

Address by Ambassador Kenji Hiramatsu
“Japan’s perspective of the changing geopolitics of Asia”
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Director Programmes of India Habitat Centre, Ms. Vidyun Singh,
Director of Society for Policy Studies, Commodore C. Uday Bhaskar,
Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

[Introduction]

It is a great honor for me to be part of this distinguished “Changing Asia” lecture series.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Ms. Vidyun Singh, Director of IHC for inviting me to share my views on Japan’s perspective of the changing geopolitics of Asia and the broader Indo-Pacific region. I would also like to thank Commodore Uday Bhaskar for chairing our session today. As the world’s attention is shifting to the Indo-Pacific region, this lecture series is being held at the most opportune timing to share Japan’s perspective of this dynamic region, as well as the role of our bilateral relationship with India, which is ever flourishing.

[Strategic overview]

The geopolitics of Asia is dynamically changing. We used to discuss strategic issues with a focus on the Pacific Ocean, but that focus has shifted to India and the Indian Ocean. Thus, it is becoming more fitting to refer to the broader “Indo-Pacific” region nowadays in order to capture the dynamics of Asia. We are now having strategic discussions on this region, stretching from Asia to the African Continent. We place India right in the middle of this geopolitical dynamics.

There are a number of reasons for this geopolitical shift. The first reason is that the global power balance is changing, as it is becoming more dynamic and complex. The strategic situation in Asia is becoming ever globalized and interconnected, with emerging powers rising in the region. The second reason is that the world we live in is becoming increasingly uncertain and unpredictable, with issues such as North Korea, the South China Sea, terrorism and others which are surfacing in the region. The third reason is the heightened significance of maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region, where the sea lanes stretching from the African continent to Japan are becoming crucial for the peace and prosperity of this part of the globe.

It is now becoming the conventional wisdom that the Indo-Pacific region is a place blessed with opportunities encompassing fast growing countries like India, and

the African continent which is full of potential. However, it is also a place where various challenges are arising.

[Challenges in the Indo-Pacific region]

North Korea poses an unprecedented, grave and serious threat to the peace and security of the region as well as the international community. North Korea has just launched another ballistic missile on the 29th of November, on top of having launched nearly 40 ballistic missiles since last year, as well as carried out six nuclear tests in violation of its various international obligations. It is totally unacceptable that North Korea has conducted such outrageous acts, in complete disregard of the strong and unanimous will of the international community. This precisely shows that its threat has entered a new level. It is not the time for dialogue for the sake of dialogue anymore. It is time for all countries to be united to exert maximum pressure on North Korea to change its policies. Japan and India have agreed on this point as shown in the Japan-India Joint Statement issued on the occasion of Prime Minister Abe's visit last September, including the need for rigorous implementation of relevant UN Security Council resolutions. Given the depth of strategic convergence between Japan and India, I look forward to our two countries further deepening cooperation in addressing this grave issue. I also appreciate India's support and understanding on the abductions issue of Japanese citizens. Many Japanese citizens were abducted by North Korean agents in 1970s and 80s. The abductions issue is very important since it concerns the sovereignty of Japan and the lives and safety of Japanese citizens. In 2002, North Korea had admitted to the abductions of Japanese citizens, but they have yet to provide any acceptable explanations. The Japanese government remains fully committed to making North Korea take action to assure the safety of victims and their immediate return to Japan, as well as to disclose the truth of all abduction cases and handover the perpetrators.

I would also like to mention the critical importance of a strong Japan-US Alliance, which remains the cornerstone of peace, prosperity and freedom of the Asia-Pacific region. This Alliance has continuously strengthened in recent years. The Japan-US Alliance and close collaboration among Japan, US and South Korea are key in dealing with the North Korean issue. During President Trump's recent visit to Japan in the beginning of November, the two leaders confirmed that they are 100 percent together on the issue of North Korea, and that the US commitment to the region is unwavering. They also shared the view that maximum pressure must be applied to North Korea, and that North Korea will not see a bright future unless it changes its course of actions toward denuclearization. The two leaders also held a telephonic conference immediately after the most recent ballistic missile launch, and reaffirmed

their unity in dealing with this issue.

Let me point out the key role China plays in dealing with the North Korean issue as well. Being in the unique position where it has the most effective leverage over North Korea, China's constructive cooperation is indispensable to ensure peace and stability in this region.

It has also become increasingly important to make deliberate efforts to protect a rules-based maritime order to promote the rule of law, freedom of navigation and over-flight, in full compliance with the principles of international laws including UNCLOS. Japan places utmost importance on the rule of law, that is, the rule of law for all countries big or small, as well as for the continued prosperity of the future generations. At a time when the geopolitics in the region is changing dramatically, it is essential that international law be observed by all countries in order to provide stability and predictability in international affairs.

