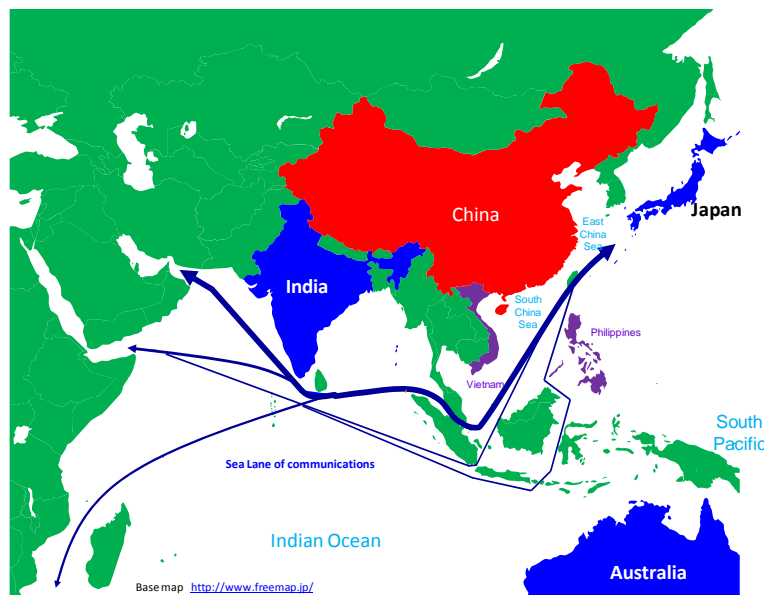
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Analysis

Several multinational security cooperation provisions are currently in place between Japan-India-US, Japan-India-US-Australia-Singapore, Japan-US-Australia etc. In most cases, such multinational security-cooperation provisions do include the United States. However, in June 2015, the first Japan-India-Australia Trilateral Dialogue held at Delhi was set to become the first of its kind since it did not include the United States. The question, then, is what, precisely, was the reason for these countries opting not to include the United States? With the exclusion of a major power is this trilateral cooperation still capable of contributing to security in the Indo-Pacific? The present paper provides a systematic analysis of the above-mentioned issues.

Figure 1: Location Map



Author's Illustration

Why Japan, India, Australia Chose not to Include the United States

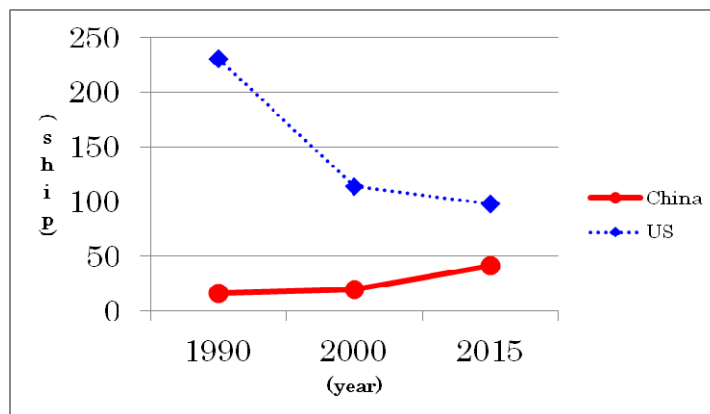
The non-inclusion of the United States has nothing remotely to do with like or dislike, but rather with an attempt to launch a much-needed security framework within the region. The Japan-India-Australia Trilateral Dialogue is a significant step towards the creation of such a new framework. The introduction of a new security framework within this region has, in fact, been the goal of United States. But what is the aim of the United States here?

Bilateral initiatives such as the Japan and the United States, the United States and India, the United States and Australia dialogues are highly valuable, but if the United States obtains all its relevant information this way, then how does it stand to benefit from such new alliances that seek new trilateral initiatives excluding the United States?

The answer is that the shift in the balance of power between the United States and China has led to consequent amendments in United States policy-making. The following information further underscores this point.

In 1990, the United States maintained 231 big surface combatants, namely, 3000 t full load displacement. By 2015, however, the number was substantially reduced to less than half, namely, to 98 big surface combatants. By contrast, during the same period China increased its big surface combatants from sixteen to forty-one. In other words, whereas China concentrates most of its fleets in Asia, the United States has obligations in various other regions of the world including Russia, Islamic extremism etc. Thus, the United States seeks from its allies and friendly countries that they play a more active role in the Indo-Pacific. In January 2015, the Commander of the United States Navy Seventh Fleet announced that he would welcome Japan's patrolling of the South China Sea¹, one such pertinent example illustrating the United States' desire to see Japan's collaboration in its naval activities.

