

India-Japan Defence Partnership

Mains: *GS II – International Relations*

Why in News?

The changing security environment in Asia is compelling India and Japan to reassess the scale and ambition of their defence partnership.

What is the background?

- **Rise of China** - The principal driver of Japan's evolving defence policy is the rise of China as a major military power.
- Beijing's growing military capabilities and willingness to alter the status quo have created common security concerns for India and Japan.
 - **Concerns of Japan** - Japan faces Chinese assertiveness in the East China Sea and around the Senkaku Islands.
 - **Concerns of India** - India faces persistent Chinese military pressure along the Himalayan border.
- Both countries confront a strategy involving persistent probing and gradual attempts to alter the territorial status quo.
- Thus, although India's geographical challenge is primarily continental while Japan's is predominantly maritime, both are responding to the broader transformation of the Asian balance of power.
- **The American Factor** - India and Japan continue to value the American presence in the Indo-Pacific.
- Japan remains closely tied to the United States through its alliance, while India considers American engagement important for maintaining a stable regional balance.
- However, changing American policies have generated questions regarding the predictability and long-term reliability of US regional commitments.
- This creates an incentive for India and Japan to strengthen their own national capabilities and develop stronger partnerships with other like-minded countries.
- Consequently, the objective is not to replace the United States but to develop greater regional capacity and strategic resilience.
- **Japan's Strategic Transformation** - For much of the post-war period, Japan followed a model in which economic development was prioritised while national security depended heavily on the US alliance.
- Defence expenditure remained relatively low, arms exports were heavily restricted and the Self-Defense Forces operated under significant political constraints.
- However, China's growing military capabilities gradually challenged this model. Under

former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Japan began a major transformation of its security policy.

- The 2022 defence reforms represented a significant milestone.
- Japan has sought to do the following:
 - Increase defence expenditure towards approximately 2% of GDP;
 - Acquire long-range counterstrike capabilities;
 - Strengthen air and missile defence;
 - Expand cyber and space capabilities;
 - Develop unmanned systems;
 - Enhance the ability of its forces to operate beyond the Japanese islands; and
 - Revitalise its domestic defence industrial base.
- Japan has also relaxed earlier restrictions on defence exports and introduced the Official Security Assistance (OSA) framework to provide security-related assistance to friendly countries.
- Thus, Japan is increasingly treating military power, defence technology, arms exports and security assistance as instruments of statecraft.

What is the status of India-Japan Defence Cooperation?

- **Existing Foundations** - India and Japan already possess substantial institutional foundations for deeper cooperation.
 - The 2+2 Foreign and Defence Ministerial Dialogue;
 - A logistics support agreement;
 - Regular military exercises;
 - Cooperation among the three armed forces;
 - Maritime security cooperation; and
 - Growing defence technology engagement.
- The two countries have also increased cooperation in the maritime domain, particularly through exercises and efforts to improve Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA).
- **Recent developments** - The announcement of a bilateral defence co-development project involving the UNICORN naval communications antenna is an important step towards technological cooperation.
- However, institutional mechanisms alone are insufficient.
- The real challenge is converting them into deployable capabilities and sustained defence-industrial outcomes.
- **The Australia-Japan Model** - Japan's expanding defence relationship with Australia demonstrates what a more ambitious partnership can achieve.
- Tokyo and Canberra have expanded:
 - Military exercises;
 - Reciprocal access arrangements;
 - Logistics cooperation;
 - Defence-industrial collaboration; and
 - Acquisition of Japanese defence platforms.
- Australia's decision to acquire Japanese-designed Mogami-class frigates represents an important breakthrough in Japan's evolution as a defence exporter.
- For India, this demonstrates the possibilities of moving beyond dialogue and exercises

towards joint procurement, co-development and co-production.

What are the key challenges in India-Japan defense cooperation?

- **Limited Defence Industrial Cooperation** - India and Japan need greater ambition in joint research, development and production of defence technologies.
- Bureaucratic procedures, differing procurement systems and limited private-sector integration have constrained progress.
- **Exercises Need Greater Operational Depth** - Regular exercises are valuable, but the relationship should move towards more sophisticated operational coordination.
- Priority areas could include:
 - anti-submarine warfare;
 - maritime surveillance;
 - air defence;
 - logistics and replenishment;
 - unmanned systems;
 - cyber and space security; and
 - intelligence and information sharing.
- **Technology Cooperation** - Both countries possess complementary technological strengths.
- Japan's advanced manufacturing capabilities and India's growing technological and industrial base can support joint development in areas such as sensors, robotics, communications, unmanned systems and maritime technologies.
- **Defence Supply-Chain Resilience** - Greater India-Japan cooperation can reduce excessive dependence on single-country supply chains and contribute to resilient defence production networks across the Indo-Pacific.

What could be done?

- **Production of defence system** - the two countries should establish ambitious targets for joint development and co-production of defence systems.
- **Streamlining military exercises** - Second, military exercises should increasingly simulate realistic operational scenarios, particularly in the maritime domain.
- **Data sharing** - Both sides should strengthen information-sharing and maritime domain awareness across the Indo-Pacific.
- **Private sector participation** - Greater private-sector participation should be encouraged to accelerate innovation and overcome bureaucratic delays.
- **Expanding Cooperation** - India and Japan should deepen trilateral and minilateral cooperation with Australia, the United States, South Korea and other like-minded Indo-Pacific partners.
- Cooperation should remain focused on maintaining a free, open, inclusive and rules-based Indo-Pacific, rather than becoming a narrowly China-centric military arrangement.

Conclusion

- The transformation of Japan's defence policy presents India with a significant strategic opportunity.

- Japan is moving beyond its traditional post-war military restraint and developing stronger capabilities, defence technologies and security partnerships.
- For India, a stronger Japan is strategically advantageous.
- Both countries face common concerns regarding unilateral attempts to alter the regional status quo, while both have an interest in preserving a stable and rules-based Indo-Pacific.
- The next phase of India-Japan relations must therefore move from political convergence to operational capability, from exercises to interoperability, and from defence trade to co-development and co-production.
- A more capable India-Japan defence partnership can strengthen not only bilateral security but also the broader balance of power and strategic stability in the Indo-Pacific.

Reference

[The Indian Express| Indian Japan Defence Partnership](#)

