

# What Can a Japan-US-India-Australia Cooperation Do?

Written by Satoru Nagao

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SATORU NAGAO, MAY 27 2018

Currently, furthering cooperation in security relations between Japan and India seems to have become more plausible. The security cooperation between Japan-India during June to August 2017 was a good example. That time, India and Bhutan's armed forces faced China's incursion at Doklam in Bhutan. During that time, Japan-US-India started joint maritime exercises *Malabar 2017* on 6 July. In this exercise, the largest warships of three countries including aircraft carriers of US and India and helicopter carriers of Japan joined the exercises in the Indian Ocean.

Several multinational security cooperation provisions are currently in place between Japan-US-India, Japan-US-India-Australia-Singapore, Japan-US-Australia, etc. In most cases, such multinational security-cooperation provisions include the US. 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 US.

Why ja Japan the US, India and Australia sought security cooperation? Those countries relations have advanced since the 2000s when the threat perception of China began to increase. Therefore, China is certainly a decisive factor when assessing Japan-India security cooperation. Therefore, this article will analyze three following questions: (1) What changes have occurred around China? (2) To adjust the situation, what kind of security system are we seeking? (3) What can a Japan-US-India-Australia cooperation do?

### What Changes Have Occurred Around China?

China has been expanding its military activities around Japan and countries around the South China Sea, Indo-China border area and the Indian Ocean. Japan Ministry of Defense White Paper pointed out that "in FY 2012, the number of scrambles against Chinese aircraft exceeded the number of those against the Russian aircraft for the first time". The number of scrambles against Chinese aircrafts was further increased to 851 times in 365 days in 2016.

In the South China Sea, too, China has expanded their military activities. Although the Permanent Court of Arbitration rejected China's ownership claim of 90% of South China Sea in 2016, China is ignoring the verdict and building three new airports on their seven artificial islands in the South China Sea. These facts indicate that China will deploy ballistic missile submarines under the protection of fighter jets launched from these artificial islands and then exclude all foreign ships and airplanes that might identify their submarines.

In the Indo-China border area, India recorded nearly 300-500 incursions every year, since 2011. India plus Bhutan faced China's incursion at Doklam in Bhutan in 2017. In addition, China is deploying troops in "Pakistan Occupied Kashmir" as well as a part of "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor" which is core project of "One Belt One Road(or Belt and Road Initiatives)".

Since the middle of the 2000s, China's military activities in the Indian Ocean have been expanding. At least seven deployments were recorded with Chinese submarines patrolling the Indian Ocean since 2013. China also exports submarines to India's neighbouring countries. The activities of these submarines indicate that these Chinese submarines can potentially attack India's nuclear ballistic missile submarines and sea lane of communications. This means that these submarines will, to a great deal, regulate India's activities. China's strategic weakness is, however, that it does not have a naval port in the region. Therefore, China is setting up their base in Djibouti. In addition, under

