

# INDIA-FRANCE-JAPAN TRILATERAL DIALOGUE

## Order and Disorder in the Indo-Pacific:

Trilateral and Policy Perspectives  
from India, France and Japan



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ISAS-SPF-IFRI Trilateral Dialogue

India-France-Japan Trilateral Dialogue

Order and Disorder in the Indo-Pacific: Trilateral and Policy Perspectives from India, France and Japan

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Institute of South Asian Studies  
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## Introduction

The Indo-Pacific region is witnessing important geopolitical and geoeconomic shifts and contestations. The escalating competition between China and the United States (US) for primacy in the region is exacerbating the anxieties of other regional players. Countries are increasingly grappling with questions ranging from the security of supply chains to the shape of the future security architecture. At a broader level, questions have arisen over the efficacy of established forms of multilateralism and multilateral frameworks. The return of Donald Trump as the US' president has only brought more focus to these questions. At the same time, the evolving international order and China-US competition in the Indo-Pacific are encouraging regional powers to play a more prominent role and fostering conditions that allow for a broader space for them to cooperate on a wide range of issues.

*The regional security order is dithering under the impact of unfettered arms competition, including vertical proliferation of nuclear weapons and delivery capabilities.*

Overall, the evolving international and regional orders will have important policy implications. Economic over-dependences accrued during the heydays of globalisation have resulted in vulnerabilities. If exogenous shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the fragility of supply chains, the overconcentration of supply chains in specific geographies has also provided some states with tools of economic coercion. The regional security order is dithering under the impact of unfettered arms competition, including vertical proliferation of nuclear weapons and delivery capabilities. However, most disturbing is the increasing proclivity of states to make threats of the use of nuclear weapons in their military strategy. Such overt threats of nuclear use undermine the guarantees provided to non-nuclear weapon states under the nonproliferation regime and undercut the global norm of non-use of nuclear weapons. Concomitantly, geopolitical ambitions, territorial anxieties and rising nationalism are leading states to reinterpret or completely sideline well-established practices of international law. In the waters of the Indo-Pacific, maritime aggression is increasingly stretching the limits of the United

Nations (UN) Convention on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS). Freedom of navigation (FON) is being severely challenged through active military measures and cartographic reimaginings. Incidents at sea between maritime rivals are on the rise, with significant scope of escalation. The intense geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific has also created a crisis of credibility for both the process of multilateralism and the multilateral institutions. Even as the momentum of global power is shifting towards the Indo-Pacific, regional states are still not adequately represented in key governance bodies such as the UN Security Council (UNSC). In addition, regional multilateral institutions such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) find it challenging to navigate the geopolitical competition and choose between their security and economic interests.

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This emerging disorder in the Indo-Pacific provides an excellent opportunity for India, France and Japan to collaborate on a shared understanding and collective response to regional security and stability challenges. First, the three countries have a geographical presence along the most critical maritime arc of the Indo-Pacific: from the Western Indian Ocean to the Pacific. Second, all of them are resident naval powers, with French territorial interests in the Western Indian Ocean and Oceania, India's presence in the Northern Indian Ocean and Japanese territorial waters in East Asia and Northern Pacific. Third, they have a unique set of relations with the US, China and Russia, which, in the current circumstances, play the role of the extant hegemon, the rising challenger and the declining disruptor in the region. The triangular relationship between the US, China and Russia uniquely impacts the geopolitical calculations of India, France and Japan. Fourth, there is a significant convergence of anxieties and interests between the three states. China's increasing postures in the Indo-Pacific and its territorial and maritime revisionism have left India, France and Japan anxious about their maritime security and territorial integrity. France is the first European state to embrace an Indo-Pacific vision and strategy. It actively boosted its naval presence in the Indo-Pacific waters and its military presence in the French island's territories to keep the Indo-Pacific free and open to all. India has also categorically stated its preference for a free and open order



*Japan, which had called for the liberal democracies of the region to unite as early as 2007, has doubled down on its commitment to the security and stability of the Indo-Pacific with the declaration of its 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' (FOIP) concept in 2018.*

in the Indo-Pacific. Japan, which had called for the liberal democracies of the region to unite as early as 2007, has doubled down on its commitment to the security and stability of the Indo-Pacific with the declaration of its 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' (FOIP) concept in 2018. Their anxieties, however, also stretch to the role of the US in the region. France and Japan are treaty allies of the US, and India is a major strategic partner. At the same time, India and France are proud to keep the strategic space for their own autonomous decision-making, and Japan is increasingly expanding security cooperation in the region. Yet, while they witness the growing rhetorical provocations over democracy and authoritarianism, all three fear the possibility of the US' retrenchment in the face of China's growing power and capabilities.

The emergence of the India-France-Japan trilateral initiative can provide the three critical stakeholders with an avenue to discuss and debate their Indo-Pacific strategies, identify common interests and challenges and lay down a vision for the region that encompasses the interests of democracies from Europe to the Pacific. The Institute of South Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore (ISAS-NUS), the Sasakawa Peace Foundation (SPF) of Japan and the French Institute of International Relations (IFRI) organised a Track 1.5 dialogue session in 2024 among experts and officials from three key maritime democracies in the Indo-Pacific. The conversation centred on contemporary international relations in the region. Following the success of the first dialogue in 2022, ISAS-NUS, in partnership with SPF and IFRI, decided to hold a second session last year.

The theme for this time's trilateral dialogue, 'Order and Disorder in the Indo-Pacific', brought to discussion the three critical shifts happening in the Indo-Pacific. The first is the re-evaluation of the balance of power just as regional actors adjust their strategies in response to China's rise, with countries strengthening partnerships like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad). Second, the contestation of norms and values, as democracies advocate for a rules-based order while China and Russia promote models focused on state sovereignty. Finally, dormant geopolitical fault lines are reactivating – from Russia's

invasion of Ukraine to maritime disputes in Southeast Asia – further destabilising the global order.

Alongside these discussions, the dialogue also aimed to capture both normative and tangible transformations taking place in the Indo-Pacific across key areas: security, economics, climate change and multilateral cooperation. The dialogue consisted of four sessions: ‘Strengthening the Norm of Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons in an Era of Geopolitics’, ‘Critical Mineral Supply Chains’, ‘Freedom of Navigation and UNCLOS’ and ‘Climate Change and Energy Transition’. Additionally, a special session on multilateralism included perspectives from the three countries and experts from ASEAN.

## Strengthening the Norm of Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons in an Era of Geopolitics

*As the norm of non-use of nuclear weapons became central to global stability and inter-state security relations, it fed the impression that the threat of nuclear weapons was fading, and the cumulative stockpile of nuclear weapons would decline.*

Even when nuclear weapon states piled on their nuclear arsenal during the Cold War, there was a normative understanding among states on the non-use of nuclear weapons. However, it was only with the end of the Cold War that serious efforts at the reduction of nuclear arsenals were undertaken, principally by the US and Russia.<sup>1</sup> It also unleashed, what William Walker would later call the “Golden Age” of nuclear non-proliferation with many states giving up their nuclear assets, extension of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and negotiations over a Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty.<sup>2</sup> All these developments further solidified the norm of non-use of nuclear weapons. As the norm of non-use of nuclear weapons became central to global stability and inter-state security relations, it fed the impression that the threat of nuclear weapons was fading, and the cumulative stockpile of nuclear weapons would decline.<sup>3</sup> This sense of global security and stability was perceived to hold despite the rise of new nuclear powers.

The recent resurgence of great power rivalry and heightened geopolitical competition has, however, threatened the global security order. This is particularly reflected in the revision of the stance on the use of nuclear weapons and its proliferation taken by some states. Russia’s aggressive rhetoric on the use of nuclear weapons to deter North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) intervention in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war and its recent revision of its “nuclear doctrine” to lower the threshold for use of nuclear weapons has exacerbated such

<sup>1</sup> Nina Tannenwald, James M Acton and Jane Vayman, ‘The Great Unravelling: The Future of the Nuclear Normative Order’, under project – Meeting the Challenges of the New Nuclear Age, *American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, <https://www.amacad.org/publication/emerging-risks-declining-norms/section/3#:~:text=The%20Norm%20of%20Non%20Use,associated%20with%20such%20destructive%20weapons.>

<sup>2</sup> William Walker, ‘Nuclear enlightenment and counter-enlightenment’, *International Affairs* 83, no. 3, 2007, pp. 431-453, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4541751>.

<sup>3</sup> ‘SIPRI Yearbook 2020: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security’, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2020, pp. 325-393, [https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/yb20\\_10\\_wnf.pdf](https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/yb20_10_wnf.pdf).

fears.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, China's rapid expansion of its nuclear arsenal from 350 to 410 missiles between 2022 and 2023 and the enhancement of its deterrence strategy through the construction of hundreds of new missile silos in its northern borders has heightened concerns of a potential arms race and raised tensions with the US and its allies. These, in turn, threaten to destabilise the global security order.<sup>5</sup> The challenge to global non-use and non-proliferation efforts has been heightened further by the emergence of new nuclear powers such as North Korea, which often engages in nuclear sabre-rattling for both its continued relevance and as a negotiating tool.

The new nuclear age is characterised by the weakening of the global architecture of arms control that came into being during the Cold War. This was, in large part, founded upon international treaties, institutions and norms. The efficacy of these treaties is, however, in question today. For instance, Russia's suspension of its participation in the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty – a treaty ensuring arms control between Russia and the US – has raised concerns. Additionally, its withdrawal from the ratification of the CTBT and its decision to disengage with the US on any issues concerning nuclear arms control until the latter alters its position on the Ukraine-Russia war has cast a shadow on the future of US-Russia arms control. In turn, this has undermined international efforts to prevent the resumption of nuclear testing.<sup>6</sup> Critical agreements such as the NPT are visibly strained by the lack of consensus between its members.<sup>7</sup> These deep divisions exist due to differing opinions between member states on disarmament and the role of nuclear weapons in national strategies. Moreover, non-nuclear states are increasingly frustrated

*These deep divisions exist due to differing opinions between member states on disarmament and the role of nuclear weapons in national strategies.*

<sup>4</sup> Alexander Gabuev, 'How Serious a Threat is Russia's New Nuclear Doctrine', *Carnegie Politika*, 3 October 2024, <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2024/09/russia-nuclear-doctrine-blackmail?lang=en>.

<sup>5</sup> 'Yearbook 2024: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security', Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), 2024, pp. 271- 367, <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/YB24%2007%20WNF.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Heather Williams, Kelsey Hartigan, Lachlan MacKenzie and Reja Younis, 'Russian Nuclear Calibration in the War in Ukraine', Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 23 February 2024, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russian-nuclear-calibration-war-ukraine>; and Nicholas Adamopoulos, 'The Uncertain Future of U.S.-Russia Arms Control', Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 14 February 2024, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/uncertain-future-us-russia-arms-control>.

<sup>7</sup> The 2022 NPT Review Conference concluded without reaching a consensus.

with the stagnation of disarmament efforts and the expansion of nuclear arsenals.<sup>8</sup> The return of Trump to the White House has also raised questions over the country's commitment to non-proliferation and the international framework for arms control. Amidst this rapidly evolving global landscape, where norms of non-use and non-proliferation are weakening, this session in the dialogue session drew on the French, Indian and Japanese perspectives on the state of the norm of non-use, their respective roles in strengthening the norm of non-use and potential for all three states to work collectively to strengthen the norms and ensure global nuclear stability.

