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Japan-India Cooperation Facing Challenges from U.S. and China

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The world has entered an unpredictable era with the inauguration of President Donald J. Trump in the United States who advocates “America First.” Trump assured his commitment to the U.S.-Japan alliance at his meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in February 2017, but his readiness to lead the free and democratic world is not assured yet judging from his past ill-advised remarks. If the U.S.-led international order established after World War II is over, the geo-strategic environment in the world including the Indo-Pacific region will be seriously affected.

As the inauguration of the Trump Administration casts uncertainty over the future of the world, Chinese President Xi Jinping aims to achieve the dream of “great revival of the Chinese nation” by 2049, the 100th anniversary of the Peoples’ Republic of China. His intension is to become the strongest nation in Asia that will not be humiliated by foreign powers again.

It is all the more necessary for Japan and India to deepen strategic partnership under this turbulent environment. As the partnership has made substantial progress in recent years, India has become one of the most significant strategic partners after the United States for Japan. The partnership has been expanded so extensively that Japan is now ready to transfer weapons and weapon technology to India and that the two countries present development vision in the Indian Ocean region that can be alternative to China’s “One Belt, One Road” initiative. I will discuss later in this essay if there are bottlenecks for further deepening of Japan-India partnership.

End of U.S.-led world order?

The United States formed a free and open international order after World War II by giving assistance to the postwar reconstruction of Western Europe and Japan and by opening up its market to their products. At the same time the U.S. established a network of military alliances such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and U.S.-Japan security treaty that contained the Soviet Union in Europe and Asia, leading to the eventual demise of the U.S.S.R.

The United States became the sole superpower with the end of the Cold War. The U.S. led the world not only in the security, political and economic fields but also in the education and research, bringing excellent brains in American universities. Putting aside the fairness of the selection, one third of Nobel Prize winners are Americans. American culture represented by Hollywood is worshiped internationally. Emigrants have headed to the U.S., dreaming of a better life, while the U.S. opened its border for them, utilizing their energy for the nation's development.

The world order in which the U.S. stays at the center of every field may come to end with the emergence of the Trump Administration.

The U.S.-lead world order has faced challenges since the days of the Obama Administration. Three challenges came from outside. They are radical Islam terrorism, the rise of China and the resurgence of Russia. Another challenge came from inside. The U.S. has become inward-looking and hesitate to get involved in international conflicts. Trump's "America First" combines populism, anti-globalism, anti-elitism, anti-intellectualism, racism and protectionism as well as the traditional American isolationism. The wave of populism and anti-globalism can also be detected in Europe, but American phenomenon is most worrisome as the U.S. has been the leader of the world.

Trump considers radical Islam as the biggest threat among the three outside challengers. He criticizes the NATO as obsolete, claiming the Atlantic alliance cannot deal with Islam terrorism effectively. He is conciliatory to Russia, thinking of joining hands to defeat the Islamic State or ISIS. He has indicated the sanctions against Russia imposed after the annexation of Crimea could be lifted if an agreement on nuclear arms reduction is reached. Meanwhile Trump looked hardline against China at least till February 9, when he retracted in his telephone conversation with Xi his earlier doubt about being bound by the "One China" principle.

Former U.S. President Barack Obama was also inward-looking. He said "the U.S. is not the world's policeman," explaining the reason why he avoided military attack against the Syrian regime led by President Bashar al-Assad after it became clear the Syrian government forces used chemical weapons during the civil war in 2013年. Trump has used the same expression. But the difference between Trump and Obama is that Trump did not seem to place much significance on traditional alliances. During the campaign

Trump indicated the U.S. might not protect European NATO allies who spend less than 2% of GDP in defense.

He also warned Japan and South Korea that he might withdraw U.S. troops if these two Asian allies don't bear full cost of American troops stationing in their countries. He said he wouldn't care if Japan and South Korea go nuclear due to the decline of U.S. security commitment. He was ambiguous if the U.S. military come to assist Japan when the Senkaku Islands under Japan's administration in the East China Sea are attacked by China. He seems to have retracted all these positions at his meeting with Abe at the White House in February, declaring his commitment to the U.S.-Japan alliance, but nobody knows if he fully understood the importance of the alliance.

