

POLICY BRIEF

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Japan and the Indian Ocean Region: Engagement for Capacity-Building, Regional Security, and Ports Development

Dr. Monika Chansoria

17th Century Tenjiku Tokai Monogatari (The Story of a Journey to India by Sea)

The 20th and 21st centuries will be remembered for many things, including primacy of the vast and seemingly endless seas and oceans. In this setting, the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) finds itself at the heart of the world map connecting distant nations through limitless waters. As a Northeast Asian island nation, Japan’s involvement with the Indian Ocean is heavily defined by virtue of its trade, investment and supplies from this region. Japan’s story in this reference dates back to the 17th century when a prominent Japanese adventurer, merchant, and trader, Tenjiku Tokubei sailed to Siam (Thailand) and subsequently to India in 1626 aboard a Red Seal ship via China, Vietnam and Malacca. Often referred to as the ‘Marco Polo of Japan’, Tokubei’s adventurous journey and account of his travels to India gained distinction also because he became perhaps the first Japanese to visit *Magadh* (which was an Indian kingdom in southern Bihar during the ancient Indian era).

Following his return to Japan, Tokubei wrote an essay on his adventurous journey in foreign countries titled “*Tenjiku Tokai Monogatari*” (Relations of Travels to India). The essay gained substantial popularity and praise. The word *Tenjiku* means India in the Japanese language and it was for this reason precisely that Tokubei was called Tokubei Tenjiku.¹ In his essay, Tokubei provided a detailed account of people’s lives, customs, and scenery of the countries where he had travelled and lived – thus becoming a symbol of pioneering foreign adventure for Japan.²

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1 For details on the adventures of Japanese adventurer and author Tokubei Tenjiku see, Gopal Kshetry, *Foreigners in Japan: A Historical Perspective*, (Bloomington, Indiana: Xlibris Corp., 2008), p. 147.

2 Ibid.

From the 17th century described above, to present-day 21st century, the waters of the Indian Ocean narrate great countless stories. The Indian Ocean Region countries share similar challenges and opportunities by virtue of their strategic location, access to limitless unexploited maritime resources, vulnerability to natural disasters, political instability, and the looming shadow of a rising China that seeks to drive and establish an economic and politico-security dominant Asian architecture. In this backdrop, the strategic node of the Indian Ocean becomes even more crucial in that the power that shall likely dominate the Indian Ocean will eventually control entire Asia. It needs to be remembered that at any time, six to eight Chinese naval vessels are being dispatched to the northern Indian Ocean.³

***Development and Capacity-Building:
The Indian Ocean Rim Association
Framework***

Given the severe diversity and differences between countries that are bound together by the Indian Ocean, the need to promote sustained growth and balanced development in the region through regional economic co-operation becomes far more pronounced. The disparity in the capacities of the IOR Member States is a challenge that needs to be addressed through concrete programs. In this respect, the inter-governmental Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) established in 1997 envisions the Indian Ocean as the third largest ocean woven together by trade routes, commanding control of major sea-lanes carrying half of the world’s container ships, one third of the world’s bulk cargo traffic, and two thirds of global oil shipments.

Home to nearly 2.7 billion people of the world, the Indian Ocean Region is divided into a number of diverse sub-regions, namely, Australasia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, West

Asia and Eastern & Southern Africa, which are bound together by the Indian Ocean. The current 22 IOR Member-States are: Australia, Bangladesh, Comoros, India, Indonesia, Iran, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Oman, Seychelles, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. Besides these, the IORA also has nine Dialogue-Partners, namely: Egypt, France, Germany, Japan, Korea, China, Turkey, the UK and the US.

In the field of renewables, it is well acknowledged that Japan holds a major edge with Japanese electronics multinational Kyocera having begun work on perhaps the world’s biggest floating solar farm. The Yamakura dam power plant will likely see more than 50,000 solar photovoltaic panels covering an area of 180,000 sq mtrs. Although relatively small in comparison to other land-based plants, turning to water is becoming the need of the hour because of scarcity of land for utility-scale solar in Japan. Kyocera has already built three floating solar farms, and in the future many Indian Ocean littoral nations can benefit substantively from this technology innovation.⁴

Fisheries & Aquaculture

The Indian Ocean region is one of the highest producers, representing a huge market for fish products the IORA. Member States of the IOR face a wide range of challenges, including the increasing pressures of climate change, overfishing and overexploitation of fisheries resources and marine pollution. Fisheries is an ever-growing sector that contributes to job creation, income generation, and food security. The aquaculture sector and fisheries have great influence on the livelihood of coastal communities through the provision of direct employment, food and income. In 2012, almost

3 *Press Release* “Chinese Navy is a Force that is here to Stay,” *Press Trust of India*, January 10, 2019.