### A Perspective from France

*With the possibility of the US' disengagement from Europe, states have begun to discuss the shape of a nuclear future without the US.*

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has shown that it is willing to use military force to expand its influence. President Vladimir Putin's repeated threats of using nuclear weapons to assert his demands, along with Russia's joint military drills with Belarus involving tactical nuclear weapons, have raised concerns across Europe, especially among those bordering Ukraine. These fears have been furthered by the change in the US' approach towards NATO.<sup>9</sup> Historically, the US' military presence and support for its NATO allies has been fundamental to the European security order. However, with the re-election of Trump, there is a strong chance that Washington may adopt a more transactional approach towards its European partners. This approach could be seen during one of Trump's rally speeches where he claimed that the US would protect only those countries that contribute what he perceives as their rightful share of defence spending, leaving the rest to be open for attacks by Russia.<sup>10</sup> With the possibility of the US' disengagement from Europe, states have begun to discuss the shape of a nuclear future without the US.

<sup>8</sup> Michiru, Nishida, 'A glimmer of hope for Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty', *The Korea Times*, 28 August 2024, [https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/opinion/2024/10/137\\_381309.html](https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/opinion/2024/10/137_381309.html).

<sup>9</sup> Heloise Fayet, Andrew Futter and Ulrich Kuhn, 'Forum: Towards a European Nuclear Deterrent', Institute for International and Strategic Studies, 27 September 2024, <https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/survival-online/2024/09/forum-towards-a-european-nuclear-deterrent/>.

<sup>10</sup> Laura Kayali, Thorsten Jungholt and Philipp Fritz, 'Europe Is Quietly Debating a Nuclear Future Without the US', *Politico*, 7 April 2024, <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2024/07/04/europe-us-nuclear-weapons-00166070>.

Among the most prominent voices in this debate is French President Emmanuel Macron, who has emphasised France’s “special responsibility” of protecting the security of the continent, given its deterrence capacity.<sup>11</sup> During his speech at the Swedish Defence University in Stockholm in January 2024, Macron proposed more European involvement in France’s nuclear deterrence. Since then, France has attempted to foster closer ties with key European nations, particularly Germany, Poland and the United Kingdom (UK), by engaging in deeper coordination on defence matters, including with NATO. Macron proposed that NATO includes a “European nuclear pillar”, which would allow France to contribute to collective defence while maintaining its autonomy.

As it stands, the French nuclear policy of ‘strict sufficiency’ or *dissuasion du faible au fort* limits the country’s ability to share nuclear weapons with other European countries, as this would compromise its deterrence. Furthermore, any move to expand its nuclear commitments could be seen as a violation of the NPT and may result in international and domestic backlash. France’s position on the nuclear question is being influenced by the need to strengthen European security in the face of an unpredictable US and growing threats from Russia. However, practical and political challenges, including fiscal constraints, strategic nuclear policy, domestic opposition and international scepticism, complicate the development of a more European-focused nuclear deterrent.

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## A Perspective from India

India occupies an interesting position in the global nuclear order as a nuclear-armed state that is not a signatory to the NPT or the CTBT. Guided by a doctrine of credible minimum deterrence and a declared no-first use (NFU) policy, India has consistently demonstrated restraint in its nuclear posture, prioritising non-aggression and stability.<sup>12</sup> The

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Cabinet Committee On Security Reviews Progress In Operationalizing India’s Nuclear Doctrine’, Prime Minister’s Office, Press Bureau of India Archives, 4 January 2003, <https://archive.pib.gov.in/release02/lyr2003/rjan2003/04012003/r040120033.html>.



NFU principle is central to India's nuclear strategy and highlights its commitment to minimising the risks of nuclear escalation. India's emphasis on the NFU can be contrasted with other nuclear states such as Pakistan, which maintains a first-use nuclear doctrine, and China, whose claims to be committed to the NFU have been met by scepticism from various sections.<sup>13 14</sup>

*Through these initiatives and its nuclear doctrine that emphasises NFU and the non-use of nuclear weapons on non-nuclear states, India seeks to position itself as a constructive participant and partner in non-proliferation dialogues.*

From India's perspective, the norm of non-use is a means of reducing tensions and fostering a stable international security environment. In line with this, it has long supported the push for global nuclear disarmament. It has officially called for a Comprehensive Nuclear Weapons Convention that would establish legally binding agreements that oversee the process of eliminating nuclear weapons.<sup>15</sup> In addition, India has raised other resolutions at the UN advocating both for the prohibition of the use of nuclear weapons and the reduction of nuclear danger. Through these initiatives and its nuclear doctrine that emphasises NFU and the non-use of nuclear weapons on non-nuclear states, India seeks to position itself as a constructive participant and partner in non-proliferation dialogues.

While India has chosen not to join the NPT or the CTBT due to concerns over the inequities of these regimes, it has voluntarily adhered to key norms, including a self-imposed moratorium on nuclear testing.<sup>16</sup> Regionally, India faces a challenging nuclear environment, particularly in South Asia, where its strategic rivalry with Pakistan presents risks of miscalculation and escalation. India has refrained from engaging in nuclear brinkmanship, focusing instead on maintaining conventional deterrence and pursuing diplomatic engagement.

<sup>13</sup> Toby Dalton, 'Much Ado About India's No-first-use Nuke Policy', *Carnegie Emissary*, 26 September 2019, <https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2019/09/much-ado-about-indias-no-first-use-nuke-policy?lang=en>.

<sup>14</sup> Tong Zhao, 'Its Time To Talk About No First Use', *Foreign Policy*, 6 November 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/11/06/united-states-china-nuclear-meeting-no-first-use-arms-control/>.

<sup>15</sup> 'India statement delivered by Secretary (West) at the Annual High-Level Meeting on International Day for The Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons', Ministry of External Affairs, 27 September 2023, [https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/37149/india\\_statement\\_delivered\\_by\\_Secretary\\_West\\_at\\_the\\_Annual\\_High\\_Level\\_Meeting\\_on\\_International\\_Day\\_for\\_The\\_Total\\_Elimination\\_of\\_Nuclear\\_Weapons](https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/37149/india_statement_delivered_by_Secretary_West_at_the_Annual_High_Level_Meeting_on_International_Day_for_The_Total_Elimination_of_Nuclear_Weapons).

<sup>16</sup> Dinakar Peri, 'Not Signing the NPT one of India's most consequential decisions: Former Envoy', *The Hindu*, 13 July 2022, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/not-signing-the-npt-one-of-indias-most-consequential-decisions-former-envoy/article65635838.ece>.

## A Perspective from Japan

Japan's nuclear policy is shaped by its unique position as the only country to have suffered the devastating consequences of nuclear weapons. This historical experience has fostered a national commitment to nuclear disarmament, positioning Japan as a leading voice in global advocacy for the abolition of nuclear weapons and the reinforcement of the norm of non-use.<sup>17</sup>

However, Japan's stance on disarmament has been complicated by the rapidly evolving security landscape in East Asia, specifically, the growing nuclear capabilities of Japan's neighbours – China and North Korea. China's rapid military modernisation and the expansion of its nuclear arsenal to include over 500 operational nuclear warheads and 300 intercontinental ballistic missiles silos have raised concerns in Tokyo.<sup>18</sup> China is not only increasing the number of its nuclear warheads but is also developing advanced nuclear technologies. These include fast breeder reactors, which could enable the production of more amounts of plutonium. Such developments, coupled with China's refusal to engage in arms control discussions and provide transparency on its nuclear strategies, have made Japan uneasy about China's future nuclear trajectory.<sup>19</sup>

*China is not only increasing the number of its nuclear warheads but is also developing advanced nuclear technologies.*

Similarly, North Korea's nuclear ambitions, particularly its development of underwater nuclear platforms, signal a troubling shift in the Korean Peninsula's security environment that is feeding a deep sense of insecurity in Japan.<sup>20</sup> Japan's position is further complicated by broader geopolitical developments. While Japan remains a staunch advocate for nuclear disarmament, it is also forced to rely on the US' extended nuclear deterrence for its security. Russia's invasion of Ukraine and

<sup>17</sup> 'Japan's Efforts on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation', Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 1 June 2012, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/un/disarmament/arms/overview.html>.

<sup>18</sup> Ryo Asona, 'China's Nuclear Strategy', *SPF China Observer*, no.54, 24 September 2024, Sasakawa Peace Foundation, <https://www.spf.org/spf-china-observer/en/document-detail054.html>.

<sup>19</sup> 'China halts nuclear arms talks with US over Taiwan support', *Aljazeera*, 18 July 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/7/18/china-halts-nuclear-arms-talks-with-us-over-taiwan-support>.

<sup>20</sup> 'North Korea conducts test of underwater nuclear weapons system, state media reports', *CNBC*, 18 January 2024, <https://www.cnbc.com/2024/01/19/north-korea-conducts-test-of-underwater-nuclear-weapons-system-kcna.html>.

its statements on revamping its nuclear policy, which was discussed above, have prompted concerns about the US' ability and willingness to defend its allies under nuclear deterrence commitments. This, in turn, has led to Japan feeling vulnerable to the shifting dynamics of nuclear deterrence, even as it continues to support disarmament and the norms of non-use.

Despite these challenges, Japan's public remains largely supportive of nuclear disarmament, though there is less discussion about nuclear weapons and their role in the country's defence. However, the deteriorating security environment means Japan must reconcile its moral leadership on nuclear disarmament with the strategic realities of an increasingly nuclear-armed region.

### **Cooperation between India, France and Japan**

*A key area of cooperation lies in reinforcing multilateral arms control frameworks.*

In the face of rising nuclear threats and the weakening of global norms surrounding non-use, India, France and Japan are uniquely positioned to form a strong coalition to promote responsible nuclear practices and reinforce non-proliferation efforts. While the three nations have distinct geopolitical concerns, interests and limitations, they share a commitment to maintaining the integrity of the non-use norm and curbing nuclear proliferation. A key area of cooperation lies in reinforcing multilateral arms control frameworks.

Additionally, while India is not a signatory to the NPT, its nuclear status is internationally recognised, and the three countries can work together to reform the NPT, making it more reflective of contemporary realities and creating pathways for non-NPT states to participate in disarmament discussions. Another essential area of collaboration is in promoting regional stability and preventing conflict. Given their respective regional nuclear risks, India, France and Japan can work together to establish confidence-building measures and joint diplomatic initiatives aimed at de-escalating tensions and reducing nuclear miscalculations.

## Critical Mineral Supply Chains

Critical mineral supply chains (CMSCs) have emerged as a pivotal element in the contemporary geopolitical and geoeconomic landscape. Minerals such as lithium, cobalt and nickel are integral to clean energy technologies, electric vehicle batteries and development of the semiconductor industry and are, thus, central to the global clean energy transition and climate action. The strategic importance of CMSCs is shaping both industrial practices and policy frameworks. The expanded application of critical minerals has also necessitated the adoption of innovative approaches to their extraction and supply chain management.

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The International Energy Agency projected in 2021 that the demand for critical minerals will rise significantly by 2025: over 40 per cent for copper and rare earth elements, 60 to 70 per cent for nickel and cobalt, and almost 90 per cent for lithium.<sup>21</sup> These projections signal the onset of a new era, one that is characterised by intensified mining activities, the emergence of critical mineral dependencies and geopolitical competition for resources.<sup>22</sup> The fact that states across the globe are reliant on minerals that are geographically concentrated in a few states and oceans amplifies the fear of geopolitical competition for these resources. It is no surprise that integration into CMSCs is increasingly being seen through a national security lens.<sup>23</sup> Supply chain vulnerabilities that came to the fore during the COVID-19 pandemic have only accentuated the security imperatives surrounding CMSCs.

The concentration of mining and refining of critical minerals in a few countries is illustrative of the concerns over access and competition. For example, China accounts for 63 per cent of global rare earth

<sup>21</sup> 'World Energy Outlook Special Report: The Role of Critical Minerals in Clean Energy Transitions', International Energy Association, 2021, <https://www.iea.org/reports/the-role-of-critical-minerals-in-clean-energy-transitions/executive-summary>.

