

India and Japan proclaim “special strategic, global partnership”

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Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s five-day visit to Japan, which ended yesterday, was aimed at boosting New Delhi’s military-strategic partnership with Tokyo and securing desperately needed investments to revive India’s flagging economy.

According to a joint statement, Modi and his Japanese counterpart, Shinzo Abe, “affirmed their shared belief that at a time of growing turmoil, tensions and transitions in the world, a closer and stronger strategic partnership between Indian and Japan is indispensable.” Moreover, a key element in reinforcing the “partnership” must be to “upgrade and strengthen” Indo-Japanese military ties.

This is to include Indian purchases of Japanese armaments—among the first to be made under Japan’s new policy of building up the military capacities of close allies—and increased trilateral military-security collaboration between India, Japan and the US. Japan has long been Washington’s most important military-strategic partner in Asia and these ties have been significantly upgraded under the US’s “pivot to Asia,” which is aimed at isolating and strategically encircling China.

Modi’s Japan trip launched a month of hectic diplomatic activity in which India’s new prime minister will meet the heads of government of all the key powers in the military-strategic confrontation between US imperialism and China.

Today, Tony Abbott, the prime minister of Australia—the US’s other principal military-strategic ally in the Indo-Pacific region—begins a two-day visit to India. Chinese President Xi Jinping is to visit India in the middle of the month and at the end of September Modi is to travel to Washington to meet with US President Obama.

Indian press coverage of Modi’s visit to Japan has highlighted his hosts’ announcement that the Japanese government and private sector will work together to invest \$35 billion in Indian infrastructure and development projects over the next five years. Were this to be realized, it would certainly be significant. But given the explosive character of inter-state relations across the Indo-Pacific region as a result of the US’s diplomatic-strategic offensive against China and

Japan’s own increasingly aggressive stance against Beijing, clearly the most important outcome of Modi’s visit was the strengthening of Indo-Japanese military-strategic ties.

In their public appearances, Modi, Abe, and their respective aides conspicuously avoided mention of China. But there is no doubt that the enhanced military-security ties between India and Japan are directed against Beijing and, that in choosing to ally more closely with Tokyo, New Delhi is tilting still more sharply toward Washington.

The two prime ministers signed a “Memorandum of Cooperation and Exchanges in the Field of Defence.” “We intend to give a new thrust and direction to our defence cooperation, including collaboration in defence technology and equipment,” declared Modi.

Japan’s prime minister has long advocated close ties with India as part of a more assertive Japanese foreign policy and at his joint press conference with Modi he again emphasized the importance he attaches to an Indo-Japanese partnership. Abe declared an alliance between Japan and India as “the one with the most potential” of any “in the world,” adding that his government will “fundamentally strengthen” its ties with India “in every field” so as “to elevate our relationship to a special strategic and global partnership.”

Abe certainly values India—a nuclear-armed state that is now developing a blue-water navy as a part of a comprehensive modernization of its armed forces—for its potential as a military ally. But he also envisions Japanese imperialism developing India into an alternate manufacturing-chain hub to China.

Modi, for his part, has repeatedly proclaimed his fondness for Abe and the importance of Japan to the realization of the Indian ruling elite’s own great power ambitions. Modi proclaimed Japan to be at the “heart” of India’s “Look East” policy and insisted that the addition of the qualifier “special” to the Indo-Japanese “strategic and global partnership” is not just a “play of words.” India plans for Japan to play an increasingly important role in India’s development, especially its economy and its military-strategic affairs.

The Indian prime minister was at pains to convince Abe and Japanese big business that his government will do everything in its power to facilitate Japanese investment. He repeated his refrain that under his government investors will be greeted by a “red carpet” not “red tape.” More importantly, Modi announced that Japanese capital will henceforth be given preferential treatment. A “Japan-plus special management team” will be set up under the Prime Minister’s Office to facilitate speedy-approval of investment proposals from Japan and this team will include two Japanese officials nominated by Tokyo.

As part of its anti-China “pivot,” Washington has been pushing for increased trilateral cooperation between the US, India and Japan. In July, Japan participated in the annual US-Indian Malabar naval exercise, from which it had withdrawn five years ago so as not to antagonize Beijing. Modi and Abe have announced that Japan’s participation in Malabar will continue and that their governments will explore the possibility of holding trilateral meetings between their foreign ministers and the US secretary of state.

Although the summit initiated a qualitative strengthening of Indo-Japanese ties, both Modi and Abe failed to attain one of their major pre-summit objectives. India had hoped to sign a civilian nuclear cooperation agreement with Japan, but the Abe government proposed only further negotiations, citing India’s refusal to commit to a ban on further nuclear weapons tests. India declined to institutionalize “two-plus-two” meetings of the countries’ foreign and defence ministers, although the final communiqué did emphasize the importance of “multi-sectoral ministerial and Cabinet-level dialogues” and joint meetings of the two countries’ foreign and defence secretaries for their “growing strategic partnership.”

The Chinese government has responded cautiously to Modi’s trip to Japan, just as they have to other provocative statements and actions taken by his government, including the invitation of the head of the Tibetan government-in-exile to his inauguration and a build-up of military personnel and infrastructure near the Indian-Chinese border.

Under conditions where the US and Japan have already inflamed China’s relations with most of its neighbours and are intent on trying to harness India to their strategic drive against China, Beijing clearly calculates its best course is to offer New Delhi trade and other inducements. Chinese President Xi Jinping is reportedly preparing to offer India participation in a series of joint development projects when he visits New Delhi later this month, as well as full membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

Asked about a comment Modi made while in Japan that was uniformly interpreted by the western media as directed against China and in which India’s prime minister castigated

unnamed powers that are thinking of “expanding by taking away land of another nation and going into the seas,” a Chinese foreign minister official claimed not to know what Modi was referring to. He then recited previous statements by Modi in which he declared “China and India” to be “strategic partners for common development” whose “good neighbourliness and cooperation” is of “great significance” for “all mankind.”

In a series of editorials, China’s state-run *Global Times* voiced its concern and anger about the strengthening of the Indo-Japanese partnership. The first played down Modi’s condemnation of “expansionism” then warned New Delhi that “Japan is located far from India” while “China is a neighbor it can’t move away from.” “Sino-Indian ties,” it concluded, “can in no way be counterbalanced by the Japan-Indian friendship.” The second *Global Times* editorial hit out at Japan. It declared, “We need a rational Japan that behaves itself and stops serving as the pawn of the US to sabotage China’s strategic interests.”

Modi, while harnessing India ever more tightly to the US and its Asian allies, especially Australia and Japan, is seeking to maintain the pretense of Indian “strategic autonomy” in the hopes of extracting concessions from China as well as from the western imperialist powers. This is a most dangerous game, all the more so under conditions where the aggressive policy of US and Japanese imperialism is making any attempt to straddle the geopolitical fault-lines in Asia ever more precarious, if not impossible.



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