4 “Japan begins work on ‘world’s largest’ floating solar farm,” *The Guardian*, January 27, 2016.

58.3 million people globally were engaged in fish-rearing and harvesting activities, with artisanal fishing comprises 90 percent of all fishing jobs globally, representing approximately 45 percent of the world’s fisheries, and nearly 25 percent of the world catch.

Japan is well placed to help lesser developed IOR countries work on sustainably developing maritime resources including traditional industries such as fisheries, shipping, or ports, as well as newer industries including aquaculture, renewable energy, bio-products, carbon sequestration, and desalination. These sectors can potentially address employment issues, thus leading to socio-economic development.⁵ Fisheries remains underdeveloped due to lack of skills among fishermen who go deep into sea water, lack of tools (boats and fishing gears) and dearth of regulatory frameworks.⁶ Their challenges also include weak institutional management and capacities, unknown fisheries stock carrying capacity, low quality of fish/ fisheries products, limited aquaculture and low productivity of fishermen community.⁷ In order to develop capacity-building, the need for capacity-building programs that will ultimately improve the quality and value of fisheries products has been expressed at multiple IORA meetings and forums.

Japan is known to have used fisheries’ resources since time immemorial. The food culture in Japan reflects the vast variety of Japanese marine ecosystem and local cultures,

stretching between the sub-arctic in Hokkaido to tropical Okinawa. Known to utilize fisheries resources in sustainable ways, the fundamental principle of the Japanese fisheries institution is “resource management by the resource users themselves.”⁸ Under the current fisheries’ institutional framework, local fishers themselves manage fishing operations, subject to the resource and ecosystem conditions of the area. Japan’s management can be categorized as ‘community-based co-management’ – one that acknowledges fishing people as the primary participants in management, further garnering the support of the broader community, thus implementing a balanced mix of biological, social, and economic objectives.⁹

The 37th session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, held in Phnom Penh in August 2013, applauded the Shiretoko Approach as a “bottom-up approach to management through the involvement of local communities and stakeholders.” The current institutional framework in Japan has been rationalized to meet particular social and ecological conditions, such as resource diversity, the importance of seafood as a key source of animal protein, the economic scale of fisheries operations, and the total number of fishers.¹⁰ An organization of local fishers can function effectively as a body for local fisheries management, given that small-scale fishers are very important to domestic seafood consumption and food culture, especially in developing countries. These are not the export-oriented fisheries operations typically

5 For details see the training program on ‘Improving the quality and value of fisheries products’ – organized by the Somalia and Yemen Development Programme (SYDP) cited at IORA <https://www.iora.int/en>

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 For details and further reading on Japanese fisheries management see, Mitsutaku Makino, “Institutional and Economic Analysis of Japanese Fisheries Management and Its Expansion into Marine Ecosystem Conservation,” *AGri-Bioscience Monographs*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2017, p. 22.

9 For details see, P. Copes and A. Charles, “Socioeconomics of Individual Transferable Quotas and Community-based Fishery Management,” *Agricultural and Resource Economics Review*, vol. 33, pp. 171–181, cited in Makino, n. 8.

10 Makino, n. 8.

operated at large scale in offshore areas.¹¹ Japanese fisheries management displays a decentralized management system, an adaptive management process, the use of local and scientific knowledge, multi-scale and interlinked management, backgrounder of an ecosystem conservation framework, and the promotion of sustainable resource use in an economic context.¹²

Indeed, Japan’s assistance and training can play a game-changing role in improving the skills, knowledge and expertise in handling of artisanal fishermen. This will also make way in processing and preserving fisheries products, that shall improve the value and quality of fisheries products securing a better market and ensure greater socio-economic growth. Japanese training and technologies can provide support for developing small-scale fisheries activities and businesses across the IOR nations. The key areas¹³ that can bring about an innovative change in the coastal economies through their fisheries are:

- a) sharing knowledge and training on fish storage, handling
- b) post-harvest processing and preservation
- c) sharing information on seafood safety and quality standards, and
- d) increasing access to markets through improved quality of fisheries products

It has been observed and acknowledged that information systems on fisheries and aquaculture activities throughout the IORA Region remains fragmented and uncoordinated,

directly requiring some sort of harmonization.¹⁴ For instance:

- a) reported landings are estimated to be around two thirds of actual catches
- b) reported marine landings are based on fishing from boats, ignoring hand harvests, and
- c) estimated numbers of fishes are not available in many countries, or do not distinguish between marine and freshwater fishes

The IORA Review had proposed to build on existing reporting initiatives coordinated by various fishery and aquaculture bodies; to compile existing and new information into a biennial review of fisheries and aquaculture report for the Member-States; and finally to identify the (political, technical or financial) gaps in the collected data with emphasis in similarities and dissimilarities concepts.¹⁵

Contemporary Regional Security in the Indian Ocean Region

Nearly 40 percent of all Japan’s Self-Defense Forces’ missions have occurred in the IOR, and a half of Japanese Official Development Assistance (ODA) goes into the IOR countries.¹⁶ The security situation in the Indian Ocean is becoming ever more concerning given that China’s influence and assertiveness in the IOR has grown steadily. Towards the west, Beijing has made considerable investments in East African countries like Kenya, Djibouti, and Tanzania. In the east, Chinese investments in

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Somalia and Yemen Development Programme, n. 5.

14 For details see, “Harmonization of Fisheries and Aquaculture Information System in the IORA Countries,” *Biennial Review of IORA Fisheries & Aquaculture Sectors*, Fisheries Support Unit (FSU), Muscat, Sultanate of Oman, October 30, 2019.

15 Ibid.

16 Peter Wyckoff, “Making Waves: Japan and the Indian Ocean Region,” *Commentary*, The Stimson Center, May 1, 2017.

Indonesia run into billions, and Australia is often termed as its “key partner” in the pursuit for a new trade bloc. In the northern Indian Ocean, the *Belt and Road Initiative* cuts across strategic ports, both economically and militarily.¹⁷

The above factors remain a cause of concern for many littoral nations including Japan. The sea lanes of communication (SLOC) carrying energy resources from West Asia to Japan critically pass through the Indian Ocean. In reference, Japan’s growing role, presence and interest in the Indian Ocean Region is noteworthy. Japan’s policies and approach for operating in the IOR underwent a major transformation with the lifting of the ban on Japanese troops to enable the Self-Defense Force to dispatch armed troops to Iraq in 1992.¹⁸ Following that there was no looking back and Tokyo has taken a proactively robust approach to the Indian Ocean Region ever since. Multiple regional endeavors in this regard are visible ranging from its partnerships with the IOR littoral states aimed at capacity-building, developing infrastructure and contributing to the regions’ sustainable development. Japan’s presence and role in the Indian Ocean is qualitatively different from China’s *Belt and Road Initiative* since Tokyo focuses more on regional norms that depict and practice transparency, economic sustainability, and a rules-based order.¹⁹ Japan’s increasing interest in the Indian Ocean also hinges on the critical reality that its exports cross the Indian Ocean and that it remains equally dependent on energy supplies that are shipped across the Indian Ocean. Thus, securitization of these SLOCs is a primary driver for Japan to build upon security and economic partnerships with potential strategic partners across the Indian

Ocean Region.

In April 2017, the 3rd Japan-India Maritime Dialogue was held in Tokyo, represented by Toshiro Iijima, Japan’s Ambassador for Policy Planning and International Security and Pankaj Sharma, Joint Secretary, Disarmament and International Security Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs from India. The purpose of this dialogue was to strengthen cooperation between Japan and India in the field of maritime security. Further, within the trilateral framework between Japan, the United States, and India, summit talks took place in 2018, and again in 2019, when the leaders exchanged views about the future of the Indo-Pacific region. The *Quad* powers also sought to jointly play a central role in encouraging member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), as well as other neighboring countries bordering the Indian Ocean, to contribute in their vision for the Indo-Pacific region.

