

Diverging Views, Shared Interests: Japan-India Security Partnership

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Abstrak

Abstract Since the early Cold War era, Japan has cooperated exclusively with the United States in security matters. However, since the end of the Cold War, Japan began to diversify its bilateral security cooperation with other countries in the region, including those who do not necessarily share its immediate strategic interests, such as India. This article examines decision to choose India as its bilateral security partner, which started since 2008. This study relies on desk research, analyzing primary and secondary data collected from 2008-2025. The research applied qualitative deductive method and uses triangulation as an analytical tool. The analysis is grounded in neoclassical realism, which highlights the interaction between systemic pressures and domestic-level variables. Systemic factors examined included increasing maritime insecurity (terrorism and piracy) and the rise of Chinese maritime capabilities. In addition, the domestic perception and role of the foreign policy executive, particularly Prime Minister Abe, is taken into consideration. Findings from this research show that systemic pressures, especially from rising China, have pushed Japan to seek cooperation with like-minded regional actors. Furthermore, Abe's "Confluence of the two seas" speech framed India as the linchpin in Japan's Indo-Pacific strategy, citing its shared democratic values and status as a maritime states. These factors, combined with favorable elite perceptions of India, helped form Japan's decision to choosing India as its security partner.

Abstrak Sejak awal masa Perang Dingin, Jepang bekerja sama dalam isu keamanan secara eksklusif dengan Amerika Serikat. Namun, pasca berakhirnya Perang Dingin, Jepang mulai memperluas hubungan keamanan bilateral dengan negara lain, meskipun negara-negara tersebut tidak memiliki kepentingan strategis yang sama, salah satunya adalah India. Artikel ini menganalisis keputusan Jepang memilih India sebagai mitra keamanan bilateral yang telah berjalan sejak tahun 2008. Penelitian ini menggunakan studi dokumen dan literatur untuk mengumpulkan data primer dan sekunder tahun 2008-2025. Penelitian ini menggunakan kerangka analisis realisme neoklasik untuk menelusuri alasan Jepang memilih India sebagai mitra kerja sama keamanan walaupun kepentingan strategis keduanya berbeda. Penelitian ini juga menerapkan pendekatan kualitatif-deduktif dan metode triangulasi untuk menganalisis data yang telah dikumpulkan. Analisis penelitian ini menekankan pada keterhubungan tekanan dan pengaruh sistematis, yaitu ketidakamanan maritim dan meningkatnya kekuatan Tiongkok, serta persepsi domestik terhadap pengaruh sistemik, yaitu persepsi pengambil keputusan Jepang seperti Perdana Menteri Abe. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tekanan sistemik terhadap Jepang, khususnya meningkatnya kekuatan Tiongkok, mendorong Jepang untuk bekerja sama dengan negara di kawasan yang menganut nilai yang serupa. Selain itu, pidato "Confluence of the two seas" PM Abe juga merefleksikan pandangan positif pengambil keputusan Jepang. Kedua hal tersebut kemudian mendorong Jepang untuk memilih India sebagai mitra keamanannya.

Tentang Penulis:

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Introduction

The anarchic nature of the international system forces states to rely on themselves to maintain their own survival. This created a condition where states are encouraged to build their power to face threats against their survival, namely other states. When facing threats, states have two

options, to develop their capabilities or cooperate with other states. One way that a state can cooperate with other states is through security cooperation.

Security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region has historically been monopolized by defense alliance between the United States and its allies in Asia, such as Japan, the Philippines, and Thailand. By the end of the Cold War, security cooperation in the region expanded to had expanded to a multilateral level, as shown by attempts to build security community in the region by ASEAN (Caballero-Anthony, 2020). The rise of multilateral security initiatives, however, does not preclude the importance of bilateral cooperation, as it is the preferred approach by most countries in the region. Japan is one of such cases.

Since the end of the Second World War, Japanese defense policy has been heavily restricted. This is due to constraint put by the new constitution that prohibited Japan to maintain any kind of military power. Furthermore, the constitution also renounces the use of force in resolving international disputes (The Constitution of Japan, n.d.). In conjunction with the signing of the San Francisco Peace Treaty, the Yoshida administration also signed the U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Treaty. The security pact established a military alliance between the United States and Japan and in turn guaranteed Japan's security under U.S. protection (Maizland & Cheng, 2021).