<sup>22</sup> 'Geopolitics of Energy Transition', International Renewable Energy Arena, [https://www.irena.org/Digital-Report/Geopolitics-of-the-Energy-Transition-Critical-Materials?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.irena.org/Digital-Report/Geopolitics-of-the-Energy-Transition-Critical-Materials?utm_source=chatgpt.com).

<sup>23</sup> Jiayi Zhou and Andre Manberger, 'Critical Minerals and Great Power Competition', Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, October 2024, [https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2024-10/critical\\_minerals.pdf](https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2024-10/critical_minerals.pdf).

elements production and 45 per cent of its molybdenum. Similarly, over 70 per cent of global cobalt is mined in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Here, Chinese firms have successfully entrenched their position in the extraction and export of cobalt.<sup>24</sup> Australia, which is responsible for 55 per cent of global lithium output, primarily exports to China, while South Africa dominates global platinum production with 72 per cent of the global share.<sup>25</sup>

In this context, states are increasingly seeking to ensure supply chain resilience through diversification and the formation of multilateral, minilateral and regional partnerships. New partnerships such as the Quad, the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative and the Mineral Security Partnership, which have primarily been led by the US and its allies, aim to mitigate risks and fortify CMSC resilience.

*The absence of comprehensive regulatory frameworks and the involvement of multiple stakeholders complicates the establishment of governance mechanisms.*

Yet, the governance of critical mineral supply chains presents significant challenges. The absence of comprehensive regulatory frameworks and the involvement of multiple stakeholders complicates the establishment of governance mechanisms. The IPEF's Supply Chain Agreement in 2023, endorsed by 15 nations, marks a substantial first step in this direction. However, implementing such frameworks remains challenging, as frameworks require not only intergovernmental consensus but also alignment with business interests. Issues of information confidentiality and accessibility further these difficulties. Trump's return to power has also raised questions over the future of existing frameworks.

This session, which was entitled 'Critical Mineral Supply Chains', examined the state-led efforts to de-risk supply chains and enhance resilience. It also highlighted initiatives taken by India, France and Japan to collaborate with each other in pursuit of production and processing of critical mineral supply chains.

<sup>24</sup> Rajesh Chadha, 'Skewed critical minerals global supply chains post COVID-19', Brookings Institution, 10 June 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/skewed-critical-minerals-global-supply-chains-post-covid-19/>.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

## A Perspective from France

The European Commission's 2023 assessment of critical minerals was based on its evaluation of their economic and strategic significance, with an emphasis on supply risks and regional requirements. This assessment accounted for global resource availability, political stability in extraction regions and supply chain concentration.<sup>26</sup> Although France conducted a similar assessment of its own needs, its details remain undisclosed.

The European Commission's study highlighted the geographical concentration of critical minerals essential to the European Union (EU). For instance, platinum, vital for hydrogen production, is predominantly sourced from South Africa; lithium, which is needed for battery technologies, comes from Australia and Latin America; and cobalt is mainly supplied by the Democratic Republic of Congo.<sup>27</sup> However, discussions increasingly centre on China, given its dominance in the global supply chain. China's role extends beyond mineral extraction to include processing and technological transformation. This has ensured its control over CMSCs, even for minerals sourced outside its border.<sup>28</sup>

*China's role extends beyond mineral extraction to include processing and technological transformation.*

Chinese dominance over CMSCs has raised concerns about economic coercion or weaponisation of dependence, which occurs when one state wields substantial control over any supply chain. In fact, China's 2010 rare earth embargo on Japan is often cited as an example of this coercion. Historically, China has prioritised advancing its industrial policies with the aim of climbing the value chain, fostering high value-added industries and driving sustainable growth rather than achieving diplomatic leverage. Since 2023, however, China's critical minerals policies have evolved in important ways. This includes the introduction of export licensing for gallium, germanium and graphite. This export

<sup>26</sup> 'Study on the Critical Raw Materials for the EU', *Publications Office of the European Union*, European Union, 2023, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/57318397-fdd4-11ed-a05c-01aa75ed71a1#>.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Rodrigo Castillo, Caitlin Purdy, 'China's Role in Supplying Critical Minerals for the Global Energy Transition: What Could the Future hold?', part of Leveraging Transparency to Reduce Corruption (LTRC) project, Brookings Institution, July 2022, [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/LTRC\\_ChinaSupplyChain.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/LTRC_ChinaSupplyChain.pdf).



licensing system has been implemented to use specific technologies for refining rare earth minerals. While a response to the US' attempts to limit China's semiconductor industry, these measures also aim to safeguard China's CMSCs and address its domestic industrial needs.

*In the wake of the shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic, Europe embraced a new era of industrial policy, similar to Japan, which aims to foster innovation and secure its supply chains.*

France and the EU face two key challenges with regard to CMSCs – firstly, supply chain concentration and, secondly, market volatility. China's dominance raises concerns of over-reliance, potential supply disruptions and economic coercion or weaponisation of dependence, especially if supply chain concentration is leveraged as a foreign policy tool to further the country's diplomatic and economic goals.<sup>29</sup> On its part, market volatility – especially for minor metals – has deterred large-scale investments. Both France and Europe have responded to these challenges by boosting domestic production and forging new partnerships. By 2030, Europe aims to meet 10 per cent of its critical mineral demand through domestic mining, 40 per cent through processing and 15 per cent through recycling. France has also focused on developing downstream industry development with hubs in its northern and southwestern regions dedicated to battery and magnet production.<sup>30</sup> In the wake of the shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic, Europe embraced a new era of industrial policy, similar to Japan, which aims to foster innovation and secure its supply chains. A key pillar of this policy has been the formation of partnerships such as the Mineral Security Partnership (MSP) and bilateral agreements.

### **A Perspective from India**

In June 2023, India's Ministry of Mines released the country's first list of 30 critical minerals pivotal for strategic sectors such as defence, clean energy and advanced technologies.<sup>31</sup> India remains heavily dependent on imports for 10 of these minerals. These include lithium, cobalt, nickel, vanadium, niobium, germanium, rhenium,

<sup>29</sup> John Seamen, 'Critical Raw Materials, Economic Statecraft and Europe's Dependence on China', *The International Spectator*, August 2024, pp.1-18, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03932729.2024.2379980>.

<sup>30</sup> 'France inaugurates first of four gigafactories in the north', *Reuters*, 31 May 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/business/france-inaugurates-first-four-gigafactories-north-2023-05-30/>.

<sup>31</sup> 'Critical Minerals For India', Ministry of Mines, Government of India, June 2023, <https://mines.gov.in/admin/download/649d4212cceb01688027666.pdf>.

beryllium, tantalum and strontium. These are largely imported from China, Chile and Australia.<sup>32</sup> Although India is known to be rich in minerals, particularly in regions like Jammu and Kashmir, most of these minerals are yet to be explored. Thus, the domestic production of critical minerals remains minimal, and the need of the hour is for targeted reforms and international collaborations.

As a result, the Indian government has taken substantial steps to promote private sector involvement, including introducing an amendment to the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957.<sup>33</sup> Overall, the reforms permit the exploration of formerly restricted minerals (especially atomic minerals) like beryllium, lithium, niobium, titanium, tantalum and zirconium to private entities. They offer exploration and composite licences and partial reimbursements under the National Mineral Exploration Trust.<sup>34</sup> The government also initiated science and technology programmes like ‘Promoting Innovations in Individuals, Start-ups and MSMEs [micro, small and medium enterprises]’ in the mining, mineral processing, metallurgy and recycling sectors to further development and innovation in the sector.

Alongside governmental reforms, India is attempting to strengthen its CMSCs through strategic international partnerships. Initiatives such as the US-led MSP, the India-Australia Critical Minerals Investment Partnership and bilateral agreements with Chile, Peru and France on exploration, mining and processing of critical minerals and green energy, reflect its push to develop partnerships.<sup>35</sup> The state-owned venture, Khanij Bidesh India Limited, has worked on overseas critical minerals asset acquisitions in Australia, Argentina and Chile.<sup>36</sup> It invested ₹211 crore (US\$24 million) in lithium exploration projects

*Although India is known to be rich in minerals, particularly in regions like Jammu and Kashmir, most of these minerals are yet to be explored.*

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> These 29 minerals have been newly inserted into the Seventh Schedule of Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act.

<sup>34</sup> ‘Exploration and Processing of Critical Minerals’, *Press Bureau of India*, 7 August 2024, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseframePage.aspx?PRID=2042601>.

<sup>35</sup> ‘Strengthening of Mineral Supply Chains’, *Press Bureau of India*, 7 August 2023, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseframePage.aspx?PRID=1946416>; and ‘France and India adopt Joint Roadmap on Green Hydrogen’, French Embassy in New Delhi, 18 October 2022, <https://in.ambafrance.org/France-and-India-adopt-Joint-Roadmap-on-Green-Hydrogen>.

<sup>36</sup> ‘Khanji Bidesh India Ltd: Company Profile’, KABIL, India, <https://kabilindia.in/about-us/kabil-company-profile>.

in Argentina, underscoring India's focus on securing overseas mineral assets.<sup>37</sup> These initiatives align with India's broader policy framework, including reforms in mining regulations and the recently launched auctioning of critical mineral blocks, which aims to bolster domestic production capacities.

*Over the years, bilateral ties have expanded from government-to-government relations to private-sector collaborations.*

International collaborations, such as India's partnerships with Japan and France, further reinforce its efforts towards achieving critical mineral security. India and France have a longstanding history of bilateral cooperation, including the 1988 agreement between India's Mineral Exploration Corporation Limited and Bureau de Recherches Géologiques et Minières of France on exploration, mining and beneficiation of tin and tungsten. In 2021, the two countries also signed a memorandum of understanding on renewable energy cooperation. Over the years, bilateral ties have expanded from government-to-government relations to private-sector collaborations. For instance, in 2022, the French minerals company, Imerys, established a calcium aluminate plant in India to provide raw materials for the construction industry and reduce India's import reliance on such materials.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, India and Japan have advanced their partnership in the fields of rare earth oxides and green hydrogen production through the Clean Energy Partnership, which promotes green technology and energy security.<sup>39</sup>

### **A Perspective from Japan**

CMSCs are central to Japan's industrial policy, economic security and foreign relations. Since 2010, these issues have been prioritised following Sino-Japan tensions over the Senkaku islands, during

<sup>37</sup> Abhishek Law, 'KABIL to invest over ₹200 crore towards securing lithium supplies in Argentina: Pralhad Joshi', *The Hindu Businessline*, 2 January 2024, <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/companies/kabil-to-invest-over-200-cr-towards-securing-lithium-supplies-in-argentina-pralhad-joshi/article67698547.ece>.

<sup>38</sup> 'Imerys inaugurates Visakhapatnam plant in the presence of the French ambassador and President of the World Refractory Association', Indo-France Chamber of Commerce, 12 October 2022, <https://www.ifcci.org.in/communication/news/n/news/imerys-inaugurates-visakhapatnam-plant-in-the-presence-of-the-french-ambassador-and-president-of-the.html>.

<sup>39</sup> 'India-Japan Clean Energy Partnership', Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 19 March 2022, <https://www.mea.gov.in/incoming-visit-detail.htm?34992/IndiaJapan+Clean+Energy+Partnership>.

which China restricted Japan's access to certain rare earths as a form of economic coercion. This incident brought home how reliance on external sources of critical minerals needed to be rethought, and policy shifts were introduced by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's government.<sup>40</sup> These shifts supported policy decisions such as deep-sea mining, the promotion of minilateral partnerships with Japan's most trusted allies and participation in multilateral frameworks such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership and the IPEF.<sup>41</sup>

Japan's National Security Strategy of 2022 and the National Export Security Promotion Act have placed great emphasis on supply chain security as a priority. Japan's core policy principles include its commitments to promote a rules-based international order, to adhere to the free-trade regime under the World Trade Organization's (WTO) rules and to facilitate trade liberalisation through free trade agreements. However, global geopolitical challenges, including the heightening of tensions between China and the US and intensifying territorial and maritime disputes, have highlighted the urgency of diversifying supply chains. Japan views these bottlenecks in supply chains as opportunities to strengthen its alliances based on shared values and mutual economic security goals.

