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By Dr Subhash Kapila

China's shadows hovered ominously over the Japan-India Summit 2018 even though not explicitly mentioned by name as Japanese PM Shinzo Abe and Indian PM Narendra Modi confabulated at Tokyo on October 29 2018 for their annual dialogue. This is borne out by the contents of the Joint Japan-India Vision Statement 2018 and the summations enshrined.

China's switch from priority of 'Soft Power' to use of 'Hard Power' notably visible after current Chinese President assumed power in 2012 raising security concerns in Asia. China put the world at notice with its enunciation of its Maritime Strategy which aimed at not only domination of the Western Pacific but also 'distant seas'. It sought to challenge United States primacy which so far provided security in the Asia Pacific. As China's ambitions and reach extended to Indian Ocean the term Indo Pacific came into strategic use. Consequently, it was thus natural for Japan and India to draw into a Special Strategic and Global Partnership.

At the outset what one would like to stress is that Japan has a demonstrated record of being an enduring ally once it makes commitments for a strategic partnership as evident by its enduring commitment to the US-Japan Mutual Security Treaty both in words, deeds and financing. India can similarly hope for such an enduring Strategic Partnership with Japan provided there is no hedging and succumbing to Chinese sensitivities. Strategic Partnerships as I have always maintained in my writings are not 'platonic relationships'. Strategic Partnerships involve a comprehensive embrace of joint endeavours to cater for convergent threat perceptions.

In the coming years both Japan and India should envisage and work in the direction of the eventuality that the United States for whatever reason lessens its commitments to Indo Pacific security, and therefore Japan and India would have to jointly shoulder the load of security providers along with a coalition of Asian nations like Vietnam and Indonesia---a subject touched upon in my writings of earlier years.

The Japan-India Special Strategic and Global Partnership Agreements forms the bedrock of the evolving Japan-India Partnership and which each passing year witnesses adding more substance especially in terms of security and military cooperation. Japan and India have set up multiple mechanisms for discussion and dialogue at Ministerial and Officials levels

This Summit's notable outcomes include the commencement of 2+2 Ministerial Dialogues of the Foreign Ministers and Defence Ministers, commencement of negotiations for conclusion of "Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA), deeper cooperation and joint exercises of the Japanese Navy and Indian Navy, Establishment of Japan-India Space Dialogue and greater exchanges between all three Services of both Japan and India..

Japan and India's greater emphasis on naval cooperation need to be understood in light of Chan's maritime ambitions of establishing 'Full Spectrum Dominance' of the South China Sea and similar intrusive Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean. ACSA when concluded would facilitate Japanese Navy and Indian Navy to extend their naval reach in the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean.

Greater military to military exchanges between the two Armies and the Air Forces is also on the cards. This would lead to a better appreciation of each other's military doctrines and operational techniques.

Besides the security-centric discussions Japan and India also are cooperating widely in the economic fields. Of particular interest this year is Japan's increased commitment to the economic development of India's North East and its connectivity to Bangladesh, Myanmar and ASEAN region. This has security connotations of advantage for India. That Japan should commit itself to contribute towards development of infrastructure and connectivity in India's North East which includes Arunachal Pradesh claimed by China as Southern Tibet, is significant.

Economically, more significant was the 'Currency Swap Deal' of US Dollars 75 Billion which would facilitate both nations to conserve their dollars reserves by use of respective currencies. This would especially help India to tide over the current currency outflows.

Gratifying for India were the references in the Joint Vision Statement which called upon Pakistan to bring to justice the perpetrators of Mumbai 26/11 and the Pathankot January 2016 terrorist strikes. Call was also made on strengthening cooperation against terrorist groups like the Al Qaeda, ISIS, Jaish-e-Mohammad and Lashkar-e-Tayyeba. This would not only discomfit Pakistan but also China which has been repeatedly shielding the UN naming of such terrorists as Global Terrorists.