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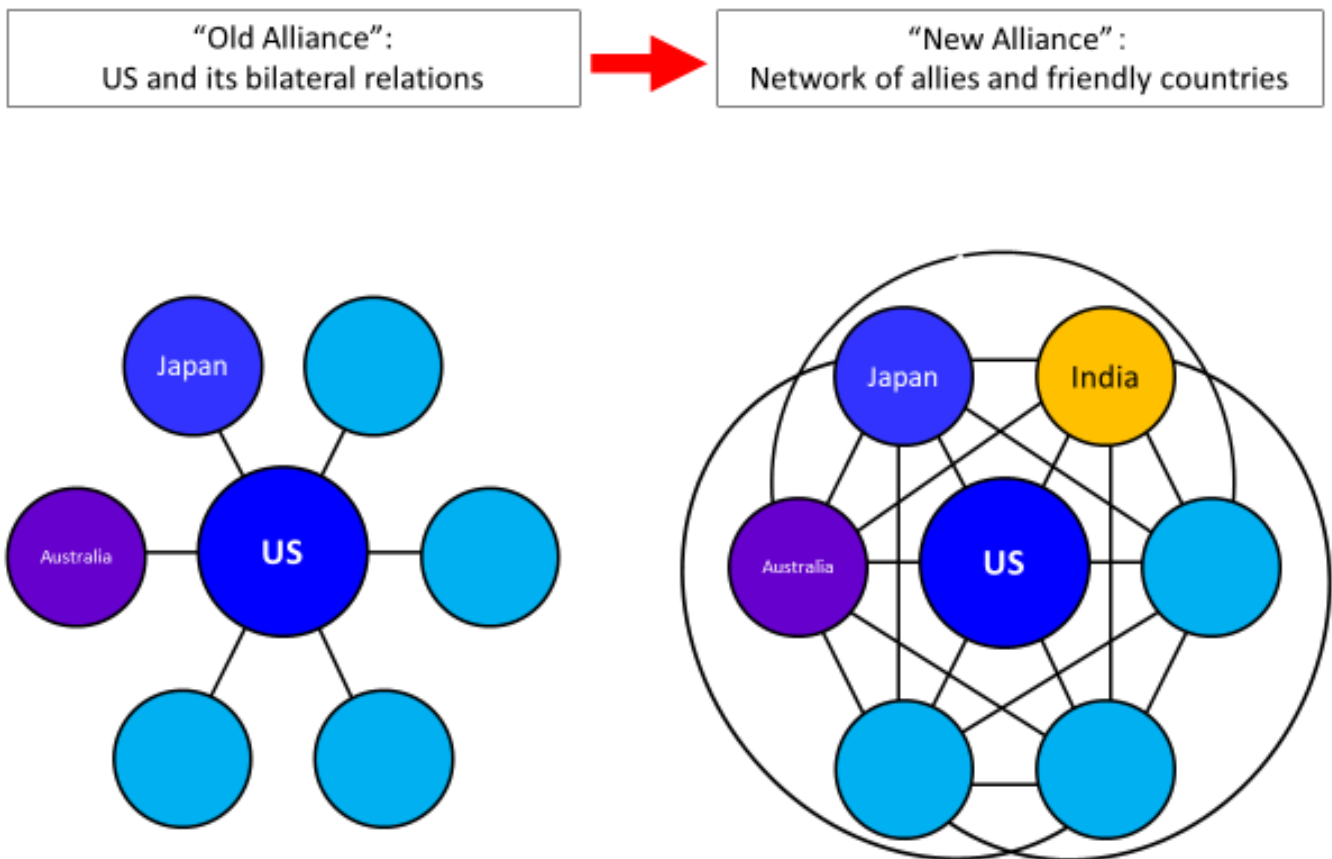
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the “String of Pearl Strategy”, China is investing to develop many ports.

Why has China’s assertiveness heightened the Indian Ocean lately? It seems that the tendency of China’s maritime expansion has been based on military balance, if history is any guide. For example, when France withdrew from Vietnam in the 1950s, China occupied half of the Paracel Islands. China occupied the other half of the Paracel Islands in 1974 immediately after the Vietnam War ended and the US withdrew from the region. After the Soviet Union withdrew from Vietnam, China attacked the Spratly Islands controlled by Vietnam in 1988. Along similar lines, after the US withdrew from the Philippines, China occupied Mischief Reef, which both the Philippines and Vietnam claimed<sup>[1]</sup>. Therefore, a need exists for us to maintain a military balance with China. How should that be done? We need a new security system.

## To Adjust The Situation, What Kind Of Security System Japan-US Are Seeking?

Figure 1: old and new security system



**Source:** Satoru Nagao, “The Japan–India–Australia “Alliance” as Key Agreement in the Indo-Pacific”

For a long time, “Hub and Spoke system” have maintained order in the Indo-Pacific (Figure 1). Under this system, both Japan and Australia are US allies, but Japan and Australia share no close security relations. Thus, this system is heavily dependent on US military power.

However, a salient feature of the recent security situation is changing US–China military balance. For example,

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during 2000-2017, the US commissioned 15 new submarines. During the same period, China commissioned at least 44 submarines. US allies and friendly countries need to fill the power vacuum to maintain military balance. As a result, a new security framework has emerged. This framework is a security network of US allies and friendly countries. This cooperation includes not only US-led cooperation, but also Japan-India-Australia, Japan-India-Vietnam, and India-Australia-Indonesia, which do not include the US. In this case, Japan-US-India-Australia cooperation will be key.

## Capabilities of a Japan-US-India-Australia Cooperation

Firstly, we should focus on the linkage of Indo-China border area and the East China Sea. For example, if India cooperates with Japan-US, India will not need to deal with all the Chinese fighter jets at once because China is likely to keep some of their fighter jets in their east side against Japan-US, and vice versa. Therefore, under the Japan-US-India-Australia strategic cooperation, by using know-how of high-end military infrastructural development, Japan-US-Australia is willing to support India's efforts to modernize India's defence in the Indo-China border area. Since 2014, Japan has planned to invest in India's strategic road project in the Northeast region of India. By using this road, the Indian army can deploy more forces and supply to the border area. Japan can export radar system to strengthen air defence capability of India. The US has already exported heavy transport planes, middle transport planes, attack helicopters, heavy lift helicopters and ultra light howitzers for India's 17 Corps army. By using these type of equipment, the 17 Corps can possess offensive capabilities against China.

