



ESCALATION OF TENSIONS BETWEEN CHINA AND JAPAN: SHOULD THERE BE A PARADIGM SHIFT IN JAPANESE FOREIGN POLICY?

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ABSTRACT

The dispute between China and Japan is a manifestation of the growing Chinese influence in the region. China has been making steady progress on the economic and military front and the recent advances in military technology have US forces in a very vulnerable position. China may perhaps harbor thoughts on taking over Taiwan. The Chinese Navy and Air force have made threatening maneuvers in and around the Pacific Ocean sending strong signals to Japan and US and it is a force to be reckoned with. The Chinese military buildup in the region and the converting of an Island in the Spratly Islands into a military facility clearly demonstrates China's willingness to take on Japan and the US at a given time in the future. On the contrary, there has been marked lack of progress on the Japanese navy to counter China threat and the US forces have been spread across the globe for countering other threats. Japan also cannot entirely rely on the US security umbrella finalized during the Second World War. This article focuses on the hard choices Japan is faced with in the wake of growing Chinese influence not only in the Pacific region but also in the Indian Ocean. This article also tries to build a strong case for Japan and the diplomatic and security measures it would have to adopt in countering the threat from China.

KEYWORDS

China, Japan, Spratly Islands, Taiwan, Defence, Diplomacy

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1. INTRODUCTION

The dispute between China and Japan would certainly be a melting pot if the situation is not properly appreciated by the world nations. China has made mammoth strides on its economic and military spheres and the strength of the China's defence establishment should not be taken lightly. Asia survived five centuries of colonial domination and yet another colonial power may be on the rise which could be an even bigger threat than the British colonial domination.

China does not have the required natural resources to fuel its economy hence it will have to rely on her requirements from overseas and a supply routes and logistics will have to be maintained for yet another century until it is firmly on its own feet.

The escalation of tensions between China and Japan is a turning point in Asian politics and all hinges on the East China Sea islands that both states claim as their own — known as the Senkaku in Japanese, and the Diaoyu in Chinese. Moreover the building of airfields and other defences around the Spratly islands would be tantamount to sounding alarm bells to Asian region. The crucial questions that Asian and Pacific leaders must ponder are – When will China put an end to its domination in the Pacific region? Would it stop after the airfields in Spratly Islands are built? Would it expand into other areas where clashes or the Third World War might erupt? Is Russia worried over the safety of their oil fields? Is America worried over the vulnerability of its air and naval bases in the Pacific Ocean which are meant to protect Japan, Taiwan and South Korea? (Manicom,,2014,,55).

2. JAPANESE PERCEPTIONS ABOUT CHINA

Chinas has frequently conducted naval war games and in fact sent patrol boats into the waters around the Senkaku/ Diaoyu islands, and the Japanese public generally supports taking a tough stance against such provocations. Japanese public have seen the close encounters Chinese air force and Navy have had over the years projecting their firepower against Japan. Recent convergence of Russian and Chinese defence contacts would also be a cause for concern for Japan. Russian is occupying the Sakhalin Island which had been taken over by the Red Army during the Second World War and Russia is currently exploiting its natural resources such as crude oil and gas. It is a legitimate territory of Japan. The *New York Times* editorial says that “a joint survey conducted this summer by the Japanese nongovernmental group Genron NPO and the China Daily, 93 percent of the Japanese do not have a good impression of China. But many Japanese also understand that China is an important neighbor and essential to their own peace and prosperity: In the same survey, over 70 percent of Japanese said the relationship between Japan and China was important, and about 80 percent expressed concern over its current state or the need to improve it. Mr. Abe knows this” (Takahara ,2014).