International law prescribes order, in particular, order governing the seas. Its history stretches back to the days of ancient Greece. By Roman times, the seas were already kept open to all, with personal possession and partitioning of the sea prohibited. Ever since what is known as the Age of Exploration, large numbers of people have come together by crossing the seas, and marine-based commerce has connected the globe. The principle of freedom on the high seas came to be established, and the seas became the foundation for human prosperity. As history moved on, the wisdom and practical experiences of a great many people involved with the sea accumulated into common rules. This is what we now know as the international law of the seas. This law was not created by any particular country or countries, nor was it the product of a particular group. Instead, it is the product of our own wisdom, cultivated over a great many years for the well-being and the prosperity of all humankind. Today, the benefits for all of us lie in the seas from the Pacific to the Indian Oceans being made thoroughly open, as a place of freedom and peace. Thus, all of us should find common benefit in keeping our oceans and skies as global commons, where the rule of law is respected throughout.

To illustrate this point, Prime Minister Abe has proposed the "three principles" of the rule of law at sea while giving a keynote address at the Shangri-La Dialogue in 2014.

- The first principle is that states shall make and clarify their claims based on international law.
- The second principle is that states shall not use force or coercion in trying to drive their claims.
- The third principle is that states shall seek to settle disputes by peaceful means.

These principles on the rule of law at sea are simple, yet they must be

emphasized. We call on countries concerned to abide by these three principles and avoid actions that would escalate tensions.

The threat of terrorism and extremism is another concern, as terrorism knows no borders. In the Japan-India Joint Statement of September, the two leaders condemned in the strongest terms the growing menace of terrorism and violent extremism. They also shared the view that all forms and manifestations of terrorism must be forcefully combatted through concerted global action, and agreed to strengthen cooperation against terrorist threats from groups including Al-Qaida, ISIS, Jaish-e-Mohammad, Lakshar-e-Tayyiba, and their affiliates. Japan firmly stands with India in the international effort to combat terrorism.

[Japan's new security strategy]

Now, taking into account the strategic overview of the Indo-Pacific that I have just mentioned, I would like to talk about the role of Japan and its strategy. On October 22nd, Prime Minister Abe scored a major victory in the general elections for the Lower House, so we expect him to further contribute to the peace and security of the region under the banner of “Proactive Contribution to Peace”.

Here, allow me to expand a little more on Japan's new security policy, as I was the Deputy Minister responsible for this historic change of our security legislation. The concept of “Proactive Contribution to Peace” is based on the principle of international cooperation from our first National Security Strategy, which was announced in 2013. This concept was born against the backdrop of an evolving security environment, and is the intent of Japan, as a major player in world politics and economy, to contribute more proactively in securing peace, stability, and prosperity of the international community, while achieving its own security as well as peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region. When we say “new”, the important clarification is that our basic philosophy as a peace-loving nation remains unchanged, and our intention is not to become a major military power. We intend to maintain our strictly defensive posture. The significance of the Japan-US Alliance is unchanged as well, where enhanced cooperation with the US serves to the peace and stability of the region.

However, taking into account several factors, including the change of the regional power balance and security situation, there are expectations for Japan to play a bigger role in the regional and global stage. There is also a broad recognition that no country can protect itself alone but needs to deepen trust and cooperation with other partners. Therefore it has become inevitable for Japan to undergo some major changes in its security policy.

I will not delve into the details of our legislative changes, but I will just inform you what these changes have enabled us to do. Japan is now able to respond to

situations in a seamless manner to secure the lives and peaceful livelihood of the Japanese people. We are capable of exercising collective self-defence in an exceptional case. Allow me to elaborate a little on the issue of collective self-defence, as the discussion on this is something unique to our country. Since we have the Article 9 of our Constitution, which stipulates that we “forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes”, the past Japanese government had considered that the Constitution permits the “use of force” only when an “armed attack” against Japan occurs. However, in light of the situation in which the security environment surrounding Japan has been fundamentally transformed and continuously evolving by shifts in the global power balance, the rapid progress of technological innovation, and threats such as weapons of mass destruction, even an armed attack against a foreign country could actually threaten Japan's survival. Under such recognition and as a result of careful examination, the Government has reached a conclusion that not only when an armed attack against Japan occurs but also when an armed attack against a foreign country that is in a close relationship with Japan occurs and as a result threatens Japan's survival and poses a clear danger to fundamentally overturn people's right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness, and when there is no other appropriate means available, use of force to the minimum extent necessary should be interpreted to be permitted under the Constitution, based on the right of collective self-defense under international law.