Trump's unpredictability can also be applied to his policy toward China. He now says he honors "One China" principle. The annexation of Crimea by Russia was an action to forcibly change international borders drawn after WWII. If Trump accepts the Russian action depending on a deal, he may also accept Chinese unlawful unilateral actions in the South China Sea or any other places depending on a deal.

India has long been alarmed by a possible U.S.-China deal in disregard of other countries' interests. We have to be alarmed that the possibility of the Trump Administration making a deal with China is higher than any previous U.S. administrations as it is doubtful if Trump has steady strategy toward China. A former U.S. senior government official told an India-Japan-U.S. trilateral track-2 dialogue organized by the Vivekananda International Foundation in New Delhi in February that Trump's appointment of Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson as well as the invitation to Mr. Abe to visit Washington are "strong signs" that President Trump is heading in the "right direction." I am not very sure about it yet.

Most cabinet members of the Trump Administration including Secretaries Mattis and Tillerson are internationalists who understand the importance of alliances and the necessity of American leadership in the world. I hope Trump listen to these internationalists rather than an inner circle of parochial "America first" advocates such as White House Chief Strategist Stephen Bannon.

I have explained so far concerns about the new Trump Administration from the standpoint of a U.S. ally. India may have different notions. A long-term friend of Russia,

India did not join sanctions against Russia unlike Japan. Mr. Trump's pro-Russia and anti-China stance may fit well with India's basic foreign policy. A welcome strategic environment for India may have come with the inauguration of the Trump Administration.

That Trump is too conciliatory to Russia is a matter of concern for Japan as it still have unresolved territorial dispute with Russia. There was no progress on the territorial issue at the Japan-Russia summit last December, when Prime Minister Abe invited Russian President Vladimir Putin to his home town in western Japan. Putin may have judged that there was no need to concede to Japan now that the international situation had become favorable to Russia with the election of pro-Russia Donald Trump in November. Abe agreed to start discussion about joint economic activities on the four disputed islands as an incentive to make progress on the territorial issue, but did not make a promise to carry out the joint activities themselves.

That Trump is harsh on China is a good thing for Japan, too. But I doubt if Trump has solid strategy toward China as I already mentioned. The doubt occurs as Trump officially declared to withdraw from the Trans-Pacific Partnership free trade agreement. The TPP not only would have become a powerful driving force for the revitalization of Japanese economy but also would have had a strategic meaning to build a free and open Asia-Pacific economic order led by the U.S. and Japan to check Chinese expansion of economic and political influence. If the TPP cannot become effective because of the American boycott, the vacuum may pave the way for a more restrictive Chinese-led trade order called RCEP or Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.

In any case, the change of international environment to be brought by the Trump Administration will become an important topic to be discussed by Japan and India as global partners.

China's efforts to remove U.S. from Asia

Meanwhile, China is heading steadily for the creation of a new order in Asia free from American influence.

(1) A2/AD capabilities

The Chinese People's Liberation Army is continuing to build up Anti-Access/Area

Defense capabilities that can prevent the U.S. military from entering inside the so-called first island chain and from operating freely between the first and the second island chains during armed conflicts involving Taiwan or in the South and East China Seas.

They have already deployed short-range ballistic missiles (DF-16s) that can attack U.S. bases on Okinawa from the opposite shore of Taiwan, medium-range ballistic missiles (DF-21Cs) that can target mainland Japan and anti-ship ballistic missiles (DF-21Ds) that can attack U.S. aircraft carriers entering inside the first island chain. China unveiled at a military parade in September, 2015, DF-26s targeting Guam on the second island chain that might be used either as longer range anti-ship or intermediate-range ballistic missiles.

The PLA Navy has been focusing on beefing up submarine forces whose main target is U.S. surface ships including carriers. The fourth generation fighters in the PLA Air Force increased to 810 in 2016, whereas Japan's fourth-generation fighters are only about 300. Even if fourth generation fighters of the U.S. Air Force in Japan and the U.S. 7th fleet are counted, the number is still about 500.

