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# INDIA-JAPAN-PHILIPPINES SECURITY COOPERATION IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

**MAHIMA DUGGAL**

In response to changing geopolitical dynamics in the region, India's foreign policy has evolved to adopt innovative modes of engagement, with an acute focus on mini-lateral groupings such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) comprising India, Japan, Australia and the United States (US), as well as trilaterals like Australia-Japan-India (AJI), Japan-America-India (JAI), France-India-Australia, and the newly emerging France-India-Japan axis. In such a context of New Delhi's increasing focus on strategic alliances, this paper considers the merits of India-Japan-Philippines triangular security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.

## **INDIA-JAPAN PARTNERSHIP: A DEFINING AXIS IN THE INDO-PACIFIC**

Over the past decade, Japan has emerged as a particularly vital partner for New Delhi; both states have built synergy on the camaraderie between former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to forge a Special Strategic and Global Partnership in 2014. Defence and security have been an integral and

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critical pillar of the partnership, underpinned by key agreements and arrangements, high-level exchanges and joint bilateral and mini-lateral military exercises.

As the Indian External Affairs Minister (EAM) S. Jaishankar succinctly stated, Japan is the only state with which India shares both an annual summit and 2+2 Foreign and Defence Ministerial Dialogues, showing how both have become “much more in sync” in their world view and definitions of interests and challenges.<sup>1</sup> Apart from these flagship policy dialogues, both states also have other frameworks like a National Security Advisors (NSA) Dialogue, India-Japan Forum, Foreign Ministers’ Strategic Dialogue, Coast Guard-to-Coast Guard Dialogue, Tri-Service exchanges and India-Japan Digital Partnership (which includes cooperation on cyber and telecom security).<sup>2</sup> Simultaneously, both hold regular high-level interactions via shared mini-lateral platforms—including the Quad, Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI), Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) and various trilaterals—in the Indo-Pacific. Both countries have also put in place defence agreements that institutionalise their security partnership in a legislative framework; some landmark pacts are the Transfer of Defence Equipment and Technology pact, Security Measures for the Protection of Classified Military Information, Cooperation in the Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy, and the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA). Signed in 2020, the ACSA will offer India access to the Japanese base in Djibouti and, conversely, enable Japan to access India’s Andaman and Nicobar Islands facilities.<sup>3</sup> These accords are a practical manifestation of both states’

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1. Elizabeth Roche, “Defence, security aspect of India-Japan relationship progressed fast: Jaishankar”, *LiveMint*, September 18, 2020, at <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/defence-security-aspect-of-india-japan-relationship-progressed-fast-jaishankar-11600449648752.html>. Accessed on February 17, 2022.
  2. See “Japan-India Relations (Basic Data)”, Japan-India Relations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, January 4, 2021, at <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/india/data.html>; “Brief Note on India-Japan Bilateral Relations”, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, accessed on September 3, 2021, at [https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/India-Japan\\_Bilateral\\_Brief\\_feb\\_2020.pdf](https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/India-Japan_Bilateral_Brief_feb_2020.pdf); “India-Japan Digital Partnership (IJDP)”, Embassy of India in Japan, February 4, 2021, at [https://www.indembassy-tokyo.gov.in/eoityo\\_pages/MTIX](https://www.indembassy-tokyo.gov.in/eoityo_pages/MTIX). Accessed on February 17, 2022.
  3. Huma Siddiqui, “India and Japan cement defence ties! Ink landmark ACSA pact, India to get access to Djibouti in Africa”, *Financial Express*, September 10, 2020, at <https://www.financialexpress.com/defence/india-and-japan-cement-defence-ties-ink->

capability and determination to advance their defence partnership, develop interoperability, further evolve their Indo-Pacific vision, and contribute to a stable and secure order in Asia.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, to improve the coordination between their defence forces, with an eye on their shared challenges (particularly vis-à-vis China), both states conduct annual tri-service drills as well as participate in exercises alongside their like-minded partners. Table 1 provides an overview of India-Japan joint exercises. Simultaneously, both states are also gradually deepening their defence trade ties, although these have been slightly stagnant. For instance, New Delhi has been unwilling to purchase Japan’s US-2 amphibious aircraft—considering it already has the P-8I, an American maritime patrol aircraft, and Tu-142, a Russian maritime reconnaissance and anti-submarine warfare aircraft, which makes acquiring US-2 a low priority. On Tokyo’s part too, despite plenty of interest from India, it has been hesitant to sell its Soryu-class submarines. However, as India focuses on military modernisation and looks to develop and acquire new and advanced defence technologies, Japan could emerge as an important partner.

**Table 1: India-Japan Military Exercises**

Service	Exercise	Salient Points
Air Force	Shinyuu Maitri	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commenced in 2018</li> <li>• Focus is to undertake Joint Mobility and Tactical Interoperability and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Operations</li> <li>• In the 2nd edition of the exercise in 2019, C-130 J aircraft of the Special Operations Squadron of IAF and C-130 H of Tactical Airlift Squadron of Japanese Air Self-Defence Force (JASDF) participated</li> </ul>

landmark-acsa-pact-india-to-get-access-to-djibouti-in-africa/2079896/. Accessed on February 17, 2022.

4. Roche, n. 1.

Service	Exercise	Salient Points
	Joint Fighter Aircraft Exercises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conceived during India-Japan 2+2 at the end of 2019</li> <li>• First edition to take place by end of 2021; Although the first edition was to take place in mid-2020, it was repeatedly postponed due to the pandemic</li> <li>• To take place at the Komatsu airbase in Japan involving Indian Air Force's (IAF) Su-30MKI fighters and JASDF's US-designed F-15J fighters</li> <li>• With China's People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) using several variants of the Su-30 jets, the exercises are expected to help JASDF familiarise itself with the aircraft family in close and long-range air-to-air combat</li> </ul>
Army	Dharma Guardian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commenced in 2018</li> <li>• Annual training exercise focused on counterterrorism operations in jungle and urban scenarios</li> <li>• The 2019 edition involved India's Dogra Regiment and Japan's 1st Division</li> </ul>
Navy	JIMEX	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commenced in 2012, with the last (and 4th) edition taking place in September 2020 in a 'non-contact at-sea-only format'</li> <li>• Focused on showcasing interoperability and joint operational skills through weapon firing tactics, cross-deck helicopter drills, and surface, anti-submarine and air warfare manoeuvres</li> </ul>