Experts are of the view that if this had been a problem of fishing rights and natural resources then the dispute could have had a history of at least 50 years. If so then why did it hyped up during last three years. It was clear that China was targeting the oil resources in the deep seas of Spratly islands as oil resources are a vial commodity required for China. There has been a surge

in the patriotism and militarization in view of China's rapid growth in economic and military power. Japan is worried that it might lose its grip over international community as China is making rapid advances. It is about high time Japan took stock of the situation and adjust its defence and foreign policy in line with the current developments. Domestic political opinion in both China and Japan have become a point of rallying nationalism, patriotism and reinforcing national identify.

3. JAPAN AND THE US SECURITY PARTNERSHIP

With the surrender of Japanese forces during Second World War, a new strategic defence partnership was established with the United States, which provided security guarantees for Japan. In the aftermath of World War II, the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation sealed the US.-Japan defence alliance and it enabled the United States to establish military bases in Japan in exchange for the assurance that it would provide security for Japan from external aggression. This has now turned into a robust and important defense alliance between the two nations that has served as the foundation for peace, security, and stability in the Asia-Pacific region. The partnership has blossomed over the years ever since it was concluded (Osirus, 2002).

If China confronts Japan it would not only be confronting Japan but with the US as well. The US is under an obligation to protect Japan hence the stakes in Pacific are extremely sensitive. The White House has given a clear message to Japan that the US is solidly behind Japan. President Barack Obama reiterated the US security commitments to Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe reiterated that "the US.-Japan

alliance is the central foundation for our regional security and so much of what we do in the Pacific region." (*Japan Times*, 2013). This is a clear endorsement of security guarantees for Japan which is part of the US.-Japan security agreement which endorses US's resolve that it would back Japan, should China decides to take over the islands, which in turn could set off ripples across the Asia-Pacific and beyond.

A Japanese Ministry of Defence document says that

"In order to ensure Japan's peace and security under any circumstances, from peacetime to contingencies, and to promote a stable, peaceful, and prosperous Asia-Pacific region and beyond, bilateral security and defense cooperation will emphasize: seamless, robust, flexible, and effective bilateral responses; synergy across the two governments' national security policies; a whole-of-government alliance approach; cooperation with regional and other partners, as well as international organizations; and the global nature of the Japan-US. Alliance.

The two governments will continuously enhance the Japan-US. alliance" (Ministry of Defence, Japan Report, 2015).. The report even says that "The United States will continue to extend deterrence to Japan through the full range of capabilities, including US. nuclear forces" (Ministry of Defence, Japan Report, 2015).

4. CONFLICT WITH TAIWAN

Territorial claims to islands of Senkaku will not rest with China and Japan as it has also been claimed by Taiwan. The security of Taiwan is totally dependent on the goodwill of the US and given the current US commitments worldwide on anti-terrorist and humanitarian operations, and its preparedness to defend Taiwan would have to be closely studied. If China attacks Taiwan and secures it, that would be a major shift of political tectonics in the region. It would further reduce the US influence in the region and would certainly be a game changer in Asian politics. Taiwan has been relying on the US supply of arms and ammunition and the large-scale war ships and other strategic partnerships. China knows for sure that the US would provide Taiwan with military intelligence, arms and ammunitions, training and other logistical support if China attacks Taiwan and it would be a huge miscalculation for China and hamper China – US relations. China exports around 15% of its exports to the US and there is a huge trading relationship with the US . If China attacks Taiwan the whole edifice of China – US trade partnership would collapse. In 1979, the US and Taiwan entered into a security partnership for the sale of advanced military equipment, “which continued even after Washington established diplomatic relations with Beijing and ended the defense treaty with Taiwan. The level of arms sales has been relatively high over the last two decades. In the first term of the Obama administration, for example, the United States transferred over \$12 billion in weaponry to Taiwan” (Bush, 2016). There is a looming doubt whether US would be able to counter the rising power of Chinese Navy which keeps enlarging its fleet of

ships and its recently tested weapons technology. Will. US be able to contain Chinese weapons?

