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History of Japan in the Indian Ocean Region

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The story of humanity has remained interwoven with the sea since time immemorial, and the centuries gone by will be remembered for many things, including primacy of the vast and seemingly endless seas and oceans. While oceans cover 71 percent of the earth's surface, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), almost 95 percent of the underwater surface of the planet remains unexplored. The Indian Ocean littoral, which spans Australasia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, West Asia, and Eastern and Southern Africa, is home to 2.7 billion people. Many historians have come to describe the Indian Ocean as 'ground zero' for globalization. The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is an apt description of a maritime space displaying a complex interplay of culture, language, economics, and politics. The Indian Ocean is the third-largest among the world's oceanic divisions woven together by vital trade routes. It commands 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. Specifically, South Asia constitutes the IOR's core sub-region and is witness to nearly half of the world's trade passing through it. The region's size and diversity explain its consequent geo-economic and geopolitical significance.

The Indian Ocean:
Roots of its Place in World History

The IOR finds itself at the heart of the world map connecting distant nations through limitless waters. The arrival of Europeans in the Indian Ocean during the 1400s was the beginning of a major transformation, especially with that of the Portuguese rounding the Cape of Good Hope after 1497. Much later, the Dutch and the English East India Companies emerged in the early 1600s. During the colonial period, the English East India Company and other colonial powers re-worked and expanded their trade networks for natural goods, from coffee and tea to opium and indigo.

Tracing their historical roots, Indo-Japanese linkages go far back to the 8th century CE when Bodhisena (704-60), an Indian monk was invited in the year 736 CE by Emperor Shomu (r.724-48) to perform the eye-opening ceremony of the largest bronze statue of Lord Buddha at Tōdai-ji in Nara. Situated in south-central Honshu, the city has significant temples and artwork dating back to the 8th century when it was Japan's capital.

By the 16th century, with the expansion of Indian Ocean routes to Southeast and East Asia, the links between India and Japan began to diversify.[1] Japan's story in this regard dates back to the 17th century, to prominent Japanese adventurer, writer and merchant Tokubei Tenjiku (1612–1692). The son of a salt wholesaler, Tokubei was 15 years in age when, in 1626, he was hired by a trading company in Kyoto to pursue commercial activities aboard Japanese Red Seal ships. As part of this vocation, Tokubei sailed to Siam (Thailand) and subsequently to India in 1626 aboard a Red Seal ship via China, Vietnam and Malacca.[2] The adventurous journey of Tokubei, often referred to as the 'Marco Polo of Japan', and the account of his travels to India gained distinction also because he became perhaps the first Japanese to visit *Magadh* (an ancient Indian kingdom in southern Bihar).[3]

Following his return to Japan, Tokubei wrote an essay on his adventurous journey in foreign countries titled *Tenjiku Tokai Monogatari* 天竺渡海物語 (Story of a Journey to India by Sea). The essay gained substantial popularity and acclaim. The word *Tenjiku* means India in the Japanese language and it was precisely for this reason that Tokubei was called Tokubei Tenjiku. In his essay, Tokubei provided a detailed account of people's lives as well as the customs and scenery of the countries where he had travelled and lived – thus becoming a symbol of pioneering foreign adventure for Japan, as has been noted in *Foreigners in Japan: A Historical Perspective*. Discovery of the sea-route to India, which linked India with Europe and Asia, became the transformational factor in encouraging a new culture (*namban bunka*) that radically shifted the focus of India-Japan relations from remaining centered around Buddhism to becoming more trade-oriented. From the 17th century (described above) to the present-day 21st century, the waters of the Indian Ocean have narrated countless great stories. Against this backdrop, the strategic node of the Indian Ocean becomes even more crucial in that the power that dominates the Indian Ocean may eventually control all of Asia.

An important development within the Indian Ocean Region during the 19th century was the development of colonial economies. Without exception, the colonies and nations along the Indian Ocean littoral developed economic structures which were geared to the needs of Europe. This bias in economic development ordained that the lands of this region should be producers of raw materials alone, especially since the concentration of raw materials in the IOR made it invaluable to Europe.[4] A major portion of Europe's and the world's needs for oil, tin, rubber, spices, gold, diamonds, jute, wool, tea, wheat, and meat were met by the countries of the IOR, and the latter's own economies suffered major structural problems as a result of this European economic domination.[5] While researching the history of a geographically or culturally diverse region like the Indian Ocean,

1 Monika Chansoria, "Finding the Indo-Pacific Through the Tales of Tokubei Tenjiku," *Japan Forward*, December 30, 2020, available at https://japan-forward.com/finding-the-indo-pacific-through-the-tales-of-tokubei-tenjiku/

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 For details see, Kenneth McPherson, "The History of the Indian Ocean Region: A Conceptual Framework," *The Great Circle* (Australian Association for Maritime History), vol. 3, no. 1, April 1981, pp. 17-18.