Acting more proactively in the IOR, Japan participated in joint exercises conducted in 2018 between the Ground, Maritime and Air Self-Defense Forces of Japan and the Indian Army, Navy and Air Force. Prior to that, since 2017, the Japanese helicopter aircraft carriers “Izumo” and “Kaga” – likely to be designated as aircraft carriers, have regularly visited South Asia by making trips to India and Sri Lanka annually.²⁰ Tokyo is also investing substantially in many infrastructure projects in coastal countries along the Indian Ocean rim, which include a tripartite venture with India and Sri Lanka to build the Colombo’s East Container Terminal Port in Sri Lanka (elaborated later in this paper).

17 Ibid.

18 For further reading see, John Hartle, “The Normalization of Japanese Policy in the Indian Ocean Region,” *Policy Report*, Analysis and Policy Observatory, Future Directions International, Australia’s Global Interests, June 21, 2018.

19 Ibid.

20 Satoru Nagao, “What is Japan’s Indian Ocean Strategy?” *Commentary*, Research Institute for Peace and Security, February 28, 2019.

Given that Japan’s Maritime Self Defense Force protects the seas around Japan and the South China Sea, the number of warships that JMSDF can dispatch to the Indian Ocean remains limited. However, the area where Japan could perhaps take the lead would be that of becoming a primary cutting-edge technology provider to countries in the Indian Ocean Region.²¹ Taking precedents from the past, regions where Japan has provided technical assistance in the past, such as Northeast Asia, and Southeast Asia, have become successful economic development models. Japan’s technological capabilities distinguish it as a world-class innovator, and thus Japan should not only export hardware, such as defense equipment and infrastructure, but also impart technical training to IOR countries.²² For an instance, although the Indian Navy is expanding its naval presence in the Indian Ocean, its efforts get hampered by ageing equipment and inadequate anti-submarine capability – an area where Japanese technical collaboration could prove to be a beneficial game-changer. Increased sales to IOR nations can provide a great stimulus to Japan’s defense industry too.

During US President Donald Trump’s February 2020 visit to India, the vision for expansion of the Washington-New Delhi bilateral security cooperation, “free and open Indo-Pacific”, bolstering cooperation between the US, India, and Japan, as well as strengthening ties between the *Quad* comprising Japan, India, Australia and the US were confirmed. It has been advocated more often that the *Quad* nations should lead the way to make substantive progress on the initiative.²³ In this reference, frequent reciprocal exchange

between the leadership of the *Quad* countries becomes an indispensable prerequisite. In order to curb China’s strong-arm, maritime expansionist displaying revisionist tendencies, and for protecting unhindered navigation, it is imperative that Japan, the United States, India, and Australia ramp up cooperation on various fronts particularly in the Indian Ocean. More specifically, Japan and India, as well as Japan and Australia, respectively, have already declared conduct of reciprocal visits by their leaders every alternate year.

Energy-Driven Securitization

Japan imported more than 210 million short tons (MMst) of coal in 2018, making it the world’s third-largest coal-importing country after India and China. Continuing to use steam coal to fuel one-third of its electricity generation and metallurgical coal for raw steel production, Japan imports nearly all (99 percent) of the coal it consumes. Australia is Japan’s primary coal supplier, supplying 61 percent of Japan’s demand in 2018. And, Indonesia, Russia, the United States, and Canada account for another 35 percent of the total coal imports. Today, coal accounts for about one-third of Japan’s electricity generation. A decade ago, in 2010, coal accounted for 25 percent of its electricity generation, and nuclear generation accounted for 29 percent.²⁴ New coal plant development would also hinge upon whether Japan will grant environmental approvals to planned coal-fired power projects, given the country’s intention to reduce carbon dioxide (CO₂) emission levels by 26 percent by 2030.²⁵

Before 2011, Japan’s Ministry of Economy,

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 “More Than Ever, ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific’ Vision Becomes Crucial,” *Editorial*, Sankei Shimbun, March 16, 2020.

24 “Japan is the world’s third-largest coal-importing country,” *Country Analysis Brief: Japan*, U.S. Energy Information Administration, June 14, 2019.

25 Ibid.

Trade and Industry (METI) had planned to reduce coal’s generation share by more than half by 2030, intending for nuclear power to offset coal plant retirements including increasing the nuclear generation share in Japan’s electricity mix to 50 percent by 2030.²⁶ However, as a result of the Fukushima accident and subsequent suspension of Japan’s nuclear fleet, METI now projects a future energy mix of 20-22 percent nuclear, 22-24 percent renewables, 26 percent coal, and 27 percent natural gas through 2030.²⁷ Japan remains primarily dependent on West Asia for its crude oil imports, with 83 percent of Japanese crude oil imports originating from the Middle East. Besides, because of its limited natural gas resources, Tokyo relies on imports to meet nearly all of its natural gas demand. More than 95 percent of Japan’s gas demand is met by liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports.

