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Japan's Shifting Foreign Policy to South Asia: Issues and Challenges

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Abstract– Due to the geographical distance and cultural diversity, South Asia was considered a ‘distant neighbour’ to Japan’s foreign policy and retained diminutive relations during the early post-WWII period. To amplify its ‘bubble economy in the cold war era, Japan moved towards China immediately after the ‘Nixon Shock’ and towards Southeast Asia, following Fukuda’s ‘heart to heart’ strategy in the 1960s and 1970s, respectively. Since the end of the cold war, the world has witnessed several new incidents in the new world order, ranging from Japan’s ‘lost decade’ to China’s rise. Understanding the changing geopolitical realities of the global order, increasing strategic demand of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), and huge potential market for Japanese goods, Japan has now broadened its foreign and defence outlook and economic engagement with this region. Moreover, South Asia will soon be an ‘economic hub’ with middle-class consumers. In that case, China’s growing investment and proximity to South Asian countries, particularly Xi’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) under his ‘China Dream,” has been seen as a significant threat to Japan’s new strategy. Besides, South Asia became a crucial part of the Asia-Pacific region to implement Japan’s new Free and Open Indo Pacific (FOIP) policy and make Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) effective. From this strategic point of view, Japan already has maintained warm relations with India and swelling its relations with other South Asian countries. Given the above circumstances, this paper aims to figure out the prospects of Japan’s new shifting foreign policy towards South Asia and identify the critical challenges of Japanese engagement with this region, where China is already a decisive actor. The methods and tools employed in this paper include lexical scrutiny’s, mapping, contextual analysis, and qualitative and mixed methods data analysis

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software (MAXQDA) to analyse the current state of knowledge and development. This paper is context, theory, and case dictated.

Keywords Japan-South Asia · Foreign policy · Economic hub · BRI · FOIP · QUAD ·

1. Introduction

Japan gives utmost importance to maintaining peace and stability to the region where they intend to invest and strengthen their bilateral relations. In this regard, from the very outset of the Cold War, East Asian countries, particularly China, South Korea, and ASEAN member states, have been prioritised in Japan's diplomatic agenda. Japan was a significant factor in the economic development and regional politico-security ties to the said region (Jain, 1997). Endowed with natural resources compounded by less product and labour cost and the most significant trade market, China became the target area for Japanese investors post-war. On the other hand, following 'heart to heart' contact, Japan moved towards Southeast Asia under the 'Fukuda Doctrine' in the 1970s. By the end of the 1980s, Southeast Asia had become the centre for Japanese investment destinations where the Japanese business community was keen to establish their companies. Again, due to the ideological inhibitions and the insularity (Hirose, 1996), South Asia has played a minor role in Tokyo's strategic-diplomatic agenda (Moni, 2008) and remains at the periphery of Japan's 'Asianization' values in the post-war period. This early stage of Japan-South Asia relations was termed as 'the dark age' by Takako Hirose (Hirose, 1996).

On the other hand, since the demise of the Cold War, the new world order forced Japan to transfer its old-fashioned diplomatic style (Furuoka, 2002) following several challenges, including post-bubble recession in the Japanese economy, China's growing coercive economic diplomacy in Asia (Lai, 2017), and maintaining a stable 'balance of power' in Indo-Pacific Ocean region. Though Japan's global political activity is hardly visible (Jain, 1997), as a critical regional geopolitical position (Blechinger & Legewie, 2000), its intention to be an active actor in international politics has grown enormously. Addressing the new global hurdles and its desire, Japan realised the importance of expanding its engagement and cooperation with South Asian countries where China is already a significant actor by pushing its BRI concept. Besides, other factors, including increasing strategic demand of the IOR, cheap and flexible labour market, increasing the purchasing power of the South Asian people (Morsalin & Akon, 2021), and huge potential market for Japanese goods, have also played a crucial role behind Japan's growing interest in South Asia.

Furthermore, due to the enthusiasm of the Abe administration, Japan has become one of the most trusted friends and development partners to most of the South

Asian countries. Japan has been providing economic assistance, i.e. official development assistance (ODA), foreign direct investment (FDI), and technical support (Akon, Rahman, & Bhuiyan, 2019) to maintain the peace process in this region. Besides, several high-profile Japanese companies have shown eagerness towards South Asia, particularly India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. On the contrary, South Asian countries have pursued economic liberalisation policies to reach Japanese investment. A series of political reforms (Jain, 1997) -democracy and political stability-have also been undertaken by several countries. Considering these different aspects, the paper's objective is to discover the issues and challenges of Japan's shifting foreign policy towards South Asia in the 21st century.

Despite the significant progress in Japan-South Asia relations, the existing literature has mainly emphasised Japanese relations with South Asian countries from economic and historical perspectives. Very little literature focuses Japan-South Asia relations from a political and strategic point of view. A clear gap exists in the entire spectrum of literature, particularly on Japan's strengthening South Asian chapter in the contemporary era considering several facts, including FOIP, QUAD, and BRI. Under this backdrop, this paper strives to explore why South Asia has become increasingly crucial in the scope of Japanese foreign policy objectives and what types of issues and challenges exist while shifting the foreign policy? The paper consists of four major sections. The first section delineates Japan's hegemonic role in South Asia from a historical perspective. The second section covers the current pattern of Japan's shifting foreign policy to South Asia and its changing nature of relations with other South Asian countries. The third part focuses on the geopolitical importance of South Asia to Japan for both geo-economic and geostrategic considerations. The final section of this paper tries to articulate the major challenges that Japan might face while moving toward the South Asian region.

2. Methodology

The study follows the qualitative research approach –a popular research method in social sciences that works with non-numerical data by analysing the facts and opinions. To understand the current nature of Japanese engagement with South Asian countries, the study relies heavily upon text analysis and oral questioning to different respondents by using MAXQDA data analysis software to code qualitative data from documents and interviews. Data has been collected from both primary and secondary sources. In terms of primary sources, the study involves conducting in-depth interviews (IDIs) with a few specialists to explore their perspectives on Japan's recent association with this region. On the other hand, the study follows both academic and non-academic sources for the

secondary literature. For academic articles, books and journals were explored. At the same time, newspapers, magazines, reports, official and non-official websites were used for non-academic sources, which help to understand the historical and current state of relations between Japan and South Asia and the driving factors that pushes Japan to redefine its relationship with South Asian countries. After reviewing the literature and interviews, the paper critically analyses the issues and challenges of Japan's shifting policy toward South Asia, where China is already a significant factor.