The fall of the Soviet Union at the end of the Cold War caused a great change in security policy. Losing its primary threat, the United States began reducing its defense spending and drawing down overseas deployment. The change of policy created new dilemma for U.S. allies, especially Japan. This development then pushed Japan to recalibrate its defense policy by building new multilateral security initiatives and expanding bilateral security partnerships with other countries (Midford, 2000, p. 375). However, these new security partners do not always share immediate strategic interests with Japan, one such country is India.

Japan and India security cooperation is growing rapidly due to Japan's interest in securing its sea lines of communication (SLOC). The Indian Ocean is important for Japan's SLOC as it is the primary route for Japan's energy imports (Kotani, 2011). With the rise of maritime security incidents, such as terrorism and piracy, the flow of Japanese energy imports from the Middle East may be disrupted. Furthermore, Japan also factored China's increasing maritime activities into their interest in the Indian Ocean (White, 2020). Among these factors, rising Chinese maritime capabilities has come the most influential driver towards of regional security cooperation. To address these challenges, Japan needs partners in the region. India's position as regional power in the Indian Ocean region put them as a potential partner for Japan.

However, the two countries' security cooperation is overshadowed by differences in strategic interests. Japan's strategic interest is to ensure rules-based order remain the status quo in the international system. This can be seen in Japan's efforts to counterbalance China's increasing power by expanding security cooperation with other countries (Cabinet Secretariat of Japan, 2013). On the other hand, India is implementing strategic autonomy policy, which does not favor any major power and gives itself a degree of independence in its foreign policy (Ranjeev, 2025).

This is reflected in the different actions taken by Japan and India towards Russia on the issue of Ukraine-Russia War. India did not boycott trade with Russia as it needed Russia's support to maintain its weapon system, which mostly sourced from Russia. On the other hand, Japan takes a strong position against Russia as a manifestation of its interest in maintaining rules-based order (Solanki & Togashi, 2022). These differences in interests tend to hinder security cooperation between countries. Nevertheless, security cooperation between Japan and India could be conducted despite the differing interests. Considering the differences of both countries' strategic interests, this article can be summarized into the following question: Why did Japan chose India as its security partner even though the two countries have different strategic interests?

To explain Japan decision in choosing India as its security partner, this article is divided into four sections. The first section will elaborate the background of the security cooperation, explaining the research question, as well as the literature review. The second section will explain the analytical framework used in the article to answer the research question. The third section will explain research methods utilized, and the final section will briefly explain the Japan-India security cooperation and then elaborate the findings of the article and its conclusion.

Literature Review

Previous studies that discussed Japan and India strategic partnership have differing views on the partnership. First, the strategic partnership between the two countries is built on the basis of a common interest to balance China (Chand & Garcia, 2017; Joshi & Pant, 2015; Keerthiraj & Sekiyama, 2023; Shaheen & Mu, 2023). Chand and Garcia (2017) highlighted the securitization of China by Japan, India, and Southeast Asian states, which allowed Japan and India cooperate closely in providing security assistance for the Southeast Asian states. While Joshi and Pant (2015) argued that weakening United States-led security order provided rationale for Japan-India strategic partnership, which worked as “hedging” for both countries. However, there is a view that this partnership will only hold as long as China remains as a threat for Japan and India (Mukherjee, 2018). Therefore, if China ceases to become a threat, the strategic partnership may falter and fail.

The second group of studies focused on Japan’s foreign policy towards India. Previous studies discussed how Japan’s approach towards India is based on Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy. The strategy promotes cooperation in various fields with countries in the Indo-Pacific region. In addition, the strategy also underlines the need for diffusing certain values in maritime security cooperation and infrastructure development (Yoshimatsu, 2019). Japan’s policy towards India has also evolved from soft balancing to hedging as an attempt to counterbalance the rise of China. Aside from the rise of China, India’s growing power is also considered as another driving factor for the strengthening of Japan-India cooperation (Jain, 2008). However, security cooperation between Japan and India has only been developed recently and seen as volatile. But the cooperation between the two countries has the potential to develop further (Brewster, 2010). The security cooperation indeed has expanded further. This led to the perception that Japan’s security cooperation with India is highlighted as a new type of defense cooperation model, which is US-led federated defense model (Ishibashi, 2018; Yoshimatsu, 2020).