Collaboration and Assistance in Ports Development across the IOR

Japan’s approach to building connectivity underscores the Ise-Shima Leaders’ Declaration endorsed by the G7 in 2016 that include safety, reliability and resilience, social and environmental considerations, local job creation and transfer of know-how, alignment with host country development strategies, and economic viability.²⁸ The strategy also emphasizes norms such as transparency and non-exclusivity.²⁹ In a statement pertaining infrastructure, the G7 Ise-Shima Leaders’ Declaration endorsed promoting quality infrastructure investment to address the global demand-supply gap and strive to align the

G7’s infrastructure investment with Principles. The G7 encouraged relevant stakeholders, including multilateral development banks (MDBs), to align their infrastructure investment and assistance with the Principles. The global demand-supply gap of infrastructure investment is a serious bottleneck to the current growth including job creation and development challenges the world faces. While recognizing that effective mobilization of resources in quantity is imperative, the G7 highlighted that investment without the quality perspective could end up introducing infrastructure with higher lifecycle costs, less durability, inequitable distributive effects, highly negative environmental and social impacts, vulnerability against natural disasters and the impacts of climate change.³⁰

Thus, the G7 reaffirmed the crucial importance for stakeholders, including governments, international organizations and the private sector, to work coherently towards bridging the existing gaps by promoting quality infrastructure investment, so as to promote strong, sustainable, and balanced growth, with an important contribution to productivity gains, enhance resilience in society, as well as contribute to the global efforts to advance sustainable development by addressing development challenges including those identified in the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda.³¹ To promote such quality infrastructure investment, the G7 aimed at aligning its own infrastructure investment with the G7 Ise-Shima

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Hartle, n. 18.

29 For further details see, David Brewster, “Japan’s plans to build a ‘Free and Open’ Indian Ocean,” *The Interpreter*, The Lowy Institute, May 29, 2018, available at <https://www.loyyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/japan-plans-build-free-and-open-indian-ocean> ; also see Hartle, n. 18.

30 Statement on the G7 Ise-Shima Summit, Official Release, The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, May 27, 2016, available at <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/05/27/g7-ise-shima-leaders-declaration>

31 Ibid.

Principles for Promoting Quality Infrastructure Investment. The relevant stakeholders, namely governments, international organizations, including MDBs, and the private sector, such as in PPP projects have been encouraged to align their infrastructure investment and assistance with the Principles, including the introduction and promotion of a transparent, competitive procurement process that takes full account of value for money and quality of infrastructure.³²

In the more recent years, Japan has joined multiple major port construction/renovation projects spread in the Indian Ocean Region. From Mombasa (Kenya) to Providence, these projects represent the rising graph of Japanese investments in the region. From a meager 1.1 percent of Japanese Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in 1999, the IOR countries commanded 21.3 percent of Japanese FDI in 2014.³³ Besides, Japan's trade with IOR nations has shot up to \$ 225 billion, and similar is the fate of energy reliance.³⁴ In 2012, 83 percent of Japan's oil imports came from West Asia (through the Indian Ocean), rising from 70 percent during the 1980s.³⁵ Between 2011 and 2014, Japan imported 66.5 percent of its raw materials from the IOR.³⁶

According to David Brewster, Japan's *Partnership for Quality Infrastructure Initiative* that was first announced in 2015, involves infrastructure spending, over five years, of around \$110 billion in Asia. In 2016, the scope of this initiative was expanded to \$ 200 billion globally (including in Africa and the South

Pacific). Few significant Japan-sponsored ports infrastructure projects³⁷ since 2016 are listed as follows:

- Nacala, Mozambique: port (\$ 320 million)
- Mombasa, Kenya: port and related infrastructure (\$ 300 million)
- Toamasina, Madagascar: port (\$ 400 million)
- Mumbai, India: trans-harbor link (\$ 2.2 billion)
- Matarbari, Bangladesh: port and power station (\$ 3.7 billion)
- Yangon, Myanmar: container terminal (\$ 200 million)
- Dawei, Myanmar: port and special economic zone (\$ 800 million)