3. Japan's quasi hegemony in South Asia: From a historical perspective

Due to the preoccupation with economic reconstruction (Beeson, 2001), Japan heavily relied on the US during the post-war period, making Japan reluctant to adopt an independent foreign policy, mainly to expand its bilateral relations beyond the capitalist block. In the post-WWII defeat, US forces under General Douglas MacArthur wielded a profound influence upon Japan (LaFeber, 1997) by depending on the US with its new constitution and incorporating Japan into the new world order with economic development (Beeson, 2001). According to Beeson (2001), Japan's rise from the war devastation is an unparalleled and unprecedented achievement that sets as an exemplar of a state-led economic reconstruction with miraculous development to other states (Amsden, 1995). Despite having significant economic development, Japan played little hegemonic influence over the Asian region during the Cold War by emphasising economic cooperation, which was highly different from other historical examples.

Like other parts of Asia, Japan's involvement with South Asia was overwhelmingly economic, spearheaded by the business. Besides, trade and investment have been the most tangible aspects of Japan's engagement with the region. During the late 20th century, South Asia became the biggest recipient of Japanese economic support, especially in car manufacturing and textiles. Japan highly emphasised the economic development of South Asia by providing ODA to promote peace and prosperity (Reza, 2014). With its economic status, Japan hardly translated economic power into political influence in South Asia. However, though Japan only focuses its economic engagement with South Asian countries after the Cold War's demise, this economic dominance, sometimes, has imposed some political and ideational influence, highlighting its quasi-hegemony nature. India and Bangladesh have adopted the 'Look East' policy to emulate the Japanese economic development model- an example of Japan's ideational influence.

On the other hand, even in response to China's growing assertiveness in South Asia, initially, Japan was reluctant to pursue its politico-strategic interests.

However, over time, particularly since the start of Prime Minister Abe's second stint in 2012, Japan has emphasised pursuing its political determination by taking solemn strategic policies, i.e. broadening and deepening its political relations with South Asian countries, which are also reflected in Hirabayashi (2000) and Reza's (2014) statement- '*South Asia and Japan are inclined to strengthen their ties not only in the economic area but also in the political sphere*'. However, addressing the new challenges and understanding the necessity of new mechanisms in relations, Japan has transformed its quasi-hegemonic nature to hegemonic power in South Asia.

4. Pattern of Japan's shifting foreign policy in Asia

Japan maintained close relations with the East Asian region from the very beginning. Its foreign policies primarily focused on neighbouring countries like China, Korea, and other Southeast Asian nations. In the post-war period, South Asia did not play a significant role in Japan's foreign policy as it has been irrelevant to Japan's security needs. Besides, South Asia was considered a distant land to Japan with internationally low profile features. Because of having some least developed countries in the region, Japan had hardly interest to invest in South Asia. However, since the 1990s, economic malaise portentous changes have been undergone in Japan's relations with Asian countries. Japan needed to strengthen its relationship with South Asia as it has substantially developed itself politically and economically with geostrategic advancement.

From the very beginning, Japan maintained intense relations with East Asian countries, and during the 1960s, Japan started its investment in China, particularly in the post-Nixon shock period. Having available natural resources, less product and labour cost, and the most significant trade market, China became the target area for Japanese investors. Besides, Japan's continual endeavour since the 1970s to play a leading role in maintaining peace and stability and socio-economic development in Southeast Asia is considered a game-changer in the Southeast Asian region. However, its expansion into Southeast Asia was an altogether more uncertain enterprise. By the beginning of the 1990s, Japan's cooperation with most Southeast Asian countries, notably its expanding economic relations, had manifold intensified. The anti-Japanese movement in China in 2005 provided fuel to this Japan-Southeast Asia relations through adopting the '*China plus one*' strategy by Japan.

On the other hand, despite Justice Radha Binod Pal's crucial role at the International Military Tribunal for the Far East in acquitting the Japanese of war crimes, and India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka's peace treaties with Japan following the 1952 San Francisco Peace Treaty, Japan's relations with South Asia lag far

behind other regions in Asia. According to one of the IDI respondents, Japan was sceptical about its engagement in South Asia due to the Cold War complexities in world politics. Even due to the obligations in the 1992 ODA charter, Japan's relations with India and Pakistan came almost to a standstill following the nuclear tests in 1998 by both non-signatories to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) (Varma, 2011). However, after the end of the cold war, South Asian countries witnessed substantial progress in relations with Japan (Reza, 2014). Since the early 21st century, Japan has emerged as the largest donor and ODA provider to all South Asian countries.

Again, understanding the changing geopolitical realities of the global order, increasing strategic demand of the Indian Ocean, and China's growing influence, Japan has now broadened its foreign policy, particularly defence outlook and economic engagement with South Asian countries. Moreover, with middle-class consumers, South Asia will be an '*economic hub*' shortly. At the same time, Japanese investors are keen to invest in South Asia due to low labour costs – a natural competitive advantage in the region. Since the re-establishment of Japan-South Asia relations in the early 21st century, Japan has profoundly influenced South Asia, particularly shaping South Asia's economic development despite China's presence. Japan remains a prominent economic actor in South Asia in this new identity. Besides, this economic superiority and economic engagement also help Japan establish a broader political and geostrategic order in the region to address the contemporary global intention in the Indo-Pacific region.

