When Japan's Hedging Meets Türkiye's Identity Politics: India Feels the Strain

By
Yashwant Singh

Published: August 18, 2026

Japan may cultivate Türkiye as a "secondary strategic pillar," raising a deeper question about whether such hedging is compatible with the long-term partnership India expects out of Japan. The question is whether Japan's move is just a flexible, interest-driven hedge that can be adjusted easily, or a deeper alignment based on identity and long-term commitments that are harder to undo and come with obligations that last beyond the original interests involved.

A Theoretical Scaffold

Three bodies of work help clarify the stakes. The first is hedging theory. Author Kuik Cheng-Chwee distinguishes hedging from balancing and band-wagoning by its deliberate ambiguity. Kuik, along with scholars Jürgen Haacke and John D. Ciorciari, further argues that hedging spans a spectrum from "risk-contingency" behavior, insurance against low-probability but high-cost shocks, to "return-maximizing" behavior, which is opportunistic diversification. Japan courting Türkiye, within the continental-connectivity logic *The Hudson* piece outlines, fits the latter: a bet on Eurasian corridor economics, not a hedge against U.S. abandonment.

Secondly, the alliance security dilemma matters. Researcher Glenn Snyder's framework holds that allies constantly navigate fear of abandonment and fear of entrapment. For India, the risk is not that Japan abandons its alliance commitments, but that India becomes entangled indirectly. If Japan's connectivity partnership with Türkiye deepens while Türkiye maintains commitments to Pakistan, defense sales, and organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) positions on Kashmir, India absorbs diplomatic externalities it did not generate and cannot easily price out. This is not entrapment in Snyder's original sense of being pulled into war; it is a softer but real version. It is reputational and diplomatic drag transmitted through a third party.

A third lens is the shift from hub-and-spokes to lattice architectures in Asian security. Scholars Michael Green, Daniel Twining, and Matteo Dian describe how the old American model of bilateral spokes is giving way to overlapping mini lateral and bilateral ties. A lattice is more resilient because redundancy and multiple pathways reduce dependence on a single node. But that resilience only holds if the strands are compatible. A Japan-Türkiye strand and an India-Japan strand can coexist only if Türkiye's other commitments do not corrode the trust the India-Japan strand depends on. Snyder and Victor Cha both emphasize that compatibility of interests is foundational to alliance networking.

Why Japan's Transactionalism Is Not the Problem

Japanese mercantile realism, articulated by researchers Eric Heginbotham and Richard Samuels, explains why a Japan-Türkiye relationship is less risky than it appears. Japan's post-war strategy has consistently prioritized economic statecraft and technological leverage over ideological alignment. A Türkiye partnership based on Eurasian connectivity and chokepoint economics is therefore shallow, transactional, and revisable. This logic underpins Japan's simultaneous engagement with Gulf states, China, and India without requiring exclusivity. Because such commitments are elastic, Japan can recalibrate them if they begin to generate friction with higher-priority partners such as India.

Why Türkiye's Non-Transactionalism Is the Actual Variable

The friction arises not from Japan's hedging but from the nature of the partner Japan may hedge toward. Türkiye's foreign policy under the Justice and Development Party (AKP) has been interpreted by Ibrahim Kalin and scholars like M. Hakan Yavuz through a neo-Ottomanism and strategic autonomy lens which emphasizes civilizational identity, Islamic leadership, and independent great-power aspirations. Türkiye's ties with Pakistan, expressed through OIC solidarity and positions on Kashmir, are embedded in a normative framework costlier to revise than commercial relationships. In hedging-theory terms, Türkiye is a less suitable hedging partner because its commitments are identity-anchored rather than return-maximizing. Japan's transactional elasticity thus meets Türkiye's strategic rigidity, and that rigidity can transmit across Japan's wider network, including to India.

Implications for Indo-Pacific Architecture

If Japan deepens continental ties with Türkiye, the consequence is not a rupture in the U.S.–Japan alliance but a geographic bifurcation of Japan's strategic focus, a maritime Indo-Pacific pillar anchored in the Quad, and a continental Eurasian-connectivity pillar spanning Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Türkiye. These tracks are not inherently incompatible, but they compete for Japan's finite diplomatic, industrial, and financial resources. That competition reduces the incentive to close the asymmetry in the India-Japan relationship by elevating India from a developmental and manufacturing partner to a truly co-equal strategic one.

India–Greece as the Assured Tier: An Ontological-Security Argument

Rather than contest Japan's choices, India should strengthen partnerships less vulnerable to transmitted strategic risk. Here, the constructivist concept of ontological security as developed by scholars Jennifer Mitzen and Brent Steele is more useful than pure interest calculation. Ontological security concerns a state's need for a stable sense of identity and role; partnerships grounded in mutual recognition are therefore more durable than those based solely on shifting interests.

India and Greece exemplify this on three counts. First, threat-perception symmetry, for example Greece's concerns over Turkish revisionism and India's concerns over Pakistani revisionism which are reinforced by Turkish support, are structurally parallel, creating durable strategic empathy. Second, institutional embeddedness, such as Greece's position within the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy and NATO providing India indirect access to emerging European strategic-autonomy debates. Third, low normative overhead, unlike India-Japan ties, which retain developmental asymmetries, or India-Türkiye ties. The Pakistan and Kashmir issue and India-Greece burden these as cooperation begins from a comparatively clean slate. In hedging terms, this is identity-congruent alignment, a stable foundation within India's diversification portfolio amid the more elastic, transactional relationships partners such as Japan will continue to pursue.

Conclusion: An Asymmetric Hedging Thesis

The argument is not that Japan is drifting from India or that Türkiye is inherently problematic, but that transactional hedges can transmit risk when linked to partners with identity-anchored commitments. India should interpret Japan’s engagement with Türkiye through the same multi-alignment lens it applies to its own diplomacy. At the same time, it should treat the India-Greece partnership as the stable anchor of its diversification strategy, grounded in ontological security and institutional embeddedness rather than relationships that may shift with changing strategic priorities.

Dr. Yashwant Singh is a sociologist, served as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at GITAM (Deemed to be) University, Bengaluru Campus, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India. He holds an M.Phil. in Sociology from the University of Delhi and a Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Hyderabad, India. His writings have appeared on several digital platforms, including South Asia Journal, Modern Diplomacy, World Geostrategic Insights, and IA-Forum. The views of the author are his own.