Figure 2: United States and China Big Surface Combatants



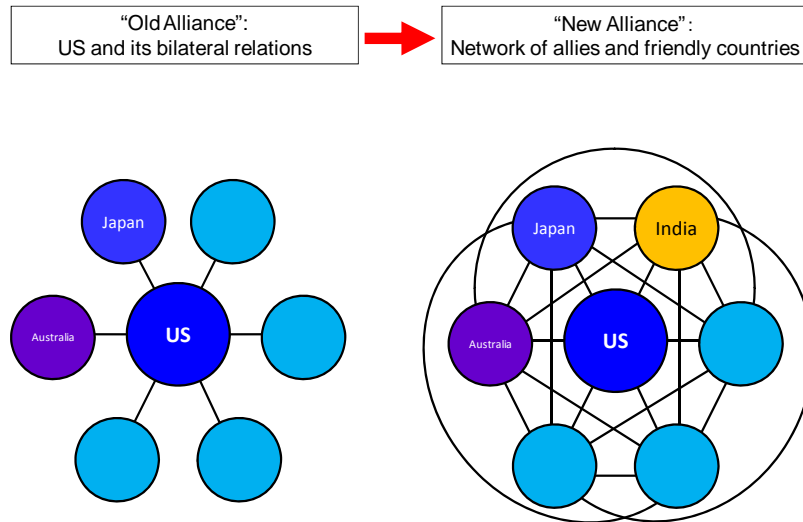
The International Institute for Strategic Studies, "The Military Balance"

This kind of more recent United States policy has seemingly baffled Japan and Australia, both of which have depended on the former for some considerable time. This indicates insufficient capability on the behalf of Japan and Australia. Tackling this issue thus calls for a combined initiative between Japan, Australia and other United States allies. Furthermore, the missing, but integral link in the equation is collaboration with India. In other words, since India is currently emerging as a stable democracy it experiences similar concerns with respect to China². In view of the above, it thus stands to reason that the Japan-India-Australia Trilateral Dialogue has been initiated. Instead of the former system of bilateral alliance, the new cooperation between the United States and its other allies, together with friendly countries calls for the formation of a thoroughly reviewed security network system: The epoch of "New Alliances".

¹ Tim Kelly and Nobuhiro Kubo, "U.S. would welcome Japan air patrols in the South China Sea", (Reuters, 29 January 2015)
 Web source: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/01/29/us-japan-southchinasea-idUSKBN0L20HV20150129>

² Satoru Nagao, "Japan, the United States, and India as Key Balancers in Asia" (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2015)
 Web Source: http://csis.org/files/publication/150331_Nagao_JapanUSIndia.pdf

Figure 3: "Old Alliance" and "New Alliance"



Author's Illustration

The Scope of the Trilateral Cooperation for Security in the Indo-Pacific

What is this trilateral cooperation capable of achieving with respect to maintaining security in the Indo-Pacific? Three aspects become apparent when addressing the issue of the South China Sea: information sharing, capacity building and demonstrating presence. The following section provides a detailed analysis of these three aspects:

Information sharing: when countries seek information on current events in the South China Sea, they need to dispatch warships or aircraft to confirm such information. Recently, there has been an increase in the number of Japan's Maritime Self Defense warships and aircraft dispatched to Vietnam and the Philippines. It is worth noting here that during the Cold War, Australian submarines collected vital information in the South China Sea. The present situation calls for a similar initiative. The periodic presence of India's naval warships in the countries of the South China Sea has likewise been on the increase. However, since each of the warships and airplanes can deploy only for a short period of time, the three countries in question could alternate deployment and timing, accordingly share the obtained information, and thus carry out regular inspections of the South China Sea.

Secondly, capacity-building offers another example of what could be done. For some considerable time now Japan has supported the development of anti-piracy measures and disaster management capacities in South East Asia. Presently, Japan is also donating ten patrol ships and aircraft to both Vietnam and Philippines. Similarly, Australia has also trained Special Forces and facilitated UNPKO training in Vietnam. India's comprehensive project for training submarine crews and fighter pilots in Vietnam similarly displays a robust capacity-building strategy. India also plans to donate four offshore patrol vessels to Vietnam. The best outcome in capacity building would thus be a scenario in which these three countries were to enter into project collaboration, whereby overlaps could be avoided and effective support provided. For example, if Japan and Australia



built an airport and other facilities in Vietnam, and if the Indian Air Force trained Vietnam's fighter pilots, Vietnam would then acquire the benefits of an airport and fighter pilot training. As this example illustrates, the Japan-India-Australia joint support of Vietnam would guarantee a win-win-win-win situation.