5 Ibid., p. 18.

a major and common problem arising is that of conceptualizing the history of the region as a functioning entity. Throughout history, the Indian Ocean has been an important communication route providing access for many peoples to influence, trade with, or gain control of, lands washed by its waters. The lands of the littoral have been a continuous source of raw materials despite the formidable distances to be covered.[6] India was obviously the major pivot for British strategy in the Indian Ocean. While the Suez Canal's shares were purchased by the British Government in 1875, and Egypt was occupied in 1882, to further secure access to India, much of Britain's Middle Eastern policy for the last half of the 19th century was formulated with one eye on India and the other on the Indian Ocean.[7]

The economic definition of the Indian Ocean Region has primarily been derived from evidence of trade across the Indian Ocean found as early as 5000 BCE. The flow of money and trade around the Indian Ocean, and the resultant struggle for economic dominance between the Portuguese and Ottoman Empire, outlined how the rise of European trading companies in the 17th century expanded the definition of territory to include Cape Town (South Africa) as a part of the Indian Ocean's boundary in 1652. Later, the rise of British industrialization in the late 18th century, carried over throughout the 19th century, shifted the economic focus of the region toward colonial domination and cash crop economies.

In a book titled *The Indian Ocean in World History,* the author Edward A. Alpers argues that at the end of the 19th century, the "… Indian Ocean world was, more than ever before, both an internally connected world region and one that was globally linked to the rest of the world."[8] By the 20th century, a strong commodity connection emerged, namely oil. This irreversibly established that economic activity would be the most predominant factor defining the geopolitics of the Indian Ocean.[9] The pattern of shifting alliances became further complicated in the decade of the 1970s with the re-assertion of power amongst the oil-rich Arab states of the Indian Ocean littoral. The enormous wealth available to them since they gained control over their vital oil resources provided them a considerable degree of independence from the traditional power blocs. This effectively created another major influence bloc in the region to rival the domination of eastern and western Europe and the United States.[10]

For the British, the Indian Ocean was not simply an area of imperial economic and strategic endeavor. Throughout the 19th century they settled large parts of the littoral with a huge number of British settlers. This created a new British colony stretching from the old Cape Colony along the east coast of southern Africa to the borders of Portuguese Mozambique. Elsewhere on the littoral, in British, French, Dutch, German and Italian colonies, there was minimal settlement by Europeans. In these areas Europeans remained for the most part either an administrative or mercantile elite and rarely developed permanent ties with the indigenous peoples of the region.[11]

Since the second half of the past century

6 Ibid., p. 10.

7 Ibid., p. 16; for related arguments also see, Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*, 1660-1783 (New York: Dover, 1890).

8 Edward A. Alpers, *The Indian Ocean in World History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) p. 127.

9 *Book Review Essay* by Caleb Clark on Alpers, n. 8, published in *Southeast Asia in the Humanities and Social Science Curricula*, vol. 20, no. 1, Spring 2015, p. 68.

10 Kenneth, n. 4, p. 19.

11 Ibid., pp. 16-17.

until now, maritime geopolitical history of the world has been undergoing a paradigm shift. An emerging trend often referred to as "new world history" is helping change the landscape of traditional thinking by incorporating a global perspective rather than focusing singularly on the West. The Indian Ocean is part of this new world history, and the story of its strategic evolution in an ever-increasing globalized world has its share of vitality.[12] In order to understand the dynamics at play in the Indian Ocean, four clear themes emerge: physical geography, economics, policy and governing bodies, and a shared culture connecting the region to larger historical themes. *The Indian Ocean in World History* defines the physical geography of the Indian Ocean as a place that stretches from the Cape of Good Hope, north to the Red Sea, east to the South China Sea, and finally south to Australia. The physical geography of this region has dictated the course of human events until the Industrial Revolution provided man the machinery to overpower nature with the building of the Suez Canal, thereby equipping steamships to travel freely against the prevailing winds.[13]