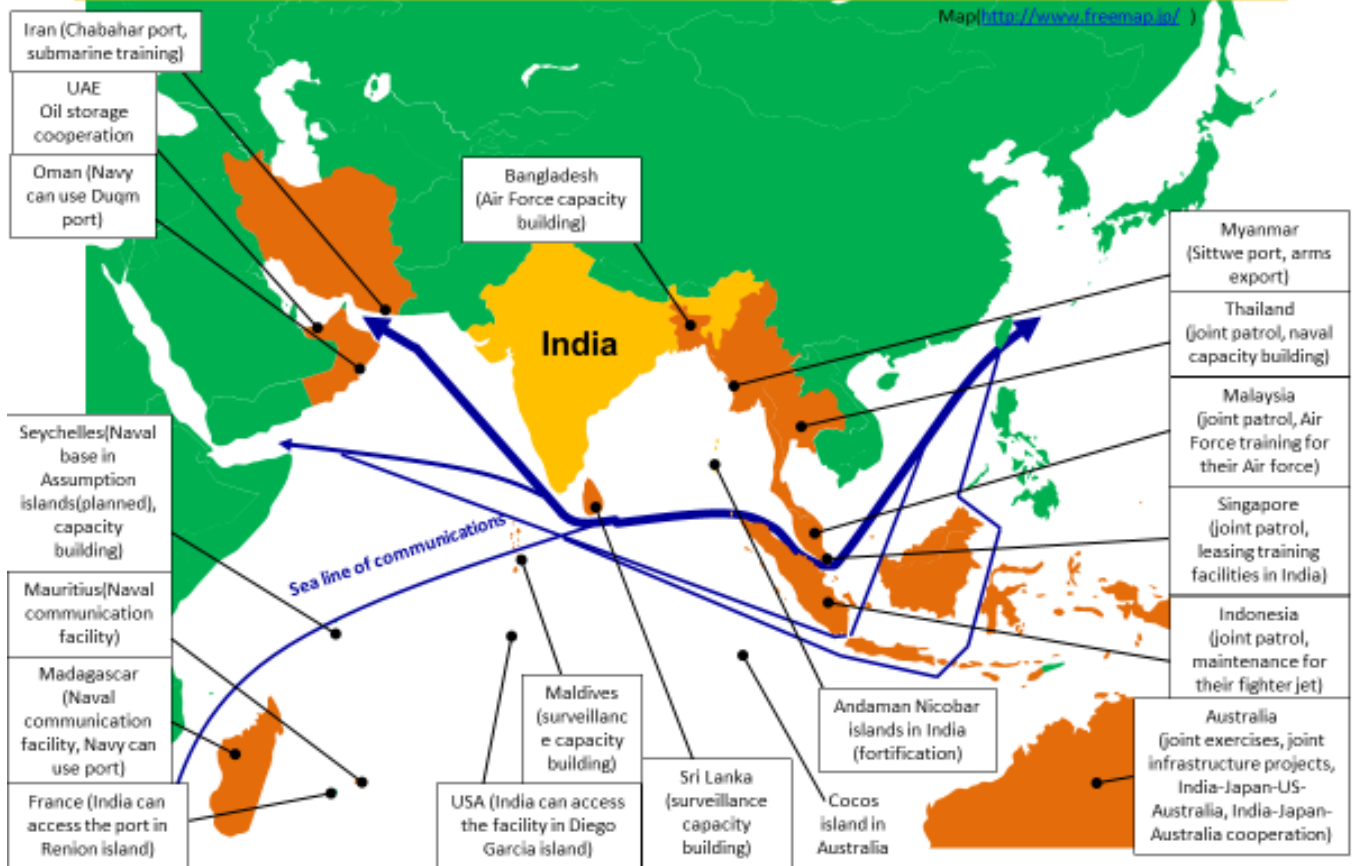
Secondly, in the Indian Ocean, if India has capabilities, Japan and the US will be able to release themselves from the heavy burden of safeguarding the Indian Ocean and can deploy more military forces in the East China Sea and the South China Sea to maintain the military balance. Also, India will be set for a key role in the Indian Ocean. Recently, India has shown active presence (Figure 2). India will be a new hope for Japan, the US and Australia. In turn, Japan, the US and Australia should share the know-how related to anti-submarine capabilities and enhance India's capability as a security provider. In the "Japan-India Joint Statement Toward a Free, Open and Prosperous Indo-Pacific" in September 2017, "They noted the ongoing close cooperation between the Japan Maritime Self-Defence Force (JMSDF) and the Indian Navy in various specialised areas of mutual interest, including anti-submarine aspects."