From the two groups of previous studies, it can be summarized that the relations between Japan and India have rapidly developed into a strategic partnership. The strategic partnership between two countries is not only limited to economic partnership, but also in the field of security. Japan sees India as a potential partner in dealing with the rise of China. Even though both countries do not necessarily share the same strategic interests, security cooperation between Japan and India has flourished. Although previous studies have discussed Japan and India security cooperation, very little has been discussed from the perspective of Japan and role of the prime minister in creating the cooperation. Therefore, this article seeks to fill the research gap on Japan-India security cooperation, by analyzing The Japanese decision of choosing India as its partner through neoclassical realism approach.

Analytical Framework: Neoclassical Realism

Neoclassical realism was first coined by Gideon Rose in 1998 in his article, “*Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy*”. Neoclassical realism is a development from classical realism and structural realism. It attempts to bridge the previous theoretical approaches to foreign policy formation. The theory adopts two variables from existing theories, which are

systemic pressures and influences from offensive realism and defensive realism. The other variable is internal factors or domestic factors from *innenpolitik* (Rose, 1998). The following paragraphs will explain systemic pressures and influences as the independent variable in the analytical framework. Then, it will elaborate on how domestic factors work as the intervening variable on systemic pressures. Domestic factors, such as foreign policy executives' perceptions, translated systemic pressures into working foreign policy.

Neoclassical realism theory considers that systemic pressures and influences alone are not enough to shape an actor's foreign policy. Systemic influences must go through filtering process by internal parties of an actor, in this case foreign policy executive of a state. Through the perception of foreign policy executives, systemic influences will be translated into foreign policy. Thus, analysis of foreign policy solely through the lens of external factors as its independent variable is generally inaccurate (Rose, 1998, p. 152). On the other hand, neoclassical realism theory disagrees with putting internal factors as the independent variable. Rose (1998, p. 151) argues that systemic factors will automatically limit the influence of internal factors in foreign policy formation. Thus, neoclassical realism considered internal factors as intervening variables in the formation of foreign policy.

Systemic influences in neoclassical realism theory can be classified into systemic pressures and incentives. Systemic pressures and incentives are changes in the relative power that affect a state's position in the international system. These pressures can materialize in the form of an increase in power of a state relative to other state, thus posing a security threat to the other state (Rose, 1998, p. 149).

Then, the intervening variables can be classified into two groups, elite perceptions of systemic influences and the domestic political structure of a country. Systemic influences are the independent variable of foreign policy formation, but foreign policy executive perception towards systemic influences will affect what kind of foreign policy will be formulated. The perception of these foreign policy executive towards systemic influences does not change slowly, but tends to change abruptly (Rose, 1998, p. 158). In addition, foreign policy executives' interpretation of systemic influences is not always rational.

The Perception of foreign policy executives towards systemic influences is analyzed based on the identification of both international and domestic threats. This threat identification model is referred to as complex threat identification. It identifies threats at three levels, namely systemic, subsystemic, and domestic levels. The three levels are interconnected and the boundaries between them are not clear (Lobell, 2009). Based on this threat identification, the foreign policy executives will act at a certain level, but the action is intended to influence outcomes at other levels. Thus, state action that appear ineffective at one level can be expected to be optimal at another level (Lobell, 2009, p. 47).

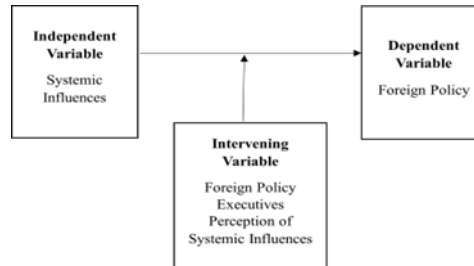
Threats at the systemic level come from competition between states, especially great powers. According to defensive realism, anarchy in the system encourages states to prioritize their own security. A state effort to increase power is considered as counterproductive because it can cause a balancing act from another states by increasing their power (Lobell, 2009, p. 47).

Meanwhile, threats at the subsystemic level observe the dynamics of competition between regional powers. Regional power competition is semi-autonomous, which means that the dynamics are different compared to great power competition. However, it is still influenced by great power competition and domestic politics. Great powers can also influence the distribution of power within the region, which creates new threats and opportunities for states in the region (Lobell, 2009, p. 49).