Currently, Japan is involved with multiple mega projects in South Asia, including the Bay of Bengal Industrial Growth Belt (BIG-B) initiative and Dhaka Metro Rail in Bangladesh, Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC), and Chennai Bengaluru Industrial Corridor (CBIC) in India. Besides, Japan is also involved in rural development and economic infrastructure development, i.e. road network development in most South Asian countries. Besides these megaprojects, Japan has increased its FDI to all South Asian countries. For example, in 2015, the inflow of FDI from Japan to Bangladesh was US\$45 million, which increased in 2019, worth US\$72 million, while in India, the inflow of Japanese FDI in 2019 was US\$2.7 billion.

Besides these economic relations, Japan has also been focusing on political and geostrategic issues related to South Asia. The region is crucial for Japan for the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal, where the Japanese sea-trade route heavily relies on. The Indian Ocean, for its sprawling vibrant scape, is significant for both China, India, and Japan as their trade with the Middle East to supply crude oil is passes through this sea lane. Moreover, the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) reserves 40% of oil and gas and consists of 25% of the world's land (Shepard, 2016). Here, Japan's primary concern is China. It has already developed strong strategic ties

with some South Asian nations by building deep seaports, i.e. Hambantota in Sri Lanka and Gwadar in Pakistan.

Indeed, the post-Cold war mechanism was also a decisive factor for Japan, particularly the collapse of the Soviet Union the emergence of the US as the only superpower in the then world order to shift its policy to South Asia considering the security issues. Japanese policymakers were aware to search for alternative security ties beyond the US's security umbrella which Ozawa Ichiro (1994) points out that, "*The post-Cold War security environment in Asia is fragile. We need to develop a new security framework that can respond to the power vacuum that an American withdrawal would leave*". The statement of Ozawa clearly shows Japan's intention to expand its security cooperation beyond its immediate neighbours in East Asia. In this regard, the Japan-India ties, particularly to counter the concomitant rise of the Chinese military in the Indo-Pacific, are seen as significant security cooperation in the contemporary period. Japan-India defence and security cooperation were jump-started during then-Prime Minister Abe's visit to India in August 2007. Since then, both parties have issued the 'Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation' and signed an agreement allowing the Indian Navy and the Japan Maritime Self-Defence Forces (JMSDF) to conduct regular joint training. Besides, during the 2014 and 2015 Japan-India annual summits, both countries issued the 'Tokyo Declaration for Japan-India Special Strategic and Global Partnership' and the 'Japan-India Vision 2025 Special Strategic and Global Partnership' to enhance their bilateral security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region where China is already a decisive actor. However, considering the contemporary issues and challenges, it has broadened its outlook to pursue Japan's intention to be a powerful state. It has come forward to play a significant role as the South Asia region become the centre of world politics.

5. Geopolitical importance of South Asia

The south Asian region has gained considerable importance in contemporary global politics. However, the concept of South Asia as a separate region has been recognised relatively in recent times (Mahan, 1991). For a long time, the South Asian region was attached to the Southeast Asian region. This region had no separate regional identity. It was considered a part of greater Southeast Asia. There is no authentic unanimity and exact definition of South Asia so far. In academic discourse, the South Asian region was also known as the Indian subcontinent. Usually, the South Asian region comprises seven countries, such as India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Nepal, and Bhutan. After the incorporation of Afghanistan in 2006, it has been considered a South Asian state. However, the location of Afghanistan is highly debatable to be part of South Asia. The world's largest populated region South Asia is vital for its geostrategic

location and a potential market. The post-colonial South Asian states have witnessed many challenges, such as socio-economic turmoil, political unrest, ethno-religious conflicts, poverty, environmental hazards, terrorism, etc. The South Asia region has been one of the core regions of global politics, security, trade, and cooperation. However, this region's economic development and technological advancement have attracted many advanced countries, like Japan. In the post-second world era, the proliferation of regional organisations is found across the globe. South Asia is not exceptional as a regional SAARC started its journey in 1985 to promote a couple of interests of South Asian states. BIMSTEC is another intra-regional organisation formed in 1995 that comprises both South and Southeast Asian countries.

In the 21st century, the Indian Ocean has been a substratum of international economic maritime movement. The Indian Ocean littoral states of South Asia have been getting global attention. The IOR is very potential in terms of oil and minerals, affecting it as an energy heartland both in the supply and demand. The region is strategically important because of bridging the Indian Ocean to the Pacific in the East and the Mediterranean in the West. Moreover, this region has appeared as a vital juncture of maritime trade, linking the countries' producers of natural resources with the consumer states. More than two-thirds of worldwide oil and over eighty per cent of China's and Japan's oil has been shipping through this region. About half of the global container shipments navigate through the Indian Ocean.

India is very much concerned about the security of its 1382 islands. The growing Chinese dominance has been an immense threat to Indian security. Apart from India's independent policy persuasions, from Washington to Tokyo and Beijing to Perth, India has emerged as a common thread and point of convergence for most Indo-Pacific security and engagement models. Since 2014, India has formally engaged with several island nations in the entire Indo-Pacific through the forum of India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC) (Pradhan and Singh, 2020). The Indian littoral small island states Sri Lanka and the Maldives jointly conducted coast guard exercise several times (Nandy, 2020). The puzzling fact is that the Chinese hegemonic presence in Sri Lanka and the Maldives is unprecedented. However, these island states are afraid of China, but the debt trap compelled both island states to continue their Chinese dependency. China almost occupies the open and free sea lanes of the Indian Ocean. Although Indo-American joint naval forces are trying to counter the Chinese presence, it is insufficient to counter Chinese economic and military dominance in the South Asian region. Since China's rise is primarily seen as a hegemonic power, India has leaned towards Japan and the USA for securing this region collectively.

The Chinese economic dominance in the South Asian region through BRI, CPEC, and maritime silk routes has exposed China as a significant power in this region. China has already signed several treaties to develop maritime engagements with various countries of South Asia, especially Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives, and Nepal. The American South Asia policy has been loosening due to the Chinese 'string of pearls policy'. In the post-Cold War era, the economic and strategic synergies between New Delhi and Washington are considered an initiative to maintain a balance of power in South Asia. However, America has lost its dominance in South Asia, and China grabbed the opportunity to fill up the power vacuum. The initial objectives of China in South Asia were economic later on, and it has become military. The Chinese investment in South Asian countries is much ahead of the USA and Japan. The investment of Japanese companies is very selected in some particular sectors, such as electronics, chemical, technology, vehicles, and banking. However, China has expanded its investment in a large number of sectors. The Japanese government has emphasised economic and technological affairs in South Asia and soft power. The policy of Japan is non-aggressive, but Chinese policy is more hegemonic, where South Asian nations have had to witness hard conditional loans or financial assistance or defence engagements. Geographically, China is in an advantageous position than Japan.