Service	Exercise	Salient Points
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conducted in the Arabian Sea, the 2020 exercise involved the Indian Navy's <i>stealth destroyer INS Chennai</i>, <i>Teg Class stealth frigate Tarkash</i> and <i>Fleet Tanker Deepak</i> and Japan's <i>JS Kaga</i> (<i>Izumo Class Helicopter Destroyer</i>) and <i>JS Ikazuchi</i> (<i>Guided Missile Destroyer</i>)</li> <li>It also included P8I Long Range Maritime Patrol Aircraft, helicopters and fighter aircraft</li> </ul>
	Malabar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Started as annual India-US exercises in 1992, with Japan participating since 2015 (as a permanent member) and Australia since 2020</li> <li>The last edition took place in August 2021</li> <li>Focused on improving integration and honing warfighting skills to address irregular maritime threats (like China's expanding naval prowess)</li> <li>Involves advanced surface, sub-surface (anti-submarine) and air domain operations</li> <li>In 2021, India participated with <i>INS Shivalik</i> and <i>INS Kadmatt</i> and P8I patrol aircraft and Japan with <i>JS Kaga</i>, <i>Murasame</i> and <i>Shiranui</i>, and P1 patrol aircraft</li> </ul>

Source: Compiled by the author based on data from “Defence Cooperation,” Embassy of India in Tokyo, Japan, March 8, 2022, [https://www.indembassy-tokyo.gov.in/eoityo\\_pages/NzE](https://www.indembassy-tokyo.gov.in/eoityo_pages/NzE). Accessed on May 2, 2022.

Not only is the India-Japan partnership recognised as a defining axis in Asia, but both states are increasingly emphasising the “Indo-Pacific” and “global” dimensions of their ties by enhancing cooperation in third countries. Recent comments by EAM Jaishankar—such as at the 13th India-Japan Foreign Ministers’ Strategic Dialogue<sup>5</sup>—stress

5. “13th India-Japan Foreign Ministers’ Strategic Dialogue”, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, October 7, 2020, at [https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/33100/13th\\_IndiaJapan\\_Foreign\\_Ministers\\_Strategic\\_Dialogue](https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/33100/13th_IndiaJapan_Foreign_Ministers_Strategic_Dialogue); PTI, “India, Japan hold strategic dialogue; focus on expanding collaboration in third countries”, *The Economic Times*, October 7, 2020, at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/india-japan-hold-strategic-dialogue-focus-on-expanding-collaboration-in->

the importance of third-country cooperation between Tokyo and New Delhi as a critical area of focus for their bilateral ties moving forward.<sup>6</sup> As both states gear up to celebrate their 70th anniversary of diplomatic ties in 2022, third extensive third-country cooperation (including in regions beyond India's immediate neighbourhood, such as the Russian Far East and the Pacific Islands) is a priority.<sup>7</sup> They are, for instance, already working on joint ventures in Sri Lanka (such as the recently approved port development project), Bangladesh and Myanmar.<sup>8</sup> Considering Japan's strong relationship with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), demonstrated by its developmental investments in the region,<sup>9</sup> and India's focus on Southeast Asia under its Act East Policy (AEP), the geographical expanse is a prominent part of both countries' joint focus on third-country cooperation. While states like Indonesia and Vietnam rank high among potential candidates for India and Japan's outreach, the Philippines can also emerge as a critical link in New Delhi and Tokyo's shared Indo-Pacific impetus.

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third-countries/articleshow/78530550.cms?from=mdr. Accessed on February 17, 2022.

6. PTI, "India, Japan looking at working in third countries: Jaishankar", *LiveMint*, September 18, 2020, at <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/india-japan-looking-at-working-in-third-countries-jaishankar-11600445194173.html>. Accessed on February 21, 2022.
7. "Foreign Secretary's Remarks at the Opening Session of the India-Japan Forum (July 20, 2021)", Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, July 20, 2021, at <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/34026/Foreign+Secretarys+Remarks+at+the+Opening+Session+of+the+IndiaJapan+Forum+July+20+2021>. Accessed on February 21, 2022.
8. See Sreeparna Banerjee and Pratinashree Basu, "India-Japan Partnership in Third Countries: A Study of Bangladesh and Myanmar", Issue Brief, Observer Research Foundation, April 19, 2021, at <https://www.orfonline.org/research/india-japan-partnership-in-third-countries-a-study-of-bangladesh-and-myanmar/>. Accessed on February 21, 2022.
9. See Tomoo Kikuchi and Sayaka Unzaki, "Japanese Infrastructure Investment in Southeast Asia", Policy Report, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, May 2019, at [https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/PR190503\\_Japanese-Infrastructure-Investmentin-in-SEA.pdf](https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/PR190503_Japanese-Infrastructure-Investmentin-in-SEA.pdf). Accessed on February 21, 2022.

**Figure 1: Japan-Philippines Defence Cooperation and Partnership (July 2021)**

## Japan-Philippines Defense Cooperation and Partnership

As of July 2021

Japan and the Philippines share common geostrategic interests and perspectives on security challenges, viewing stronger bilateral defense cooperation as mutually beneficial.

In January 2015, both countries signed the "Memorandum on Defense Cooperation and Exchanges" to further deepen and broaden their security and defense cooperation and partnership.