The domestic level mainly observes the dynamics of competition within the state. Domestic threats arise from the lack of loyalty to the central government from domestic actors, which then threatens the continuity of the government. This causes the state to prioritize internal threats to ensure regime survival and override external threats (Lobell, 2009).

From the explanation above, the operationalization of the neoclassical realism theory can be described as follows. Systemic influences are the independent variables that affect foreign policy formulation, which is the dependent variable. Then, the perception of foreign policy executives towards systemic influences is considered as the intervening variable. The operationalization of the theory is explained by the figure below.

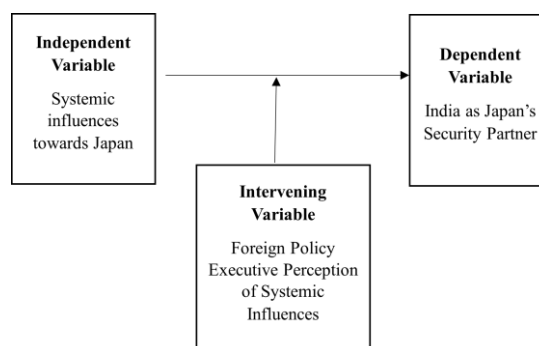
Figure 1. Neoclassical Realism Operationalization



Source: processed by the author based on Rose, 1998

Based on the operationalization of the theory, the factors that encourage Japan to choose India as its security partner can be explained. The independent variables in this study are systemic influences towards Japan. There are two systemic pressures that are considered in this analytic model, rise of non-traditional maritime security threats and rise of China. These systemic pressures provided external influences on action taken by Japan. Then, the independent variables are combined with intervening variables in the form of Japanese foreign policy executive's perception of systemic influence towards Japan. Foreign policy executives' perception will be inferred from speeches and policy decision, especially those connected directly with Japan's relations with India. Japanese foreign policy executives' perceptions moderate and translate systemic pressures and influence into working foreign policy, in this case, choosing India as Japan's security partner. Foreign policy executives' perception is inferred from policy documents, speeches and official reports pertaining to systematic pressures toward Japan and Japan's relations with India. Both variables then result in Japan's decision to choose India as its security partner. The analytical model explained can be observed in figure 2 below.

Figure 2. Analytical Model



Source: processed by the author

Methods

This article will apply qualitative research with a deductive approach. Qualitative methods are used to understand the world and focus on the meaning and processes that shape international politics (Lamont, 2015). This approach can explain Japanese foreign policy decisions following the end of the Cold War, including its decision to expand security cooperation with India. The

deductive approach itself will utilize categorization based on the theory used (Lamont, 2015). The deductive component is based on the neoclassical realism framework, in which Changes the systemic conditions, such as the rise of China, will be categorized into systemic pressures toward Japan. In addition, responses by Japanese foreign policy executives, such as speech, policy statements, and strategic decisions responding to the systemic pressures mentioned are considered as foreign policy executive perception. Through the two categories, Japan decision to cooperate with India can be inferred as the result of interaction of domestic perceptions and systemic pressures and influences.

This article utilizes desk and library research as the data collection method. Desk and library research will collect data from official documents, news, and previous studies. Primary and secondary data sources will be utilized in this article. Primary data will be sourced from official documents from the Japanese government (defense white paper, diplomatic bluebook, official reports, speeches). Secondary data will be collected from books, media, journal articles and previous studies that discussed the issues in this article. The research period of this article will start from the signing of the joint declaration in 2008 to 2025. Collected data then will be processed through the triangulation method. In the next section, this article will explain Japan-India Security Cooperation briefly in order to provide a background for the discussion.

Results and Discussion

This section will analyze the factors that influenced Japan's decision to choose India as its security partner through neoclassical realism approach. The factors to be analyzed are systemic influences towards Japan and foreign policy executive's perceptions of systemic influences. Both factors then encouraged Japan to cooperate with India in security issues. The following section will elaborate historical and diplomatic background of Japan-India security cooperation as basis for discussing Japan's decision to choose India as its security partner.