The Japanese government has invested a significant amount of capital in India. Apart from India, the Japanese government has already established economic and technological linkages with Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. The relations between Bangladesh and India are very positive. Japan invested millions of dollars in Bangladesh, and hundreds of Japanese nationals residing in Bangladesh associated with different projects. Japan is the largest donor for Bangladesh. In 2018, Bangladesh received US\$1.8 billion as a loan. In Sri Lanka, China has invested a lot and given conditional load with high interest. The due inability of the Sri Lankan government to pay off its taken debt, the Chinese government took over the Hambantota deep seaport. The Japanese government is taking the initiative to counter China's presence in Sri Lanka and South Asia (Nath, 2019). The growing relational synergies between Beijing and Kathmandu have been a primary concern to India and Japan. The Chinese investment in Nepal is much higher than in other countries. The potentiality of Nepal's market is not viable. They are a land-locked country and share a long land border with India; since 1950, the entire maritime trade of Nepal has depended upon India. So, considering India's cordial relations with Japan, the government of India is very much interested in giving access to Japan to do naval trade and investment with Nepal. In 2017, the Japanese government agreed to invest US\$ 1 billion in Nepal. About 60,000 Nepali people live in Japan. Increasing Japanese influence in Nepal is also a challenge for China.

Japan has also shown interest in investing in Bhutan, and Japan agreed to provide higher education and training to young Bhutanese civil servants to increase professional proficiency. Pakistan is also seeking Japanese assistance, especially capital investment, and the critical sector of the investment may be Information Technology. There are two challenges to Japan investing in Pakistan: (1) the Chinese unprecedented economic dominance in Pakistan and (2) Pakistan's unstable security environment.

Japan has already invested a lot in India in various sectors. In the financial year 2021, India has attracted over US\$72 billion. Japan has invested in hydroelectric power and forest management in technology, IT, chemicals, banking, vehicles, and road construction. Due to geostrategic importance, the Indian North-eastern region prioritises Japan. This region shares borders with Bhutan, China, Myanmar, and Bangladesh. So Japan is gradually being active in this region to counter China through economic engagements.

5.1 Strategic demand of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR)

South Asian region has been a region of rivalry between extra-regional powers, like the USA and China. Even a few years ago, both India and China were considered the rising power of Asia. However, the Chinese dominant economic and military in South Asian politics is far more prominent and robust than India. In the Asian context, until World War II, Japan was the most powerful state of Asia with advanced military equipment. After being defeated in World War II, the Japanese government has abandoned its aggressive policy and military intervention in this region. Emphasising economic and technological development, Japan has taken a peace policy and economic and scientific engagements with South Asian countries. The vital sea lens of IOR is strategically important and economically viable. The Indian Ocean region has become a region of naval rivalry between the superpowers.

There are some significant challenges of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR)— (1) The rivalry between the Chinese naval forces and the US naval forces (Akon, 2020). The naval dominance in this region has been started after 1945. There is no doubt that China's rise has posed a challenge to the USA. The naval activism of Russia in this region has been added as an additional hazard. (2) This region may be led by the USA and other local partners, like India, Australia, Indonesia, and South Africa. The proposal of Quad was raised in 2007 to strengthen security in this region jointly by India, Australia, Japan, and the US. The purposely anti-Chinese stance has been taken in Quad. The small and militarily weakened states of IOR face challenges in deterring their relational equations. (3) India's ambitions to be a great power largely depend on its managing capacity and dominance in IOR and Counter-Chinese strategies. The limitations of New

Delhi's naval strength have compelled it to emphasise enhancing more connectivity with Quad. India's rivalries with China and Pakistan to pull strategic attention of allied power of India to probe forcible entity of China and illicit activities of Pakistan. The importance of St. Martin island of Bangladesh is strategically essential. So, the security of South Asian islands is becoming threatened gradually. (4) The functions of IOR have been challenging for Chinese dominance in South-East Asia, especially ASEAN. On the other hand, SAARC, and BIMSTEC, as regional and interregional organisations, are in a dilemma to formulate official policy regarding the security of IOR, considering the importance of leading countries of IOR. (5) To develop security designs in the Asia-Pacific, the 'Bottom-up' model can be implemented to give importance to the demands and suggestions of small islands. The small-scale 'bottom up' exercises is effective in IOR's security cooperation. The Tsunami Core Group was formed with the US, Japan, India, and Australia provided an early indication of the practical dividends (Phillips, 2012).

The IOR has also taken non-traditional security measures for the member states, such as anti-piracy, counter-terrorism activities, disaster relief, and humanitarian assistance. India's South Asian neighbours need to work with New Delhi to peacefully accommodate the South Asian region free from extra-regional great powers. China has challenged the Indo-US presence in the energy-rich Indian Ocean Region (IOR). To restrict China's 'String of Pearls Strategy', the USA has shifted 60% of its naval forces to the Asia Pacific Region (APR). Both Japan and India will be benefited from the American decision. The US has been a naval partner of India in the Indian Ocean to counter China (Malik, 2014). To counter Chinese economic dominance through Pakistan's Gwadar port, India has established Chabahar port in Iran, where Japan is the key supporter of India. The activism of Japan in IOR is more sophisticated and moderate than in China. China, India, and Japan have been more active in connecting with energy-rich Hormuz in IOR.