Japan and the Indian Ocean Region: The Historical Context

By the late 19th century, contact between Europe and the countries of the IOR began giving rise to the first wave of nationalist movements. In Egypt, India, and Iran, European political and diplomatic control was seriously challenged by World War I and, by the end of World War II, Europe's days of direct political domination over the Indian Ocean littoral were numbered. Nationalist philosophies had taken root in most of the colonial territories on the littoral, whilst European power and prestige had diminished as a result of WWII and Japan's takeover of Indonesia, Malaya, Singapore, and Burma. The post-1945 decade saw a rapid dissolution of European empires across the Indian Ocean. Although a notable sea power in the pre-1945 world, Japan did not exercise a telling influence in the Indian Ocean area during peacetime. Only when it forayed into the Indian Ocean in pursuit of its war objectives did Tokyo attempt to gain naval and aerial supremacy over the "Southern Resources Area" – a broad arc from the Andamans in the Bay of Bengal to the Bismarck Archipelago in Southeast Asia.[14]

Nearly all of Japan's foreign trade remains seaborne. As one of the leading commercial and maritime nations of the world, Japan held vital interests in the Indian Ocean Region relating to sea traffic and the flow of raw materials and fuels from the littoral nations and hinterlands to industries at home. A large part of Japan's foreign trade flowed along two major sea routes. The first was the Pacific route, of which the central lane links Japan with Canada and the US, the southern lane with Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Islands, and the southeastern lane with South America. The second sea route for Japan's trade flows was the Indian Ocean route which connects Japan with the Indian subcontinent, the Middle East, Europe, and the east coast of Africa via the East and South China Seas and the Strait of Malacca.[15] Nearly one-half of Japan's seaborne trade is carried along the Indian Ocean route, which remains vital for Japan's tanker fleet in particular, given that it is the only economic route available to Japan. The importance of this route has only increased with

12 Clark, n. 9.

13 For more details on the *Indian Ocean in World History* see, Alpers, n. 8; also see, K.M. Panikkar, *Geographical Factors in Indian History*, (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1955).

14 P.A. Narasimha Murthy, "Japan and the Indian Ocean Basin," paper presented in a seminar on the *Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace* organized by the India International Centre (IIC), New Delhi, December 1980; published subsequently as an article in *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 37, no. 1, 1981, p. 48.

15 Ibid., pp. 36-37.

the passage of time, sensing which Japan began enhancing its trading ties with the Persian Gulf region.

During the decade from the mid-1960s, the Indian Ocean was firmly drawn into the orbit of superpower military competition to the extent that, even while stressing the need for détente, militarization of the Indian Ocean became a stark reality. The rampant search for naval bases and other facilities in the region involved the littoral states and mid-Ocean islands.[16] In the following decade, the foreign trade of Japan stood at $213.70 billion in 1979, with the country being the leading importer of raw materials such as coal, iron-ore, petroleum and timber. Of these, petroleum held an overwhelming dominance in Japan's trade with the Middle East, for which the sea lanes of the Indian Ocean became what was appropriately described as the 'great veins'[17] on which the Japanese economy depended. The IOR's richness in raw materials complemented the might of Japan's industrialization. These predominant economic interests rendered freedom of navigation along the Indian Ocean route a prerequisite for Japan. The threats posed to peaceful sea traffic from conflict and instability that could result in the denial or suspension of vital supplies during this period included developments in the Gulf region.[18]

Emergence of South Asia and IOR in Japan's Post-war 'Asia vision'

The sub-continent of South Asia (the heart of the Indian Ocean Region) remained peripheral as far as Japan's post-war "Asia vision" was concerned, especially in comparison to its far profounder engagement with East and Southeast Asia. During that period, South Asia professedly was the "other Asia" for Japan. A systemic dissection of the Asian continent into its many sub-regions finds that Japan's presence and influence in South Asia, be it economic, political, or strategic, came nowhere close to the effect it wielded in the other sub-regions. Despite its dense population of 1.97 billion at that time (24.9 percent of the globe's humanity), South Asia's widespread poverty, limited industrialization, and inward-looking economic policies placed limits on Japan's economic and diplomatic penetration of the region.[19] Japan's limited influence in South Asia was also reflected in the inadequate coverage given the region in books, special editions of academic journals, and magazines that dealt with Japan's relations within Asia. For instance, a *Far Eastern Economic Review* article on the changing role of Japanese *sogo shosha* (Japan's prominent companies involved in trade and business) in Asia did not even mention South Asia.[20]

