

Three isn't a crowd

China was the looming presence in this year's India-Japan Special Strategic and Global partnership summit. "Toward a Free, Open and Prosperous Indo-Pacific", the title of the joint statement, gave away the common concern weighing down both countries. India went into the summit fresh from settling the Doklam row with China. A convivial BRICS summit in Xiamen, China, where two Pakistan-based terror groups with animus toward India, Lashkar and Jaish, were named in the resolution, were a mood elevator but not enough to wipe out the worry that there might be more Doklams on the long unsettled border between the two countries, at a place and time of China's choosing.

Japan, which has its own troubles with China over territory and much historical animosity, was the only country that openly articulated its support for India during those two troubled months. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is even said to have recalled Japan's own experience with China's claims over the Senkaku (Diaoyu) islands as "very challenging". The joint statement calls for a "rules-based order" in the Indo-Pacific region where "sovereignty and international law are respected, and differences resolved through dialogue, and where all countries, large or small, enjoy freedom of navigation and overflight, sustainable development, and a free, fair and open trade and investment system". The joint statement also took a swipe at China's OBOR initiative by calling for transparency in the development of connectivity and infrastructure development in the region, and reaffirmed the India-Japan project to connect Africa and Asia. In the event, the absence of a specific mention of the South China Sea was just a small window that both countries left open. The statement condemns North Korea, but for the first time, includes "the importance of holding accountable all parties" that helped that country develop its nuclear programme, which is not just an allusion to China, but also Pakistan.

The defence and security co-operation between the two countries has steadily risen over the last few years, with the Malabar joint exercise the most high-profile representation of this. Though there were no new breakthroughs on this front, there was acknowledgement of the potential to widen it. As Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) and Premier Abe heralded a new chapter of co-operation in their relations in all spheres, from terrorism, defence, the bullet train, infrastructure development to nuclear co-operation, this much is clear: The "friends forever" tag signals the uncertainties in Asia with the rise of China, and the unpredictability of the Trump Administration. But both New Delhi and Tokyo have to keep in mind that they have independent relations with China, with problems unique to their own bilateral histories. As they join hands, they can take oblique potshots at the largest military and economic power in the region, but cannot wish it away. The next step in the India-Japan partnership has to be constructive engagement with China.

END

Downloaded from [crackIAS.com](#)

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com