The legislation also enables Japan to provide our foreign partners with logistic support so that they can ensure Japan's peace and security. We will be more active in participating in PKO missions and other multinational operations to maintain peace under the UN and relevant international organizations, without engaging in combat operations. Our new security policy is a testament to the resolve of Japan to take further responsibility in ensuring peace and stability in the region and beyond.

[Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy]

The key to carrying out such proactive contribution in the Indo-Pacific region is the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy” that Prime Minister Abe announced last year. By now, this concept has started to resonate widely with the international community.

Our “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy” regards the Pacific region and the Indian Ocean region as one big strategic domain. It aims to improve inter- and intra-region connectivity, and to promote fundamental values such as freedom, openness and rule of law. This strategy is also a statement of intent that Japan is ready to play a greater role in the Indian Ocean region. I look forward to the increased engagement by countries to initiatives based on our “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy”.

[India as key partner to Japan]

Let me briefly look back here, and touch upon the visit of Prime Minister Abe to India last September. This visit was indeed unprecedented and special, as my Indian friends had predicted. It was special in a way that Prime Minister Abe received an enormous welcome, as well as the gracious hospitality personally shown by Prime Minister Modi, and of course by the people of Gujarat. The substance was just as good as the optics. We demonstrated concrete progress in all areas of cooperation which we had developed over the years. The two leaders were able to have strategic discussions that further exceeded the depth of the previous ones. I could not stress more that the visit surely contributed in elevating our bilateral relationship to a new level, and ushered in a new era for Japan-India relations. Furthermore, the two leaders met for their 11th Summit meeting just recently on the fringes of the East Asia Summit (EAS), which was held on November 14th. They followed up on various issues ranging from security to economy that were discussed during Prime Minister Abe's visit.

As you can see, Japan-India relations are at its best ever, and substantial dialogues are being held at all levels. India is Japan's key partner, and there are various reasons behind this. The very basic but important factor is that we share values, such as our commitment to democracy, openness, and the rule of law. As I had mentioned, Japan places great importance to upholding the rule of law. India also values the rule of law, and its adherence to the rule of law in the international arena is worthy of admiration. You can see this from India's compliance with an arbitral decision regarding a sea boundary dispute with Bangladesh that was not necessarily in India's favor. I appreciate India's consistent attitude to engage in dialogues through diplomatic channels to find a mutually acceptable solution at time of disputes. This is precisely why India is an indispensable strategic partner for Japan. We can work together in upholding these fundamental principles for the peace and prosperity of the world.

I believe you can now see why India is the key partner to carry out Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy". It is not an exaggeration to say that this strategy is largely about cooperation with India. Prime Minister Modi's "Act East" Policy synergizes well with Prime Minister Abe's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy", and the two leaders agreed to reinforce the alignment of the two strategies in the Japan-India Joint Statement in September.

As the synergy is gaining momentum, Japan would like to further work with India on strengthening the connectivity among countries in the Indo-Pacific region.

[Connectivity]

It is encouraging that our two countries shared the principles of connectivity

infrastructure during Prime Minister Abe's visit. The connectivity infrastructure projects should be implemented "in an open, transparent and non-exclusive manner based on international standards and responsible debt financing practices, while ensuring respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, the rule of law and environment". I am happy to point out that these principles are gaining international currency, and the United States, which is an important partner to both Japan and India, referred to the elements of these principles in recent speeches and statements. This shows that the US thinking is closely aligned with that of Japan and India.

Japan would like to promote cooperation on infrastructure development to the countries in the Indian Ocean region and beyond, based on these principles of connectivity enhancement. Furthermore, connectivity not only in the sea, but also on land is essential. Japan and India have launched the Act East Forum to advance development in and to foster people-to-people exchanges with the North Eastern Region in order to enhance overland connectivity. We hope the Forum will serve as a springboard for concrete projects in the Region.

[Materializing Japan-India cooperation in various areas]

We would also like to give shape to the efforts of defence cooperation between Japan and India. So far, we have actively engaged in dialogues regarding maritime security, and also conducted strategic dialogues on various levels including 2+2 at the Foreign/Defence Secretary level.

It is only natural that our defence cooperation sees more concrete outcomes. We aim to enhance exchanges in all levels between our countries' respective forces of the air, sea and land. Cooperation on defence equipment and technology is also a crucial area to be expanded. We have recently shown progress in this regard with the commencement of the technical discussion for the future research collaboration in the area of Unmanned Ground Vehicles and Robotics. We look forward to more tangible outcomes in the future.