*Japan views these bottlenecks in supply chains as opportunities to strengthen its alliances based on shared values and mutual economic security goals.*

Domestically, Japan has initiated measures to rebuild its capacity as a supplier of chemicals, materials and equipment to the semiconductor industry. This is an industry that is deeply linked to critical minerals. Despite losing their lead in the semiconductor industry, Japanese firms continue to remain major suppliers of materials (56 per cent) and equipment (32 per cent) for semiconductor development. The country also accounts for approximately 10 per cent of the global chip market.<sup>42</sup> Japan has also engaged in collaborative ventures such as the establishment of 'Rapidus' – a joint initiative between eight Japanese

<sup>40</sup> Tatsuya Terazawa, 'How Japan solved its rare earth minerals dependency issue', World Economic Forum, 13 October 2023, <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2023/10/japan-rare-earth-minerals/>.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid; and Brad Glosserman, 'We've got to get deep-sea mining right', *The Japan Times*, 25 June 2024, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/commentary/2024/06/25/japan/seabed-deep-sea-mining-japan/>.

<sup>42</sup> Pratinashree Basu, Namisha Binaykiya, 'Rebuilding Japan's Chip Industry', Observer Research Foundation, 22 July 2024, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/rebuilding-japan-s-chip-industry>.

firms which aims to advance Japan's semiconductor capabilities from 14 to 2 nano-metre chips and could help recover a significant proportion of the lost market for Japan.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, significant investments have been made in research and development with a special focus on back-end operations. This includes an investment of ¥19 billion (US\$125 million) for the establishment of a new research and development centre in Tsukuba and substantial funding for projects with Sony, Canon and Ulvac, amongst others.<sup>44</sup> Currently, most of these back-end operations are located outside of Japan.

### India-France-Japan Cooperation in Critical Minerals

*Japan's leadership in magnet technology, India's growing capacity in rare-earth production and France's industrial sophistication create a complementary foundation for cooperation.*

Amid ongoing efforts by India, France and Japan to navigate challenges pertaining to their domestic requirements for critical minerals, international collaborations, particularly a partnership between the three states, offer a unique opportunity to overcome challenges associated with access to CSMCs. While multilateral alliances often focus on addressing broader structural challenges, minilateral formats such as these could be more effective in targeting niche industries such as sea-bed mining and rare-earth processing for magnet technology. Japan's leadership in magnet technology, India's growing capacity in rare-earth production and France's industrial sophistication create a complementary foundation for cooperation.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, India's engagement with the Global South can provide Japan and France with valuable insights into the requirements of the developing economies and can offer pathways for future partnerships.

This trilateral cooperation is also pivotal to addressing mineral supply bottlenecks and ensuring resilient supply chains in the Indo-Pacific.

<sup>43</sup> Jiji, 'Rapidus gearing up for mass production of next-generation chips', The Japan Times, 6 May 2024, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/business/2024/05/06/companies/rapidus-preparation-focus/>.

<sup>44</sup> Sujal Shivakumar, Charles Wessnes and Thomas Howell, 'Japan Seeks to Revitalise Its Semiconductor Industry', Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 25 August 2023, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/japan-seeks-revitalize-its-semiconductor-industry>.

<sup>45</sup> Rajesh Chadha and Karthik Bansal, 'Critical Mineral Supply Chains: Trilateral Perspectives from Japan, India and France', Centre for Social and Economic Progress, 20 February 2024, [https://csep.org/blog/order-and-disorder-in-the-indo-pacific-trilateral-on-policy-perspectives-from-japan-india-and-france/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://csep.org/blog/order-and-disorder-in-the-indo-pacific-trilateral-on-policy-perspectives-from-japan-india-and-france/?utm_source=chatgpt.com).

As active members of the MSP and active participants in regional frameworks such as the Quad and the IPEF, the three countries bring distinct strengths to the table. France's expertise in hafnium and indium processing, Japan's leadership in processing selenium and nickel, and India's advancements in manganese and copper processing present an opportunity for technology sharing and innovation.<sup>46</sup> Such collaborations are essential for manufacturing semiconductors, solar panels, wind turbines, electric vehicles and batteries, and fostering sustainable growth across the Indo-Pacific while reducing dependency on China for mineral processing.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.



## Wither Multilateralism? Perspectives from France, India, Japan and ASEAN

*The free and open global market visualised by post-Cold War globalisation has been upended by a wave of protectionist policies, with states prioritising domestic concerns over free trade.*

Multilateralism has been under considerable stress as a result of four factors. First, multilateral institutions, especially economic institutions like the WTO, are finding it difficult to balance the demands of globalisation and rising protectionism. The free and open global market visualised by post-Cold War globalisation has been upended by a wave of protectionist policies, with states prioritising domestic concerns over free trade.<sup>47</sup> Second, the intensification of great power competition has led to the US' resource calculation and adoption of a transactional approach to its bilateral and multilateral ties, resulting in a growing reluctance to lead on global challenges. Without American leadership and coordination among the major powers, the prospect of sustaining a cohesive, robust international order remains slim. Questions over the US' leadership on multilateral fronts have only been heightened by the return of Trump as the US' president. Third, regional instability wrought by the war in Europe and the Middle East, and rising tensions across Asia with disputes involving Vietnam, China, India and Japan testify to this breakdown of cooperation. Finally, the erosion of universal values including human rights, free movement of labour and liberal values that underpin transatlantic partnerships, has been intensified by the rise of right-wing populism.<sup>48</sup>

This crisis in multilateralism is further compounded by emerging threats – the rise of revisionist powers like China and Russia that have challenged Western norms undermined existing international organisations and sought to reshape and create new institutions that align with their interests and world views. Simultaneously, the rise of unilateralism, with states prioritising domestic strategic goals and responsibilities over international commitments, has diminished the

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<sup>47</sup> 'Protectionism is Failing to Achieve Its Goals and Threatens the Future of Critical Industries', World Bank, 29 August 2023, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2023/08/29/protectionism-is-failing-to-achieve-its-goals-and-threatens-the-future-of-critical-industries>.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

international order's ability to address transnational challenges such as climate change, pandemics like COVID-19 and nuclear proliferation. Meanwhile, multilateralism also confronts an efficiency problem best epitomised by how the UN responded to the Russia-Ukraine war, the Palestine-Israel conflict and the conflict in Sudan.<sup>49</sup> The inability of multilateral frameworks to deliver effective outcomes has led to the proliferation of minilateral groupings as an alternative. Additionally, the legitimacy and representative nature of existing multilateral institutions have been increasingly called into question. This is clearly reflected in the repeated calls from Global South countries for greater representation. Meanwhile, the establishment of groupings such as the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, China, India and South Africa) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation have presented competitors and alternatives to address prevailing global problems. Finally, intensifying US-China competition has fostered a preference from states to refrain from contributing collectively and instead hedge by participating in minilateral coalitions. These coalitions, however, tend to favour exclusivity over inclusivity, reflecting a broader loss of confidence in multilateralism.

In the Indo-Pacific, this crisis of multilateralism has led to the rise of minilateral groupings emerging as a viable alternative. Minilateralism comes in two forms – functional cooperation to achieve specific objectives between like-minded partners like the Quad and strategic pacts between allies like AUKUS (Australia, the UK and the US). These groupings can coexist and complement existing multilateral frameworks. For instance, the Quad, ostensibly perceived as an anti-China security grouping, has evolved into a more inclusive platform to discuss public goods issues like climate change, cybersecurity, supply chains, clean economy and vaccines. This situation potentially highlights the efficacy of minilateral groupings to operate alongside existing multilateral organisations, addressing emergent challenges like climate change while maintaining some flexibility and focus.

*These groupings can coexist and complement existing multilateral frameworks.*

<sup>49</sup> 'There Are 'Alarming Signs Multilateralism Has Run Out of Steam', First Committee Hears as General Debate Enters Second Week', United Nations, UN Meetings Coverage and Press Release, Seventy-Ninth Session, 6th Meeting, 14 October 2024, <https://press.un.org/en/2024/gadis3740.doc.htm>.

## A Perspective from France

France's commitment to multilateralism is deeply embedded in its identity as a global actor, best exemplified by its position as a permanent member of the UNSC. This commitment reflects France's support for human rights, free trade, international law, the rule of law and multilateralism.<sup>50</sup> The French government, led by Macron, emphasises this current crisis affecting multilateralism and how to best protect and uphold the international order to address contemporary challenges.<sup>51</sup>

*Such initiatives reflect France's proactive role in promoting effective multilateralism.*

France's approach to multilateralism transcends short-term diplomatic engagements and is perceived as a mechanism to uphold democratic values globally. However, this preference is dented by a lack of consensus on global issues like climate change. Historically, France has strived to serve as a bridge between the Global North and the Global South. Macron continues this legacy through summit diplomacy to foster better global governance. For instance, in June 2023, France hosted a summit on a New Global Financing Pact, seeking a new deal between key countries to create a new international financial system to address climate change, biodiversity and development challenges. Such initiatives reflect France's proactive role in promoting effective multilateralism.<sup>52</sup>

Furthermore, informed by Gaullist foreign policy principles, France advocates for strategic autonomy, especially amidst intensifying Sino-US competition. This stance was reaffirmed by Macron in a strategic review, where he envisioned France to become a "balanced, influential power that assumes responsibility, a driving force for European autonomy and a supportive partner for the preservation of

<sup>50</sup> 'France defends a strong and effective multilateralism, which produces results', Speech by Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne, Minister of State for Tourism at Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations, Permanent Mission of France, 7 May 2021, <https://onu.delegfrance.org/france-defends-a-strong-and-effective-multilateralism-which-produces-results>.

<sup>51</sup> 'Multilateral Cooperation for Global Recovery', *Élysée*, 3 February 2021, <https://www.elysee.fr/en/emmanuel-macron/2021/02/03/multilateral-cooperation-for-global-recovery>.

<sup>52</sup> 'France calls for the adoption of a New Global Financing Pact (22-23 June 2023)', France Diplomacy, Ministère De L'Europe et Des Affaires Étrangères, 2023, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/development-assistance/events-and-news/2023/article/france-calls-for-the-adoption-of-a-new-global-financing-pact-22-23-06-23>.

multilateral mechanisms based on international law”.<sup>53</sup> The ‘Macron Doctrine’ involves aligning with allies like the US while maintaining an independent foreign policy that emphasises strategic autonomy. France also emphasises ‘effective multilateralism’ that underscores the rule of law and cooperation over competition. Paris also strongly rejects coercion.<sup>54</sup>

In the Indo-Pacific, France seeks to enhance ties with ASEAN, having endorsed ASEAN’s centrality. At the heart of France’s Indo-Pacific strategy, launched in 2019, is maritime security and respect for international law.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, France’s approach to multilateralism is deeply embedded in its pursuit of defending democratic values, bridging global divides, asserting strategic autonomy and practicing cooperative multilateralism.