(2) South china Sea

China has completed the reclamation of seven reefs of the Spratly Islands by 2015. They reclaimed approximately 13 square kilometers of land, equivalent to 1,800 soccer fields. 3,000-meter long runways have been completed on the three largest artificial islands --- Fiery Cross, Subi and Mischief --- that are long enough to be used by any type of military planes. Radar facilities have been set up on the remaining four artificial islands, enhancing surveillance and response capabilities. China has deployed anti-aircraft guns and probable anti-cruise missile defense systems on all these seven artificial islands to protect ground-based facilities against air attacks. China has reportedly nearly completed structures intended to house surface-to-air missile systems on the three largest artificial islands. It has already deployed HQ-9 SAM systems on Woody Island of the Paracel Islands.

(3) East China Sea

China declared the creation of an Air Defense Identification Zone in the East China Sea in November 2013, overlapping partly with Japan's ADIZ, warning that Chinese military will take "defensive emergency measures" to respond to aircraft flying in the

Chinese zone that refuse to follow their instructions.

The intrusion by the China Coast Guard ships into Japan's territorial water around the Senkakus has become routine after the nationalization of the islands by Japan in September 2012. The number of intruding ships had been relatively stable and less than 10 per month after January 2014, but as many as 23 ships entered the territorial water in August 2016, escalating provocation. China has been introducing larger ships into the Coast Guard some of which are modified warships.

The number of scrambles by Japan Air Self-Defense Force in FY 2016 reached more than 1000, surpassing the level of Cold War years. Over 70% of scrambles were against Chinese planes.

China unilaterally built 12 new maritime structures to accelerate the development of natural gas between 2013 and 2015 in the East China Sea, totaling 16 structures. This is against the agreement of avoiding unilateral development pending maritime boundary delimitation between Japan and China. And what is worse, these structures can be diverted to military use. The Japanese government confirmed in August, 2016, that surface radar equipment was set up on one of the structures.

(4) Regional economic development, finance and trade initiatives

China is also eager to create new economic order. President Xi launched "One Belt, One Road" initiative in 2013 under which China would take a lead in developing a "Silk Road Economic Belt" and a "21st Century Maritime Silk Road" to strengthen economic and trade relations with regional countries.

The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank was established at the end of 2015 under the Chinese leadership. Its main purpose will be to serve as one of the pillars that financially support "One Belt, One Road." China took a 30% stake in the AIIB, and the head office was established in Beijing. It was set up when the U.S. and Japan-led Asian Development Bank was unable to meet Asian financial demand because of strict screening standard. AIIB has 57 original members. The U.S. and Japan have declined to join.

As the early entry into force of the TPP cannot be expected due to the U.S. withdrawal, regional interest in the RCEP or Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership has

increased. ASEAN 10 plus six Indo-Pacific countries including Japan and India have been negotiating the RCEP while the U.S. is not among the participants. China is promoting the RCEP as it is excluded from the TPP that was signed by Japan, the U.S. and ten other trans-Pacific nations. In comparison to the TPP, the RCEP features insufficient elimination of tariffs, insufficient restriction on state-owned companies, and insufficient protection of intellectual property rights.

(5) Regional security framework

President Xi even proposed the establishment of a regional security framework excluding the U.S. when he spoke at the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) held in Shanghai in May 2014. He challenged U.S.-led alliance system in Asia, saying, “to beef up and entrench a military alliance targeted at a third party is not conducive to maintaining common security.” He then called for the creation of a regional security system excluding the U.S., saying, “It is for the people of Asia to run the affairs of Asia, solve the problems of Asia and uphold the security of Asia.”

Japan-India strategic cooperation, now and future

The Japan-India strategic cooperation has made remarkable progress as the prime ministers hold annual meetings by visiting alternately each other’s capital.