Strengthened Interactions	Capacity Building
 <p>Japan and the Philippines conduct effective bilateral cooperation through close consultations and sound policy coordination between high-level officials such as Ministers of Defense and Chiefs of Staff, and at the operational level.</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; font-size: small;">SINCE 2015:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Twelve (12) Defense Ministers' meetings and telephone/video talks.</li> <li>★ Twenty-four (24) Chief of Staff level meetings and telephone/video talks.</li> <li>★ More than thirty (30) port calls by Japan Self-Defense Forces' (JSDF) vessels and aircrafts; President Rodrigo Duterte came aboard in two port calls in 2017 and 2018.</li> </ul>	 <p>No country can maintain its peace and stability on its own. The Ministry of Defense/ISDF provide capacity building to support the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) based upon its need and requests.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ HA/DR, ship maintenance, military medicine, and engineering</li> <li>★ Seminars, education, training programs, and opinion exchange</li> </ul>
Bilateral and Multilateral Exercises	Transfer of Equipment and Technology
 <p>Japan-Philippines bilateral exercises and JSDF's participation in the Philippines-U.S. exercises contribute effectively to enhancing mutual trust and response capabilities, particularly by improving interoperability on HA/DR, while demonstrating our determination and high capacity for regional stability.</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; font-size: small;">SINCE 2015:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Seventeen (17) Japan-Philippines goodwill/bilateral exercises by the two Navies at sea in the Philippines; the two Air Forces conducted their first bilateral training in July 2021.</li> <li>★ Eleven (11) JSDF participations in the Philippines-U.S. exercises, of which five (5) were through sending observers.</li> </ul>	 <p>Transfer of Japanese defense equipment and technology to the AFP contributes to promoting security and defense cooperation and realizing a Free and Open Indo-Pacific Initiative, which maintains and strengthens peace, stability, and prosperity in our region.</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">In February 2016, Japan and the Philippines signed the Agreement on the Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology.</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; font-size: small;">SINCE 2016:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Five (5) TC-90s were granted.</li> <li>★ UH-1H spare parts were granted.</li> <li>★ Purchase contract on four (4) air surveillance radar systems was signed – the first overseas transfer of a complete Japan-manufactured defense equipment.</li> </ul> <p style="font-size: x-small; text-align: right;">*Credits: Icon made by Freepik from www.flaticon.com</p>

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[www.ph-emb.japan.go.jp](http://www.ph-emb.japan.go.jp)

Source: Embassy of Japan in the Philippines, Japan-Philippines Defense Cooperation and Partnership. Accessed on September 3, 2021.

## THE PHILIPPINES IN JAPAN'S SECURITY CALCULUS

In April 2022, Japan and the Philippines held their first-ever 2+2 Defence and Foreign Ministerial Meeting, where they opposed any belligerent and unilateral actions that may lead to increased tensions in the East and South China Seas. Further, both states agreed to initiate discussions for a defence pact that can form a framework for further military cooperation between both states.<sup>10</sup> This development followed a series of steps taken by both states to gradually build their security cooperation in response to the regional and international situation.

In July 2021, Japan and the Philippines held their first-ever joint air force exercises at a former US military facility in the northern Philippines called Clark Air Base. The bilateral air-to-air manoeuvres involved a Japanese C-130H cargo aircraft, as joint teams of the Japanese Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF) and Philippine Air Force (PAF) stimulated delivering essential goods to isolated areas as part of humanitarian and disaster relief operational training.<sup>11</sup> Both Japan and the Philippines being highly disaster-prone countries owing to their climate and topography—evidenced by Japan's experience of countless earthquakes and typhoons,<sup>12</sup> and the frequent impact of floods, typhoons, landslides, earthquakes, volcanoes and droughts in the Philippines<sup>13</sup>—such collaboration on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) operations comes as a natural starting point for deeper defence ties between the two countries. While these bilateral training exercises were the first of their kind, the JASDF first assisted the PAF in HADR after the devastating Typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda

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10. "First Japan-Philippines Foreign and Defense Ministerial Meeting ('2+2')", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, April 9, 2022, at [https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e\\_003111.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_003111.html). Accessed on February 21, 2022.

11. "Japan, Philippines to hold first joint air force exercises", *The Economic Times*, July 1, 2021, at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/japan-philippines-to-hold-first-joint-air-force-exercises/articleshow/84016562.cms?from=mdr>. Accessed on February 21, 2022.

12. See "Disaster Prevention: Disasters and Disaster Prevention in Japan", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, accessed on August 26, 2021, at <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/disaster/21st/2.html>. Accessed on February 21, 2022.

13. See Vincenzo Bollettino, Tilly Alcayna, Krish Enriquez, and Patrick Vinck, *Perceptions of Disaster Resilience and Preparedness in the Philippines* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, June 2018), at <https://hhi.harvard.edu/publications/perceptions-disaster-resilience-and-preparedness-philippines>. Accessed on February 21, 2022.

in November 2013—an operation which saw the deployment of 16 aircraft (including seven C-130H cargo planes), three naval vessels and almost 1,200 personnel.<sup>14</sup> Last month's joint air drills, therefore, came as a "significant milestone"<sup>15</sup> in Japan-Philippines defence ties as both states celebrated 65 years of official diplomatic relations.<sup>16</sup> In 2020, Tokyo and Manila also approved the export of Japan's air radar systems to the Philippines, demonstrating their gradually growing synergy.

In essence, this development, more than anything else, shows how the Philippines can be an integral part of Japan's security outlook towards the region. In 2015, Tokyo and Manila signed a "Memorandum on Defence Cooperation and Exchanges" under a "Strengthened Strategic Partnership" aimed at furthering their shared geostrategic interests and coordinating a response to shared challenges.<sup>17</sup> Increased bilateral interactions, cooperation in capacity building, participation in bilateral and multilateral exercises, and Japan's support through the transfer of defence equipment and defence technology have featured as the four key tenets of such a strategic partnership (see Figure 1).<sup>18</sup> Both states not only held 17 naval exercises since 2015, but the Philippines was also notably the first country to sign a contract to purchase four completely Japanese-manufactured air surveillance radar systems—further adding

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14. "First Air-to-Air Bilateral Training on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief between Japan Air Self-Defense Force and the Philippine Air Force", Embassy of Japan in the Philippines, July 8, 2021, at [https://www.ph.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr\\_en/11\\_000001\\_00467.html](https://www.ph.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_en/11_000001_00467.html). Accessed on March 14, 2022.

15. Ibid.

16. "Video Message by Prime Minister Suga on the "65h Anniversary of the Normalisation of the Diplomatic Relations between Japan and the Philippines", Japan-Philippines Relations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, July 28, 2021, at [https://www.mofa.go.jp/s\\_sa/sea2/ph/page3e\\_001126.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/s_sa/sea2/ph/page3e_001126.html). Accessed on March 14, 2022.