Three areas which remained particularly underdeveloped in Japan-South Asia ties in the initial post-war decades were aid, trade, and investment-commercial ties. South Asia and the South Pacific constituted two sub-regions where Japan was not involved in any striking conflicts. Besides, both remained of lesser geo-economic status. Foreign policymaking in Japan leans towards being principally responsive to external developments and gravity. Since the post-war period, Japan and South Asian nations were best defined as distantly estranged Asian neighbors with a conventional view of Japan acting on external developments and pressure *(gaiatsu)*. It remained the case that *gaiatsu* did, at times, play a critical role in bringing key

16 Ibid., p. 38.
17 Ibid., p. 37.
18 Ibid., p. 41.
19 William R. Nester, *Japan and the Third World: Patterns, Power, Prospects*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992) pp. 271-274.
20 "Tokyo's Deal Makers," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, February 1, 1996, cited in Purnendra Jain, "Japan's Relations with South Asia," *Asian Survey*, vol. 37, no. 4, April 1997.

Japanese foreign policy initiatives to fruition.[21] Additionally, Tokyo's post-war foreign policy between 1952–1973 followed a "separation of economics and politics" *(seikei bunri)* strategy whereby it avoided involvement in almost all international issues/conflicts. This phase, however, abruptly ended in late 1973 with the quadrupling of oil prices by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and the oil embargo by the Arab states. It was here that Japan arrived at comprehending that it was no longer possible to separate economics from politics, a consequent of which came about its "comprehensive security" *(sogo anzen hosho)* strategy which involved active diplomatic involvement.[22]

Rising from the ashes of 1945, Tokyo's exponential growth miracle rendered it an economic superpower, enabling it to master a neo-mercantilist strategy that lasted from 1973 until 1990. The said period saw Japan's foreign economic presence throughout the Third World (including South Asia) expand rapidly as Tokyo confronted a range of issues in its quest for diversified sources of markets, raw materials, cheap labor and energy.[23]

Notably, in the wake of the October 1973 Arab-Israeli war, an eight percent reduction in Japan's supplies caused a serious, though temporary, economic dislocation. Subsequently, the Iranian crisis, the Iran-Iraq conflict, and the situation in Southeast Asia (and the South China Sea) had similar effects. Because of its geographical location and economic importance, Southeast Asia always found precedence in Japanese thinking, for it was here that the gateways from the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea and the Pacific Ocean were located, namely, the Malacca, Sunda, Lombok, and Makassar Straits. During this period, Japan began focusing and favoring the littoral states of the Indian Ocean Region. It also took the position that security in the region must be left to the nations around the Indian Ocean, be it expanding their naval strength in order to maintain peace in the region or performing search, rescue, and surveillance functions. Japan was among the supporters of the Lusaka Declaration of September 1970 which called for designating the Indian Ocean as a "zone of peace."[24] Pending this realization, Japan undertook pursuing its interests in the IOR bilaterally as well as multilaterally by cooperating with regional groupings. This entailed narrowing down these groupings and identifying three distinct areas[25] of critical importance to Japanese policies in the Indian Ocean basin:

- Arabian/Persian Gulf region
- Indian sub-continent
- Southeast Asia (particularly the ASEAN countries) – more importantly for it controlled the 'choke points' along Japan's oil route from the Middle East

Japan's policy towards the Third World became a foundational strategy through which Tokyo employed foreign aid as a diplomatic tool to spread its influence across the Third World, crucially including South Asia. The "Fukuda Doctrine" enunciated in August 1977 by Japanese Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda constituted three basic points:

- declaring Japan's resolve to not play the role

21 For a detailed discussion and reference on the subject see, Tanaka Akihiko, "Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy," in Inoguchi Takashi and Purnendra Jain, eds., *Japanese Foreign Policy Today: A Reader* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000).

22 Nester, n. 19, p. 15.

23 Ibid., p. 18.

24 Murthy, n. 14, p. 40.

25 Ibid., p. 42.

of a military power in the region;
- seeking a relationship of mutual trust with Southeast Asian nations; and
- maintaining closer relations with ASEAN and simultaneously endeavouring to build better links with (then) Indochina.

