



## **JIMEX IN THE WAKE OF CHINA'S INROADS INTO INDIAN OCEAN REGION**

*Chandra Rekha*  
*Research Associate, CAPS*

An interesting emerging contour of India-Japan's strategic partnership was reflected in the joint naval exercise - Japan and India Maritime Exercise (JIMEX) that took place between 19-22 December 2013. The naval exercise in the Bay of Bengal was primarily to enhance maritime security cooperation between the two countries.

However, relations between India and Japan failed to gain momentum during World War II and the Cold War period. During World War II, Japanese Imperial Army's aggression over East Asia and Southeast Asia, and its post World War external policies aimed at strengthening Japan's status quo in Asia, which, in turn strained the Japanese image abroad. The bilateral relationship between Tokyo and New Delhi reached its potential only after the end of Cold War. Non-military threats and issues like terrorism, and piracy assumed new importance in strengthening the ties in post cold war era<sup>i</sup>.

In August 2007, the annual India-US Malabar naval exercise was transformed into large-scale multilateral exercises in the Bay of Bengal involving the United States, India, Japan, Australia, and Singapore. These political and military initiatives, taken together, were seen as the beginning of a four-way security alliance between the United States, India, Japan, and Australia, aimed at balancing or containing a rising China.<sup>ii</sup> Hence, the two navies on a multilateral level have regularly conducted Passage Exercises (PASSEX).

The first ever maritime exercise between India and Japan commenced in June 2012 off the coast of Tokyo. This included two destroyers, one maritime patrol aircraft and a helicopter

of the Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) that participated in the exercise. India and Japan also jointly patrol Malacca Straits. Through maritime dialogue mechanism, the warships of the two navies started coordinated naval patrolling in the Gulf of Aden to escort large number of cargo vessels passing through troubled waters in the region.<sup>iii</sup>

However, JIMEX 2013, is the second combined Japanese-Indian navy exercises to have been staged, following on from 2012's inaugural event commemorated the 60th anniversary of the start of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Equipped with advanced radar signature suppression and management technologies, the naval exercise was armed with anti-ship missiles, cruise missiles, rocket launchers and a naval gun.

The Indian navy was represented by Indian Navy's Mazagon Dock (MDL)-built Shivalik-class stealth multi-role frigate *INS Satpura* (F48), the Rajput-class guided-missile destroyer *INS Ranvijay* (D55) and Khukri class corvette *INS Kuthar* (P46).<sup>iv</sup> From the Japan Maritime Self Defense Force (JMSDF), two Guided Missile destroyers, JS Ariake (with Commander Escort Division – 7 embarked), and JS Setogiri had participated in the naval exercise.<sup>v</sup>

The four-day JIMEX naval exercise conducted recently concentrated on maritime security issues which included:

- Humanitarian Aid & Disaster Relief (HADR) operations
- Visit, Board, Search, and Seizure (VBSS) drills
- Anti-piracy operations, gun firing, cross deck HALO (High Altitude- Low Opening) operations and operations in anti-surface, anti-submarine, and anti-air threat scenarios.
- Enhancing interoperability, thereby enabling the two navies to undertake operations in the sphere of maritime security should the need arise.<sup>vi</sup>

China's power projection and its aggressive policies have led Japan to pursue exploratory policies despite its security agreements with the U.S. Japan is also concerned of China's economic growth after it dislodged Japan as the world's second largest economy in 2010 and China's objective to emerge as the world's single- biggest economy and strongest military power.<sup>vii</sup>

Interestingly, the current compulsions of both Japan and India in terms of China's assertive inroads into the Indian Ocean region have further strengthened the logic of strategic ties between both the two countries.

- China's declaration of an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) over part of East China Sea recently. Accordingly, ADIZ required any foreign aircraft, including commercial jetliners, to identify their flight plans that followed up with instructions from the Chinese military. Japan, on the other hand, protested the move by China as the zone covers the islands are under Japan's purview that is also claimed by China and Taiwan<sup>viii</sup>.
- Chinese navy's interest in the Indian Ocean region which is the leading premier trade and energy seaway is reflected by the projects China has undertaken. These include the port building in Hambantota in Sri Lanka, the modernization of Chittagong port in Bangladesh and also the already operational Gwadar port in Pakistan which is straight at the entrance to the Strait of Hormuz (the only exit to the Persian Gulf Oil). Further, China is also building Irrawaddy Corridor linking Yunnan province in China with Burmese ports on the Bay of Bengal.<sup>ix</sup>
- South China Sea domination by China as the Chinese policies of 'String of Pearls' pose a threat to Asian stability at large.