17. "Japan-Philippines Joint Declaration: A Strengthened Strategic Partnership for Advancing the Shared Principles and Goals of Peace, Security, and Growth in the Region and Beyond", Department of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Philippines, June 4, 2015, at <https://dfa.gov.ph/dfa-news/dfa-releasesupdate/6444-japan-philippines-joint-declaration-a-strengthened-strategic-partnership-for-advancing-the-shared-principles-and-goals-of-peace-security-and-growth-in-the-region-and-beyond>. Accessed on March 14, 2022.

18. Image obtained from "Japan-Philippines Defence Cooperation and Partnership", Embassy of Japan in the Philippines, July 1, 2021, at [https://www.ph.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr\\_en/11\\_000001\\_00451.html](https://www.ph.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_en/11_000001_00451.html). Accessed on March 14, 2022.

credence to the foundations of a strong bilateral security partnership between the two countries.

This defence focus was complemented by cooperation on quality infrastructure development in the Philippines, with Tokyo providing financial aid for major transport and connectivity infrastructure projects.<sup>19</sup> Japan has been involved in most of the Philippines' modern public infrastructure as the principal partner of President Rodrigo Duterte's "build build build" programme; it is not only the Philippines' top source of Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) accounting for almost 39 per cent of its total aid,<sup>20</sup> and one of its leading investors (the largest in Q1 of 2021 at almost 55 per cent),<sup>21</sup> but also its second-largest export destination (narrowly trailing China).<sup>22</sup> Some key examples of Japanese investments are the Manila metro and the North-South Commuter Railway projects.<sup>23</sup> Under his focus on quality infrastructure development in the region—through flagship initiatives, the Expanded Partnership for Quality Infrastructure (EPQI)—Prime Minister Abe announced a commitment of one trillion yen (via loans, grant aid and technical cooperation); this included supporting the Philippines Coast

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19. "10th Meeting of the Japan-Philippines High Level Joint Committee on Infrastructure Development and Economic Cooperation", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, October 28, 2020, at [https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e\\_002958.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_002958.html). For earlier Japanese infrastructure investments in the Philippines, see "Roadmap for Transport Infrastructure Development for Metro Manila and Its Surrounding Areas (Region III and Region IV-A)", Department of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Philippines, accessed on August 31, 2021, at [https://dfa.gov.ph/images/2015/dfareleases\\_pdf/june/Roadmap\\_for\\_Transport\\_Infrastructure\\_Development\\_in\\_Metro\\_Manila.pdf](https://dfa.gov.ph/images/2015/dfareleases_pdf/june/Roadmap_for_Transport_Infrastructure_Development_in_Metro_Manila.pdf). Accessed on March 19, 2022.
  20. Beatrice M. Laforga, "Japan remains top source of ODA with over \$10 billion in first half", *Business World*, September 28, 2020, at <https://www.bworldonline.com/japan-remains-top-source-of-oda-with-over-10-billion-in-first-half/>. Accessed on March 19, 2022.
  21. "Approved Foreign Investments Reached PhP 19.55 Billion in First Quarter 2021", Reference Number 2021-225, Philippine Statistics Authority, Republic of Philippines, June 3, 2021, at <https://psa.gov.ph/foreign-investments-press-releases>. Accessed on March 19, 2022.
  22. "Highlights of the Philippine Export and Import Statistics June 2021 (Preliminary)", Reference Number 2021-332, Philippine Statistics Authority, Republic of Philippines, August 6, 2021, at <https://psa.gov.ph/statistics/foreign-trade/fts-release-id/164911>. Accessed on March 19, 2022.
  23. Aika Rey, "Philippines, Japan sign \$1.54-billion loan deal on North-South Railway", *Rappler*, January 22, 2019, at <https://www.rappler.com/business/philippines-japan-sign-loan-deal-north-south-railway>. Accessed on March 19, 2022.

Guard with training and equipment (13 high-speed boats for law enforcement as well as a loan to build ten 94-metre-class patrol vessels) for “capacity building for maritime law enforcement including in the South China Sea (SCS).”<sup>24</sup>

In a sign of this increasingly deepening partnership, Abe famously visited Davao City in 2017, where he sought to buttress their fortified links with a personal level of diplomacy—even prompting President Duterte to refer to Tokyo as Manila’s “friend” and “closer than a brother.”<sup>25</sup> To a large extent, the paramount factor driving Japan and the Philippines together—to bring about a “golden era” in their ties—has been China’s hasty and aggressive rise.<sup>26</sup> In other words, Beijing’s bellicosity has pushed the two American treaty allies into an apotheosis in their bilateral ties with Abe successfully positioning Japan as an indispensable strategic security partner for Manila and an intermediary between President Duterte and President Trump, while their ties waned. Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga sought to take forward Abe’s success in establishing warm relations with a planned visit to the Philippines (alongside India), and even if the trip was cancelled due to surging COVID-19 in Japan, it nevertheless shows Tokyo’s continued focus on Manila (and New Delhi) in its Indo-Pacific strategic outlook.<sup>27</sup>

### **AN EMERGING SECURITY DIMENSION IN DELHI-MANILA TIES**

Traditionally, India’s ties with Manila have been facile and low-key, possibly due to a lack of shared colonial vestiges and cultural linkages. As with Japan, much of their recent focus on strategic security has

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24. “Japan’s Contribution of One Trillion Yen in Public & Private Finances to the Philippines’ Nation-Building”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, July 2021, at <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100217186.pdf>. Accessed on March 19, 2022.

25. Joyce Ann L. Rocamora, “PH-Japan ties ‘closer than brothers’”, *Philippine News Agency*, Republic of Philippines, August 6, 2018, at <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1043732>. Accessed on March 26, 2022.

26. Richard Javad Heydarian, “The Golden Era of Japan-Philippine Relations Has Arrived”, *National Interest*, June 16, 2019, at <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/golden-era-japan-philippine-relations-has-arrived-62572>. Accessed on March 26, 2022.