Japan-India Security Cooperation

Japan and India relations faced its highs and lows since the end of the Second World War. In the early days of the diplomatic relations, Japan views India positively. This was due to India's decision to sign peace treaty with Japan separately and refusing to take any wartime compensation (Jain, 2010, p. 404). Both countries relations are strengthened further by strong economic relations, as Japan needed raw materials, such as iron ore, to rebuild the Japanese economy. Furthermore, India was one of the first recipients of Japanese foreign aid in 1958 (Jain, 2010, p. 405). However, differences in alignment, Japan is a staunch U.S. ally while India is non-aligned in its foreign policy, prevented both countries from cooperating closely with each other. The 1990s was the low point of diplomatic relations between both countries, as Japan condemned India's nuclear weapons test. In addition to condemnation, Japan also imposed economic sanctions on India, recalled its ambassador, and pushed the international community to "punish" India (Jain, 2010, p. 406). Diplomatic relations were improved by 2000, when Prime Minister Yoshihiro Mori visited India. The visit also marked the beginning of a deeper cooperation between the two countries (Jain, 2010, p. 407). Then in 2005, cooperation was expanded to eight initiatives for Japan-India partnership, one of which is dialogue and cooperation on security issues (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2005).

Japan and India security dialog and cooperation was previously conducted in an ad-hoc manner. However, building on the initiative agreed in the past years, Japan and India agreed to institutionalize their security cooperation through a joint declaration in 2008 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2008). The action plan for the security cooperation was then adopted in 2009. The plan detailed cooperation between the armed forces (joint exercises, visits, education, etc.) and cooperation in non-traditional security issues (piracy, terrorism, and transnational crimes) (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2009). After the signing of the joint declaration and action plan, security cooperation between the two countries has grown rapidly.

Both countries signed agreements on the security of shared classified information in 2015 and provision of logistics for the military of both countries in 2021 (Chansoria, 2024; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2024). In addition, inaugural 2+2 meetings between Foreign Ministers and Defense Ministers were also conducted in 2019 (Chansoria, 2024). In the next section, the article will explain results and discussion of the factors that influenced Japan's decision to choose India as its security partner.

Systemic Influences towards Japan and Domestic Factors

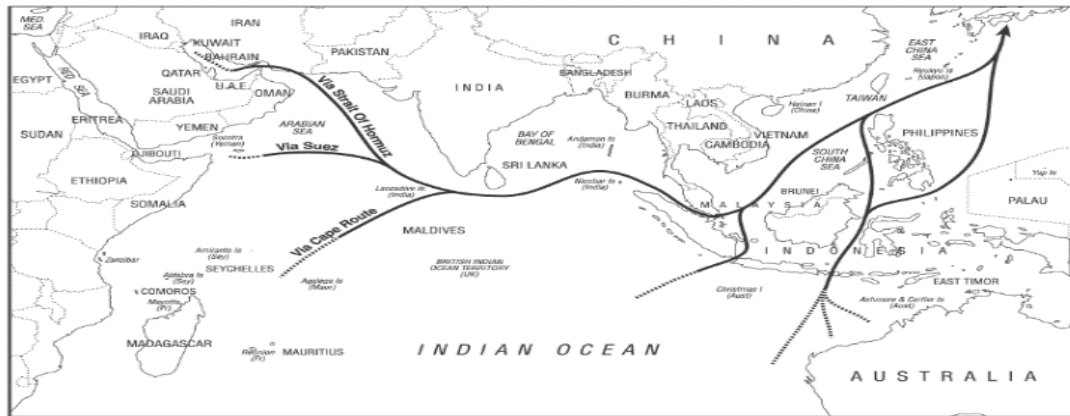
In the case of Japan's security cooperation with India, systemic pressures and incentives that encourage Japan to cooperate with India are the changing security conditions in the Indian Ocean. The rise of ship piracy, terrorism in the neighboring regions, and increasing China's maritime activities in the Indian Ocean are changing the security conditions for Japan. These factors influenced the security of Japan's Sea Line of Communication (SLOC). In addition to the systemic pressures, domestic factors played a quite significant role in the Japanese security policy formation, especially the leadership of the Prime Minister. In the case of Japan-India security cooperation, Prime Minister Abe is a strong factor in pushing cooperation between the two countries as the result of the systemic pressures and influences. The following sections will elaborate on systemic pressures and influences, maritime insecurity threats and Chinese maritime capabilities. Then, it will explain the role of Japanese foreign policy executives' perception towards systemic pressure and influences in Japan-India security cooperation.