### A Perspective from India

India’s External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar drew attention to the prevailing inequities in the international order during the Munich Security Conference, describing the system as “unfair and unjust”. This critique captures India’s discontent with multilateral institutions and their inability to address complex global challenges. India calls for a comprehensive review of the multilateral system, with a special focus on restructuring the UNSC.<sup>56</sup> India has long argued for a more inclusive, accountable and representative global governance system, emphasising the need to accommodate additional permanent and non-permanent members in the UNSC for effective solutions for global challenges.<sup>57</sup>

*India calls for a comprehensive review of the multilateral system, with a special focus on restructuring the UNSC.*

<sup>53</sup> Celine Pajon, ‘France’s Indo-Pacific Approach: Salvaging the Rules-based Order and Staying Relevant’, in *The Transformation of Liberal International Order: Evolutions and Limitations*, Yuichi Hosoya and Hans Kundnani (eds), Springer Briefs in International Relations, pp. 65–74, [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-99-4729-4\\_6](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-99-4729-4_6).

<sup>54</sup> Celine Pajon, ‘La stratégie indopacifique de la France’, *Vie publique*, 15 June 2024, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/parole-dexpert/294622-la-strategie-indopacifique-de-la-france-par-celine-pajon>.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Dinakar Peri, ‘India a bridging power in many ways: Jaishankar’, *The Hindu*, 22 February 2024, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-a-bridging-power-in-many-ways-jaishankar/article67875779.ece>.

<sup>57</sup> ‘Only comprehensive reform can enable UNSC to effectively manage global conflicts: India’, *The Indian Express*, 26 June 2024, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/only-comprehensive-reform-can-enable-manage-global-conflicts-india-9415570/>.

*From India's perspective, such a multi-vector approach allows New Delhi to balance its diverse relationships, maximise its strategic goals and advance core interests.*

India's vision for multilateralism is shaped by the principles articulated during its tenure as a non-permanent UNSC member in 2023. Known as the 'Five S' – *Samaan* (Respect), *Samvaad* (Dialogue), *Sahyog* (Cooperation), *Shanti* (Peace) and *Samridhi* (Prosperity) – these principles are reflective of the role that India hopes it can play in the international order. They reflect India's aspiration to assume a leadership role in global governance, positioning India as both a Vishwaguru (world leader/teacher) and a bridging power – *Vishwamitra* (friend to all).<sup>58</sup> From India's perspective, such a multi-vector approach allows New Delhi to balance its diverse relationships, maximise its strategic goals and advance core interests.<sup>59</sup>

India's multilateral engagements are increasingly shaped by its leadership role in the Global South. Such a focus on the Global South has brought attention to shared challenges like debt relief, protectionism, climate change and the lack of representation of developing countries in the multilateral system. India's presidency of the G20 emphasised the prioritisation of these issues by organising the 'Voice of Global South Summit', positioning itself as not merely a participant but a leader advocating for the position and interests of the Global South.<sup>60</sup>

India's perspective on multilateralism is further reflected in initiatives to protect the global commons. Key examples include the International Solar Alliance (ISA), launched with France to promote solar energy adoption in developing countries for climate mitigation.<sup>61</sup> India's partnership with Japan includes connecting Asia to Africa and developing the latter's capabilities with special emphasis on industrial development, connectivity and sustainability.<sup>62</sup> Another

<sup>58</sup> 'India as 'Vishwa Guru': As G20 Summit ends, PM Modi's vision of India's place in the world in sharper focus', *The Indian Express*, 17 September 2023, <https://indianexpress.com/article/political-pulse/india-vishwa-guru-g20-summit-pm-modi-vision-world-8933278/>.

<sup>59</sup> Dinakar Peri, 'India a bridging power in many ways: Jaishankar', op. cit.

<sup>60</sup> "G20: How India emerged as the voice of Global South", *The Economic Times*, 6 September 2023, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/g20-how-india-emerged-as-the-voice-of-global-south/articleshow/103410416.cms?from=mdr>.

<sup>61</sup> Vyom Jha, 'International Solar Alliance: Bridging the Gap', in *Tracks to Transition: India's Global Climate Strategy*, ed. Constantino Xavier and Karthik Nachiappan, Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP), <https://csep.org/reports/international-solar-alliance-bridging-the-gap/>.

<sup>62</sup> Takuya Taniguchi, 'Should we forget about the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor?', *Institute Francais des Relations Internationals*, <https://www.ifri.org/en/editorials/should-we-forget-about-asia-africa-growth-corridor>.

key contribution to India's multilateral agenda has been its role in the creation of the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) – an initiative focused on promoting infrastructure systems resilient to climate and disaster risks in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>63</sup> The CDRI initiative has received overwhelming support from small island states that are extremely vulnerable to climate change; these countries require sustained support for disaster management, long-term preparedness and resilience. Other global and regional efforts led by India include the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (IMEC) which enhances connectivity and development.<sup>64</sup> These initiatives demonstrate India's focus on collaboratively addressing global challenges.

As India's aspirations grow, its positioning as a 'net security provider' in the Indo-Pacific reflects an expanded strategic vision beyond the Indian Ocean region. That said, it is difficult for India to undertake a broader regional security role for several reasons. First, membership in diverse groupings such as BRICS and other regional fora like the Quad, IMEC and the India, Israel, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the US initiative create strategic dilemmas. Second, limited resources and technology capacity, particularly in addressing climate change and trade issues, could constrain India's ability to effectively contribute. India has sought to bridge these gaps through partnerships with states like France and Japan, but optimising its role across these frameworks will remain a complex task. Finally, India's primacy in its neighbourhood can be questioned, complicating its efforts to establish regional influence. Although participation in various minilateral arrangements is not inherently problematic, it risks dispersing resources and potentially constraining tangible outcomes. The strategic direction of many of these frameworks remains unclear, raising concerns about the coherence of India's broader geopolitical goals.

*Although participation in various minilateral arrangements is not inherently problematic, it risks dispersing resources and potentially constraining tangible outcomes.*

<sup>63</sup> Avni Sablok, 'Examining the Role of the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI)', Indian Council of World Affairs, 14 September 2023, [https://www.icwa.in/show\\_content.php?lang=1&level=3&ls\\_id=9924&lid=6344](https://www.icwa.in/show_content.php?lang=1&level=3&ls_id=9924&lid=6344).

<sup>64</sup> This is paused at the moment due to the rising tensions between Gaza and Israel.



*While such frameworks generally align with India's distinct development and economic priorities, strategic coherence remains a challenge.*

Regionally, India's engagement with ASEAN, the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the IPEF highlights both opportunities and challenges. While such frameworks generally align with India's distinct development and economic priorities, strategic coherence remains a challenge. Similarly, India's smaller economic and technological base, compared to its Quad partners, creates a hurdle in building equitable partnerships. Despite such challenges, India has intensified its Indo-Pacific engagements through its outreach with Pacific Island states by leveraging UN collaborations to address climate resilience and infrastructure development and working with partners like the US and France to secure the Indian Ocean. The Indian Ocean Naval Symposium is another step in reinforcing India's commitment to maritime security under its SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) policy, which emphasises sustainable development, the blue economy and climate action.

### **A Perspective from Japan**

Since World War II, Japan's engagement with ASEAN has been marked by an increasing emphasis on multilateralism. Anti-Japanese sentiment in Southeast Asia persisted until the 1970s, prompting Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda to introduce the 'Fukuda Doctrine' in 1977, which rejected post-war Japan becoming a military power in the region and committed Japan to pursuing peaceful and cooperative relations with the ASEAN member nations as an equal partner. This move set the foundation for Japan's multilateralism with ASEAN, emphasising shared development goals and regional stability, underpinned by a dedicated flow of Official Development Assistance and private investments till recently.

A significant development occurred in 2014 when Prime Minister Shinzo Abe underscored ASEAN-Japan cooperation to enhance regional security. Abe's focus and initiatives highlighted Japan's multilateral strategy through continued development aid for infrastructure, health and disaster relief, and Japan's Self-Defence Forces' contributions to capacity building and training. This commitment expanded in 2022 with the introduction of Official

Security Assistance, enabling Japan to make grant provision of military equipment to the ASEAN member countries like Malaysia and the Philippines, signalling its enhanced role in regional security frameworks.

Japan's multilateral efforts have been reinforced through diplomatic initiatives. In 2023, Japan celebrated 50 years of ASEAN-Japan friendship by hosting a special summit in Tokyo with ASEAN leaders, reaffirming its commitment to regional cooperation. Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has emphasised people-to-people connectivity, described as 'Trust in purpose', which has bolstered Japan's reputation as a trusted global power in Southeast Asia.<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, Japan still faces challenges in navigating ASEAN's positioning amidst growing US-China competition.<sup>66</sup> Japan's multilateralism manifests through bilateral and regional engagements and the balancing of security and economic priorities. However, scepticism persists among larger ASEAN member states like Indonesia and Thailand regarding Japan's expanding security role. Such perceptions highlight the need for Japan to carefully balance its multilateral initiatives to ensure inclusivity and regional cohesion.

*Japan's multilateralism manifests through bilateral and regional engagements and the balancing of security and economic priorities.*

Japan's emphasis on a rules-based international order and consistent advocacy for the rule of law is central to its multilateral agenda to counter China's unilateral attempt to alter the status quo by force and coercion. The Japan-ASEAN Joint Vision Statement, adopted in 2023, reflects shared principles, yet ASEAN member states remain focused on the tangible benefits these frameworks can deliver. The evolution of the Quad from a security-centric grouping to a public goods mechanism that advances issue-based collaboration on disaster relief, cybersecurity, climate change and global health illustrates the importance of practical outcomes in multilateral initiatives.

<sup>65</sup> Joanne Lin, 'Building Upon Deep Trust- ASEAN-Japan ties at a Crossroads', *Trends in Southeast Asia*, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, Issue 27, 2024, [https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/TRS27\\_24.pdf](https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/TRS27_24.pdf).

<sup>66</sup> Euan Graham, 'Advice to ASEAN: 'N' should equal non-aligned, not neutral', *The Strategist*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 7 March 2024, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/advice-to-asean-n-should-equal-non-aligned-not-neutral/>.

Key areas for ASEAN-Japan cooperation include both traditional and non-traditional security concerns, such as climate change, global health and biodiversity. Japan's multilateral contributions, including anti-piracy measures in the Malacca Strait, Mekong River stability efforts and anti-human trafficking campaigns, align with ASEAN's priorities. Enhancing transparency and aligning Japan's multilateral programmes with ASEAN's specific needs would further strengthen this cooperation.

Institutionalised mechanisms that foster strategic dialogues like the Senior Officials' Meetings can enhance Japan's multilateral engagements with ASEAN. By fostering trust and promoting inclusive and responsive collaboration, Japan's multilateral efforts can contribute to a stable and prosperous Southeast Asia, reinforcing its role as a trusted regional partner.

### **ASEAN's Perspective**

*ASEAN prioritises regime security while accommodating diverse security concerns.*

Multilateralism has been a cornerstone of Southeast Asia's regional architecture. This is exemplified by the formation and evolution of ASEAN itself. The forum has fostered regional stability for decades. A key principle in ASEAN's evolution has been the practice of non-interference in member states. ASEAN has continually emphasised coexistence and cooperation over confrontation. ASEAN prioritises regime security while accommodating diverse security concerns. Furthermore, ASEAN's commitment to neighbourly relations, largely driven by economic imperatives, highlights its emphasis on cooperation and inclusivity.

While the US and China need to be incentivised to exercise restraint and engage in dialogue, for smaller states in ASEAN, there is a need to foster multilayered relationships where antagonism and resistance in one domain can coexist with productive collaborations in others.<sup>67</sup> For ASEAN, hedging and maintaining a balanced yet

<sup>67</sup> Alfred Gerstl, 'Southeast Asia's Grand Strategy: Hedging', *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, 12 August 2024, <https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2024/08/12/southeast-asias-grand-strategy-hedging/>.

complex relationship with major powers such as the US, China, India and Japan is imperative. For instance, while many Southeast Asian states harbour historical grievances against Japan, contemporary ties have resulted in a constructive partnership. ASEAN's strategy of associational balancing relies on soft power, not military capabilities. Although most Southeast Asian countries are relatively weak states compared to the major powers, regional and multilateral frameworks like ASEAN facilitate equitable dialogue, promoting an imperfect but enduring peace. These improvised multilateral platforms, though unconventional, serve as vital alternatives to traditional multilateral frameworks.

