

Towards a rule based order in the Asia-Pacific:

Mapping Indian and Japanese strategic thinking

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The political leadership of the leading democracies in the Asia-Pacific has been arguing to create a rule based order in the region. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has put forth-rightedly his ideas in his speech at Shangrila Dialogue urging the international community to adhere to “international law” while making their claims or resolving any dispute. Similar statements have been made by various leaders from the US, Germany and India.

The calls from the leaderships of these powers to create a rule based order is based on their assumption that when a new power rises it changes the status quo of the existing order and tries to dominate the region by undermining the existing laws. They have expressed concerns about China’s expansive behavior and assertions in South China Sea and East China Sea.

The research paper in this context has attempted to evaluate the statements and speeches of Japanese and Indian leadership and then tried to assess how the strategic thinkers and the media which help shape public opinion view their calls for forging a new regional architecture. Since the popular debate generated by the media and strategic thinkers help influence the decision making process of the states, the analyses of their debates would help understand what are the converging and diverging points towards creating a new rule based order?

The reactions among the strategic thinkers, both from Indian and Japanese strategic thinkers, are mixed. A section of the Indian strategic thinkers, who help shape Indian public opinion through their writings and in turn influence the decision making, welcome this kind of partnership where the US, Japan and other nations are hedging against China. This kind of argument has been put

forwarded by leading strategic thinkers such as Brahamma Chellaney and C. Rajamohan. But another strand of strategic thinking consisting of Srinath Raghavan and Sidhartha Vardarajan, believe that India, Japan and China are key players in the Asia-Pacific region and without China forming a regional architecture would not be possible. They consider that since the US is an outside power it does not fit in inclusive security architecture of the Asia-Pacific. They believe that both Japan and China are equally important for India.

Similarly, in Indian press including the vernacular Hindi press, various articles and editorials have come to the fore. The study has analysed selected editorials of these media and found that like strategic thinkers media is also divided over the issue of forging a new security architecture, some favouring a hedging of China with the help of Japan and the US as well as other like-minded countries while others are arguing not to stroke insecurity in China by forging the partnership with other countries.

The study finds that the opinion over whether to balance China with the help of other like-minded countries is also divided not only among the Indian strategic thinkers but among the Japanese thinkers as well. While Yoriko Koike and Takeishi Shiraishi and others argue for a strong partnership among democracies in the Asia-Pacific region to check China's dominating tendencies, Yoichi Funabashi, Norio Kondo, Takenori Horimoto and others believe that India and Japan should not pursue the strategy of encirclement of China. Their arguments are in favour of accommodating China in the regional architecture wherever possible. Similarly, the Japanese media is divided in two opposite camps. The analyses of editorials of Yomiuri and Asahi Shimbun suggest that while both favour a closer partnership between India and Japan, the former suggest strong partnership with India to counterbalance China, the later has maintained ambivalence over this issue.

Based on the analyses of the strategic thinking both in India and Japan, the researcher infers that gap remains among them over how to forge a new rule based order in the Asia-Pacific. The divergent perceptions among the strategic thinkers who influences the state's decision making process suggest that it would be difficult for the leadership in those countries to take a clear cut position while formulating their policies to form a rule based order in the region. Interestingly, the researcher found that though both Indian and Japanese leadership have sounded positive to form a rule based order to check China's rise, however, they have not hesitated to embrace China

wherever their national interests converged with Beijing. While Tokyo denounces China's aggressive behavior but when it comes to restraining Pyongyang it has been amenable to the idea that Beijing should play an influential role in six party talks. In addition to this, the need of a new architecture is not only in the field of security but also in the field of economy. While Japan so far finds comfortable with European and US led economic order, India is uncomfortable with this order and rather than allying with Japan, it has gone with China to forge a new alternative economic order. Now, a section of the Japanese thinkers and media is calling the Abe administration to secure its interest by joining China led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). They are of the view that the AIIB is not necessarily a rival to Japan led Asian Development Bank (ADB) rather it can complement the ADB. The paper against this context also suggests the two countries to bridge their perceptions over various global and regional issues and offers few recommendations which will help them to forge a strongly knit rule based order.