27. Ritsuko Ando, “Japan PM cancels trip to India, Philippines amid rising COVID-19 cases”, *Reuters*, April 21, 2021, at <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/japan-pm-postpone-visit-india-philippines-media-2021-04-21/>. Accessed on March 26, 2022.

emerged from their shared China challenge, with both states being involved in a territorial (whether land or maritime) dispute with an aggressive Beijing.<sup>28</sup> Further, despite being a treaty ally of the US, a Duterte-led Manila has found it difficult to openly cooperate with Washington; under such circumstances, increasing strategic and security ties with India—which holds the unique position of being a “Major Defence Partner” of the US while staunchly maintaining its strategic autonomy—has pushed both states to recognise each other as “vital partners”.<sup>29</sup>

India-Philippines ties have gradually assumed an added importance to their defence and security dimension in their ties. This is evident in both statements and increasing defence trade between the two states. In March 2021, both countries signed a government-to-government military hardware materials and equipment procurement deal for India to supply the BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles (co-developed by New Delhi and Moscow) to the Philippines, the first Southeast Asian state. Thereafter, in January 2022, India and the Philippines signed a US\$375 million deal for the BrahMos system—the first major defence export contract India has concluded with any country.<sup>30</sup> The BrahMos is the Philippines’ first weaponry with deterrent capabilities—enabling it to quickly detect, track, chase and destroy targets—thus boosting its coastal defence and potentially unnerving China.<sup>31</sup> Beginning July, their defence cooperation will take further shape as Filipino marine corp operatives come to India for training on operating the BrahMos

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28. Jeff M. Smith, “India and the Philippines: A New Chapter in Defense Ties?”, The Heritage Foundation, January 23, 2020, at <https://www.heritage.org/asia/commentary/india-and-the-philippines-new-chapter-defense-ties>. Accessed on March 26, 2022.

29. Dipanjan Roy Chaudhary, “India seeks to widen Indo-Pacific partnership with Philippines amid China’s aggression”, *The Economic Times*, June 13, 2020, at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/india-seeks-to-widen-indo-pacific-partnership-with-philippines-amid-chinas-aggression/articleshow/76362720.cms>. Accessed on March 26, 2022.

30. “India, Philippines ink \$ 375 million deal for BrahMos missiles”, *The Economic Times*, January 29, 2022, at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/india-philippines-ink-375-million-deal-for-brahmos-missiles/articleshow/89188501.cms?from=mdr>. Accessed on March 26, 2022.

31. Kiran Sharma and Cliff Venzon, “Philippines set to be first buyer of India-Russia cruise missile”, *Nikkei Asia*, November 22, 2020, at <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Philippines-set-to-be-first-buyer-of-India-Russia-cruise-missile>. Accessed on March 26, 2022.

systems. Furthermore, the pact will act as a legal framework for future defence transfers, according to Filipino Defence Secretary Delfin Lorenzana.<sup>32</sup>

Furthermore, in August 2021, Indian naval vessels INS *Ranvijay* (Guided Missile Destroyer, D55) and INS *Kora* (Guided Missile Corvette, P61) carried out joint maritime exercises focused on enhancing interoperability with the Philippine Navy's BRP *Antonio Luna* (Frigate, FF 151) in the West Philippine Sea.<sup>33</sup> The joint drills came as part of the Indian Navy's larger deployment to the Western Pacific to boost maritime security cooperation with regional littoral security partners and promote a free, open, stable, peaceful, prosperous and inclusive Indo-Pacific. While India has made several port calls to the Philippines, this marks the first instance of bilateral exercises between the two states—although they did notably participate in joint drills alongside the US and Japan in 2019—that showcase their shared commitment to a safe maritime environment in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>34</sup>

Over the past decade, both states have set up a Joint Commission on Bilateral Cooperation (JCBC) for foreign policy dialogues and a Joint Defence Cooperation Committee (JDCC) to further security-based consultations.<sup>35</sup> Both states have also begun regular intelligence-sharing on shared security issues alongside service-to-service exchanges on military (and foreign service) training and capacity-building support. Maritime security is a crucial area of

32. Rezaul H. Laskar, "India signs pact with Philippines for supply of BrahMos missile", *Hindustan Times*, March 4, 2021, at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/india-signs-pact-with-philippines-for-supply-of-brahmos-missile-101614795752832.html>. Accessed on March 26, 2022.

33. Ministry of Defence, "Maritime Partnership Exercise between Indian Navy and the Philippine Navy—23 August 2021", Release ID: 174832 8, Press Information Bureau, Government of India, August 23, 2021, at <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1748328>. Accessed on April 9, 2022.

34. Ministry of Defence, "IN Ships Kolkata and Shakti undertake Group Sail with Naval Ships of Japan, Philippines and the USA", Release ID: 1571780, Press Information Bureau, Government of India, May 9, 2019, at <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1571780>. Accessed on April 9, 2022.

35. "A Brief on India-Philippines Bilateral Relations", Embassy of India in Manila, Philippines, accessed on September 1, 2021, at <https://www.eoimanila.gov.in/page/bilateral-political-and-cultural-relations/>. Also see "4th India-Philippines Joint Commission on Bilateral Cooperation", Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, November 6, 2020, at [https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/33168/4th\\_India\\_Philippines\\_Joint\\_Commission\\_on\\_Bilateral\\_Cooperation](https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/33168/4th_India_Philippines_Joint_Commission_on_Bilateral_Cooperation). Accessed on April 9, 2022.

convergence, with a communiqué from the Filipino Naval Chief to his Indian counterpart stating that Manila hoped an expanded partnership would focus on making “our seas safer and more secure for everyone.”<sup>36</sup> Beyond such a maritime security and strategic dimension, India is also looking to establish stronger economic ties with the Philippines, which ranks as ASEAN’s third-largest economy by GDP. New Delhi is reportedly even considering a preferential trade pact with Manila (among other ASEAN states) as a way to better integrate itself with the economic bloc’s supply chain network after passing on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (RCEP).<sup>37</sup> Such a pact would not only bolster India’s AEP while strengthening trade relations, but also reduce China’s economic influence over the region. In the infrastructure domain as well, India has sought to mobilise its private sector investments in the Philippines’ connectivity infrastructure—like airports, railways, shipbuilding, coastal ports and railways—through tie-ups with President Duterte’s “build, build, build”.<sup>38</sup> This marks another crucial area where India and Japan can find synergy as part of their third-country cooperation focus.