During this period, Japan recognized that the existential gorge between ASEAN and Indochina was not merely economic, and encompassed political, social, and historical experiences. The Fukuda Doctrine envisaged that Japan could play the role of a bridge between ASEAN and Indochina out of regional and self-interest.[26] However, by 1979, there was a subtle shift in Japan's stance vis-à-vis involvement in the IOR in that the former dissociated itself from the final document issued by participants at the two-week long conference of the 43 Indian Ocean littoral and hinterland states held in New York in 1979. This conference took a position on the question of the presence of 'outside powers' in the Indian Ocean and called for the coastal and hinterland states of the IOR to not extend help to the great powers for any military activity in the region.

The decade of the 1980s saw relations between the global economic power (Japan) and South Asia (particularly India) improve dramatically. The primary factors behind this were Japan's ambition to re-emerge as an international actor with Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone's repeated call for the "internationalization of Japan." His successor Noboru Takeshita echoed the view that Japan needed to revive and widen the ambit of its ties with other nations and not singularly deal with the West, including the US. This approach seemingly stemmed from the friction that Japan was experiencing with Washington and Europe over matters pertaining to trade, tariffs, and investments, which were seen as a serious challenge to Japan's economic growth. In its search for newer markets and partners, South Asia as a region emerged as a natural contender with its enormous size and potential. Interestingly, in February 1989, Thailand's Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan commented, "The world economic war is over, [and] Japan has won."[27] That said, however, Japanese investments in South Asia were minuscule between 1979–1986, which could be gauged from the fact that they constituted less than 0.1 percent of total foreign investments globally during the period, and less than 0.5 percent of total investments in Asia.[28] Japan's interest in South Asia (particularly India] grew very gradually post-1991 following several high-profile investment missions, including one by officials from the Federation of Economic Organizations (*Keidanren*) and a first-ever visit by the Minister of International Trade and Industry (MITI) in 1995.[29]

Japan's Approach, Engagement, and Capacity-Building in the Indian Ocean

The South Asia visits of successive Japanese PMs from Nakasone to Toshiki Kaifu in April 1990 only strengthened the perspective that "… peace and stability in Asia is a matter of great concern to Japan… the development of this region inhabited by… one fifth of all mankind, is in itself one of the major interests of the whole world…"[30] Kaifu further underscored that Japan would seek deeper engagement on

26 Ibid., p. 47.
27 For more details on the subject see, Bruce Koppel and Michael Plummer, "Japan Ascendancy as a Foreign-Aid Power," *Asian Survey*, vol. 29, no. 11, 1989.
28 Ibid., pp. 271-274.
29 For details see, Jain, n. 20.
30 Speech by PM Toshiki Kaifu, *Japan and South Asia: In Pursuit of Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace and Prosperity* (Parliament House, New Delhi) April 30, 1990.

issues without limiting its agenda to bilateral or Asian issues alone.[31] It was for these reasons that, despite the fact that Japanese premiers had previously visited the region in 1957, 1961, and 1984, the visit of Prime Minister Kaifu to four South Asian countries, namely, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, became a landmark in the history of Japan-South Asia ties. By means of this visit, Japan sought to convey the notion that, with Japan having achieved an 'Asian economic powerhouse' status, Tokyo's policy interests and approach, traditionally limited to East and Southeast Asia, were increasingly shifting towards South Asia.

The sub-continent began assuming greater significance for Japan's economic and political interests from the fact that 70 percent of its oil imports from the Middle East came via sea, crossing the Indian Ocean. It was thus in Japanese interests that regional security and stability be maintained by means of providing economic/development assistance. By this time, Japan had already established its credentials in so far as investments and aid across the Third World was concerned. South Asia, and India in particular, was seeking Japan's technological and economic development assistance as well as its foreign aid funding, which was the largest in absolute dollar terms. Being a net creditor nation soon led Japan to becoming the leading individual donor toward development for this region.[32] There came about a seeming convergence of Japan's overall regional politico-economic strategies with South Asia per se, in that the region (especially and most notably India) was pursuing an economic liberalization and deregulation agenda.