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**RELEVANCE OF INS  
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SECURITY PERSPECTIVE OF  
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Source: [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/String\\_of\\_Pearls\\_\(China\)](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/String_of_Pearls_(China))

Hence, the security concerns for both India and Japan arise from the assertive Chinese domination over the surrounding ocean region. The rise of China as a modern military power with its extended strategic reach to the South China Sea and its periodic belligerent approach to Taiwan, and Tibet have led to shared security interests between India and Japan. Furthermore, North Korea's nuclear and missile capabilities further aggravates the fear factor of causing instability in Asian continent as it is the epicenter for nuclear non-proliferation with North Korea, Myanmar and Pakistan as its frontrunners.<sup>x</sup>

Japan views India as a great balancer against China's rising influence and a potential partner in filling the strategic vacuum created by declining US role in the Indian Ocean region. India in turn wants Japan's high end technology, private investment and greater access to the Japanese markets.<sup>xi</sup>

With India emerging as the single largest recipient of Japanese aid with security and defense cooperation ties, the two sides agreed to institutionalize joint exercises by their navies and to increase their frequency as Japan offered its highly advanced sea plane Shinmaywa or US-2 in what is the first instance of Tokyo's willingness to offer a technology that has both military and civilian applications. A very sophisticated craft, the amphibian plane can land and take off in choppy waters<sup>xii</sup>. Despite Beijing's fulminations, India and Japan lifted their strategic convergence to a new level by vowing to work together for ensuring stability in the Asia-Pacific region in the face of growing muscle-flexing by China.

*(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies CAPS)*

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#### End Notes:

<sup>i</sup> Prakash Paneerselvam, "India-Japan Maritime Cooperation (1999-2009): A Report", JMSDF Staff College Review, Volume 2, Pp. 67-69. [http://www.mod.go.jp/msdf/navcol/SSG/review/eng\\_2/2-4.pdf](http://www.mod.go.jp/msdf/navcol/SSG/review/eng_2/2-4.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> Rajaram Panda, "India-Japan Defense Partnership", *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal*, Vol. 7, No.3, July-September 2012. Pp.no. 315-317

<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.naval-technology.com/news/newsindian-navy-and-jmsdf-to-conduct-jimex-2013-bilateral-naval-exercise-4148237> 18 December 2013.

<sup>v</sup> First Bilateral Maritime Exercise between India and Japan 'Jimex 12' to Commence on 09 June 12 <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=84780> Release ID :84780, [www.mea.org](http://www.mea.org).

<sup>vi</sup> David Brewster, "The Australia-India Security Declaration: The Quadrilateral Redux?", Pg. no.3, <http://www.securitychallenges.org.au/ArticlePDFs/vol6no1Brewster.pdf>.

<sup>vi</sup> India, "Japan to Conduct First Ever Bilateral Naval Exercise Next Year", <http://defence.pk/threads/india-japan-to-conduct-first-ever-bilateral-naval-exercise-next-year.134116/> 11 OCTOBER 2011

<sup>vii</sup> Panda, "India-Japan Defense Partnership", pg. no. 316

<sup>viii</sup> Santanu Chudhury, *The Wall Street Journal*, December 2013, [www.online.wsj.com/news/artcles](http://www.online.wsj.com/news/artcles)

<sup>ix</sup> India, "Japan to Conduct First Ever Bilateral Naval Exercise Next Year", <http://defence.pk/threads/india-japan-to-conduct-first-ever-bilateral-naval-exercise-next-year.134116/> 11 OCTOBER 2011

<sup>x</sup> Panda, "India-Japan Defense Partnership", pg. no. 318

<sup>xi</sup> Purnendra Jain, "Japan-India Summit Boosts Bilateral Ties", June 6th, 2013 <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2013/06/06/japan-india-summit-boosts-bilateral-ties/>

<sup>xii</sup> Diwakar, "India, Japan join hands to break China's 'String of Pearls'", May 30, 2013, [http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-05-30/india/39627850\\_1\\_indian-ocean-india-and-japan-japanese-counterpart-shinzo-abe](http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-05-30/india/39627850_1_indian-ocean-india-and-japan-japanese-counterpart-shinzo-abe)