China, with a population as estimated by CIA at 1.3 billion (July 2016 estimated) (CIA Country Report on China) and with a GDP growth rate at 7.3% (2014 estimate) (CIA Country Report on China), one would naturally pose a question as to the influence of China on the world map. China boasts a literacy rate of 95.1% though official figures as to accessibility to internet are not available. Since GDP is growing alarmingly it is naturally in search of resources to keep moving its industry. This is a mammoth task as energy resources are totally insufficient to reap the full potential of Chinese economic miracle. China has been active in the African continent looking for potential allies (*Economist, 2013*). The rapid economic growth also enabled China to modernize its military industry and hardware necessary to protect the vital sea lanes of communications. The latest manifestation of China’s aggressive stance is amply demonstrated by threats made to Japan and forcibly engaging in oil drilling activities in South China sea off Vietnam.

This is a wakeup call to the US to further increase its presence in the Pacific Ocean. Japan requires an immediate overhaul of its defence apparatus and a paradigm shift is required in :

- human resource mobilisation both civil and military within Japan,
- acquisition of modern state of the art weaponry,
- conduct defence research

- explore whether the constitution can be amended to meet the threats
- mobilise the all international propaganda and information warfare resources and establish a Radio Station to conduct programs in Chinese and to reach China.
- evaluate military training doctrine in the wake of China's aggressive behavior.
- take decisive efforts to mobilise the Japanese diplomatic corps overseas to stem the growing Chinese influence in the region and to make an awareness on the Chinese aggressive posture in the South China sea.

The recent aggressive behavior in the South China seas amply demonstrates that China would not sit idle by when there is a massive boom in the Chinese economic activities. It has also augmented its naval war fighting capability with newly built aircraft carriers and submarines. China has now threatened its neighbor Japan. Japan has been peaceful nation since 1945 and failed to take into account the consequences of the threats from the emerging China. Japan still has time to reorganize its defence capabilities. Japanese economy is entirely dependent on the energy resources from Middle East, Australia and other countries. Japan must therefore ensure that vital sea lanes of communications are secured. Any interdiction of such Japan bound cargo would have dramatic consequences and it would cripple the Japanese economy (Tarrant,2010).

5. CAN JAPAN TOTALLY RELY ON THE US?

Japan cannot solely rely on US to provide defence cover as US. too is highly pre-occupied with other potential threats. There

have been moves to cut the defence spending and this is done at a time when China is leapfrogging in defence capabilities. It is imperative that Japan stays ahead of the military capability on its own. Defence planning is of paramount importance and Japan cannot wait until events to unfold. It would be prudent to have in place advance preparations. Japan has come under threats not only from China but from North Korea as well. The US Congressional Research report says that

“North Korea's increased asymmetric capabilities pose a direct threat to Japan. A territorial dispute with China over a set of islets in the East China Sea raises the risk of military escalation, a scenario that could trigger US. treaty obligations to defend Japan. Japan has pursued security cooperation with others in the region, including Australia, India, and several Southeast Asian countries. Of concern to the United States is the tense Japan-South Korea relationship, which has prevented effective trilateral coordination. Without cooperation among its allies, the United States may find itself less able to respond to North Korean missile threats and to influence China's behavior” (Chanlett, 2016).

The recent developments in the North Korean defence posture where North Korea had proven its capability in delivering nuclear capable ballistic missiles has put the region US defence alliances with Japan

and South Korea in an awkward position where the US will have to project a sterner defence posture as a counter to North Korea.

6. STRATEGIC PETROLEUM RESERVE IN SRI LANKA

This author had proposed a strategic petroleum reserve for Japan in the Hambantota district in Sri Lanka as far back as 1993 as an independent strategic consultant. (*Daily Financial Times, 2012*). If it had been given due recognition Japan would have secured a vital strategic asset in Sri Lanka (*Daily Financial Times, 2012*). The petroleum reserve would have provided an insurance policy for any eventuality in the Middle East and it would have ensured that the continuous flow of crude oil to Japan. China seem to have secured energy supplies through its pipeline in Myanmar and the supply route from Central Asia whereas Japan solely relies on the ocean transport of its energy supplies and passes through the troubled waters of the South China.

