



ENCIRCLING CHINA? JAPAN, THE QUAD AND THE INDIANS

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Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) policy is at the centre of Tokyo's economic and security strategy in the Indo-Pacific Region. Although Japanese policymakers do not admit to that in public, the FOIP is not only aimed at enabling Tokyo to economically compete with China's 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI) but is also – and indeed equally importantly – 'about China', so to speak. Next to what is referred to as 'Quality Infrastructure', i.e. infrastructure development projects funded or co-funded by Japan in Asia and Africa, Tokyo's FOIP creates the conceptual and instrumental framework to militarily deter and, indeed, contain China. And this is where the so-called 'Quadrilateral Security Dialogue' (Quad), an Indo-Pacific security forum facilitating dialogue and consultation between Japan, Australia, India and the US, comes in. And there is (much) more.

In addition to intensifying security cooperation and consultations in the Quad framework, Tokyo in recent years has invested significant resources into expanding bilateral security defence ties with India. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has developed close ties with his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi who is becoming concerned about China's alleged plan to turn the Indian Ocean into a 'Chinese lake.' Beijing's massive investments in numerous countries in South Asia, together with the expansion of Chinese-Pakistani defence and security ties, have set off alarm bells in Delhi, and intensifying economic and defence ties with Tokyo is meant to counterbalance China's ever-growing political and business interests in many South Asian countries.

The Quad is facilitating Japanese-Indian-Australian-US cooperation in the areas of maritime security, counterterrorism and freedom of navigation. Japan's approach to maritime security translates, among other things, into the Japanese navy and



coastguard, together with counterparts from the US, India, and Australia, contributing to US-led 'freedom of navigation operations' (FONOPs) and joint military exercises in the South China Sea. While the US, Japan and pretty much everybody else minus China insist that the FONOPs are taking place in international waters, Beijing typically refers to them as 'illegal intrusions' into Chinese territorial waters. That, of course, does not come as much of a surprise since the entire South China Sea is – at least as far as China and Chinese-drawn maps are concerned – part of China's national territory.

The international community – backed up by international law, e.g. the ruling by the International Court of Arbitration of 2016, which at the time ruled that the islands in the South China Sea that Beijing insists are part of China's national territory do not in fact belong to China – whomever begs to differ. In August 2018 Tokyo deployed three navy vessels to the South China Sea to hold joint military exercises with five Asian navies and the US from the end of August to October of that year. At the time, Japanese navy vessels made calls in ports in India, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines and linked up during the exercise with the US Navy deployed in the region. In addition, Tokyo decided to help improve Sri Lanka's maritime security capabilities by donating two coastguard patrol craft. In September 2018 a Japanese submarine for the first time joined a naval military exercise in disputed territorial waters in the South China Sea. At the time, a Japanese submarine was accompanied by other Japanese warships, including Japan's state-of-the art Kaga helicopter carrier.

The legacy of India's non-alignment policies was until recently considered the main obstacle to New Delhi's committing itself to security and defence ties, which in Beijing are perceived as part of Western-led containment against China. However, that has very clearly changed since Beijing has begun to operate

in and sail into what for decades was India's geopolitical and geo-strategic 'backyard' in South Asian territorial waters. Indeed, Beijing's massive investments in ports and other strategic industries in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, the Maldives and other countries in South Asia with access to the Indian Ocean are keeping India's defence planners on their toes these days. Chinese territorial expansion in the South China Sea and Chinese investments in strategic sectors in Pakistan, in particular, have become a concern in New Delhi. In September 2018 Beijing confirmed that it would be maintaining its commitment to invest US\$60 billion in the so-called China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (which is part of the BRI). However, it must not go unmentioned that Beijing's confirmation of its economic and military commitments took place against the background of the suggestion made by the Pakistani Minister of Commerce, Abdul Razak Dawood, in September 2018, to temporarily suspend projects in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, the Pakistan leg of China's Belt and Road Initiative. In January 2018 it was reported in the (non-Chinese) media that Beijing was planning to build an offshore naval base near Pakistan's Gwadar port on the Arabian Sea. If and when built, such a military base would become China's second offshore naval base after having opened its first in Djibouti in the Horn of Africa in 2017. China has already invested heavily in civilian facilities at Gwadar port and the second base would reportedly be used to dock Chinese naval vessels.

This has led Indian policymakers to attempt to counter growing Chinese influence through closer economic and military ties with Japan. In October 2018 Japan and India established a 2+2 dialogue mechanism, i.e. regular consultations between their respective foreign and defence ministers. During a meeting between Japan's Prime Minister Abe and his counterpart Modi in October 2018, Japan and India agreed to strengthen what is referred to as 'maritime domain awareness'



by signing an agreement between their naval forces. Also in October 2018, Tokyo and New Delhi started negotiating a logistics-sharing agreement, the so-called Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA). The ACSA facilitates joint manoeuvres, including three-way exercises with the US Navy in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific. The Japanese-Indian ACSA will give their armed forces access to each other's military bases for logistical support. Under the agreement Japanese

navy vessels will have access to Indian naval facilities on the Andaman and Nicobar islands, located close to the western entrance to the Malacca Straits through which Japanese (and Chinese) trade and fuel imports pass.

All of this means that China is charged with the task of preparing itself for the worst from where it is standing and anxiously observing: containment and encirclement led and paid for by Washington and Tokyo.