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〔注〕

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Rise of China and the Emerging Asian Strategic Order: An Indian Perspective



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Introduction

Asia is in a state of flux and uncertainty. Four of the world's emerging military powers are in Asia – Russia, Japan, China and India; five of the world's nine nuclear powers (six if Israel is counted as part of Asia); and some of the fastest growing economies are in Asia. The US continues to be the superpower although there is strong expectation that the US pre-eminence is waning in relative terms. All of these characteristics point to an Asia that is likely to trigger more uncertainty, competitiveness, rivalry, all leading up to danger. While the present century has been widely acknowledged as the Asian century, rise of China has been much more consequential given the rapid nature and consequences of that rise.

Given the kind of history that is so contested as also the inherent characteristics and difficulties of the region, Asia appears ripe for conflicts. Some of the factors contributing to the uncertainty include unsettled boundary and territorial issues; distrust among major Asian powers; uncertainties surrounding China's growing military might. The baggage of history also weighs quite heavy on all the major bilateral relationships in Asia. There is major speculation about China as to what kind of a power it would become as it grows even stronger; however, it is clear that it will have a significant effect on the strategic balance in Asia. The difficulty is also that while some of the major powers have adopted inclusive and accommodative approaches, other powers have embraced a more exclusive approach that is not conducive for a stable Asian security order.

This paper will first deal with the rise of China debate from a theoretical perspective; the second section deals with the context in which the rise of China is occurring; third section analyses the regional responses; and lastly the implications for India, Japan and the regional order.

The Debate about China's Rise

China's rise has led to an intense debate about the consequences of that rise. Realist scholars have long predicted, even before China's rise became certain, that it would lead to conflict and chaos. Aaron Friedberg, taking the history of Europe, brings out all the various reasons why Asia will be unstable. He argues as to why the end of bi-polarity and the movement towards "multi-multipolarity" is going to be dangerous for Asia. He says, "systems in which

power is distributed at the outset more or less evenly among a substantial number of states do not remain indefinitely in peaceful equilibrium. As, inevitably, the distribution of power among states shifts, wars tend to break out."¹⁾ He also argues "The mere existence of an assortment of potential alliance partners has not always guaranteed the prompt formation of countervailing coalitions" and therefore the tendency to balance and form potential coalitions does not take place or at least not "quickly enough to deter an aggressive state or alliance."²⁾

When applied to Asia, it is pertinent for a variety of factors – governmental and societal as well as history. The differences between states at the structural level, between democracies and authoritarian ones, as well as the differences in economic prosperity and per capita development and sense of history about Asia further accentuate the complexities in the region. For instance, history is something that aggravates the sense of difference and divergence and bitterness in the case of Asia. As Friedman argues, there is no sense of "a single, shared interpretation of their recent past" and "the Asian powers show signs of divergence, each constructing a history that serves its own national purposes." Unresolved border and territorial issues in Asia compound the problem further, adding to the already complex Asian affairs. Unlike in Europe, the sense of economic integration in Asia is minimal and also under-institutionalized, which could have been cementing factors. In this backdrop, the tendency towards military modernization as opposed to finding alliance partners as a way of balancing each other could fuel further insecurity in Asia. As argued by Friedman, "once initiated, a multi-sided security scramble could accelerate quickly to high levels of competitive military and diplomatic activity. Among its other consequences, this turn of events would likely disrupt the further evolution of whatever mitigating tendencies are presently developing in Asia. Mounting insecurity could intensify feelings of nationalism, slow the construction of sturdy economic and institutional ties, and weaken or reverse any trend toward increasing democratization." While it is too early for a verdict, the prevailing sense is that "an Asia in which alignments were more fluid, more complex, and less certain might be more likely to see crises escalate into wars."³⁾ Citing Snyder and Deising, Aaron argues as to how nuclear weapons make the scenario even more dangerous in a multipolar Asia that is already veiling under miscalculation. However, if one were to go by Kenneth Waltz' calculation, nuclear weapons could potentially offer stability.⁴⁾