7. CYBER SPACE AND SECURITY

As far as the US is concerned, it has a very high rate of accessibility to the internet. The entire US society is now logged on to the internet in one way or the other. A life without internet in the US is unimaginable and any disruption of the free flow of information would pose grave political and commercial consequences. The entire US Government machinery functions on information technology. IT infrastructure/Cyber security is so crucial that it is linked to Japan and other the US Allies in Europe as well. The protection of

IT infrastructure/Cyber security is of paramount importance.

In 2007, China demonstrated that it has the ability to take on an ailing satellite and China was successful in destroying the satellite (Nicholson, 2007). This is an alarming development and had wider corollary for US National Security concerns. Does China have the capacity to destroy the US military satellites? Does the US have the ability to counter Chinese capacity to target the US commercial and military satellites? These are vital US national security concerns. Has the US ever conducted war games in the absence of a network of satellites? Almost all the war games hitherto conducted have been to test the effectiveness of plans and weapons and its high technological effectiveness. Never has there been a war game to prepare the US for a situation where there is a total breakdown of communications. Communications play a central role in governing a country and without it a military high command cannot function and it would put the entire country at risk.

8. SECRET SUBMARINE BASE

There have been reports that China had constructed a secret submarine base in the Hainan Island primarily to counter the US military presence in the Pacific. India too had expressed concern as the base is within the striking distance of Indian territory and India would be vulnerable to submarine-launched ballistic missiles (Harding, 2008). This is a clear manifestation of China's grand intentions in the region. China is a secretive society unlike the US. where public affairs are conducted every hour on the hour using high technology through mass media channels. Neither the US nor

India could fathom the exact military capabilities of China (Harding, 2008). Neither country has the capability to penetrate the secret defence research being undertaken in China. Does the Indian Naval Intelligence have the ability to account for all the Chinese naval and merchant fleet in the Indian Ocean? Would it not be prudent to mount a joint US, Japan India Naval intelligence to monitor Chinese naval forces (Harding, 2008). There have been reports that China is trying to encircle India using ports in Pakistan, Myanmar and Sri Lanka. It would be highly unlikely that the Sri Lankan Government would allow China to take advantage of the Port of Hambantota as a strategic staging point against India. No Government in power would allow China to threaten the security of India. This is inconceivable and it would never happen. However any Chinese vessels with commercial registration may engage in providing logistical facilities for the Chinese Naval forces in the Indian Ocean regions. Government of Sri Lanka may not be in a position to deny any Chinese commercial vessels anchoring or berthing at Port of Hambantota when its requirement is for fuel and other logistical needs. However, the historic and cultural relations with India far transcend the political expediency of China's military strategies whether covert or overt.

9. CHINESE PRODUCTS MAKING INROADS INTO MARKETS.

Chinese products keep penetrating markets worldwide at an alarming rate. The products range from footwear to machinery. Chinese construction companies have in the recent past made inroads into traditional markets receptive to

US and European companies. European designs have been extensively copied by Chinese entrepreneurs and it would be difficult for an unsuspecting individual to differentiate the Chinese product of original handcrafted quality footwear from the US or European product. China has invested heavily in industrial espionage (Roper,2014) and Chinese nationals have been caught in the very acts of espionage. The Chinese domestic political landscape is so interwoven that people can be mobilized at will by the State, unlike in the US, where civil and political rights have been guaranteed by the Constitution and conscription would be politically suicidal for the Government. The Chinese domestic political situation is a far cry from the US system and molded on the needs of the military (Roper,2014).