### MANILA’S SHIFTING NEEDLE ON CHINA

Perhaps one of the most important factors when considering the potential of India-Philippines-Japan triangular cooperation is the Philippines’ changing China strategy, a country with whom it shares exceedingly asymmetric ties, a maritime dispute, and significant economic dependency. To protect its interests in the SCS, China has been strategically (and unilaterally) installing military infrastructure like bases on artificial islands—blatantly ignoring the 2016 international tribunal ruling of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea that explicitly rejected Chinese SCS claims in favour

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36. Dipanjan Roy Chaudhary, n. 29.

37. Nayanima Basu, “India considers long-term economic ties with the Philippines, to boost Indo-Pacific initiative”, *The Print*, March 1, 2021, at <https://theprint.in/diplomacy/india-considers-long-term-economic-ties-with-the-philippines-to-boost-indo-pacific-initiative/613360/>. Accessed on April 9, 2022.

38. “Business Conference on India-Philippines Infrastructure Cooperation”, Embassy of India in Manila, Philippines, February 19, 2021, at [https://www.eoimanila.gov.in/news\\_letter\\_detail/?id=56](https://www.eoimanila.gov.in/news_letter_detail/?id=56). Accessed on April 9, 2022.

of the Philippines.<sup>39</sup> However, President Duterte chose to downplay, if not entirely abandon, this decision in favour of courting Chinese foreign direct investments, which were singularly attractive by being massive in quantity and easily accessible. This overall congenial tone was representative of Manila's rather submissive attitude vis-à-vis China; several analysts saw Duterte's election to office as a "godsend to China".<sup>40</sup> President Duterte famously (and jokingly) referred to the Philippines as another province of China amidst an ardent defence of Beijing and Xi Jinping.<sup>41</sup>

However, not only did Duterte's China-tilt policy prove unpopular with international and domestic audiences but also yielded little dividends. For instance, polls of the Filipino public found overwhelmingly negative opinions towards China; a recent survey found that 87 per cent of Filipinos see Chinese encroachment as the top security concern in the SCS and would choose to align with the US over China.<sup>42</sup> Further, despite Duterte's high hopes of drawing billions in Chinese financing, few of the projects announced were implemented and aid pledged delivered<sup>43</sup>—even as Beijing

39. The South China Sea Arbitration (No. 2013-19) (The Republic of Philippines v. The People's Republic of China), Permanent Court of Arbitration Case No. 2013-19, Award of July 12, 2016, ITLOS Rep. 465-469, at <https://pcacases.com/web/sendAttach/2086>. Accessed on April 9, 2022.

40. Zhou Bo, "Duterte's genial tone on the South China Sea is just one of many signs of warmer Sino-Asean ties", *South China Morning Post*, November 14, 2016, at <https://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/2045739/dutertes-genial-tone-south-china-sea-just-one-many-signs>. Accessed on April 16, 2022.

41. "Duterte jokes about 'Philippines, province of China'", *Philstar Global*, February 19, 2018, at <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2018/02/19/1789428/duterte-jokes-about-philippines-province-china>. Accessed on April 16, 2022.

42. Sharon Seah, Hoang The Ha, Melinda Martinus and Pham The Phuong Thao, *The State of Southeast Asia: 2021 Survey Report* (Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, 2021), at <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/The-State-of-SEA-2021-v2.pdf>. Earlier surveys found similar results. See Laura Silver, "U.S. is seen as a top ally in many countries—but others view it as a threat", Pew Research Center, December 5, 2019, at <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/12/05/u-s-is-seen-as-a-top-ally-in-many-countries-but-others-view-it-as-a-threat/>; Camille A. Aguinaldo, "Pulse survey: Filipinos trust US the most, China the least", *Business World*, January 14, 2019, at <https://www.bworldonline.com/pulse-survey-filipinos-trust-us-the-most-china-the-least/>. Accessed on April 16, 2022.

43. Jason Koutsoukis and Celine Yap, "China Hasn't Delivered on Its \$24 Billion Philippines Promise", *Bloomberg*, July 25, 2018, at <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-07-25/china-s-24-billion-promise-to-duterte-still-hasn-t-materialized>. Accessed on April 16, 2022.

continued to press its advantage by increasing its provocative activities—including regular patrolling of the Philippines’ maritime and air space<sup>44</sup>—to strengthen its claims to the disputed SCS waters. Ultimately, it would be fair to conclude that Duterte’s China policy compromised the Philippines’ security and sovereignty and failed to safeguard its economic interests.<sup>45</sup>

This has gradually forced the Duterte administration to not only rethink their strategy but also publicly express their frustration with Chinese behaviour.<sup>46</sup> Duterte’s rather public charm-offensive vis-à-vis Beijing has shifted to a neutral strategy as China’s rise has become a serious—and, more importantly, no longer avoidable—security concern for the Philippines’ security. China’s rise and its “more active and aggressive presence” in the West Philippine Sea are explicitly identified as a policy concern for Manila in its 2018 National Security Policy.<sup>47</sup> This shift has only strengthened amid the pandemic and heightening US-China great-power tensions in the Indo-Pacific that have thrown the region into flux. Duterte’s address to the 75th UN General Assembly, which invoked the 2016 Tribunal ruling to defend Manila’s SCS rights, evidenced such a sharp turnaround in its China outlook.<sup>48</sup> Simultaneously, the Duterte administration reversed its somewhat hasty decision to end the US-Philippines Visiting

44. Nandni Mahajan, “Explained: Why Chinese vessels in Whitsun Reef has Philippines scrambling ‘Sovereignty Patrols’”, *The Indian Express*, March 31, 2021, at <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/china-philippines-south-china-sea-dispute-explained-7252250/>; Jarius Bondoc, “China now patrolling sea, air space”, *Philstar Global*, August 20, 2017, at <https://www.philstar.com/opinion/2017/08/20/1731136/china-now-patrolling-philippines-sea-air-space>. Accessed on April 16, 2022.