5.2 FOIP and QUAD strategies

Japan and the United States have some common interests in the Indo-Pacific region to maintain prosperity, security, and a rules-based order. This region is diverse, and this region has both developing and developed economies and democratic and authoritarian governments. To tackle several challenges in this region, Japan and the United States thought about an umbrella-based forum. Tokyo and Washington have formed Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) to execute regional frameworks and strategies. In 2016, the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe had formally introduced FOIP. Tokyo argues that FOIP has formed to counter Beijing's strategic output and the region's development. The US

administration has outlined FOIP, emphasised trade and investment, and ensured open access to sea lanes. The US-China trade war has started in 2017 that is beneficial for the future of FOIP. The U.S.-Japan dialogue could prove critical in developing the FOIP.

In 2017, the quadrilateral cooperation framework or Quad created a new equation in global politics that includes Australia, India, Japan, and the USA (Hanada, 2019). The significant initiative within Quad is the formation of the framework of Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP). The Quad is extensively considered in security partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region. The Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has played a crucial role in forming the Quad. The growing assertive acts of China have been instrumental in forming Quad to ensure maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region. Through several high-level meetings and negotiations among the member countries, several pertinent are given priority in Quad. The issues like maritime security, terrorism, cyber security, and connectivity have been priority issues.

The Quad has been formed to serve several activities, which can be briefly discussed-(1) The Quad is not an alliance. However, intelligence-sharing is one of the critical objectives of Quad (Hanada, 2019). The members are sharing information about maritime domain awareness. The significant areas of maritime security of Quad members are the Indian Ocean and Western Pacific region. (2) Introducing joint exercises for defining interoperability, (2) military technology and defence equipment transfer among the Quad, (3) initiative to enhance capacity-building of Indo-Pacific region. (4) To counter the growing military dominance of Russia and China in the Indo-Pacific region. (5) China's Belt and Road Initiative has created a meaningful impact in the South Asian region. The competition between Japan and China in the South China Sea is confined within that region. The challenge of the Japanese government in South Asia is economic, but considering the aggressive economic and strategic acts of China posed a threat to Japan. So, Japan is very active in the Quad to suppress China collectively. In November 2018, the Quad consultation was held and widely touched upon regional connectivity. The Quad aims to fulfil broader regional interests, connecting the Bay of Bengal region to the Indian Ocean through India.

5.3 Emergence of South Asia as 'New Economic Hub'

South Asia's diversity offers enormous potential for commerce, investment, and economic progress, as seen by the region's extraordinary achievements in recent decades. Its economies have thrived, becoming more linked with one another and the rest of the globe. South Asia as a whole, and its largest economy, India, in particular, are now playing an increasingly vital role in the world economy. Economic integration between South and East Asia is anticipated to accelerate

with India's free trade agreement (FTA) with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 2010 and the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) accord in 2006. Suppose the regional economy is appropriately supported by cross-border infrastructural facilities, including hardware and software, further dispersion of production and services across the two areas. A well-planned regional infrastructure would decrease trade costs and stimulate industry restructuring to increase efficiency.

The potential of creating uniform product standards and aligning such standards with equivalent international standards as a "regional block" is an incentive for regional cooperation and integration. Like with the EU, common standards would draw South Asia into the global marketplace. Adopting best practices to harmonies standards would enhance dependability and satisfy health, safety, and environmental criteria, resulting in the broader market and greater worldwide acceptability of South Asian products. Regional collaboration like SAARC, BIMSTEC, and BBIN will improve infrastructure and transportation links, facilitating trade. Not only will this facilitate commerce in the area, but it will also open up new trade prospects given the region's strategic location at the crossroads of Asia between oil-rich West and Central Asian countries and the dynamic economies of Southeast Asia. Regional cooperation would expand the market and provide multilateral organisations and the private sector with appealing investment possibilities in improving the region's physical infrastructure.

Economic corridors have emerged as a powerful accelerator for regional commercial integration in South Asia, owing to the fast expansion of regional economic activity. Infrastructure development across the area, particularly transportation linkages and energy pipelines, is projected to help integration by lowering transportation costs and enabling intraregional commerce and services (De, 2014). South Asia's commercial trade is anticipated to grow significantly in the future years due to regional and bilateral free trade agreements. It will be accompanied by a growth in demand for national and international infrastructure services, both for production and consumption and international trade. Failure to meet this demand will impede commerce and stifle growth in the region. As a result, improved knowledge and sufficient assistance are required for the infrastructural issues that South Asian countries confront.

Economic corridors serve as a blueprint for enhanced connectivity, increased competitiveness, and a greater sense of community in a region. It will improve national and regional connectivity by making it quicker, cheaper, and simpler for people and products to move across and within borders; promoting greater national, regional, and worldwide integration, and therefore quicker economic growth; and reducing the cost of national, regional, and global commerce, so improving the competitiveness of national and regional production networks and

encouraging more investment. South Asian economic corridors can reduce trade costs, resulting in greater commerce and investment. They can also indirectly promote higher FDI, mainly through cross-border intra-firm integration capitalising on each location's comparative advantages. Such increases in FDI boost regional commerce even further. International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), linking India, Iran, and Russia, the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor, and the Bangladesh, China, India, and Myanmar (BCIM) economic corridor are significant initiatives in the region.

Regional cooperation will eliminate trade obstacles, increase competitiveness, and increase productivity through improved industry allocation and restructuring. A faster growth rate would alleviate poverty and raise living standards. In this sense, the industrial sector offers enormous potential for job creation. Increased integration will result in increased access to technology, infrastructure, scalability, and infrastructural improvements, all of which are now barriers to the sector's growth. A more active manufacturing sector with more capacity would generate enormous possibilities and lift many South Asians out of poverty.

The region is changing rapidly, as are the economic and political realities. South Asian states also understand the need to encourage regional cooperation in South Asia and prioritise economic development, growth, and poverty reduction over political difficulties and problems. It recognises that clinging to historical distinctions may lose its position in the global economy, given the growing competition, the present global economic climate, and other countries' protectionist inclinations. The rest of the globe is increasingly acknowledging the importance of the region.