Further, South Asia began deriving benefits from Japan's economic and technological assistance and acknowledged the imperatives of its economic interdependence with Tokyo in view of the prevailing global economic realities. Economic assistance was an area where responsibility was[33] and continues to be shared widely by various ministries in Japan, including Official Development Assistance (ODA) provided through the coordinated efforts of Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) and Economic Planning Agency (EPA). Of these, METI maintains the most pronounced influence in terms of yen loans, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) playing a decisive role in determining grant aid. Notably, the 1992 ODA Charter stipulates few principles for such political use.[34] In the case of South Asia, official aid has been a more dominating feature of relations with Japan, given that the latter remains a top aid donor to most of the sub-continent's nations.

The decades of the 2000s and 2010s began witnessing a gradual thawing of ties between Japan and India, with a long distance having been travelled since the mid-1960s when South Asia, including India, was omitted from what Japan considered "Asia". This embrace seemingly mirrors the regional and global geopolitics and geo-strategy at play, which have been impacted by the strategic shifts in policy thinking and approaches occurring within Asia. The IOR 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 establish and drive an economic- and politico-security-dominant Asian architecture. Against this backdrop, the Indian Ocean as a strategic node becomes even more crucial, in that the power that dominates the Indian Ocean may eventually control all of

31 Ibid.

32 Saburo Okita, "Japan's Quiet Strength," *Foreign Policy*, no. 75, Summer 1989.

33 Purnendra Jain, "Japan and South Asia: Between Cooperation and Confrontation," in Takashi et al., n. 21.

34 For more details on this see, Akihiko, n. 21.

Asia.[35] Given the severe diversity and disparities among the countries 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.

Japan's policies and approach for operating in the IOR underwent a major transformation with the lifting of the ban on Japanese troops, enabling its Self-Defense Forces to deploy to Iraq in 1992.[36] Today, nearly 40 percent of all Japan's Self-Defense Forces' missions have occurred in the IOR, and half of Japanese ODA goes to IOR countries.[37] While China's Belt and Road Initiative cuts across strategic ports in South Asia and the IOR,[38] Japan's presence and role in the Indian Ocean remain qualitatively distinct from those of China both economically and militarily. Tokyo tends to focus more on regional norms that advocate and practice transparency, economic sustainability, sustainable development, and a rules-based order.[39] Japan's increasing interest and presence in the Indian Ocean also hinges on the critical reality of its dependency on energy supplies shipped across the Indian Ocean. Thus, securitization of the sea lanes of communication (SLOCs) from the Middle East to Japan is a primary driver for the latter to build upon security and economic partnerships with potential strategic partners across the IOR.

Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes argue that Japan is no longer the political shrinking violet of the immediate post-war years. History will look back on the first decade of the 21st century as a turning point for Japanese strategy, both in East Asia and beyond.[40] Japanese contributions and endeavors have showcased its political willingness and military capacity to bear responsibilities commensurate with its economic prowess. Change has been afoot for some time. Viewed through the prism of the geopolitics of connectivity, the Indian Ocean presents itself as perhaps a fundamental connecting link with the other half of the Indo-Pacific. For Japan, the IOR has become an indispensable region which shall serve in maintaining its status as a vital Asian player regionally. Establishing a more than visible presence here has thus become a necessity for Tokyo. While India remains among the key cornerstones of Japan's Indo-Pacific policy and strategy, be it in the economic, political, military or cultural sphere, the past decade has witnessed Tokyo taking a keen interest in deepening cooperation and engagement with other IOR states, too. In all, the significance of the IOR for Japan has only grown in history and has never been greater in terms of focus, strategy, policies, budgets, and scope than it is now, so Japan must deliberate on and manage a fine balance in setting geostrategic and geo-economic priorities and allocate resources accordingly.

35 Press Release, "Chinese Navy is a Force that is Here to Stay," *Press Trust of India*, January 10, 2019.

36 John Hartle, "The Normalization of Japanese Policy in the Indian Ocean Region," *Policy Report*, Analysis and Policy Observatory, Australia's Global Interests, June 21, 2018.

37 For more details on this see, Peter Wyckoff, "Making Waves: Japan and the Indian Ocean Region," *Commentary,* The Stimson Center, May 1, 2017; for related and comparative contemporary reading see, *Council on Security and Defense Capabilities in the New Era*, "Japan's Visions for Future Security and Defense Capabilities in the New Era: Toward a Peace - Creating Nation," August 2010, p. 24.

38 Ibid.

39 Hartle, n. 36.

40 For further details on Japan in the Indian Ocean, see, Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes, *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies*, vol. 13, no. 2, Winter 2011, p. 8.