Richard Betts similarly argues that growing wealth and power makes for a potentially

dangerous situation in Asia, as China rises. This contrasts with Europe where greater wealth and greater prosperity increased the potential for stability. Betts argues that greater trade interactions (that spur greater economic growth rate for both the US and the region or a particular country in the region) could accumulate wealth “that is convertible into military power” posing itself as a potential threat. If one were to apply the liberal principle, “other countries are more dangerous if they are lean and hungry than if they are fat and happy. Realists, however, worry that prosperity may just make them muscular and ambitious.”⁵⁾ Looking at the Asian spending on military and defence matters, the realist interpretation holds truer than the liberal school. As China picks up pace in the economic arena, there is almost a direct correlation with its military spending. Similar conclusion can be drawn for Japan as well. While Japan sticks to the under 1% of GDP cap in its military spending, the military spending in actual terms has gone up. However, even if the Japanese defence spending continued unabated, the potential for certain amount of equilibrium is going to be an issue. Betts argues that “asymmetries would make it hard to estimate the balance of conventional military capability in such a competition, because China is more of a continental power, reliant on ground forces and quantity of weaponry, while Japan is more of a maritime power, reliant on naval and air forces and quality of technology. Confusion about which one had a military edge could be especially destabilizing. Rough parity is more conducive than clear hierarchy to miscalculation and to decisions to gamble on the resort to force.”⁶⁾ Therefore, if all the different strands of liberal school (greater economic prosperity leading to democracy, respect for human rights, basic freedoms; and greater economic interdependence leads to greater institutionalism which will offer institutional mechanisms to avoid conflict) do not prove right, then pursuing greater trade alone does not create stability. On the other hand, it strengthens the potential for competition, rivalry and instability. The realist school offers that a wealthier China “would overturn any balance of power.”⁷⁾ But these perspectives have not gone unopposed. Asian scholars, particularly David Kang has argued that Asia’s future will not face such problems, partly because the tradition of balance of power is peculiar to Europe whereas Asia traditionally lived peacefully under a China-dominated hierarchical international system. Kang goes on to show how Eurocentric theoretical understanding has made wrong conclusions and predictions about Asia.⁸⁾ For instance, he argues that Western scholars were wrong about Asian arms race and power politics or that Asian states balancing against rising powers such as China. Kang goes on

to make more sophisticated arguments to say that “China seems no more revisionist or adventurous now than it was before the end of the Cold War.” While this may have been true even as late as 2008, developments in the region in the last few years prove that Kang may have been wrong about those arguments.

Kang goes onto say that states are not only not balancing but are actually bandwagoning with China. This may have held true for two reasons. One, US appeared to have forgotten the Asia-Pacific, having been drawn into the Middle East and elsewhere after the 9/11 attacks and the 2003 Iraq war; and two, China was also playing an excellent diplomatic game with its neighbours, and these Asian states considered China to be a benign power. Both of these have now proven wrong; the US is back in Asia as a ‘resident power’ and China is proving to be a threat that needs to be worried about. Accordingly, one sees much of the region abandoning the hedging strategy of the past decade to more open balancing that has become dominant today.

Kang’s arguments that historically Asia has gone through turbulent periods when China was weak and therefore a prosperous and economically strong China would be good for Asian stability may only offer partial truth. And that East Asian region has remained hierarchic and therefore more peaceful and more stable is a problematic argument. Kang’s suggestion that “after a century of tumult in Asia, the late 1990s saw the reemergence of a strong and confident China, the growing stabilization of Vietnam, and increasingly consolidated political rule around the region. Although realists and liberals have tended to view modern East Asia as potentially unstable, if the system is experiencing a return to a pattern of hierarchy, the result may be increased stability”¹⁰⁾ can be challenged. One, Asia is currently witnessing for the first time the simultaneous rise of four rising powers – China, India, Japan and Russia. Given the history of their relations with each other, each power looks at the other with a sense of wariness and competition. Today, the biggest challenge facing Asia is not over resource or territory but if there is enough strategic space for all the powers to grow together. China in this regard has had a different track record in having followed an exclusive approach to Asian strategic framework as against other powers that have tended to adopt an inclusive framework.

Similarly, George Gilboy and Eric Heginbotham in their recent book, *Chinese and Indian Strategic Behavior: Growing Power and Alarm* explain the Chinese defence expenditure, arguing that there is nothing alarming about China's increased defence spending.¹¹⁾ As countries achieve greater levels of economic prosperity, this is bound to happen and one may see sharper spikes in regional military spending as well. Whether it is spurred by higher economic growth rate or any other rationale, other states will look at the Chinese military spending in absolute terms and with alarm. This assumes an even more alarming proportion given the opacity of the Chinese system, baggage of history and that there are unresolved border and territorial issues in the region.