## Freedom of Navigation and UNCLOS

UNCLOS, often referred to as the Law of the Sea Convention or Treaty, governs marine and maritime activities. As of October 2024, UNCLOS has been adopted by 169 countries and the EU. It codifies the concept of FON in international law.<sup>68</sup> The document guarantees that all nations, irrespective of their geographical position, are able to navigate the open seas. It elucidates several legal principles that enable the unfettered exercise of navigation rights within the maritime jurisdictions of individual countries.<sup>69</sup> Notable among these are the right of innocent passage, the right of transit passage, the right of archipelagic sea lanes passage and the overarching principle of freedom of the high seas.

*Diplomatic responses, joint exercises and symbolic stances are increasingly used to emphasise a collective position.*

In the Indo-Pacific, particularly in the South China Sea, issues of legitimacy, strategic intent and power dynamics come into focus under the lens of FON. Despite the existence of UNCLOS, biases influenced by the major powers challenge the rules-based order. China's militarisation of artificial islands highlights the strategic tug-of-war, with these structures serving both as surveillance platforms and potential wartime strongholds. This militarisation disrupts regional stability even during peaceful times. Addressing these actions presents a dilemma: direct confrontation may escalate tensions, while inaction could further embolden such manoeuvres. Diplomatic responses, joint exercises and symbolic stances are increasingly used to emphasise a collective position. Yet, regional fragmentation hinders cohesive action. As nations pursue joint maritime cooperation in the Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific, expanding codes of conduct and reinforcing alliances may provide a path forward, strengthening FON without instigating direct conflict.

<sup>68</sup> 'High Seas', United Nations, [https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention\\_agreements/texts/unclos/part7.htm](https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/part7.htm).

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

## A Perspective from France

The FON in the Indo-Pacific, particularly in the South China Sea, raises important questions which concern legitimacy, strategy, available options and operational formats. In terms of legitimacy, the international legal framework governing maritime conduct, UNCLOS, suffers from a foundational flaw: it was shaped significantly by the interests of major powers. It is worth noting that the US, widely recognised for its unwavering commitment to the principles enshrined in UNCLOS, has not ratified the treaty. Conversely, China, frequently perceived as a potential adversary of these principles, has formally signed and acceded to UNCLOS. As a result, the term ‘international law’ has gradually shifted to the less specific ‘rules-based order’, prompting important questions, such as: whose rules matter? Which rules are being followed? And whose order is being protected? These questions hold particular relevance in light of the intensifying security challenges in the Indo-Pacific.

Strategically, there is a stark contrast between two opposing narratives. One narrative posits that China’s construction and militarisation of artificial islands in the South China Sea constitute a grave threat to regional security. These islands function as surveillance platforms and bases for offensive and defensive missile systems, thereby enabling China to project its power far beyond its territorial waters. These facilities are described as ‘unsinkable aircraft carriers’, giving China a significant strategic advantage. The counter-narrative from China claims that these islands are integral to the preservation of supply routes during wartime. However, this rationale becomes problematic in times of peace. Should these militarised islands be equipped to sustain operations during conflict, they inherently disrupt the equilibrium of power in the region during peacetime, creating an impression of hostility. This strategic contradiction highlights the complexity of each side’s position: both arguments are logically defensible, yet they are fundamentally opposed.

*This strategic contradiction highlights the complexity of each side’s position: both arguments are logically defensible, yet they are fundamentally opposed.*

The options to address China’s actions in the South China Sea are limited. Direct confrontation presents an undesirable prospect, as it

*A more practical response involves actions that increase the political, economic and military costs of Chinese manoeuvres.*

invites the risk of escalation, an outcome that all parties seek to avoid. At the same time, it is imperative to guard against complacency. In the short term, diplomatic activities and symbolic gestures, such as the issuance of joint communiques, are often employed but result in limited tangible outcomes. A more practical response involves actions that increase the political, economic and military costs of Chinese manoeuvres. This could include deploying coast guards or participating in joint exercises like SEACAT, a multilateral naval exercise involving several nations, which originally focused on counterterrorism but has broadened its objectives to include maritime domain awareness. The aforementioned exercises could serve to present a unified stance against China's maritime claims while avoiding direct confrontation.

The disconnect between peacetime and wartime strategies further complicates this issue. If China insists that militarised islands are essential for its defence, other nations could justify similar pre-emptive measures even during peaceful times. The use of multilateral exercises, such as those held in 2021 involving India, France, Japan and the US, reinforces the preparedness of these countries to counterbalance China's dominance without triggering outright conflict. However, this effort is hindered by regional fragmentation. Indo-Pacific coalition-building efforts are often diluted by the presence of the US, which adds a polarising dimension as countries avoid taking sides in US-China tensions.

China's proximity to the South China Sea gives it a unique advantage. This advantage might not, however, be as effective in other littoral areas such as the Indian Ocean. While China has strengthened its presence along sensitive areas like the East African coast, it has yet to establish a substantial foothold in the Indian Ocean. Here, there is potential for countries to build collaborative mechanisms without directly aligning against China.

Looking ahead, strengthening regional alignment, rather than outright cooperation, may prove to be a viable approach for countries of the Indo-Pacific. Existing organisations, such as the Indian Ocean Commission, despite their limited capabilities, offer political options

that can facilitate collective resilience against excessive influence or intervention. Furthermore, the IORA, although currently ineffective, provides another platform that could be revitalised to coordinate regional activities. The concept of an Indian Ocean version of Exercise SEACAT, tentatively called 'IOCAT', could start with limited, realistic goals, allowing participating states to gradually build cooperative mechanisms. This gradual approach may strengthen a collective rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific, making the region more resilient to maritime assertiveness without unnecessarily escalating tensions.

### **A Perspective from India**

China's assertion of territorial and resource rights along its coastline, particularly in the South China Sea, is seen to violate UNCLOS. Beyond being a potential threat to regional stability, states like India feel that China's actions are eroding international law. Through coercive measures, China is transforming one of the world's busiest waterways into a restricted zone, accessible only at its discretion. This poses a significant challenge to regional countries.

From India's perspective, four key challenges arise from China's actions in the South China Sea:

1. Obfuscation and circumvention: China's actions obfuscate and circumvent its treaty obligations and principles of FON.
2. Grey-zone coercion: China engages in grey-zone coercion that undermines the principles of FON and infringes upon the territories of other countries.
3. Disregard for binding arbitration: China disregards binding arbitration proceedings, undermining the rule of law and the peaceful resolution of disputes.
4. Militarisation of disputed territories: China militarises disputed territories, increasing tensions and posing a threat to regional security.

*This gradual approach may strengthen a collective rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific, making the region more resilient to maritime assertiveness without unnecessarily escalating tensions.*



*It is, thus, clear that without the involvement of the US, it would be challenging to balance China's power in the region.*

The strategic responses open to countries like India and France are constrained by two factors. First, distance poses a significant challenge. India is approximately 4,400 kilometres from the South China Sea, and France is even further away at 12,200 kilometres. This distance makes it difficult to sustain a military presence in the region without a local base. Second, there is a significant disparity in maritime capabilities between both countries and China. China has the world's largest coast guard, maritime force and merchant marine navy, giving it a considerable advantage. It is, thus, clear that without the involvement of the US, it would be challenging to balance China's power in the region. As such, the US is seen as essential for any strategic counterbalance.

The issue of FON is pivotal in this context. Despite UNCLOS, the fundamental purpose of the US Navy was to guarantee the unimpeded navigation of its commercial vessels. The US' perspective on FON is firmly rooted in the conviction that unhindered maritime movement is indispensable in preventing conflict. This concept encompasses more than just commercial interests; it incorporates the right of military vessels to traverse international waters, including territorial waters, in accordance with the principle of the global commons. US President Ronald Reagan's decision not to sign UNCLOS was primarily driven by disagreements over provisions related to deep seabed mining, rather than a fundamental rejection of the principles of FON.

Despite Prime Minister Narendra Modi's repeated affirmations of India's adherence to the principle of FON, some misconceptions about India's stance on this matter persist. To play a meaningful role in preserving FON, India, France and Japan must overcome their strategic autonomy preferences and align more closely with the US. However, the geographical and capacity constraints of India and France make it impractical for them to solely rely on military options to deter China. Instead, these countries should focus on refusing to recognise China's domestic laws in the South China Sea and collaborating to enhance regional understanding of the significance of navigation freedom. By fostering influence, they can help ensure that extra-regional powers continue to enjoy FON rights. Expanding the Code of Conduct on

resource rights in the South China Sea could serve as a platform to enhance domain awareness, coordinate regional maritime activities and oppose UNCLOS violations.

To bolster compliance with UNCLOS and deter territorial seizure, several approaches can be undertaken. Peaceful dispute resolution is of utmost importance. India has set a precedent by accepting the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) ruling in its maritime dispute with Bangladesh in 2011, despite the ruling not being wholly favourable to India. Another approach is to increase China's operational costs in the region by supporting countries such as the Philippines and Indonesia in enhancing their domain awareness capabilities and asserting their maritime rights. Additionally, encouraging solidarity among the ASEAN member states could amplify regional resistance against China's actions.

The enforcement of international arbitration decisions remains an ongoing challenge, with countries like China, Thailand and other major powers selectively resisting UNCLOS obligations. To strengthen maritime security in Southeast Asia, the India-France-Japan trilateral coalition can foster a robust framework. India's provision of BrahMos missiles to the Philippines exemplifies its regional capacity-building efforts. However, caution is necessary to prevent overextension and unintended escalation.

*To strengthen maritime security in Southeast Asia, the India-France-Japan trilateral coalition can foster a robust framework.*

Finally, collective measures are essential to address the militarisation of artificial islands in the South China Sea. This militarisation places all Southeast Asian capitals within the range of Chinese military strikes. While civilians may overlook these developments, no government can afford to ignore the strategic implications. The preservation of peace in Asia is fundamentally contingent upon the maintenance of balance of power. The existing multilateral frameworks prevalent within the Indo-Pacific facilitate the promotion of peace through diverse mechanisms. The introduction of an additional structure possesses the potential to further augment regional stability by enhancing the collective capacity to counterbalance China.

## A Perspective from Japan

In the Indo-Pacific, the security of sea lines of communication (SLOCs) faces substantial risks, with Taiwan as a potential flashpoint. These risks must be understood within the broader context of global conflicts, each presenting unique cross-regional risks and challenges. For instance, the Ukraine war has disrupted food supplies across Europe, demonstrating how regional instability can have far-reaching implications. Meanwhile, in the Pacific, tensions in the South China Sea persist, with the Taiwan issue representing the most immediate and high-intensity risk due to the possibility of conflict with China.

*In the event of a Taiwan crisis, military analysts anticipate an intense, high-attrition warfare scenario.*

The Ukraine crisis has cast a long shadow over the Taiwan scenario. Unlike Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea, which involved minimal military engagement, Ukraine's recent resistance under President Volodymyr Zelensky's leadership has proven to be far more formidable. Predicting how a Taiwan crisis might unfold remains a challenge. One plausible scenario involves hybrid or grey-zone warfare, where Taiwan's government could face destabilisation through cyber-attacks and military pressure short of a full-scale conflict. In the event of a Taiwan crisis, military analysts anticipate an intense, high-attrition warfare scenario. Oriana Maestro's 'Red Letter Scenario' underscores the potential for a complex, multi-dimensional conflict involving both naval warfare and cyberattacks. This reality underscores the intricate and multifaceted nature of contemporary military confrontations.