Terrorism and Piracy in the Indian Ocean

Japan is dependent on energy imports from the Middle East. The energy import trade route from the Middle East passes through the Indian Ocean (Figure 3). As observed in the map, Japanese sea trade route passes through vulnerable areas in the Indian Ocean, such as the Strait of Hormuz and the Strait of Malacca. Thus, Japan has an interest in ensuring the security of shipping lanes in the Indian Ocean (Graham, 2006). During the Cold War, Japan relied on the United States Seventh Fleet to secure the sea lanes in the Indian Ocean (Graham, 2006, pp. 97–98; Kotani, 2011, p. 225). After the Cold War ended, there was a demand for Japan to participate in securing SLOC in the Indian Ocean (Kotani, 2011).

The demand for Japan to participate in securing SLOC came from both external and internal parties. The United States, as Japan's ally, pressured Japan to send a military contingent in the Persian Gulf War (1990-1991) (Cooney, 2007). Japan was unable to fulfill this demand due to domestic legal obstacles that prohibited Japan from sending troops overseas. This sparked an internal debate within the Japanese government on what role Japan should play in the international community in the post-Cold War era (Ushirogata, 2025). These two factors then helped expand Japanese role from maintaining security in its surrounding waters to supporting the United States in securing SLOC.

Figure 3. Japanese Sea Lines of Communication

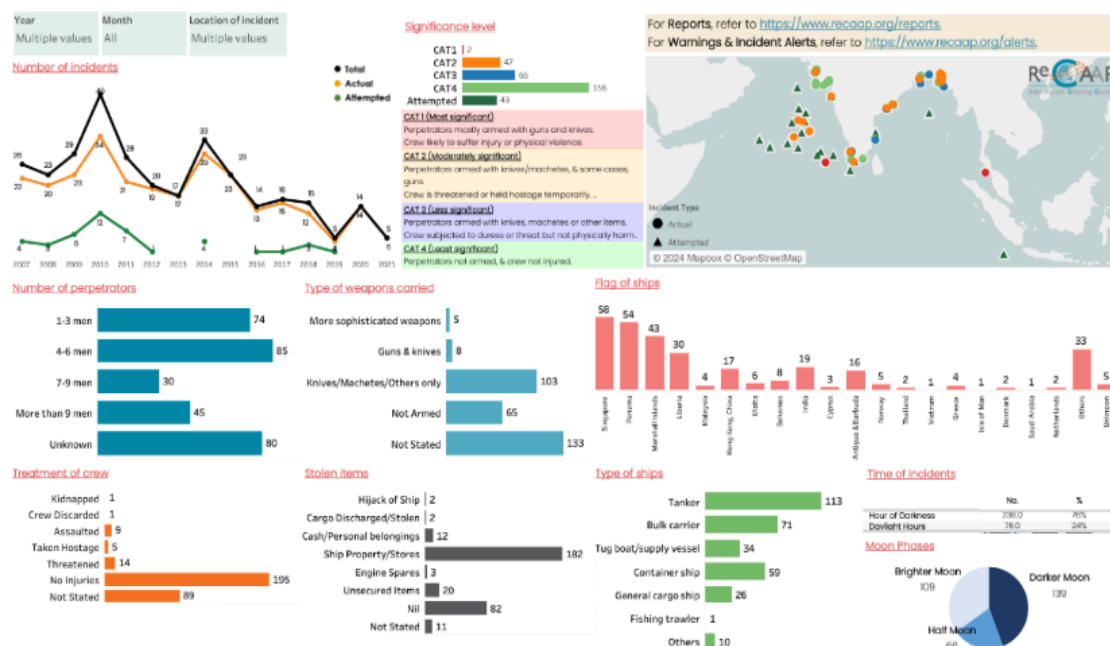


Source: Graham, 2006

With the rise of terrorism, Japan could end its warships to the Indian Ocean under the guise of counterterrorism. The change of policy happened when the Japanese government passed the Anti-Terror Act in October 2001 in response to the 11 September 2001 attack in the United States (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2002). The Act gave Japan a legal basis to deploy warships to the Indian Ocean in support of US naval operations and coalition forces (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2002, p. 19). Japan's decision to support United States and coalition forces naval operations was tied directly to its expansion of contribution towards international security in the post-Cold War era. Furthermore, by supporting the United States, this action works to reassure United States that Japan is ready to share the alliance burden.