The Abe administration's "free and open Indo-Pacific strategy" pushes for Japan to provide yen-based loans to three Indian Ocean rim countries – i.e., Bangladesh, Myanmar and Sri Lanka – in order to develop ports in Matarbari (which will be large enough to handle 50 percent of the country's cargo), Dawei and Trincomalee, respectively.³⁸ These projects are collaborative ones with the port at Dawei being developed by Japan, Myanmar and Thailand. Additionally, a special economic zone will be created alongside the port and a highway built between Bangkok and Dawei, resulting in a new economic bloc.³⁹

32 Ibid.

33 *Trade and Investment Statistics*, Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO), available at <https://www.jetro.go.jp/en/reports/statistics/>; also see, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 第3 回日・インド海洋に関する対話の開催 April 10, 2017.

34 Ibid.

35 For details see, "Japan is the Second Largest Net Importer of Fossil Fuels in the World." U.S. Energy Information Administration, November 7, 2013.

36 *World Bank* – World Integrated Trade Solution, "Japan Import by Country and Region 2011-2015."

37 Brewster, n. 29.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

Sri Lanka

In South Asia, India, Japan and Sri Lanka have combined to expand an existing small port into a trade port that could be used by large ships. Sri Lanka recently announced in May 2019 of its decision to enter into a trilateral partnership with India and Japan to develop a deep-sea container terminal. The state-run Sri Lanka Ports Authority (SLPA) said a Memorandum of Cooperation (MOC) had been signed between the three countries to jointly develop the East Container Terminal (ECT) of the Colombo Port. The East Container Terminal is located at the southern part of the newly expanded Port of Colombo. India and Japan will likely deepen and develop this facility to allow large container ships to enter seamlessly.⁴⁰ The SLPA further said it will retain 100 percent ownership of the ECT while all operations will be owned jointly. Sri Lanka will retain 51 percent while joint venture partners, India and Japan, 49 percent stake.⁴¹

While the three countries are formulating the scale and form of the project, corporate partners are also expected to be brought on board in the project that shall be financed majorly by the Japanese Official Development Assistance (ODA). Work on this trilateral project was likely to begin by March 2020⁴² and is projected to increase the port’s container volume and enhance marine transportation in and around South Asia.⁴³ According to the SLPA, the decision demonstrates “Sri Lanka’s ability to

maintain and further its national interests while cooperating with international partners” and contributes to advancing the regional prosperity and stability of global trading networks.⁴⁴ The project holds high importance in the region given that Japan’s primary maritime routes run through the Indian Ocean, and thus, improved capacity of the region’s ports will resultantly improve the security of tankers and commercial ships.⁴⁵ Interestingly, between 2011 and 2015 itself, vessels of the Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force visited Sri Lankan ports on 22 occasions.⁴⁶ Japan plans to send specialist “mobile cooperation teams” to train Sri Lankan authorities in the use of two patrol boats, and in dealing with oil spills from ships. Colombo also participated as an observer for the first-time in January 2018 in the joint anti-piracy drills carried out by Japan and India.⁴⁷

Djibouti

The Japanese government has begun to get more intrinsically involved in supporting the maritime security capabilities of countries lying in the Indian Ocean in the Horn of Africa, namely Djibouti – an eastern African country strategically located at the southern entrance to the Red Sea on the route to the Suez Canal. In 2017, Japan announced leasing of additional land to expand a military base in Djibouti. A year earlier Tokyo had pledged to increase its support to infrastructure, education and healthcare projects in Africa, committing an extra \$ 30 billion in public and private support.⁴⁸

40 For further reading and details see, Monika Chansoria, “Development of Sri Lanka’s East Container Terminal Port: Japan & India’s Regional Cooperation in South Asia Shaping Up,” *Policy Brief*, The Japan Institute of International Affairs, June 28, 2019, available at https://www.jiia-jic.jp/en/policybrief/pdf/PolicyBrief_Chansoria_190628.pdf

41 Ibid.

42 However, the Covid-19 global pandemic that caused a lockdown the world over, will likely delay the project’s launch.

43 Chansoria, n. 40.

44 Ibid.

45 “Japan and India to develop Colombo port, Countering Belt and Road,” *Nikkei Asian Review*, May 20, 2019.