Other Asian scholars like Amitav Acharya have disputed Kang's arguments. While agreeing with Kang's rejection of balance of power politics, they have nevertheless dismissed Chinese hierarchical system and its utility in regional stability argument. Acharya makes a strong case to say, "Asia's future will not resemble its past."¹²⁾ Disputing Kang and Friedman, Acharya goes on to argue that "Asia is increasingly able to manage its insecurity through shared regional norms, rising economic interdependence, and growing institutional linkages." It is possible that there are elements of truth in all these perspectives. For examples, scholars like Katzenstein and Okawara have suggested that a single theoretical perspective, either realism or anything else, may be insufficient to understand Asian international relations.¹³⁾

While the jury is still out on the predictions made by these different theoretical perspectives, the realists may have made relatively better predictions than others because one is seeing increasing Chinese power leading to certain aggressive posturing, contributing to potential conflict and instability in the region. We see increasing number of disputes between China and its neighbours over the South China, the East China Sea, and the India-China border. While the South China Sea has remained contested for several decades, the recent tensions surrounding the area have shown the potential for it to emerge as a major flashpoint between China and major powers in Asia. China miscalculated on the response from its smaller neighbours – the kind of high-pitched response from these countries was completely unexpected for China given Beijing's overall power quotient. What this demonstrates is that China is potentially as strategically inept as others and could make wrong judgments about Asian politics. This has also produced the unintended (from a Chinese perspective) result of greater role and presence of external powers in Asia. The greater economic interaction

between China and other Asian powers did not stop them from questioning China's unilateral way of handling South China Sea. Similarly, the recent confrontations between Japan and China have strengthened the role of the US in Asia, furthering the regional security-insecurity dilemma.

China's miscalculations about its own political and strategic power might have had huge impact on its bilateral relations with other countries as well as regional security. The US inattention to the region for the last decade had left a strategic void, which has been filled by China. The US pivot policy is an attempt at re-capturing some of the lost spaces while reassuring some of its own allies in the region. However, the US commitment and ability to act is an issue that the Asian states have to make a judgment about. The region is far from seeing an open conflict between US and China, and it has been and will be the neighbours that have had to deal with the rising China. However, in the absence of internal ability to deal with the mounting Chinese might, the Asian neighbours have called for a greater US attention partly leading to the Asian pivot. This has been witnessed in the last few years with even states such as Vietnam becoming much bolder in embracing the United States. In 2010, for instance, it was the Vietnamese pressure on the US that brought about the open US call for freedom of the seas and open navigation at the ARF meeting. The region is likely to see more such pressures in the coming decades.

Overall, in broad argument, one can say that China's rise does create questions about stability in Asia. Though the issue is not settled, it is possible that China recognizing that its behavior is contributing to some of the problems might mend its behavior.

The Context

Having dealt with the theoretical debate on the rise of China, one needs to place this within the background in which this debate is taking place. There are four inter-related points in this regard.

I. Power Transition

There are two aspects to this power transition. One is the relative decline of the United States but the more important one is the rise of China. Both of these are important but the latter

is more important for a few reasons – the US decline has been a long process, going back to the early Cold War. The US economy that was roughly half the world's economy in 1945 gradually declined to roughly 20% today. On the other hand, what has been more dramatic has been the rise of China over the last two decades. The rapid expansion of the Chinese power has been more serious.

As all states become more powerful, they tend to expand their space, not so much in physical terms though in the current times. Great powers will always seek to dominate their neighbourhoods and as much of the rest of the world as they can. There is nothing peculiarly Chinese about it. Thus, China's rise clearly is going to impact not just its neighbours in Asia but the entire world. It will seek global dominance just like other powers have done in the past. Even so, China's rise is likely to be as problematic, tense and destabilizing.

Over the last decade, there have been a number of scholars who have asserted that China's rise will be unlike that of other powers, that it will be peaceful and so on. And, of course, the Chinese government's rhetoric has also asserted this.

However, the reality is very different. And China's behaviour in the region over the last year provides sufficient proof. One can say that China's rise will be much like that of other great powers in the past, no more destabilizing but certainly no less so.