Aside from terrorism, reducing threats from piracy is another factor in the Japanese involvement in the Indian Ocean region. The Increase in piracy incidents in the Indian Ocean, especially in the Gulf of Aden, poses a threat to the shipping routes. Incidents began to increase in 2007 and reached their peak in 2011 (BBC News, 2018). The numbers and distribution of the actual and attempted hijacking locations can be observed in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4. Number of Piracy Incidents and Incident Locations in the Indian Ocean



Source: ReCAAP ISC, 2024

The increase in piracy incidents prompted Japan to pass the Anti-Piracy Measures Law which provided legal basis for dispatching warships for anti-piracy missions in the Gulf of Aden ([Ministry of Defense of Japan, 2010, p. 244](#)). Japan's anti-piracy operations started in March 2009, and then Japan joined the multinational anti-piracy taskforce, Combined Task Force 151 (CTF 151) in 2013. By joining the task force, Japan seeks to increase the effectiveness of its anti-piracy operations and facilitate coordination with other countries in the task force ([Cabinet Secretariat of Japan, 2018](#)). These measures show that the security of the sea lanes is the utmost priority for Japan.

Development of Chinese Maritime Capabilities

The development of China's maritime capabilities also became a concern for Japan. Similar to Japan, China is dependent on energy imports. Its energy imports are also passing through the same sea lanes as Japan. However, China has not been able to project its maritime capabilities to protect its sea trade routes located far from its territory ([Henry, 2016](#)). Therefore, the people Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) seeks to build power projection capability to operate far from China proper ([White, 2020](#)). Apart from securing sea lanes, maritime capability building is also important for prestige. Strong maritime capabilities will reflect on China's image as a great power and its ability to maintain the security of its long coastlines ([Henry, 2016](#)).

China started to project its maritime capabilities to the Indian Ocean in 2008, with the dispatch of anti-piracy task force. The task force, consisted of 2 destroyers and 1 logistical ship, was tasked with escorting commercial vessels and patrolling the waters of the Gulf of Aden ([The New York Times, 2008](#)). In addition to dispatching anti-piracy task force, China also sent its warships to train in the Eastern Indian Ocean ([Panda, 2014](#)). As of 2021, China has dispatched about thirty-nine task forces for anti-piracy operations to the Gulf of Aden ([China Military Online, 2021](#)). As Chinese maritime capabilities strengthen, so does its ability to disrupt Japanese SLOC. Unlike Japan, China can utilize both land and maritime route for its energy imports. This was achieved through building ports along the Indian Ocean in states that are friendly to China. In addition, the ports are considered to be dual-use, meaning military vessels can operate from them ([Ushirogata, 2025, pp. 163–164](#)). With these infrastructures in place, the Chinese Navy can project its power in the region and deny Japan from using the sea lanes.

Chinese maritime capabilities not only threaten Japan, but also India. As India is building its own maritime capabilities, its threat matrices now also encompass the maritime dimension, in addition to the land dimension ([Ladwig, 2009](#)). This gave India the rationale to emphasize on building and modernizing its surface fleet to ensure sea control in the Indian Ocean ([Ushirogata, 2025](#)). With its large surface fleet, the Indian Navy could complement Japanese strategy in the Indian Ocean, especially in ensuring the security of the sea lanes.

Japanese Foreign Policy Executive's Perceptions of Systemic Influences

Facing systemic influences in the terms of changing regional security condition, Japanese foreign policy executives consider that Japan must expand its security relations with countries in the Indian Ocean region. Shinzo Abe is the main foreign policy executive who encourages the expansion of security ties with countries in the region, especially with India. This was by virtue of his position, Prime Minister of Japan. Japan's 2013 National Security Strategy states that strong relationships with countries that share the same values are important for strengthening Japan's security environment ([Cabinet Secretariat of Japan, 2013](#)).

In this regard, Japanese foreign policy executive considers the Indian Ocean is important for Japan. The importance of the Indian Ocean to Japan automatically positioned India, the main regional power of the region, as important as well to Japan. India's ambition to become a maritime power makes it important for Japan. Furthermore, India also shared similar views with Japan regarding securing sea lanes and maintaining freedom of navigation in the Indian

Ocean ([Hindustan Times, 2007](#)). Accordingly, India's ambition in becoming maritime power is shown through increases of navy's share of the budget from 11% in 1992-93 to 18% in 2008-09 ([Brewster, 2014, p. 13](#)).

