



# ISSUE BRIEF

*"Advancing the Strategic Potential of India-US Relations, Accelerating India's Economic Development"*

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## An Indo-Pacific Triangle of Consequence

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Six years ago, India took its "Look East" policy to a new plane, reconnecting for regional stability and security in East Asia, has been further strengthened in the aftermath of the unprecedented natural disaster that devastated eastern Japan in March this year.

with its historic space in Asia when it joined the first East Asia Summit (EAS). This year it was Asia's turn to welcome the United States into the EAS. Both events enjoyed the strong support of Japan. The strategic communities in all three countries have for the past several years promoted a vigorous partnership among these three leading democracies of the Asia-Pacific. They have now witnessed the first official India-Japan-U.S. dialogue, which took place in Washington D.C. on December 19.

Relations between all three partners are in a transformational stage. India and Japan have established a broad-based strategic partnership and concluded both a security pact and a comprehensive economic partnership agreement (CEPA). India's profile in the U.S. outlook on Asia has changed dramatically, as witnessed by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's speech in Chennai in July. India and the U.S. should now accelerate this process by concluding the bilateral investment treaty under negotiation and also consider moving towards an EPA. The Japan-U.S alliance, the cornerstone

The context of these geo-strategic developments has been amply recognized. In the words of President Barack Obama: "The Asia-Pacific is absolutely critical to America's growth...no region will do more to shape our long-term economic future."

He's right and his counterparts in India and Japan couldn't agree more.

Developing Asia, to include China, has outperformed the rest of the world in recording a phenomenal 7.2% GDP growth over the last three decades. With a feeble recovery in the U.S. and the European economies teetering on the edge, the entire world has a vital stake in Asia's continued economic success. Japan itself may well be the fastest growing developed economy in 2012.

Keeping pace with this ongoing shift in economic and strategic clout, the regional nomenclature is changing from East Asia to the Asia-Pacific and now to the Indo-Pacific. Of course, the Indo-Pacific as an inter-linked and integrated geo-political and geo-economic space from India to the Pacific and America is still a work in progress. Challenges of translating this concept into reality will reinforce the convergences of the three partners. Much

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work remains to ensure that their individual and collective steps will be mutually reinforcing, but these three maritime democracies should take a leading role in shaping the economic and security architecture of the Indo-Pacific.

The United States, India and Japan have the responsibility to take their cooperation forward in a manner that strategic competition does not erode economic inter-dependence. They will do well to heed Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's words at the EAS last month: "Asia's resurgence is dependent on the evolution of cooperative architecture." So their interactions will clearly not be about zero-sum politics or containment strategies, precisely because all three nations seek to work alongside a rising China to promote peace, stability and prosperity. At the same time, as was evident at the Bali East Asia Summit, there are widespread regional concerns about China's growing assertiveness. Discussions on China's role can only help expand cooperation, mitigate contention and reduce room for miscalculation in the bilateral relationships between each of the countries and China.

The India-Japan-U.S. trilateral in Washington provides an opportunity to begin the process of operationalising Indo-Pacific cooperation as a seamless construct in areas such as maritime security cooperation, counter-terrorism, counter-piracy, counter-proliferation, disaster relief and humanitarian assistance. On the last of these areas, experience of past tragedies in this natural disaster-prone region calls for capacity building to improve coordinated action among flexible 'coalitions of the willing' like the G-4 (India, Japan, Australia and the U.S.) in 2004.

Going forward, each of the three countries will need to address and respond to a number of questions as they translate their Indo-Pacific triangular relationship into one of consequence: While the U.S. is resolute in its intention of remaining a "resident power" in Asia, how will it do so under conditions of financial stress? How will India respond positively to the desire of ASEAN countries to see a greater Indian security role? Will Japan reassert its strategic posture in the Far East and review its outdated limitations on collective security and defence industrial cooperation? Will the US on its part move to bolster its expanding security ties with India by graduating from defense sales to technology sharing?

India and Japan have already supported President Obama's vision of a broader, EAS-based political and security architecture. Now the U.S. should equally recognize the aspirations of its trilateral partners in promoting Asian regional economic integration, including through US support for parallel progress on Comprehensive Economic Partnership in East Asia (CEPEA) and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). For its potential impact to be meaningful, the TPP needs ballast, which Japan and India can provide. This agenda may be aspirational, but is very much dictated by the indispensable nature of the India-Japan-U.S. partnership for the future of the Indo-Pacific.

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