Clearly there is a great deal of concern about China's rise. There are a few dangers that accompany China's rise.

The first danger lies in the process of transition itself. When new great powers rise, it does create some chaos in the international order. The new power will want a seat at the high table, and would want a say in how the world is run. And usually, such new powers are also impatient ones. They want to assert their role soon, sometimes even before they have the capacity and wealth to back up that role. Germany in the late 19th and early 20th century is an example from history. Such impatience can create tensions and crises, though one can possibly rule out war.

There are also questions about what such a transition might do to existing international institutions. When new great powers rise, they will want global institutions and regimes to reflect the new balance of power, as India and Japan are asking with regard to the UN Security Council seat.

Will China accept the current institutions and regimes? What modifications will be needed? How will we decide? Will the liberal trading regime that the US established continue? Will the nuclear non-proliferation and other arms control regimes completely collapse?

II. China's Increasing Aggressiveness

China had continued to articulate that its rise is going to be peaceful, and much of the region had adopted a wait and watch approach. This was particularly so given the deep economic engagement of China especially with South and Northeast Asian countries. However, this has changed in the last 3-4 years with China's expansionist and aggressive tendencies visible towards all its neighbours and also the US. Several examples illustrate this point.

PLAN's expansion: The new-found strength of the PLA Navy has been seen in the last ten years or so. This became evident in the number of naval incidents in the recent years vis a vis Japan, the US, Vietnam, Philippines among others. One of the first incidents was when the Chinese diesel submarine surfaced 25 miles off the southwest coast of Japan in November 2003. Thereafter, there have been a number of confrontations between the Chinese Navy and all of its neighbours – a reflection of the PLA Navy's growing capabilities in this regard.

String of Pearl issue: While this issue may be overblown, the reality is that China has presence in almost all the states in the Indian neighbourhood. Vast claims for territorial waters and islands create a lot of uncertainty and wariness despite the economic engagement. China's presence in almost all the countries in India's neighbourhood – Hambantota in Sri Lanka, Gwadar in Pakistan, Sittwe port in Myanmar – are a testament to this reality.

Aggressiveness with Japan: Sovereignty and territorial issues in the East China Sea around the Senkaku Islands further exacerbate the security scenario in Asia. These are long-standing issues, but they obviously have become more pronounced recently and unlikely to go away in

the near future.

South China Sea: While South China Sea has remained contested for several decades, the recent tensions in the last few years reflect the new seriousness of the issue. China's recent provocative steps have made external powers an inevitable reality. Involvement of major actors such as the US, India (to a limited extent) and ASEAN has brought in new dynamics into play.

Aggressive posturing towards India: For India, there have been several instances of Chinese aggressiveness, be it on the border or elsewhere. China's increasing border infrastructure has put India at a disadvantage. In addition, India has had to worry about other issues – China's role in the UN Security Council expansion, its less-than supporting role at the Nuclear Suppliers Group, China's actions opposing Asian Development Bank loans for hydropower projects, Beijing's long-standing links to Pakistan are a few cases in point.

There has been growing number of incidents vis a vis the United States as well. These instances have come to mark competition, rivalry and tension between China and the US be it in the maritime or nuclear domain. Similarly, China is also beginning to use some of the global commons to pursue a policy of competition, rivalry and aggressiveness. Its anti-satellite (ASAT) test in 2007, missile defence test in 2010, and its aggressive pursuance of military space programmes under the PLA direction are unsettling and inherently destabilizing in nature. So there are plenty of instances demonstrating the increasing Chinese aggressiveness, and the pace appears to be quickening.

III. Why Aggressiveness?

a) Nationalism becoming the ideology driving these tendencies.

All powers that play important roles in global affairs have to have a sense of 'great power-ness,' the idea that they are important and that they have a justified and legitimate larger role in world affairs than others. And such ideas are almost always dangerous to others. Whether it was the European idea of bringing civilization to the rest of the world, or the American idea

of promoting democracy, or the Soviet idea of spreading socialism, the consequences to those subject to these drives is never pleasant.