6. Challenges of Japan's shifting policies to South Asia

While Japan's catalytic role in modern Indo-Pacific economic success continues to grow, the only backward sub-region in this region's broad vivid terrain has not yet caught pace with this shifting trend in South Asia. Despite the size of Japanese development funding to all South Asian nations, the region's portion of Japan's worldwide commerce and investment is little enough to need special attention. Furthermore, South Asia has figured little in Tokyo's strategic-diplomatic agenda for a long time since it is important neither to Japan's security concerns nor the demands for a global economic governance framework. Nonetheless, in the backdrop of rising Chinese influence in the area, Japan has recently shown a renewed interest in strengthening its collaboration with South Asia (especially India). As a result, the economic and geostrategic cooperation between Japan and South Asia must be nurtured more effectively and constructively for shared values and advantages. However, such collaboration is not without pre-existing strategic and political obstacles.

6.1 Efforts towards countering Chinese hegemony in the region

Japan has traditionally been a key development partner for smaller South Asian governments. However, the second Abe administration has expanded these connections beyond developmental collaborations to include strategic involvement. This tendency is part of the administration's Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) agenda and a more comprehensive policy to increase its worldwide outreach under the banner of "*diplomacy with a broad perspective*". On the other hand, Tokyo's strategic engagement with South Asia is selective, and it has few direct critical interests in the subcontinent; therefore, it is not a priority for Tokyo compared to others such as Southeast Asia and the Middle East.

Meanwhile, Japan has already formed a strong alliance with India, the regional hegemon, largely to counterbalance China globally. Against this context, Japan's present South Asian policy might be characterised as "*India-plus*" (Kurita, 2020). In particular, while increasing collaboration with Delhi, Tokyo has deliberately redefined and reinforced ties with some geopolitically significant nations in the area, in line with India's "Neighbourhood First" policy.

Apart from India, Japan is trying to increase its presence in Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka to counter Chinese hegemony in the region. Japan has a generally good reputation in Bangladesh, thanks to millions of dollars in direct investment and hundreds of Japanese nationals living there. A Japanese partnership is developing the Matarbari deep seaport, which will relieve strain on Chittagong port (Barua, 2018). The port's strategic position and Bangladesh's growing economic potential led Japan to invest in the project, which is expected to provide long-term advantages. According to Tokyo, Bangladesh's geographical significance stems from inter-regional connectivity: Bangladesh is located at the "*intersection of India and ASEAN*", focusing on Japan's strategic and economic growth. Japan has been the most significant donor to Bangladesh, with over \$1.8 billion in financial support in 2018 (UNB News, 2018). Naval ships from Japan's Maritime Self-Defence Force recently visited Chattogram, Bangladesh, and participated in goodwill drills (TBS Report, 2019). These measures align with the Modi administration's regional diplomacy, which prioritises relations with Dhaka and has cited Bangladesh as an example of its Neighbourhood First approach (Kaura, 2018). Bangladesh's position is crucial to Delhi's aspirations to deepen India's relationship with Southeast Asia, and it has sought to develop road and rail ties with the country (PTI, 2020). Tokyo and New Delhi's overlapping interests have resulted in joint efforts in the field of connectivity in Bangladesh, such as improving the road link between Ramgarh in northern India and Baraiyarhat in southern Bangladesh, as well as building a bridge and providing rolling stock for the railway over the Jamuna river in Bangladesh (MOFA Japan, 2019).

In Sri Lanka, China has been in charge of important infrastructure projects and has taken over the Hambantota deep-sea port due to the Sri Lankans' failure to repay their loans efficiently. It would significantly strengthen China's capacity to control the critical commercial routes through the Indian Ocean area. Japan recently gifted two patrol boats to the Sri Lankan coast guard, each worth almost \$11 million (Mourdoukoutas, 2018). Japan's move indicates its willingness to respond to China's more established influence in the region. Because of its closeness to Indian Ocean trade routes, Japan considers Sri Lanka a key partner in ensuring the safety of its sea lines of communication (SLOCs). China's growing influence in this island country has also raised concern in Japan, highlighting the need for Tokyo to engage with Colombo. The present Japanese policy toward the nation is centred on strengthening a marine security relationship. When Abe visited Sri Lanka as the first Japanese prime leader in 24 years in 2014, the two nations started a bilateral conversation on maritime security and oceanic problems.

Nepal is another attractive market for Japan right now. Japan is an important commercial partner for Nepal, accounting for a significant portion of the country's Foreign Direct Investment. At a 2017 investment forum in Kathmandu, Nepal, Japanese businesspeople proposed investments worth up to US\$1 billion in the nation (MOFA Nepal, 2019). More than 60,000 Nepali nationals live in Japan, and the figure is expected to rise as more Nepali students travel to Japan to further their education. Koyasan, Japan, and Lumbini, Nepal, have also formed sister city connections (Nath, 2019). Increasing Japanese influence in Nepal will irritate China, especially since Nepal shares a border with Tibet. However, Japan has failed to advance Bhutan and Pakistan instead of taking cautious investments and increased involvement. Japan has committed to giving higher education to young Bhutanese public workers at Japanese institutions and is looking into expanding its commitment in the nation. Pakistan is likewise looking for Japanese investment, with the government focusing on the country's information technology industry. However, Pakistan's uncertain security situation has dampened Japan's desire to engage in the nation, while China continues to be Pakistan's "iron brother".

India serves as a pillar for Japan in South Asia, and Tokyo is expanding its collaboration with New Delhi in economic, political, cultural, and military areas. Japan is considering joining India in developing the strategically important port of Chabahar in Iran, which would serve as a counter to the Chinese-backed Gwadar port in Pakistan. There are also proposals for Japan to build an industrial complex, representing a substantial investment in the project (Parashar, 2018). Japan has also promised billions of yen in funding for projects in India's Northeast, including hydroelectric power generating, sustainable forest

management, and road development (Dasgupta, 2018). Because it shares borders with China, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Bhutan, the Northeast is a strategically significant region. It is a component of the Indo-Japan corridor, the more significant Asia-Africa Growth Corridor. China believes Arunachal Pradesh, an Indian state, to be part of its territory and refers to it as South Tibet. China professes to be opposed to foreign investment in “disputed zones”, but this has not stopped Japan from doing business in the region, proving that Tokyo is not afraid to ruffle a few feathers.