Figure 2: India's presence in the Indian Ocean

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## India's presence in the Indian Ocean



\*The Figure was made by the author

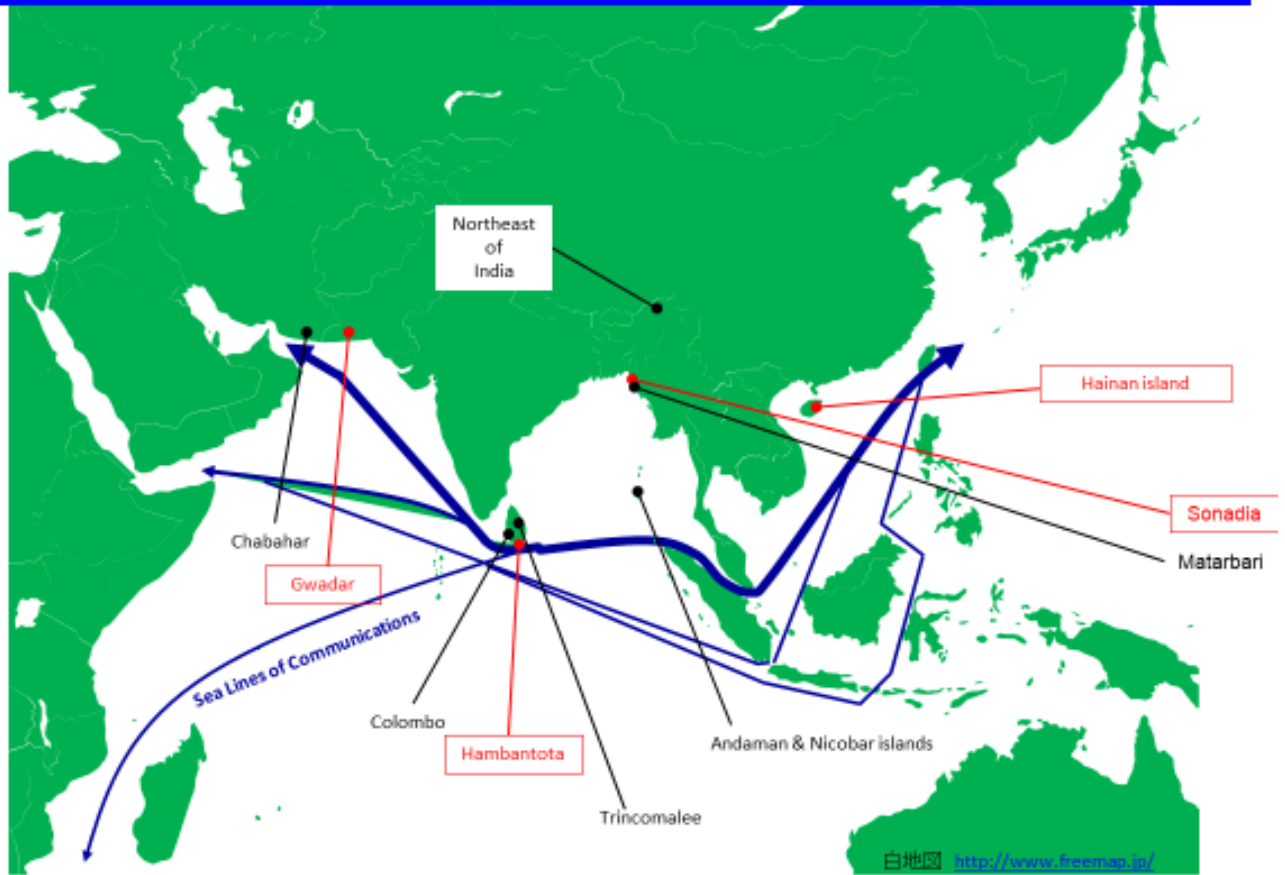
Furthermore, a cooperation among Japan, the US and India would also be useful in developing infrastructure in countries around India. For example, Bangladesh has already chosen Japan's Martabali port project instead of China's Sonadia port project (Figure 3). Thus, there is a possibility that Japan and India can use a similar pattern. Currently, Japan and India are seeking to build the Trincomalee port in Sri Lanka. If the Trincomalee port project succeeds, then the importance of China's Hambantota port for Sri Lanka will decline. The possibility exists that the Chabahar port project in Iran can mitigate the importance of the Chinese Gwadar port in Pakistan. The Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) affects China's growing influence in Africa. In this case, the US and India also cooperate in training African troops for UN PKO as a capacity building project.