China appears to be basing its great powerness on its own nationalism. Now, nationalism is no stranger to India or other powers, but in China, nationalism seems to be playing the role of the default ideology. With Maoism and socialism being on the back-burner, the Chinese leadership appears to be using nationalism deliberately as an ideological glue. This is very dangerous. One has seen nationalist demonstrations against the US as well as against Japan. Stoking such populist ideology can force crises between China and other powers. Encouraging hyper-nationalism, and then trying to manage it from getting out of control is a dangerous game. Hopefully, the Chinese government will realise that they need to control such sentiments.

Also, ideology of economic growth is an important aspect. Economic growth as justification for Communist party rule is waning and if there are increasing domestic economic or political troubles, will China become more aggressive remains to be seen. There is cause for worry in such trends.

IV. Issue of Secrecy and Opacity of Chinese National Security Policies

When it comes to China, its aggressiveness is not the sole issue. The bigger worry is about what China will do with its increasing power. This is not a new issue. A number of experts as well as governments have expressed concerns about this issue. Now, all countries do keep some aspects of their national security plans and projects secret. That is nothing new.

But in China's case, the rapid rise in its military expenditure is leading to concerns among its neighbours and others. A part of this rise in military expenditure is the result of China's increasing wealth. As it becomes wealthier, its military expenditure also rises proportionately. But China's understating of its defence budget and the opacity of its military plans can only lead to concern. China can easily ameliorate such concerns by being somewhat more transparent.

Having said that, China is prone to making many mistakes and miscalculations especially with its sense of hyper-realism – the hyper-realist view of the world. China tends to view the whole world through a sense of power competition. This has consequently resulted in a fear out of that sense of competition.

Over the last few years, China's miscalculations with its neighbours as well as other great powers have only furthered some of its insecurities. This also demonstrates that China is prone to making wrong decisions. Take the case of South China Sea. China's recent steps have made the involvement of external powers very likely. Role of external powers has brought in new dynamics into play.

Another strategic and tactical error in China's judgment relates to China's transfer of nuclear technology to Pakistan. It is quite possible that if China had not encouraged Pakistan in the manner it did to acquire nuclear weapons, India would not have built nuclear weapons. But China was convinced that India was building nuclear weapons that it helped Pakistan build nuclear weapons, forcing India to restart its own nuclear programme. So China's hyper-realism led to a result that China would not have wanted and could have avoided a nuclear-armed India. They are now repeating that mistake with North Korea. Providing a shield to Pyongyang, the Chinese policy is prompting other neighbours to contemplate on a variety of options, which if it were to become realities, China would regret.

China is also subjected to pulls and pressures, between different bureaucracies, and between different arms of the government, even if they are less visible to the world. China is not a monolith. The decision-making process in China is something India and others have to watch out for. However, the perennial role and influence of its military – the People's Liberation Army – on important national security and foreign policy issues as well as during crisis is important for India and other countries to consider.

Regional Responses

Obviously the Chinese rise along with its assertive posturing has led to serious rethinking within the region on how they must respond to this new phenomenon. It has taken different shapes, from economic integration, diplomatic maneuvers to military modernization leading

to an arms race in the region.

China's defense spending in real terms rose 8.3 percent between 2011 and 2012, while in Asia as a whole, spending rose by 4.94 percent last year. However, there is a need to analyse whether there is a genuine arms race or not. This may be looked at through couple of different questions:

A. Long-term Military Expenditure

a. If one were to examine the overall regional economic growth trends in the region, it does not show an unusually large increase in the military spending. One does not see large spikes except for China that has been going up particularly since 2004-2005.

b. In overall terms, the figures indicate that there is a close link between economic growth rate and increasing procurement/ military modernization and therefore military spending. Essentially, the larger the economy, the larger the spending power, and the greater is going to be spending on defence. So, if there was a slow down at all during economic crises in the past, this has been made up when the economies are booming as well.

c. Third, even while defence expenditure as a percentage of GDP has not gone up in significant terms, the expenditure in real terms has been growing. Economies have grown, the GDP has grown and it means that even if states continue to spend only 2% of their GDP on defence, the fact that is that a larger GDP would mean higher allocation in real terms.

d. Major acquisitions of systems and capabilities such as naval force projection, ASAT systems, which are potentially destabilizing, have taken place in the last few years. Questions are raised as to whether this should be equated with an arms race. The reality is that even if it's not a full-scale arms race, the potential for arms race does exist given the peculiarities of Asia – baggage of history; unresolved border and territorial issues; simultaneous rise of three or four major powers (China, Japan, Russia, India).