India and Japan share close defence cooperation, and discussions between the two countries are underway to sign the Acquisition and Cross Servicing Agreement (ACSA), which would allow both countries to supply supplies and support services and access each other's facilities (Nath, 2019). If Japan obtained access to bases, it would use India's bases in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and the Lakshadweep Islands. The Japanese navy's operating reach would be expanded, allowing it to effectively protect its interests in the region. Japan's long-term position in South Asia is strengthened through agreements with regional powers such as India. It uses a partnership approach in South Asia, engaging with nations on equal terms to lay the groundwork for future collaboration.

As a result, for Japan to preserve its standing as a significant force in the area, it must maintain a visible presence in the region's countries. It is in Japan's best interests to offer the region's governments as an alternative to China, especially given that animosity toward China and its intrusive influence is growing in Sri Lanka and even Pakistan. To that aim, Japan is working quietly but steadily to solidify its strategic presence in South Asia.

6.2 Ineffectiveness of SAARC

Since 1945, one of the most notable characteristics of international politics has created regional groups linked by shared interests and, ideally, geographical closeness. These links spawned a slew of regional organisations. One such organisation is SAARC. The basic concept of SAARC is to promote peace, tranquillity, and economic progress via the cooperation of South Asian governments by available pooling resources, building confidence among parties and promoting collaboration and regular communication between leaders (Nag & Bandyopadhyay, 2020). However, for South Asian governments, the nationalist view outweighs the international outlook. The complexities of South Asia's political conflicts have made regional cooperation challenging at best. Although the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) successfully brought warring states together, no significant progress toward a functioning union has been made in recent years. Given South Asia's internal and foreign

political conflicts, it is evident that regional cooperation through SAARC has broken down due to broad distrust.

SAARC, like other regional intergovernmental organisations, has the potential to become a significant political and economic bloc in its global context. South Asia is described by the World Bank as “the fastest-growing area in the world”, with an economic growth rate of 7.1 per cent expected in the coming year (World Bank, 2019). The rising trend among regional entities to enhance economic integration as they succumb to market forces gives trade possibilities and more security connected to economic interests (Hassan, 2001). However, successful relationships between SAARC member nations do not reflect this potential. In compared to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) at 32%, the European Union (EU) at 50%, and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) at 65%, intra-SAARC trade is at 5% (Khasru, 2014). According to Indrajit Coomaraswamy, Governor of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, a lack of confidence between South Asian countries impedes commerce, resulting in South Asia being the world’s least connected area. Preferential treatment under SAFTA, in particular, permits political reasons to obstruct real free trade, as seen by Pakistan’s unwillingness to award India’s Most Favoured Nation’ designation.

It is important to recall that the foundation of regional cooperation is equal interest in mutual benefit and equal engagement in increasing collaboration. However, there is no comparison between India and the other seven SAARC states regarding geographical size, population, military strength, economic growth. India would utilise SAARC to increase its control in the region - SAARC’s minor nations have expressed similar concerns since its inception. Indian hegemonic design, distrust, and a negative attitude toward South Asia’s smaller states stymie any efforts for deeper regional integration. Furthermore, increasing mutual collaboration among the people of different South Asian nations through SAARC would help grow democratic thought in those countries, and it could lead to mass protests against the authoritarian rulers of those countries. This concern, they believe, has resulted in an unfavourable attitude toward India. As a result, with the assistance of external powers (especially China), several neighbouring nations have dedicated themselves to diminishing India’s dominance in South Asia.

Furthermore, due to hostility between India and Pakistan, they cannot trust each other. Pakistan has repeatedly attempted to raise the Kashmir issue in SAARC meetings, despite the SAARC Charter. Tensions between the two rivals have harmed SAARC’s collaboration significantly. The persistent Kashmir problem has also been a significant impediment to development and collaboration. Furthermore, South Asian countries compete to sell their products globally, such as tea and jute. Such rivalry has been a thorn in the side of SAARC’s smooth

operation. The SAARC-states have failed to show themselves as a unified force in economic affairs on the International Forum.

Japan has been a strong supporter of the SAARC in economic growth, democracy, freedom, and the rule of law. It encourages regional cooperation based on a long history of friendly ties, and Tokyo saw multilateral involvement with South Asia as a chance to weaken China's hegemony. Japan has sought to solidify its goodwill as a friendly power through programs such as the Japan-SAARC Special Fund, Student and Youth Exchange (JENESYS), and human capacity development efforts. Japan's interest in SAARC might also be connected to its broader geo-economics ambitions. However, the inoperability of SAARC remains a big challenge for Japanese interests in the region.

6.3 Political instability

A faltering and fragmented political organisation is one of the fundamental reasons for Pakistan's unstable political situation, which every administration faces. On the other side, weak political parties forced every administration to seek coalition assistance to gain power. As a result, every government makes every effort to satisfy all of its coalition partners and remains in power at all times. Furthermore, forming domestic and foreign policy becomes difficult for the government since it needs the support of the masses within a party. It has been stated that a stable political system cannot be created until all members of a party work together. It should also be noted that inept governors contribute to an unstable political environment. The position of a leader is critical, especially in Pakistan, which has different races and sects. Without a doubt, when the masses of a state are not served equally and express dissatisfaction with the performance of the authorities, the state experiences an identity crisis, and people from various communities begin to harbour negative sentiments toward the ruling party; as a result, people lose faith in institutions and pursue their interests (Memon, Memon, Shaikh, & Memon, 2018). Eventually, a fragmented society emerges, with each faction preferring its perks above the state.

The stumbling and destabilised Democratic governments have painted a bleak future for Pakistanis. Due to political instability, the country has already lost its East wing and constantly suffers from rising tensions. Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are now the most susceptible regions where the consequences of political instability may be felt most acutely. Another difficulty that Pakistan faces due to uncertain political conditions is misrepresenting the issue of terrorism, making it hard to develop practical answers and strategies to the long-standing problem of terrorism. The country's economy has been completely devastated due to the continuous poor domestic circumstances caused by internal and external attacks, and the door has been closed to international investment. It has become a

significant problem for Pakistan to cope with international pressure while dealing with internal issues such as a crumbling economy, widespread complaints, and losing the nation's support for the government and military.