45. Joshua Kurlantzick, “Duterte’s Ingratiating Approach to China Has Been a Bust”, *World Politics Review*, June 2, 2021, at <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/29697/duterte-s-approach-to-china-philippines-relations-has-been-a-bust>. Accessed on April 23, 2022.

46. “Philippines foreign minister issues expletive-laced tweet over China sea dispute”, *Reuters*, May 3, 2021, at <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/philippines-foreign-minister-issues-expletive-laced-tweet-over-china-sea-dispute-2021-05-03/>. Accessed on April 23, 2022.

47. *National Security Strategy: Security and Development for Transformational Change and Well-Being of the Filipino People* (Manila: Government of the Philippines, 2018), 90, at [https://apcss.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Philippines-National\\_Security\\_Strategy\\_2018.pdf](https://apcss.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Philippines-National_Security_Strategy_2018.pdf). Accessed on April 23, 2022.

48. Rodrigo Roa Duterte, “Philippine Statement” (speech, General Debate, 75th Session of the General Assembly, New York, September 22, 2020), United Nations, at [https://estatemnts.unmeetings.org/estatemnts/10.0010/20200922/cVOfMr0rKnhR/onTeYkHGFL0t\\_en.pdf](https://estatemnts.unmeetings.org/estatemnts/10.0010/20200922/cVOfMr0rKnhR/onTeYkHGFL0t_en.pdf). Accessed on April 23, 2022.

Forces Agreement, thus choosing to continue its treaty alliance with Washington amid disintegrating relations with Beijing.<sup>49</sup>

Moving forward, as Duterte comes to the end of his Presidential term in 2022 and looks to pass the reins to his daughter, Sara Duterte, he has further hardened his stance on China to bolster domestic approval. For Manila, this shift has created room for increasing broader geopolitical alignment with partners like Japan and India in the long term. In any event, the May 2022 elections will bring a change in leadership; most candidates have called for a tougher stance on China, displaying the growing anti-China sentiment within the country. If the front runner, Ferdinand Marcos Jr. wins the presidency there are concerns that Manila will revert to a “kowtowing attitude” towards China, and pursue a bilateral deal on their dispute in the SCS. Yet, Marcos has stated that he will reject aligning with any single state and look to tread carefully with China and maintain ties with the US.<sup>50</sup> Here, too, closer partnerships with India and Japan in a middle-power connect can be a vital move for Manila to sustain such a strategy and navigate between great-power politics.

### **A TRILATERAL PARTNERSHIP FOR THE NEW ERA**

With such a changing calculus in the outlooks of Japan, India and the Philippines, Tokyo and New Delhi can find much synergy with Manila in the security and geostrategic domains. This could feasibly emerge as a maritime partnership in the Indo-Pacific, with all three sharing maritime security concerns with regard to China.

The Philippines is a littoral Chinese neighbour and is involved in an increasingly heated maritime dispute in the SCS, which has already prompted increased defence cooperation with partners like India and Japan. With Duterte now reaffirming the 2016 UNCLOS award, New Delhi and Tokyo can support and strengthen Manila’s position or posture as it manages and negotiates with China on the

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49. “Statement of Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro L. Locsin, Jr. on VFA Extension”, Department of Foreign Affairs, Republic of the Philippines, November 11, 2020, at <https://dfa.gov.ph/dfa-news/statements-and-advisoriestupdate/28141-statement-of-foreign-affairs-secretary-teodoro-l-locsin-jr-on-vfa-extension>. Accessed on April 25, 2022.

50. Andreo Calonzo, “Marcos to Maintain US Ties, Tread Carefully With China”, *Bloomberg*, March 16, 2022, at <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-03-16/marcos-to-sustain-philippines-u-s-ties-careful-on-china-row>. Accessed on April 25, 2022.

dispute. The SCS is of critical economic importance to India and Japan as well, with a significant portion of their trade passing through the region, and they have a vested interest in protecting the freedom of navigation in the sea; deeper ties with the Philippines can help both states have a stronger voice in the SCS issue. Apart from its economic significance, the SCS issue also poses security implications for both India and Japan. For Tokyo, the outcome of the matter—whether or not it results in an all-out war, and how China navigates and imposes its claims—can have serious implications for its maritime dispute with Beijing over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea. Similarly, for India, a favourable outcome for Beijing can pose a grave challenge to its national security by giving it an economic and strategic advantage—particularly in terms of easier access to the Indian Ocean.

Moreover, should its shift away from China sustain, the Philippines can also prove to be a vital partner when it comes to Taiwan's security. Over the last few years, amid Duterte's bonhomie with China and souring ties with the US, Manila's potential as a security ally was largely overlooked. Now, however, India and Japan (as well as the US) must recognise the importance of outreach to the Philippines to cement its status as a partner under a US-led security architecture. The Philippines' geostrategic position, near China and Taiwan, makes it a crucial ally when developing contingencies for the Taiwan dilemma. While Taiwan has not been a major point of concern for Manila, the changing regional dynamics and growing focus on the Chinese threat to Taiwan mean that the Philippines cannot avoid the issue much longer. It must map out its strategy to ensure its strategic interests and gains; a closer India-Japan-Philippines can help Manila align closer to the US and therefore as an ally vis-à-vis Taiwan. This security partnership can simultaneously develop as a comprehensive and broad-based venture with a focus on the blue economy and fisheries, sustainable economic growth, resilient supply chains, and quality infrastructure in the coming era.