The verdict may be that the rise of China, particularly its military power has led to kick-

starting of an arms race in the region. Smaller neighbours such as Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia are on a major arms buying spree. Vietnam has begun beefing up its military capabilities particularly in the maritime domain with addition of new submarines. Malaysia too has been adding to its inventory. Singapore plans to strengthen its submarine strength with two additional submarines. Bigger players such as South Korea, Japan, Australia, and India are not lagging behind.¹⁴⁾ The fact is that the military expenditure of these countries has been rising in the last few years but the pace of military modernization has picked up greater momentum in the face of the growing Chinese power.

B. Obsolescence and Recycling Trends

This is an important factor that explains some of the recent hike in military expenditure. The revolution in military affairs from the 1990s to the new trends in warfare with an emphasis on technology and hi-tech systems and the need to improvise/ replace aging systems – all combined have had an impact on the higher allocation of funds for defence.

It is also important to look at where these allocations are made and what those big ticket, high-technology items are that are being acquired. For instance, every decade plus, major acquisitions take place in areas such as aircrafts, ships that will constitute major bulk in terms of the expenditure due to their high per unit costs. These are, in a sense, cyclical rounds in procurement. However, there has been the arrival of new technologies and capabilities as well.

C. Are the new systems and capabilities potentially destabilizing? Does it go against the responsible stakeholder behavioural approach?

In the case of East Asia, there have been a few major additions in terms of systems and capabilities, some of which are potentially destabilizing. Development and proliferation of advanced military systems such as anti-ship missiles, new submarines, advanced combat aircraft and cruise missiles, ASAT systems are few cases in point.

D. Regional/ External Threat Scenario

Has the external threat scenario or the threat perception in the region changed significantly calling for higher defence spending?

Global politics and security are going through a period of flux and uncertainty. This is driven by the relative decline of the US along with the rise of other power centres such as India, China, Japan. This period of transition is likely to witness an intensification of competition, rivalry, driven by massive accumulation of power, improving the overall power quotient. This effort along with uncertainty when imposed on an Asia that is already volatile given the history and mutual distrustful nature of relationship between major powers, it could harbor greater wariness and concerns. This would manifest in relationships that are primarily unsettled in nature, and could further regional insecurities. Therefore, until this power transition reaches certain amount of stable equations, Asia and international security are likely to be in a state of flux.

The relative decline of the US or at least the perception of it has also contributed to the recent spike in defence expenditure with allies and friends having to find ways to defend themselves or develop capabilities as a hedge or deterrent against an uncertain China and uncertain Asia.

Lastly, what makes the situation dangerous?

In terms of potential flashpoints, we have several conflicts:

- Situation in the Korean Peninsula that is destabilizing.
- Evolving situation in South China Sea is unsettling.
- Potential scenario between China and Japan; and India and China, which remain uncertain.

Lack of institutional and security mechanisms to defuse crises is a major lacunae. While the Chinese behavior may be legitimate from its point of view, its disregard for international law and its neighbour's interests will have long-term implications for regional security. For instance, the recent events in South China Sea have also brought out the differences within

ASEAN. As long as economic issues were the focus of the group, it functioned well and was displayed as a model for other regional groupings. However, it appears unable to present a united front when political issues such as territory and sovereignty are brought into the forum.

Also economic tractions have not proven to be effective deterrents. If economics were to determine overall inter-state relations, Japan and China should have been the best of friends. Therefore, one can argue that while trade and economic interactions are beneficial to both sides, they have a limited role and they do not alter the basic nature of state-to-state relations.

Essentially, it's the bad combination of factors that makes it worse. China's growing capabilities, use of force or threat of force in settling territorial disputes and sovereignty issues have compounded the security dilemma for regional powers, where each one looks at the other with a sense of wariness and rivalry. The sense of nationalism particularly among the younger generation of Chinese has led to a greater emphasis on territorial sovereignty. This is manifested in the making of expanding sovereignty claims. How far will China go back into history to make these claims is an important question.

Diplomacy and Balancing Act

In terms of diplomacy, there were earlier suspicions that countries will bandwagon with China for two reasons: US was not around in Asia-Pacific, having been drawn into the Middle East and elsewhere; and China was also adopting a soft approach with its neighbours, and these powers considered China to be a benign power. Both of these have proven wrong – US is a staying power in Asia and China is a challenge that others need to manage.