Political instability is a deep-seated concern in Pakistan, shaking the economy's leg, interfering with social progress, and displacing people for various reasons. However, the primary causes of a paralysed political system are inappropriate functioning of political parties, ineffective leadership, and fragmentation of unifies. As a result, Pakistan is dealing with several challenges, including public discontent, a weak economy, and threats from both external and domestic forces.

Bangladesh is ranked 172nd in political stability, with an index of -1.15. It shows that Bangladesh is mainly afflicted by political insecurity (Rahman & Md. Mamunur, 2018). The primary causes of this political instability include conflict between political parties, incompetence of local administration in holding a legal and transparent election, good governance and corruption at the government levels (Islam, 2016). Moreover, these reasons are aided by other variables such as a lack of a seamless transition of power, investment in research and education, substantial economic disparity. These issues have a stronger impact on political and social aspects. Due to political insecurity, the venture has had a fall in financial growth, infrastructure destruction, individuals getting involved in political confrontations (Duchesneau & Gartner, 1990).

Bangladesh has been a parliamentary democracy with a distinct judiciary and an active civil society since 1990, yet it is nevertheless classified as "partly free". Despite being a democracy, Bangladesh has two significant challenges to establishing a functional democratic system: freedom of expression and political opposition. With the advent of radical Islam in Bangladesh, these democratic practices will become increasingly difficult to achieve, as extreme Islamists regard democracy as heresy in and of itself. Political insecurity denotes a schism in the attitudes of political parties. There is no continuity of stable political policy to provide a stable environment for all types of growth. One political party regards the other political party as an enemy. They are always more concerned with the development of their party than with the country's development. On the other side, many political party leaders in Bangladesh have been corrupted. They make use of the party platform for their ends. Bangladesh's political turmoil has resulted in corruption, poverty, and significant difficulties in the educational system. The country is becoming increasingly unstable. Radical Islamists are filling a political power vacuum, posing a danger to the secular-democratic system. Liberal minds are being threatened and brutally murdered.

With the restoration of multi-party democracy in the 1990s, aspirations and ambitions for a free and prosperous Nepal were substantial. The outpouring of

passion was understandable because the system they envisioned meant that everyone, including those who did not belong to the upper class, had an equal opportunity to prosper. Unfortunately, their aspirations and vision have yet to materialise despite three decades of democracy. Nepal embraced federalism in 2015, reviving the promise of economic development and attempting to address the plethora of difficulties surrounding years of ethnic groups' non-participation (Thapa, 2021). The country entered a new era of political stability with a two-thirds majority administration in its Parliament. However, persistent political unrest has again distracted attention away from strengthening federalism and adhering to the economic development objective of establishing an enabling climate for entrepreneurship and investment to achieve long-term prosperity. One might even argue that federalism was never the main emphasis of Nepalese political parties except for a few parties. While the concept of market-preserving federalism is valid for many federal nations, old and new, Nepal's federal system appears to be a sudden event with little internalisation of concepts among Nepal's main political parties (Gill, 2021). Nepal's economic, political, and societal spheres have shrunk over time.

The political infighting has aided neither the government nor the opposition parties. One might even claim that the contemporary political instability we are seeing is the consequence of conflicts amongst political leaders. There is some consolation in the knowledge that one may still turn to the courts in these trying times. However, even a robust and sturdy judicial system cannot compensate for a mediocre executive. The recent political instability, which saw two House dissolutions and resulted in a change of government with the involvement of the Supreme Court, demonstrates that the people's shared vision is not secondary to political benefits for their leaders (Chaulagain, 2021). For a citizen, this indicates that Nepali politics has fragmented and that Nepal is once again struggling to defend democratic values. Attempts to smooth up politics have come at a high price.

7. Conclusion

South Asia has long been characterised as a conflict-prone region, with Kashmir serving as a nuclear flashpoint. However, there is no disputing that the nations of this region, although being among the greatest sufferers, were eventually able to loosen the two-century-old colonial stranglehold after a valiant battle for freedom. The end of the Cold War has undoubtedly had several significant ramifications for South Asia, which may legitimately compel Japanese attention to be more attentive to the region's changing requirements. While most South Asian nations now have democratically elected governments, they have realised that their previous restricted economic policies would no longer be compatible with the changing realities of the globalisation process. They now understand that they

must resolve some of their fundamental political disagreements to improve economic cooperation with one another.

With a particular focus on India, the number of countries is paying increasing attention to the country due to its sustained economic progress in recent years, its technical excellence globally, its diplomatic activism, particularly as a significant player in the Group of 20 developing countries, and its push to secure a G4 membership bidding to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council, and Japan is no exception. While India is already a prominent actor in Asia, the country's increasing importance on the global scene should be considered. In the future of Asian politics, India and Japan may be powerful and trustworthy allies since they share core principles such as democracy, press freedom, a market economy. Both countries would work together to foster such ideals in Asia peacefully and stably. It should also be noted that, with Japan and India so closely linked, China may offer strategic space to these two nations, paving the path for Asian security. However, for it to happen, Japan must understand how much India has changed, and India must act as a responsible state with its expanding capabilities.

To keep up with changing times and trends, it is reasonable to expect that Japan's foreign policy radar will be oriented toward strengthening coherent strategic ties with South Asia. Because strategic economic cooperation between Japan and South Asia has so many potentials, Japan should do everything to make it a reality. Japan and South Asia would have common strategic objectives to realise an "arc of Asian prosperity" and cope with global dangers and problems such as the environment, energy, terrorism, and UN reform. Tokyo would benefit from continuing to acknowledge South Asia's strategic weight in a fast-moving Asia and demonstrating an ever-growing interest in expanding its uttermost assistance to the area so that it may overcome a slew of global competitiveness barriers.

Finally, it might be claimed that the expanding Japan-India multidimensional relationship would serve as a gear to revitalise Japan-South Asia relations without limiting them to specific industries.

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