10. CHINESE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

Chinese construction companies have been awarded construction projects worldwide, especially in the Middle East region without weighing the pros and cons of engaging a construction company with a track record (Anderson, 2011). In some cases, cost aspects have taken precedence over quality and safety matters, thus rendering the project vulnerable to catastrophes (Rabinovich,2011). The cost of engaging a Chinese company is much cheaper than employing a US company. A group of Chinese engineers could share a congested room at a construction site whereas an American or a European engineer would require a fully furnished apartment with frequent travel to and from home base and also additional facilities such as family packages to compensate for working outside the US territory. These factors keep

US and European companies from competing with Chinese companies. This has been so due to societal norms in the US. But to counter rising China, the US. needs a much more holistic approach that would encompass its traditional US allies and India in particular. There has been a foray by the Chinese companies to enter the European market (Dasgupta, 2016). The US. must have a political dialogue with India as India is the only country that can be pitted against China. What the US. should now be doing is empowering India and its people to face the reality before it is too late. It would be difficult for the US. to deal with China given the current social, cultural and political considerations to mount a campaign to withstand rising China in about 20 years' time.

11. THE US PIVOT TO ASIA

The Obama administration first mooted the concept the "US. pivot to Asia" in the wake of rising China in terms of economic and massive investments in the Asia region, display of military power and influence in the region. The US had to redefine its role in Asia. The pivot encompasses a diplomatic, economic, foreign investments and display of military assets and holding naval maneuvers in competition with US Navy (Foreign Policy Initiative). There has been a sustained diplomatic effort that led to the reviving of former US enemies, such as Myanmar and Vietnam. The central thrust behind this move was to resuscitate and reassert the US role as Asian countries move towards regional integration and to project the US as an indispensable nation (Foreign Policy Initiative). The US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Kurt Campbell said in an interview with the Foreign Policy Institute

that "we all have to recognize as a player and a major player, a dominant player, is that every country in Asia wants a better relationship with China. That's just a fact on the ground. So, it's very different than a Cold War environment. And what countries also want is a good relationship with the United States. They want a good relationship with the United States in its own right, but they also believe that a strong, durable, stable reliable relationship with the United States gives them a better ability to deal with the giant in the neighborhood" " (Foreign Policy Initiative). Under Trump administration, US still continues to send war ships to South Pacific as counter to Chinese naval expansion and to send a strong signal to Beijing that it does not recognize the artificial Islands and its territorial ambitions in South Pacific. The Trump foreign policy is still evolving and it is yet to manifest its true impact. The Prime Minister Abe was the first Head of Government to meet President Trump and indicator for strong US – Japan alliance (Dias, 2017).

12. CONCLUSION – WHAT POLICY ALTERNATIVES TO BE CONSIDERED

Japan does not have a strong lobby in Washington DC to check the foreign policy objectives or garner support from the US. Government unlike Israel which has a permanent lobbying organization called American Israel Public Affairs Committee – AIPAC. The lack of progress on Japanese Russian dialogue and access to arctic resources has not been pursued with Russian Government. A strong military contacts with NATO as a front has not yet been exploited. Japan has an ongoing dialogue with NATO over shared values

and currently Japan has partnered with NATO on Cyber defence (Scimia, 2018). Japan does not have a central strategic investment entity where Japan can invest in other countries strategically. Japan should consider investing in strategic ports, port development partnership and airport development as well. China seems to have made inroads into African and Asian countries on the pretext of developing strategic infrastructure such as ports and airports and investment zones.

Missile defense is yet another area Japan must venture into in view of the threats from North Korea and for its defence posture. China would soon acquire hypersonic missiles and Japanese defence research must now focus on missile defence by countering hypersonic anti-missile system with equal speed. The US Government is in a fix on countering hypersonic missiles but US does have the technical competency and wherewithal to come up with an antidote (Sonne, 2018). Ever since Soviet Union collapsed, the US Government relaxed its defence research and underestimated the Russia, and Chinese resolve to undertake further defense research.

13. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Japan should also seek support from Russia as emerging China would one day be a potent threat to Russia as well. One way of garnering support from Russia would be to build an oil pipeline linking Russia to Japan and also by procuring military hardware.

This has some impact on the Japanese US relations hence any such move must have

the sanction from US administration. Alternatively, the US. too could be involved in the exploration and pipeline construction or it could be 100% US private equity participation so that the US policy towards Japan would not be hampered. Japan needs to look afresh on the dispute with Russia over Sakhalin Islands and explore whether any joint exploration of hydro carbon would be possible in an effort to nurture political relations with Russia. There should be coherent public diplomacy efforts by the Government of Japan to garner support from the whole world. Global media plays a vital role in shaping public opinion and Japan is ahead of China over this and must continue the momentum. Public diplomacy is about global perceptions and seeks to promote the national interest and the national security through understanding, informing, and influencing foreign publics and broadening dialogue between American citizens and institutions and their counterparts abroad (USIS definition).

- Japan's strategic influence will have to be explored and exploited by the Japanese Diplomatic Corp overseas just the same way US went about immediately after the 9/11 incident – though the office strategic influence was scrapped thereafter. This is a new phenomenon for Japanese Diplomatic Corp overseas. A paradigm shift in Japanese foreign policy is now needed to counter China. Where there is high Chinese influence, Japan must move in to neutralize Chinese influence through overt and covert diplomatic maneuvers. The Government of Japan should create a Japan Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Agency to monitor Chinese infiltration of

Japanese defence establishment, keeping tabs on Chinese economic espionage on Japanese advanced technologies and domestic propaganda.

- Japan must keep tabs on domestic political activities and on pro-China political affiliations. There could be covert activities to dilute the Abe Administration and might funnel money to elect a government in Japan more pliant to China. There has to be a strong internal defence mechanism to ward off any Chinese influence and infiltration. The Government of Japan should inculcate a sense of patriotism among Japanese population. Introduce a National Security Levy to galvanise patriotic citizens of Japan to collect money for defence budget.

- Japan must build a Coalition against China and keeping the pressure on China to desist from such aggressive behavior. Japan must rope in South Korea, Vietnam, Brunei, and Malaysia, Philippines, Taiwan and rest of the World. Other coalition partners too must make similar diplomatic offensives against China. Japan, US, India must jointly establish a Trilateral Commission/ A Secretariat so that diplomatic channels are ever ready to meet and discuss the joint action. Japan and India must open another front and recent media reports indicate that Japan and India to work on joint exercises with Indian and Japanese forces. Japan must build additional naval assets such as Aircraft carriers to project power beyond Japanese shores. US and Japan must assess the industrial and commercial opportunities in India vis-à-vis competition with Chinese products.

- It would be prudent for Japan to initiate an internationally accepted quality assurance/ quality control regime/ convention so that Chinese products will be required to comply with such international standards and this will enable the signatories to comply with the requirements of the convention with penalties for transgressions.

- Introduce a mechanism whereby Chinese manufacturing could be subjected to international inspection for compliance. Thorough checks and balances on Chinese manufactured products would deter Chinese products being entertained by end users. Japan needs to mobilise her friends all over the world and devise an international convention so that Chinese piracy can be held at bay. US and Japan must forge greater strategic cooperation with Indian defence establishments and on defence research. Japan should explore whether it could participate in the antiballistic missile defence shield. Japan too should actively contribute to advances in antiballistic missile defence.

- Japan must have a lobbying organization along the lines of American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) in Washington DC to check US domestic political opinion and support legislators who are in favor of Japanese policy. This would allow Japan to elect a President who is more in favor of supporting Japan. This approach must be introduced to other coalition partners. The same attitude must be present in countries where incumbent governments are either not aggressive enough or elect a government which would support Japan diplomatically and in militarily in case of an emergency.

Government of Japan must use the entire government machinery in a concerted effort to influence China to abide by the international rules and norms.

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