46 Chansoria, n. 40.

47 “Japan adding Indian Ocean countries to maritime security push,” *Kyodo News*, February 23, 2018.

48 Nobuhiro Kubo, “Japan to expand Djibouti military base to counter Chinese Influence,” *Reuters*, October 13, 2016.

The Abe administration dispatched a coast guard team in February 2018 to Djibouti to impart training to the coast guard personnel in Djibouti that faces sea lanes vital to international trade.⁴⁹

By means of these projects, Japan primarily aims at ensuring the securitization of its SLOCs. India and Japan have been jointly focusing on the “Asia-Africa Growth Corridor” wherein they are partnering with many African countries and organizations to enhance the impoverished continent’s development. Developing a network that connects the Pacific and Indian Oceans with a special focus on Africa was the nucleus of Shinzo Abe’s announcement in 2016 in Nairobi that Japan would invest \$ 30 billion for infrastructure development, education and healthcare expansion over three years beginning in 2016. Similarly, India too announced that it would provide a \$10 billion line-of-credit to Africa during the India-Africa summit held in New Delhi in 2015.

Seychelles

Moreover, Japan is financing the construction of additional facilities that would cater for increased artisanal and semi-industrial fishing activities in Seychelles. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has provided a grant of around \$ 12 million for the expansion of the Providence fishing port. The existing port located at the Providence Industrial Estate (which is about three kilometers south of Seychelles’ capital, Victoria) had a 110-metre long quay and could accommodate up to 60 boats measuring 21 meters in length.⁵⁰ The

Seychelles Fishing Authority stated that the proposed extension was an additional 200 meters, since the existing port could not handle the increasing number of boats as well as bigger vessels that are joining the artisanal and semi-industrial fishing industry. These measures would motivate more people to venture into fisheries, thereby promoting blue economy.⁵¹ While foreign-owned vessels have long dominated the industrial long-line fishing sector in Seychelles, it were the local fishermen who got mainly involved in artisanal and semi-industrial long-line fishing. Apart from creating additional mooring facilities for the boats, the Japanese-funded project is expected to include the construction of other facilities, including a 20-tonne capacity ice plant.⁵²

Mozambique

The expansion and second-phase refurbishment of the Port of Nacala (located in the north of Mozambique) aimed at increasing the port’s capacity to handle cargo in transit, especially for Malawi and Zambia, is being realized with a major contribution and involvement from Japan. The estimated cost being \$ 400 million, funded by Mozambique and Japan, the joint work is expected to increase the number of parking for containers and installation of new equipment. The Port of Nacala project was heading for completion by 2020.⁵³ According to a study by JICA, upon completion, the Port of Nacala which could receive only six ships at once, will be able to handle 250,000 twenty-foot containers annually.⁵⁴

49 *Kyodo News* report, n. 47.

50 “Seychelles’ port extension aims to support growth of artisanal, semi-industrial fishing sectors,” *Seychelles News Agency*, March 23, 2016.

51 *Ibid.*

52 *Ibid.*

53 “Second phase of construction of the port of Nacala Mozambique begins in March 2017,” *MacauHub*, December 15, 2016; although the Covid-19 global pandemic could cause a delay in the project’s completion.

54 *Ibid.*

Kenya

Japan has also signed a \$ 270 million loan deal with Kenya to assist in expanding the capacity at Mombasa Port – the main trade gateway to east Africa. The port handles fuel, consumer goods and other imports for Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda, South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo and Somalia, and regional tea and coffee exports.⁵⁵ By means of this loan, Kenya has benefitted in terms of increasing container traffic through the port, purchase of cargo handling equipment, helping finance a brand new container terminal, and aiding in construction of another terminal that is already under construction.⁵⁶

Propelling growth and investment through capacity-building, quality infrastructure projects that are slated to build institutional, industrial, and transport corridors, will prove to be a boon for better integration of the IOR and its stakeholders. Japan’s expertise in providing quality infrastructure and state-of-the-art technology can prove to be a clincher in the region, and also serve as a balancer and significant partner in the regional maritime paradigm of the IOR. Perhaps, it is the apprehension of being outmaneuvered by China and its strategic strides, which has placed the theories of functional integration in the region to test.

⁵⁵ “Japan lends \$ 270 million to Kenya to help expand Mombasa port,” *Reuters*, January 16, 2015.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*