This sentiment is reflected in Shinzo Abe's 2007 speech on the "confluence of the two seas". The speech mentioned Japan and India as a bridge between two seas, the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean, which became part of "broader Asia" ([Abe, 2007](#)). With the capacities owned by both countries, Abe pointed out that both countries also had the responsibility to bring prosperity to the region together ([Abe, 2007](#)). Furthermore, he highlighted common values, such as democracy and interest in maintaining the security of trade routes held by both countries ([Abe, 2007](#)). He also emphasized that Japan benefits from a strong India and vice-versa ([Abe, 2007](#)).

In the beginning, security cooperation with India mainly to address non-traditional security threats in the Indian Ocean. This was evident in the first bilateral naval exercise, which emphasized anti-piracy and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief operations ([Indian Navy, 2012](#)). However, as maritime insecurity threats winding down in the 2010s, bilateral naval exercise between the two countries are starting to tilt towards countering traditional threats, such as submarines ([Panda, 2017](#)).

The "confluence of the two seas" speech then led to the emergence of Free and Open Indo-Pacific concept in Japanese foreign policy. As mentioned in the "confluence of the two seas" speech, Abe envisioned Japan's role as protector of rules-based order and international norm not only in the Pacific, but also Indian Ocean region. This is achieved through cooperation with democracies in the region. The concept is based on the premise that peace, stability, and freedom of navigation in the Pacific Ocean are closely related to the same issues in the Indian Ocean ([Abe, 2012](#)). In the concept, Japan views cooperation with countries that share the common values, such as democracy, as key to maintaining stability in the Indo-Pacific region. This is also reinforced by Japan's national security strategy document which states that India's growing power and its strategic position in the region makes it a key potential partner for Japan in maintaining its security ([Cabinet Secretariat of Japan, 2013](#)). The approaches made by Japan towards India are efforts to ensure the stability and security of sea lanes in the Indian Ocean. In addition, Japan's security cooperation with India is also viewed as an effort to counterbalance China's growing maritime capabilities ([Abe, 2012](#)).

Japan is responding to systemic influences in the Indian Ocean region by strengthening its ties with democratic countries in the region. Japan considers that strong relations with democratic countries such as India could strengthen its security environment. India's growing power and strategic position are also viewed as its strengths. In addition, Abe's positive perception of India also helped influence Japan's decision to choose India as its security partner. This perception aligned with Abe's vision of Japan's role as defender of rules-based order and international norms in the Indo-Pacific region.

Conclusion

Japan's decision to choose India as its security partner was primarily driven by combination of two factors, systemic influences and domestic perception. Maritime insecurity threats and rising Chinese maritime capabilities are becoming threats for Japanese SLOC. Among these systemic pressures, rising Chinese maritime capabilities took priority when non-traditional security threats winded down. As a result, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe recognized the Indian Ocean's importance and saw cooperation with countries sharing similar values, such as India, as essential. India's strategic position and maritime capabilities were also considered to be an asset in securing sea lanes and counterbalancing China in the Indian Ocean. Furthermore, the main foreign policy executive, Prime Minister Abe, saw that India shared the same democratic values as Japan, which created a positive perception. These dynamics are in accordance with how neoclassical realism explains foreign policy formation. We can see that Prime Minister

Abe as the foreign policy executive, moderated systematic pressures and influence and shaped the Japanese decision to cooperate with India.

Due to its flexibility in explaining differing foreign policy, neoclassical realism as an analytical framework can be applied to different security cooperation. One such potential research is on Japan-United Kingdom security cooperation. Systemic pressure from China aligning with revisionist powers and the United Kingdom's economic interests in the region provided strong reasons to be involved in maintaining stability and security (Cleverly, 2022). As with India, the United Kingdom is a democratic country that is in line with Japan's strategy to build partnerships with countries that share the same values. However, compared to India's position as regional maritime power, the United Kingdom's military deployment in the region is too few to be effective. Considering these points, neoclassical realism can be utilized to explain the cooperation, demonstrating its utility as an analytical framework for cross-regional security cooperation.

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