Thirdly, these three countries could also cooperate in demonstrating or enhancing their presence. By presence, the following is meant. In 2011, the Japan-US-India Trilateral Malabar Exercises were planned to be carried out near the Okinawa islands of Japan. In spite of the fact that Japan was unable to join the exercises owing to the Great East Earthquake, it was nevertheless grateful to the United States and India for executing the exercises. Such a demonstration of presence by the friendly countries of Japan made sense, since it is in the Okinawa islands region that China has increased naval and air activities. Japan had to divert some of its warships otherwise deployed in the Okinawa islands region to the earthquake rescue operation in order to deal with the earthquake. Under such reduced numbers of warships in the region, the presence showed by friendly countries such as the United States and India, sends a strong signal to China to deter from exercising its policy of aggression against Japan.

When, in 2014, China commenced oil exploration in the South China Sea region – a region claimed by both China and Vietnam – both countries' security ships collided. At the time, Japan's warship bearing United States and Australian army personnel – visited Vietnam in a demonstration of their partnership and support of the country. Furthermore, when responding to questions concerning the South China Sea in December 2012, navy Chief Admiral D K Joshi remarked that "when the requirement is there for situations where country's interests are involved, for example ONGC Videsh, we will be required to go there and we are prepared for that. Are we holding exercises for that nature, the short answer is yes³". Where Japan, India and Australia are able to demonstrate their presence simultaneously, collective influence will be correspondingly greater.

The three aforementioned cooperation tactics i.e. information sharing, capacity building, demonstrating presence are not only relevant for the South China Sea, but no less for the Indian Ocean and South Pacific region – regions in which China has begun expanding its influence. If India were to demonstrate its will to be the most responsible security provider in the Indian Ocean, Japan and Australia would be able to support India's initiatives, since both Japan and Australia are likewise capable of exerting their respective influence in this region, albeit a limited one. Japan has already deployed two warships to the Indian Ocean since 2001, and has periodically held joint exercises with India. Australia holds the strategically significant Cocos Islands in the Indian Ocean. Moreover, these three countries have already collaborated in the Tsunami disaster management operation in 2004, in the search operation for the missing Malaysian Airlines aircraft in 2014, and various current anti-piracy measures. They have, furthermore, participated in the Indian Ocean Rim Association and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium. It is by way of these collaborative activities, that India's leadership in the Indian Ocean is to be supported by Japan and Australia.

By the same token, if Australia is concerned about China's influence in the South Pacific region, Japan and India can also support Australia's initiatives. Japan has influence in the South Pacific region due to its having provided economic support to the pacific island countries for considerable time. As for India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Fiji in 2014, and India hosted the fourteen island nations' Forum for Indo-Pacific Islands Cooperation in August 2015. India is also set to open a space station in Fiji.

³ India set protect its interests in the disputed South China Sea: Navy chief (The Times of India, 3 Dec 2012)
Web Source: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/India-will-protect-its-interests-in-disputed-South-China-Sea-Navy-chief/articleshow/17463910.cms>



Present Opportunities

As the present analysis shows, the Japan-India-Australia cooperation has considerable potential in the East and South China Sea, the Indian Ocean and South Pacific region. This opportunity should thus not be overlooked. In 2007, all of Japan, India, Australia including the United States and Singapore participated in the Malabar exercises, and thus demonstrated their intention to collaborate. However, similar exercises could not be held again following China's strong criticism of the above. China's assertive stance was at the time less conspicuous than it is now; the result was that both India and Australia were obliged to respect China's position.

Today, however, China's assertive capability has worsened considerably. Japan, India and Australia all agree as to the importance of trilateral cooperation. We thus now have the opportunity to bolster concrete relations such as will ensure long-term cooperation. The Japan-India Australia Trilateral Exercises should be initiated, and defense technological cooperation – including Soryu class submarines, US-2 rescue planes etc. should also be actively pursued.

Remarks: Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.

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Satoru Nagao is Research Fellow at The Tokyo Foundation, Lecturer in Security at the Department of Political Studies at the Faculty of Law, Gakushuin University, and Research Fellow at the Japan Forum for Strategic Studies. Dr. Nagao was awarded his PhD by Gakushuin University in 2011 for his thesis entitled "India's Military Strategy", the first such research thesis on this topic in Japan. Gakushuin University is a premier institute from which members of the Japanese Imperial Family have also graduated. He was Visiting Scholar at the Center for Strategic & International Studies, in Washington D.C. Furthermore, he was Research Fellow at the Ocean Policy Research Foundation in Tokyo, was a post-doctoral fellow at the Research Institute for Oriental Cultures at Gakushuin University, and was Security Analyst at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA); he was also a First Lieutenant of the Japan Ground Self Defense Forces (Japanese Army). Dr. Nagao has authored numerous books and articles on security issues, and he also writes for a column on related topics at Nikkei Business, the journal of one of Japan's leading newspapers.



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