### *What Can India Do?*

For such a trilateral partnership to materialise, New Delhi must take the lead and capitalise on its bilateral relationships with

Tokyo and Manila. India-Japan security ties are already on a strong upward trajectory; the challenge will be to sustain this momentum under Tokyo's new leadership post its upcoming elections. Abe and Modi's camaraderie and Suga's continued focus on the Indo-Pacific ensured the synergy in their ties. Now, with a change in Tokyo's leadership imminent,<sup>51</sup> the impetus will be for New Delhi to actively reach out and continue building a strategic alliance with the new administration. Some agendas that India can push in India-Japan defence ties are enhancing defence trade and technology transfer through their existing dialogue and cooperation mechanisms. This includes expansive collaboration in the research and development of emerging technologies in the defence domain, beyond their current focus on unmanned ground vehicles (UGV)/robotics.<sup>52</sup>

One project where Japan could feasibly play a critical role is India's recently sanctioned INR 50,000 crore project, P-75, which entails the indigenous construction of six conventional diesel-electric submarines.<sup>53</sup> Although the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has now developed an indigenous Air Independent Propulsion (AIP), the technology has already raced ahead to lithium-ion batteries; building, sea-proving and commissioning AIP submarines would therefore be outdated.<sup>54</sup> The Indian Navy is interested in equipping these submarines with

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51. Antoni Slodkowski and Tetsushi Kajimoto, "Japan's struggling PM Suga steps down, sets stage for new leader", Reuters, September 3, 2021, at <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/japans-ruling-party-execs-meet-pm-suga-struggles-ahead-election-2021-09-03/>. Accessed on April 25, 2022.

52. See Titli Basu, "High Technology and India-Japan Strategic Cooperation", *International Affairs*, February 3, 2021, at <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/high-technology-and-india-japan-strategic-cooperation/>. Accessed on April 25, 2022.

53. ANI, "Indian Navy's six new indigenous submarines won't have indigenous AIP for prolonged underwater stay", *The Economic Times*, July 12, 2021, at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/indian-navys-six-new-indigenous-submarines-wont-have-indigenous-aip-for-prolonged-underwater-stay/articleshow/84340973.cms?from=mdr>. Accessed on April 29, 2022.

54. Shishir Gupta, "'Atmanirbhar Bharat' in defence should not be at mercy of military bureaucrats", *Hindustan Times*, August 31, 2021, at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/aatmanirbhar-bharat-in-defence-should-not-be-at-mercy-of-military-bureaucrats-101630389646561.html>. Accessed on April 29, 2022.

an indigenous “high-capacity” lithium-ion battery system<sup>55</sup> that has inherent advantages like “higher power density, lighter weight and lower maintenance costs”<sup>56</sup>—and is pioneered by Japan’s Ouryu (Soryu class) submarine commissioned in March 2020 and Taigei-class submarines launched in October 2020.<sup>57</sup> With India being on a tight 20-month deadline for the lithium-ion project, cooperation with Japan can prove vital.

At the same time, India must position the Philippines as a strategic priority in its foreign and security policy outlook as well as under its AEP. This can, firstly, begin with a focus on softer cooperation areas like infrastructure and people-to-people exchanges that promote mutual understanding and encourage convergence in their thinking. Importantly, as the Philippines looks to stand up to China to protect its sovereignty, autonomy, and national interests, while simultaneously avoiding outright confrontation with the economic and military great power, India can set an example on how to stand firm while continuing to engage with China.<sup>58</sup> Additionally, India can press for its proposal to share coastal surveillance radar systems that enhance maritime domain awareness alongside the transfer of other defence equipment. While the India-Philippines naval exercise

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55. “Request for Information (RFI) for Indigenous Development of Truncated Lithium Ion Battery System for Submarines”, Indian Navy, October 28, 2020, at <https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/request-information-rfi-indigenous-development-truncated-lithium-ion-battery-system>. Accessed on April 29, 2022.

56. “Why is Indian Navy eyeing lithium-ion batteries for its submarines?”, *The Week*, October 30, 2020, at <https://www.theweek.in/news/india/2020/10/30/why-is-indian-navy-eyeing-lithium-ion-batteries-for-its-submarines.html>. Also see, Tyler Rogoway, “Japan Goes Back to the Future with Lithium-Ion Battery Powered Submarines”, *The Drive*, February 17, 2017, at <https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/7747/japan-goes-back-to-the-future-with-lithium-ion-battery-powered-submarines>. Accessed on April 29, 2022.

57. Mike Yeo, “Japan launches first of its new class of submarines”, *Defense News*, October 14, 2020, at <https://www.defensenews.com/naval/2020/10/14/japan-launches-first-of-its-new-class-of-submarines/>; Gabriel Dominguez, “Japan’s first Soryu-class submarine equipped with lithium-ion batteries arrives at home base”, *Janes*, April 9, 2020, at <https://www.janes.com/defence-news/news-detail/japans-first-soryu-class-submarine-equipped-with-lithium-ion-batteries-arrives-at-home-base>. Accessed on April 29, 2022.

58. Don McLain Gill, “The significance of a growing India-Philippines strategic partnership”, Observer Research Foundation, November 13, 2020, at <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/the-significance-of-a-growing-india-philippines-strategic-partnership/>. Accessed on April 29, 2022.

is a move in the right direction, such drills must be held regularly, moving forward. India must also pursue air-to-air exercises with Manila, possibly through participation in the Japan-Philippines air exercises; with disaster response becoming a major priority for the IAF, HADR can be an area of joint interest for all three states. New Delhi can also support Manila by inviting Filipino personnel for specialised military training and education and capacity building.

### CONCLUSION

The Philippines can therefore occupy a key place in India and Japan's rapidly developing focus on third-country cooperation and synergy over their Indo-Pacific approaches in the near future. Beyond traditional partners like Vietnam, Indonesia and Singapore, the Philippines can emerge as a critical power in the region and India and Japan's joint outreach to Manila must feature prominently in the coming times. Thus far, outreach to the Philippines was challenged by President Duterte's pro-Chinese orientation and oft-touted anti-American stance that limited India and Japan's opportunities to draw Manila's support for their free and open Indo-Pacific strategy. However, over the past year, Beijing's rapidly increasing assertiveness has left Duterte with little room to manoeuvre amid the two competing Superpowers and even forced Manila to strategically shift back closer to Washington. This shift has opened up room for India and Japan to heighten their outreach to Manila—and to some extent, such a focus has already emerged with Japan's recently conducted first air-to-air exercises and India's naval exercises with the Philippines. These events, and changing strategic calculus, are indications of an emerging and strengthening security dimension in India and Japan's ties with the Philippines, and, as this brief contends, provide the foundational basis of a strong triangular partnership between the three maritime middle powers of the Indo-Pacific.