Figure 3: Japan-India infrastructure cooperation

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### Japan-India infrastructure cooperation



Source: author

Thirdly, Japan, the US, India and Australia can also collaborate to support Southeast Asian countries around the South China Sea. The Southeast Asian countries around the South China Sea need to strengthen their military power with a trustworthy partner to provide coastal countries military support. Thus, Japan, the US, India and Australia should collaborate with each other and support these countries more effectively. For example, Japan, the US, India and Australia can collaborate to support Vietnam. And in the Andaman-Nicobar Islands in India, Japan-US is planning to support infrastructure projects.

The Andaman-Nicobar Islands in India are strategically important. These islands are near the Malacca Strait and SLOCs. As described above, China's submarines venture into the Indian Ocean. These submarines sail from Hainan Island of China through the South China Sea and Malacca Strait. Therefore, to track China's submarine activities, the Andaman-Nicobar Islands are an excellent location. India is modernizing infrastructure to deploy more larger warships, patrol planes, transport planes in the Andaman-Nicobar Islands. And since 1993, India has engaged in joint exercises with Singapore. Since 2002, India has started coordinated patrol with Indonesia. In 2005, the India-Thailand joint patrol has started. Now, India is set to join the Malacca Strait Patrol Group, which comprises forces from Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaysia.

No detailed official report has been published, but some media reports indicate that Japan, India, and the US are planning to install a submarine detecting sensor system along the coastline of the Bay of Bengal. Japan has decided to support radar facilities and power plants in the Andaman-Nicobar Islands. Japan is also planning to build a light

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fiber cable connection between mainland India and the Andaman–Nicobar Islands. Although these are civil projects to resolve electric power shortage difficulties, a high probability exists that the project will have strategic effects related to China.

Furthermore, the US and India are negotiating to share information when Chinese submarines leave from Hainan. If Japan invests infrastructure projects in the Andaman–Nicobar Islands, these infrastructure projects enhance India's naval capability to detect Chinese submarine activities.

In addition, Japan has invested in India's strategic road project in the Northeast region of India since 2014. If road connections were made to increase India – Southeast Asia trade, the possibility exists that growing India – Southeast Asian trade could mitigate China's influence in Southeast Asia. Although China's attitudes related to the South China Sea have harmed claims of Southeast Asian countries, some Southeast Asian countries have not shown a sufficiently strong stance to stop China's activities. One reason some Southeast Asian countries cannot adhere to their claims so strongly is that their economy depends too much on trade with China. To neutralize China's influence, Southeast Asia needs other trade partners.

Consequently, road connections between India and Southeast Asia have such effects. Currently, Japan is building an East–West Economic Corridor from Vietnam to Myanmar. This Japan road network project can connect road projects in Northeastern India. The main target is increasing India – Southeast Asian trade. In the “Japan-India Joint Statement: Toward a Free, Open and Prosperous Indo-Pacific” on September 2017 mentioned that “The two Prime Ministers welcomed the Japan-India cooperation on development of India's North Eastern Region (NER) as a concrete symbol of developing synergies between India's Act East policy and Japan's Free and Open Indo Pacific Strategy.”

To achieve this goal, what kind of systems ought to be established? In March 2017, the Japan-India Dialogue on ASEAN has launched. Through such dialogue, both Japan and India (with the US and Australia) can share the information, better identify the needs of these Southeast Asian countries and decide how to cooperate or support these countries.

### Conclusion

Nowadays, further security cooperation of Japan-US-India-Australia is increasingly plausible. The reason is related to changing US-China power balance. US allies and friendly countries now require new security cooperation. In this case, Japan-India-US-Australia cooperation will be key. The time has come to proactively further this cooperation to ensure prosperous stability in the whole of Indo-Pacific.

### Notes

[1] Japan Ministry of Defense, China's activities in the South China Sea, December 2016.

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### About the author:

**Satoru Nagao** is Visiting Fellow at Hudson Institute in Washington D.C. His research area is Japan-US-India security cooperation. He was awarded his PhD by Gakushuin University in 2011 for his thesis titled “India's Military Strategy”, the first such research thesis on this topic in Japan.