In terms of a more expanded framework, our cooperation has also materialized in our MALABAR exercise, which was held jointly by Japan, India and the United States, in the Bay of Bengal back in July. It was a huge success and was a sign of enhanced and deepened maritime security cooperation among our three countries. We look forward to further promoting cooperation in these multilateral frameworks as well.

Japan is a country known for its technology, and has been cooperating on various development projects including the metro. We are extremely happy to be able to cooperate on the installation of our high speed railway system which requires state-of-the-art technology. Furthermore, we would like to materialize our civil nuclear cooperation by setting up a working group.

[Regional architecture, multilateral frameworks]

Now, I would like to elaborate on the issue of regional architecture in the Indo-Pacific region, since the role it plays in providing a platform for countries to discuss how to promote peace and stability is invaluable. There are various regional fora that promote peace and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean region, and Japan has proactively contributed to the forming and strengthening of such institutions. Our idea is that we do not need a single entity to address various regional challenges, and rather, we should make the institutions reinforce each other and maximize the synergy and thereby comprise a flexible regional architecture. Among these regional organizations, Japan places particular importance on the East Asia Summit (EAS), as the premier leaders-led forum to discuss broad strategic, security and economic issues. As already mentioned, the most recent EAS was successfully held in the Philippines on November 14th, where leaders had fruitful discussions on how to address contemporary threats including the issue of North Korea. Prime Minister Abe emphasized that Japan will promote a rules-based maritime order through the implementation of the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy”. Prime Minister Modi also emphasized the importance of the rules-based maritime order, which shows that both our countries’ strategic thinking is closely aligned.

Allow me to digress a little here to another event that was held during the same EAS. The Japan-India-US-Australia Consultations on the Indo-Pacific, or the so-called “Quad” was held for the first time in a decade. Although there are many reports in the press in Delhi and elsewhere, it should be emphasized that, given the greater convergence of views among the four like-minded countries, it is only natural that they come together to discuss measures to ensure a free and open international order in the Indo-Pacific region. In the meeting, senior officials of the four countries discussed the direction for cooperation in upholding the rules-based order and respect for international law in the Indo-Pacific, tackling proliferation threats including North Korea’s nuclear and missile issues, ensuring freedom of navigation and maritime security in the Indo-Pacific and countering terrorism and other issues.

We share values and principles, so it is natural that we meet and discuss common challenges and deepen cooperation. We respect and understand initiatives by other countries to have their own mini-lateral frameworks, being trilateral or quadrilateral, with each of their own agenda.

Needless to say, other than the quadrilateral, our trilateral framework with India and the US holds increased significance, as evidenced in the MALABAR naval exercise. Since its inception in 2011, the Japan-India-US trilateral has been developed steadily, and our three countries have been strengthening cooperation to promote rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region. Furthermore, Japan has also been putting

emphasis on other various trilateral dialogues including Japan-India-Australia, Japan-US-Australia as well as Japan-US-South Korea to forge a network of strategic partnerships.

Coming back to the regional architecture, Japan is also actively engaged in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and other ASEAN-related frameworks. The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) is also significant in enhancing regional economic integration and cooperation. Japan is strongly supporting the efforts towards India's membership to APEC. We look forward to India's active engagement in these architectures in the Asia-Pacific.

Moving our focus to the Indian Ocean now, we believe that the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) is valuable and has potential. We proactively participate in the discussions at IORA, and hope to step up our engagement. I would also like to point out the significance of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). Although Japan is not a member, we regard BIMSTEC strategically important as it places itself in the Bay of Bengal, which is the area of convergence between our "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" and India's "Act East Policy". We welcome India's recent efforts to further strengthen regional cooperation in this forum, and would like to find ways to support BIMSTEC. Japan is eager to join the efforts of these various frameworks in the Indian Ocean.

With India's increased engagement in the architectures of the Asia-Pacific region combined with Japan's increased engagement in the Indian Ocean, Japan-India cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region as a whole will be greatly enhanced.

[Conclusion]

Japan and India are countries that share values including our commitment to democracy, openness, and the rule of law. Our two countries have deep historic and spiritual ties as well, which brings our people closer. This cultural aspect should not be forgotten, and I would like to further promote people-to-people as well as cultural exchanges to cultivate the connection between our people. As Prime Minister Abe said, a robust Japan-India relationship is a global common good that underpins the regional order.

With our flourishing bilateral relationship, we aim to provide certainty to an increasingly uncertain and volatile world. I am confident that our enhanced bilateral relationship will guide the way to the future, where there is peace and prosperity throughout the Indo-Pacific region and beyond.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.