From Japan's perspective, a conflict involving Taiwan would significantly disrupt the SLOCs in the Malacca Strait and South China Sea, thereby severing vital supply chains. Alternative maritime routes are inadequate for transporting large volumes of cargo or crude oil, emphasising the importance of Japan maintaining access over the Lombok Strait as a vital strategic necessity. As an island nation with one of the largest shares in maritime trade, safety and FON are indispensable for Japan's security and economy. In pursuit of a rules-based maritime order, Japan has been an active proponent of UNCLOS, significantly contributing to its key institutions – ITLOS,

the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf and the International Seabed Authority.<sup>70</sup>

Japan has further reinforced this commitment by introducing several key initiatives aimed at strengthening the maritime government. These include the Three Principles of the Rules of Law at Sea (2014), the Quality of Infrastructure Investment Principles (2019) at the G20 summit and the FOIP framework.<sup>71</sup> These initiatives emphasise peaceful dispute settlement, disaster risk reduction, non-proliferation and capacity building in maritime law enforcement. However, Japan's pursuits of a secure and free maritime domain have been overshadowed by escalating geopolitical competition in the Indo-Pacific region and rising maritime and territorial disputes in the South China Sea region.

*These initiatives emphasise peaceful dispute settlement, disaster risk reduction, non-proliferation and capacity building in maritime law enforcement.*

Japan supports the 1982 UNCLOS as the cornerstone of international maritime law and has actively countered China's expansive maritime claims. The South China Sea has been a hotspot for territorial disputes, with China asserting extensive claims based on claimed historic rights that conflict with UNCLOS regulations.<sup>72</sup> In response, Japan, along with other nations, has issued diplomatic notes rejecting China's claims. These notes challenge China's application of archipelagic baselines – a method meant for archipelagic states, not coastal nations with offshore islands – arguing that it is an unlawful interpretation of UNCLOS.<sup>73</sup> Japan has also raised concerns over China's attempts to restrict FON and overflight, particularly in Mischief Reef, and described these actions as violations of international law.

Japan's position aligns with the 2016 South China Sea Arbitration ruling, which found China's claims inconsistent with UNCLOS and

<sup>70</sup> 'Law of the Sea', Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 23 March 2016, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/ila/ocn/page22e\\_000665.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/ila/ocn/page22e_000665.html).

<sup>71</sup> Yurika Ishii, 'Cooperation, Challenges and Charms: The UNCLOS for Japan', *Fulcrum*, 25 October 2022, <https://fulcrum.sg/cooperation-challenges-and-charms-the-unclos-for-japan/>.

<sup>72</sup> Nguyen Hong Thao, 'Japan's Diplomatic Note on the South China Sea: Internationalising the Dispute Amid Chinese Pressure', *Commentaries*, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, 26 January 2021, <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/media/commentaries/japans-diplomatic-note-on-the-south-china-sea-internationalising-the-dispute-amid-chinese-pressure/>.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

declared the ruling final and binding.<sup>74</sup> Additionally, Japan's Defence White Paper reinforces its commitment to maintaining a rules-based international order, rejecting any unilateral attempts to alter the status quo through force or coercion.<sup>75</sup> By collaborating with like-minded countries and reinforcing the role of UNCLOS, Japan contributes to an emerging regional consensus that maritime disputes must be resolved through international law, ensuring peace, stability and the protection of vital trade routes in the Indo-Pacific.

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> 'Defense of Japan', Government of Japan, 2020, [https://www.mod.go.jp/en/publ/w\\_paper/wp\\_2020.html](https://www.mod.go.jp/en/publ/w_paper/wp_2020.html).

## Climate Change and Energy Transition

The Indo-Pacific faces urgent climate and energy challenges. As one of the most climate-vulnerable areas globally, it is particularly exposed to rising sea levels, extreme weather events and biodiversity loss.<sup>76</sup> Many Indo-Pacific states, including the small island states and densely populated coastal areas, are on the frontlines of these impacts, making climate resilience a critical priority. Simultaneously, the region is a major contributor to global emissions due to its reliance on fossil fuels for economic growth. Transitioning to sustainable energy sources is imperative but complex, requiring substantial investments, technological innovation and international cooperation. To balance development with climate mitigation and adaptation, the Indo-Pacific countries are exploring renewable energy solutions, regional partnerships and policies that align with global goals for carbon neutrality and sustainability. This session examined the measures adopted by India, France and Japan to mitigate climate risks and facilitate the ongoing energy transition. It also analysed their investments in renewable energy, definitions of energy security, the role of energy needs and collaborative efforts to achieve these objectives.

*Transitioning to sustainable energy sources is imperative but complex, requiring substantial investments, technological innovation and international cooperation.*

### A Perspective from France

In the 1960s, Europe was a major contributor to global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, accounting for 42 per cent while Asia contributed 16 per cent. Over time, however, industrial growth in Asia, particularly China and India, has altered this distribution. Today, Asia produces around 44 per cent of the world's GHG emissions, while Europe's emissions have risen since the 1960s, albeit at a slower rate.<sup>77</sup> This

<sup>76</sup> Mely Caballero-Anthony and Alistair D B Cook, 'Understanding climate security in the Indo-Pacific', *Third World Quarterly*, 45(14), 2039-2046, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2024.2428813>.

<sup>77</sup> David A Raitzer, Manisha Pradhananga, Shu Tian, 'Global Warning: Asia is Critical to Addressing Climate Change', Asian Development Blog, Asian Development Bank, 2 May 2023, <https://blogs.adb.org/blog/global-warning-asia-critical-addressing-climate-change>; and Ajit Niranjana, 'EU fossil fuel CO2 emissions hit 60-year low', *The Guardian*, 24 January 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/jan/24/eu-fossil-fuel-co2-emissions-hit-60-year-low>.

current disparity in emissions underscores a central issue in climate diplomacy: emissions are unevenly distributed, yet the impacts of climate change are global. Therefore, effective international cooperation is essential to address this collective action problem.

France, alongside Japan, has played a pivotal role in fostering international climate cooperation, as exemplified by the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement. Signed in 1997, the Kyoto Protocol represented the first legally binding framework to reduce GHG emissions.<sup>78</sup> This ‘top-down’ approach set targets for the developed countries, assigning responsibilities based on historical emissions. However, emerging economies like China and India opposed this framework, demanding autonomy to draft their climate policies given their developmental needs. The failure of the 2009 Copenhagen Conference underscored these tensions and led to a rethinking of the global climate regime.<sup>79</sup>

*France continues to advocate for ambitious climate action, leveraging the Paris Agreement to promote a collaborative, flexible framework.*

In 2015, under French leadership, the Paris Agreement was established. Unlike the Kyoto Protocol, the Paris Agreement employed a ‘bottom-up’ model, allowing states to independently determine their climate commitments or nationally determined contributions.<sup>80</sup> This framework allows countries to set targets aligned with their specific circumstances and capacities. Importantly, the Paris Agreement is non-binding, encouraging states to pursue goals aligned with the principle of ‘respective capacities’. This shift emphasises the evolving dynamics of global climate diplomacy, balancing the developmental needs of emerging economies with the environmental responsibilities of industrialised states.<sup>81</sup> Space matters to determine national climate targets. France continues to advocate for ambitious climate action, leveraging the Paris Agreement to promote a collaborative, flexible framework.

<sup>78</sup> ‘What is the Kyoto Protocol’, United Nations Climate Change, [https://unfccc.int/kyoto\\_protocol](https://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol).

<sup>79</sup> ‘Why did Copenhagen fail to deliver a climate deal?’, *BBC*, 22 December 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8426835.stm>.

<sup>80</sup> ‘Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)’, United Nations for Climate Change, <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/nationally-determined-contributions-ndcs>.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

Energy plays a pivotal role in achieving climate goals, as energy production and consumption account for approximately 75 per cent of global GHG emissions.<sup>82</sup> However, early climate agreements did not address this issue; it was only at the Conference of Parties 26 in Glasgow in 2021 that coal was explicitly mentioned in the conference's declaration and efforts for its 'phase down' were discussed.<sup>83</sup> This acknowledgement emphasised the centrality of fossil fuels in climate discussions while revealing distinct national priorities. For instance, China and India expressed dissatisfaction with the exclusive focus on coal, perceiving it as an attempt to single out their energy mix.<sup>84</sup>

France's energy transition approach is unique to Europe due to its reliance on nuclear power, which accounts for 70 per cent of its electricity generation and minimal GHG emissions.<sup>85</sup> As a result, France's energy sector contributes only about 10 per cent of its overall emissions. This reliance on nuclear energy has shaped France's climate policy and diplomacy, as it advocates for a diversified energy transition with nuclear energy as a low-carbon option. In contrast, countries like India and Japan remain heavily dependent on coal and oil, with fossil fuels accounting for 85 to 90 per cent of their energy mix. Japan's energy policy, for instance, has been influenced by the 2011 Fukushima disaster, which led to a decline in nuclear power and a corresponding increase in coal consumption.<sup>86</sup> These distinct energy profiles underscore the varying challenges countries face in reducing their carbon footprints, rendering international cooperation on energy transition both complex and essential.

*In contrast, countries like India and Japan remain heavily dependent on coal and oil, with fossil fuels accounting for 85 to 90 per cent of their energy mix.*

<sup>82</sup> 'Renewable energy-powering a safer future', United Nations for Climate Change, <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/raising-ambition/renewable-energy#:~:text=Fossil%20fuels%2C%20such%20as%20coal,and%20for%20generations%20to%20come>.

<sup>83</sup> 'COP26 climate deal reached in Glasgow after compromise on coal', *France24*, 13 November 2021, <https://www.france24.com/en/environment/20211113-cop26-climate-deal-reached-in-glasgow-after-marathon-talks>.

<sup>84</sup> Hannah Ellis-Peterson, 'India criticised over coal at Cop26 – but real villain was climate injustice', *The Guardian*, 14 November 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/nov/14/india-criticised-over-coal-at-cop26-but-real-villain-was-climate-injustice>.

<sup>85</sup> 'Nuclear Power in France', World Nuclear Association, 2024, <https://world-nuclear.org/information-library/country-profiles/countries-a-f/france>.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*



*France's advocacy for nuclear cooperation, therefore, reflects a strategic move to counterbalance Russia's influence in the region.*

France's role in climate diplomacy is also evident in its efforts to promote renewable energy adoption.<sup>87</sup> The ISA, an initiative led by India with France as a key partner, exemplifies this approach. Launched in 2015, the ISA aims to promote solar energy deployment in sun-rich countries, particularly in the Global South.<sup>88</sup> Solar energy holds immense potential as a low-carbon alternative, with the capacity to meet global energy needs if adequately harnessed. However, achieving this vision requires substantial investment in infrastructure, research and development. France's support for the ISA underscores its commitment to fostering alternate energy sources in developing countries, recognising that access to clean energy spurs sustainable development. In addition to solar energy, nuclear power is a critical component of France's climate strategy. France has pioneered the development of small modular reactors (SMRs), which offer a more flexible and exportable form of nuclear technology. By promoting SMRs, France supports countries in reducing their reliance on fossil fuels without sacrificing energy security.<sup>89</sup> However, the expansion of nuclear energy in regions like Africa also raises geopolitical concerns. Russia, through its state-owned company Rosatom, has emerged as a major player in African nuclear projects, potentially tying the energy futures of African nations to Russian interests.<sup>90</sup> France's advocacy for nuclear cooperation, therefore, reflects a strategic move to counterbalance Russia's influence in the region.