In the military field, Japan has now become a regular participant in the joint India-U.S. Malabar naval exercises. Following the policy change by the Abe government to make overseas transfer of Japan’s weapons and weapon technology possible, Japan and India has concluded an agreement to control unintended use and transfer to a third country of Japanese weapons and weapon technology provided to India. The agreement has paved the way for the export to India and the coproduction in India of Japanese search-and-rescue seaplane US-2s.

The agreement on the US-2s could not be finalized by the time of Prime Minister Modi’s visit to Japan in November. The biggest stumbling block, as far as I know, was the high price of about \$140m per plane. As the Japanese government is still eager to provide US-2s to India, the planes may be leased if the sale proved difficult.

The cooperation between Japan and India in the field of weapons and weapon

technology can be expanded beyond US-2s pending discussion between the defense ministries. India reportedly showed interest a few years ago in joint production of Japan's Soryu-class diesel-electric submarines. But Japanese defense officials say no specific request has been made by India so far and they are not sure if India has demand for Soryu-class submarines as it already has Kilo-class submarines obtained from Russia.

Japan-India strategic cooperation has expanded into economic field in recent years. Messrs. Abe and Modi agreed at their meeting in November that the two countries should collaborate for the economic and social development of the Indo-Pacific region and Africa, combining their technologies and resources under the common values of freedom, democracy and the rule of law in order to achieve prosperity and stability in the entire region.

Specifically the prime ministers included in the joint statement their intention to work together for the development of the infrastructure in the Iranian port city of Chabahar. Chabahar locates only 70 kilometers from Pakistan's Gwadar, the port facility of which has been developed by China as part of the "String of Pearls" strategy under which China has been constructing port facilities in the region surrounding India. Gwadar should also become an important part of the "One Belt, One Road" initiative. In other words, what Messrs. Abe and Modi are proposing is an ambitious strategic economic cooperation initiative that combines Modi's "Act East" policy and Abe's "free and Open Indo-Pacific" strategy, offering alternative to China's "One Belt, One Road."

The United States has a similar vision to encourage economic integration of South Asia with Southeast Asia, called "Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor." The connectivity of the Indo-Pacific region will be increased if the U.S. promote this vision.

But the inauguration of the Trump Administration offers uncertainty to the future of regional economic cooperation. While the lifting of sanctions against Iran is prerequisite for helping port facility development, the Trump Administration is critical of Iran and may impose new sanctions, casting dark clouds over the joint Japan-India development plan of Chabahar.

Prime ministers Abe and Modi exchanged views during Modi's stay in Japan in November what else the two countries can do in the Indo-Pacific region for the combined

economic cooperation initiative. There may be a possibility to work together for the improvement of port facilities in Sri Lanka in which Japan and India have been engaged separately. In Sri Lanka, China has helped to construct port facility in Hambantota as part of the “String of Pearls” strategy. If the cooperation between Japan and India in Sri Lanka becomes a reality, the two partners would create a new foothold in the region to counter Chinese ambition.

There may be some bottlenecks for further deepening Japan-India partnership. One possible bottleneck is a perception gap between Japan and India about Russia. In this regard, however, Professor Brahma Chellaney of Center for Policy Research in New Delhi has told me recently that India is not pro-Russia any more but “neutral,” dismissing the perception gap as a thing of the past.

Another bottleneck can be apparent reluctance on the part of India to join activities that might be seen as a coalition against China. Some Japanese officials suspect the reluctance may be behind India’s unwillingness to take up the idea of quadrilateral Japan-U.S.-India-Australia security cooperation and behind India’s insistence to downgrade bilateral “2+2” security dialogue from cabinet-minister level to subcabinet level. But senior Indian government officials argue it is not India but Australia that hesitates to form the quadrilateral framework, citing the Australian withdrawal from the framework in 2008. The Indian officials also say India made a counterproposal of subcabinet “2+2” not because it considered Chinese reaction but because vice ministers suit better than cabinet ministers for substantial discussions and it may be difficult for Japanese foreign and defense ministers to visit abroad during parliamentary Diet sessions.

Japan-India strategic cooperation should expand further if there are no bottlenecks cited above or other major stumbling blocks.

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