While the US pivot or rebalancing has had several different drivers, Chinese behavior has been partly responsible for bringing the US back to Asia. If the US was distracted from its commitment to Asia, given the decade-long mission in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as the domestic fiscal compulsions, it is amply clear that the US is now here to stay. The repeated statements by US officials highlight the nervousness as well as the enthusiasm to cash in on an opportunity that welcomes back the US with greater vigour.

Lastly, the question of Asia-Pacific nations' hedging strategy. Hedging was a strategy of the 1990s and the last decade. Today the predominant strategy is that of open balancing. Finding a balance between deterrence and diplomacy is also important. So even as states make efforts at finding avenues of cooperation, there will be efforts at beefing up capabilities for effective deterrence.

Implications for India and Japan

While Japan enjoys a reasonable amount of peace and stability under the current international order, regional threats appear to be beginning to dominate the Japanese security discourse. The US continues to be the principal security guarantor, however, the first year of the Obama administration made Tokyo as well as other powers in the region including New Delhi nervous. Japan in fact was faced with a similar situation to that of the immediate post Cold War years, wherein it felt that it had lost its importance in the global and more particularly in the Asian security dynamic. The first year of the Obama administration had an outlook towards Asia which was quite similar to that of the Clinton administration in the post Cold War era. Needless to say, a close Sino-US partnership is looked upon with wariness in both India and Japan.

Given the growing interdependence in today's globalised world, Japan has acknowledged the importance of "multinational cooperation" as the way forward in resolving regional disputes as well as to achieve peace and stability.¹⁵⁾ However, rising military expenditure, historical animosities, baggage of history, growing military capabilities and lack of transparency are a complex set of issues for Japan as well as India to deal with.

More importantly, countries like India and Japan have a clear role in shaping and defining the Asian strategic sphere while avoiding being entangled in an anti-China alliance. While China is certainly a driver, there are several strategic imperatives that lock Tokyo and New Delhi into enduring partnership.

Various factors have prompted closer India-Japan partnership, although managing the rise of China, protection the SLOCs and leveraging the growing strengths and areas of convergence between the two are particularly significant. Shared values as well as realist strategic

calculations such as importance of promoting democracy and human rights are important considerations for both the countries.

As Japan assumes a more important role in global as well as Asian affairs, India's rising power aspirations will likely lead to Tokyo and Delhi finding common paths. The fact that both the countries have rather inclusive approach towards the Asian strategic framework unlike that of China's exclusive framework makes it compelling for both India and Japan to collaborate in the decades to come.

Formal trilateral initiatives such as that of India, the US and Japan, while not meant to be an anti-China grouping, aims to mend the Chinese behaviour that have been rather aggressive in recent years. While a military alliance should certainly be avoided, the onus lies on China. There is an increasing responsibility on China and its client states such as North Korea to alter their behaviour if the region is to stay peaceful.

Some of the potential areas for India-Japan strategic cooperation include joint military exercises. Japan has an advanced military although the military has a serious lacuna in operational experience. India may prove itself as an ideal country to partner with given that the two countries face similar threats and challenges.

While the US nuclear umbrella and the security assurance with the US remain the cornerstone of Japanese security, the need for Japan to be more strategically independent and assert greater ownership of its security will be a strong imperative for India and Japan to get closer in the coming years. This could also be due to the fact that there are concerns about possible US arms control agreements with China and North Korea, leaving Japan and India at strategic loss, facing serious insecurities.

That India and Japan are two established space powers provides another avenue for bilateral cooperation. While the two sides have had predominantly a civilian space programme, increasing military space activities in Asia is compelling both to advance their programmes beyond purely civilian utilities.

Conclusion

Understandable concerns about a rising power, but Chinese actions are making things worse, and making worries greater. And what do these mean for India? While trade flows are an important consideration and therefore one may see an active India in this region, there are strategic motives that should also inform India's policy approach. India's strengthened partnership with East and Southeast Asian nations, increasingly strategic in nature, will call for greater Indian support to these countries. Instability in India's neighbourhood including in East and Southeast Asia does not augur well for India. Therefore, it is imperative for India to take an active role in shaping the regional dynamics that corresponds to India's growing influence.

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