Investment in low-carbon energy is another critical area where international cooperation is needed. While global investments in renewables have surpassed those in fossil fuels, most of this funding flows to developed countries. Developing nations face significant barriers to attracting renewable energy investment, as these projects

<sup>87</sup> 'France 2030 investment Plan' – Investment in renewable energy innovation', International Energy Association (IEA), 2 July 2024, <https://www.iea.org/policies/15025-france-2030-investment-plan-investment-in-renewable-energy-innovation>.

<sup>88</sup> 'International Solar Alliance', Ministère De L'Europe et Des Affaires Étrangères, 2017, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/climate-and-environment/the-fight-against-climate-change/international-solar-alliance/>.

<sup>89</sup> 'Nuclear power and SMR are central to the 'France 2030' investment plan', Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations and Organisation in Vienna, 13 October 2021, <https://onu-vienne.delegfrance.org/Nuclear-power-and-SMR-are-central-to-the-France-2030-investment-plan>.

<sup>90</sup> 'Russia is Said to Seek French-Held Uranium Assets in Niger', *Bloomberg*, 3 June 2024, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-06-03/russia-said-to-seek-takeover-of-france-s-uranium-assets-in-niger>.

are often perceived as higher risk. Development banks and agencies must play a pivotal role in de-risking such investments, ensuring that countries with limited financial resources can still pursue sustainable energy transitions. France, as a prominent donor to international climate finance initiatives, has consistently advocated for increased support to vulnerable states, aligning with its broader commitment to climate justice.<sup>91</sup> However, France could do more, prioritising funding for renewable energy initiatives in the Global South through the Climate Energy Transition Partnership.

France's approach to climate diplomacy – centred on flexible, inclusive frameworks like the Paris Agreement and targeted support for renewable and nuclear energy – illustrates the complexities of navigating global climate challenges. By championing renewable energy adoption, advocating for nuclear as a viable low-carbon option and promoting energy sovereignty through technology transfer, France supports a global energy transition that is equitable and effective. This approach not only aligns with France's own energy profile but also seeks to address the broader developmental concerns of the Indo-Pacific and other regions being impacted by climate change.

## A Perspective from India

India's energy policy is intricately tied to its climate goals, aiming to balance the need for energy security with sustainable development. The state's energy consumption is still driven by a reliance on fossil fuels, especially coal and oil, which make up 75 per cent of its total energy mix.<sup>92</sup> Despite ambitious goals to reduce carbon emissions, coal will remain a major contributor to India's energy mix. The Indian government has committed to increasing renewable energy capacity, with a target of 50 per cent by 2030.<sup>93</sup> However, the transition

*Development banks and agencies must play a pivotal role in de-risking such investments, ensuring that countries with limited financial resources can still pursue sustainable energy transitions.*

<sup>91</sup> Soraya Fettihm Andreas Sieber, 'It's time for France to amplify its climate leadership', *Euronews*, 26 April 2024, <https://www.euronews.com/green/2024/04/26/its-time-for-france-to-amplify-its-climate-leadership>.

<sup>92</sup> 'Energy Cell Monthly Report', Ministry of Coal, Government of India, 2023, <https://coal.nic.in/sites/default/files/2024-02/14-02-2024b-wn.pdf>.

<sup>93</sup> '500 GW Nonfossil Fuel Target', Ministry of Power, Government of India, 2023, <https://powermin.gov.in/en/content/500gw-nonfossil-fuel-target#:~:text=Govt.,a>.

will be gradual. The real challenge lies in reconciling short-term energy security needs, such as oil and gas supply, with long-term decarbonisation objectives.

*These challenges highlight the ongoing tensions between ensuring energy availability in the short term and transitioning towards a low-carbon future.*

One of the biggest challenges facing India is its dependence on imported oil, which accounts for nearly 88 per cent of its crude oil needs. In recent years, geopolitical events like the Ukraine-Russia war have further complicated India's energy supply. For instance, India's crude oil imports from Russia have increased by 10 per cent due to the decrease in Russia's oil price, highlighting the flexibility of India's energy strategy and its vulnerability to exogenous events. Therefore, energy diversification is critical for mitigating supply shocks, but India's energy security remains precarious, given its limited access to key technologies, including those required for natural gas infrastructure and clean coal technologies.<sup>94</sup> These challenges highlight the ongoing tensions between ensuring energy availability in the short term and transitioning towards a low-carbon future.

India's approach to addressing these challenges is diverse. First, India has introduced measures to expand its renewable energy capabilities, improve energy efficiency and promote the development and use of clean technologies. The Indian government's flagship initiative, the National Action Plan on Climate Change, outlines the state's broad framework to address climate change, with a specific focus on eight areas like renewable energy, energy efficiency, sustainable habitat, water preservation and recycling, sustaining Himalayan ecosystem, afforestation, sustainable agriculture and the creation of knowledge for mitigating climate risks.<sup>95</sup> India has also significantly increased its renewable energy capacity, becoming one of the world's leaders in solar and wind power. Policy initiatives such as the Perform, Achieve and Trade scheme and the Energy Conservation Building Code have

<sup>94</sup> Sanjar Kumar Kar, 'Clean Coal Technology in India: A potential solution to meet increasing energy needs', *Modern Diplomacy*, 10 November 2016, <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2016/11/10/clean-coal-technology-in-india-a-potential-solution-to-meet-increasing-energy-needs/>.

<sup>95</sup> 'National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC)', Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1 December 2021, <https://static.pib.gov.in/WriteReadData/specificdocs/documents/2021/dec/doc202112101.pdf>.

also been introduced to improve energy efficiency in industries and buildings.

Second, India has established the National Clean Energy Fund to support clean energy projects and innovations. The Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid and Electric Vehicles scheme aims to incentivise the adoption of electric vehicles, while the Green Hydrogen Mission focuses on developing hydrogen as a clean energy alternative. The government has also pushed for the expansion of smart grids and battery storage solutions to enhance renewable energy integration and grid reliability. Through these domestic initiatives, India is making concerted efforts to reduce carbon emissions while ensuring its energy needs are met.

*Through these domestic initiatives, India is making concerted efforts to reduce carbon emissions while ensuring its energy needs are met.*

Third, India has introduced strategic joint initiatives to develop and expand energy production and climate change preparedness and mitigation. A pivotal step has been the launch of the India-Japan Clean Energy Partnership (CEP) in 2022, which focuses on the development of hydrogen and ammonia as alternative clean energy sources, clean energy technology, expansion of renewable energy sectors like solar and wind and climate finance.<sup>96</sup> Similarly, the India-France Horizon 2047 partnership, has strengthened bilateral energy cooperation, with both countries jointly investing in renewable energy, particularly solar and wind and advancing green hydrogen production. India and France also work together on climate finance, technology transfer and initiatives under the ISA. India's recent partnerships with Japan and France – both through bilateral agreements and trilateral frameworks like India-US-Japan (2011), India-Japan-Australia (2015), India-France-Australia (2020) and India-France-UAE (2023) – highlight a shared commitment to supporting ongoing energy transitions, positioning these countries as natural partners. Their close cooperation in the Indo-Pacific to promote global public goods also facilitates stronger collaboration on energy security and climate change.

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<sup>96</sup> 'India-Japan Clean Energy Partnership', Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 19 March 2022, <https://www.mea.gov.in/incoming-visit-detail.htm?34992/IndiaJapan+Clean+Energy+Partnership>.

## A Perspective from Japan

*As an island nation with limited domestic energy resources, Japan is heavily dependent on imports for its energy needs, which makes it vulnerable to supply disruptions and price fluctuations in global markets.*

Japan's climate and energy agenda is driven by a commitment to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, as per the Paris Agreement. At the same time, its energy policy is increasingly focused on energy security. As an island nation with limited domestic energy resources, Japan is heavily dependent on imports for its energy needs, which makes it vulnerable to supply disruptions and price fluctuations in global markets. Historically, Japan has been focused on securing energy supplies through fossil fuel investments and building strong relationships with resource-rich countries.<sup>97</sup> Although Japan has attempted to diversify its energy portfolio – most notably by increasing nuclear power to lessen its heavy reliance on Middle Eastern fossil fuels – the Great East Japan earthquake and the 2011 Fukushima nuclear accident forced a significant energy policy recalibration.

Subsequently, in 2012, the government introduced its Act on Special Measures for Renewable Energy Electricity Procurement for electricity companies. Under the law, a Feed-in Tariff (FIT) policy was introduced to accelerate investment in renewable energy technologies.<sup>98</sup> These policy measures made notable progress in expanding renewable energy capacity, especially in solar photovoltaics (PV).<sup>99</sup> Japan introduced measures to explore innovative options like offshore wind, green hydrogen and energy efficiency solutions to meet its long-term climate and energy goals.

Japan has also focused on resource diplomacy to secure access to essential natural resources like oil, gas, rare earth metals and critical minerals needed for clean energy technologies.<sup>100</sup> Given Japan's

<sup>97</sup> Ben Cahill, 'How Japan Thinks about Energy Security', Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 22 May 2024, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/how-japan-thinks-about-energy-security>.

<sup>98</sup> Daoyuan Wen, Weijun Gao, Soichiro Kuroki, Qunying Gu and Jianxing Ren, 'The effects of the new Feed-In Tariff Act for solar photovoltaic (PV) energy in the wake of the Fukushima accident in Japan', *Energy Policy* 156(1), 12414, September 2021, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0301421521002846>.

<sup>99</sup> 'About Japan's Feed-in Tariff (FIT)', Ichigo Green Infrastructure Investment Corporation, <https://www.ichigo-green.co.jp/en/operation/purchase/#:~:text=Japan's%20FIT%20policy%20for%20renewable,%2C%20innovation%2C%20and%20cost%20reductions>.

<sup>100</sup> Ben Cahill, 'How Japan Thinks about Energy Security', Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 22 May 2024, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/how-japan-thinks-about-energy-security>.

limited domestic resources, it has sought to build robust economic partnerships with resource-rich countries across Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America. This approach aims to diversify energy sources and reduce risks posed by global supply disruptions, as was the case in the Russia-Ukraine war and is built around four primary considerations:

1. The availability and potential of resources in partner countries;
2. The economic feasibility of price structures, infrastructure development and export capacity;
3. The stability of the partner country's domestic market; and
4. The strategic importance of the relationships.<sup>101</sup>

A key component of Japan's resource diplomacy is renewable energy partnerships, particularly obtaining green hydrogen and energy efficiency technologies. Japan's energy partnerships with states like India are pivotal for accessing critical minerals and alternative fuels like green hydrogen and ammonia to decarbonise 'hard-to-abate' sectors like heavy industry and long-distance transport.<sup>102</sup> In 2022, Japan and India launched the CEP to support joint projects in hydrogen production, renewable energy infrastructure and technological innovation.

*A key component of Japan's resource diplomacy is renewable energy partnerships, particularly obtaining green hydrogen and energy efficiency technologies.*

Despite some progress, Japan faces challenges vis-a-vis energy self-sufficiency. While the FIT scheme has driven growth in solar PV, Japan still relies heavily on fossil fuel imports, with self-sufficiency levels stagnating. To address this gap, Japan is looking for untapped renewable energy sources, such as rooftop solar PV, perovskite tandem solar cells and floating offshore wind, all of which capitalise on the country's abundant rooftop space and sea resources. In addition,

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> 'India-Japan Clean Energy Partnership', Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 19 March 2022, <https://www.mea.gov.in/incoming-visit-detail.htm?34992/IndiaJapan+Clean+Energy+Partnership>.

Japan is working to update its grid operation rules to prioritise renewable energy, facilitating the integration of these emerging technologies into the national energy infrastructure.

By focusing on innovation and improving its energy infrastructure, Japan hopes that it could contribute to reducing its dependence on imported fossil fuels, bolster its energy security and move towards a low-carbon future. Through these initiatives, Japan is striving to meet its climate goals and build a more resilient and diversified energy system for the long term.

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