The point that needs highlighting and was stressed by Indian PM Modi also is that the Japan-India relationship is a vibrant relationship with

no divisive issues or perspectives. This relationship has the potential to emerge as the most vibrant and durable Strategic Relationship with shared strategic concerns.

With such significant moves and deep dialogue mechanisms centred on regional and global security there has to be a context and a strategic rationale. The context and rationale is China with which both Japan and India have territorial disputes, military confrontation in disputed areas and also security concerns posed to their national security by China-equipped nuclear weapons proxies---North Korea in the Japanese context and Pakistan in the Indian context.

The succeeding paragraphs attempt to highlight how and why China figures so markedly in Japan and India's strategic calculations as an 'Existential Threat' to their respective national security interest.

While India continues to engage China politically and economically and China reached out to Japan facilitating a Japanese Prime Ministerial visit after seven years gap indicating slight changes in Chinese policy, the same cannot underscore the apparent convergent Japanese and Indian concerns of an existential 'China Threat' rightly perceived by them.

The existential 'China Threat' perceptions perceived in Tokyo and New Delhi basically arise from China's demonstrated propensity to impose its will either by political and military coercion or by limited armed conflict as evident in the East China Sea against Japan and stoking military standoffs on India's Himalayan Borders with China Occupied Tibet.

China further displays propensities of being not amenable to any peaceful conflict resolution processes or respect for international diplomatic norms. On South China Sea disputes, China is not even ready to talk about it leave alone conflict resolution processes. The India-China border dispute has been festering for decades now without any headway. This arises because of Chinese intransigence.

In the wider Indo Pacific geopolitical context the Japan-India Summit 2018 assumes added significance as Japan and India as the pivots of Asian security move that much more closely to add substance to their Special Strategic and Global Partnership impelled by convergent concerns on China.

India has moved far ahead in its strategic relations with Japan when compared with the middle of the last decade when India's then Defence Minister (later President) Pranab Mukherjee asserted on the doorsteps of Japan Defence Agency that India did not consider China as a threat. In 2018, China's threat profile against India has assumed menacing contours as witnessed in Doklam Standoff 2017.

Japan too has moved far ahead in 2018 as it enhances its security and military profile indicating that it is now ready to assume greater security roles in maintenance of Indo Pacific security. China's recent years at political and military coercion of Japan over the Senkaku Islands and not restraining North Korea's nuclear weaponisation are well publicised.

Geopolitically, the Indo Pacific has churned considerably in 2018 preceding the present Japan-India Summit. United States which is the mainstay of Indo Pacific security template partnering with Japan and India has entered a phase of increasing confrontation with China over trade and security issues. US-China trade wars have intensified considerably which in tandem generate security flashpoints between the two mighty nations all over Indo Pacific.

China's strategic ally Russia is preoccupied with its own furthering of Russian interests in the Middle East and nearer home like the Ukraine. Russia does not seem to be focussing on the Indo Pacific and therefore not much of a help to China.

United States is also applying the screws on China's 'Natural Allies' in the Indo Pacific, namely, North Korea and Pakistan which raise security concerns for China. Overall, China seems to be getting isolated in the Indo Pacific as was perceived and reflected in my SAAG Papers a year or so ago.

China therefore saw a window of opportunity to reach out to India and Japan as they seemed to be also coming under strong criticism by US President Trump on trade issues. The Indian PM Modi has been to Beijing and the Japanese PM Abe returned from China only a day prior to PM Modi's arrival in Tokyo for the Summit.

While both Japan and India have both responded to China's reachout in diplomatic terms but that has not lessened the China-Threat-centric concerns which both nations perceive. This is evident from some of the major points of concern stressed in the Joint Japan-India Vision Statement 2018.

The points in this direction that stand reflected in the Joint Vision Statement 2018 are (1) Stand for rule-based order, sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations (2) Peaceful resolution of disputes without threat to use force (3) Full respect for legal and diplomatic processes in accordance with universally recognised principles of international law and conventions including UNCLOS (4) Ensuring freedom of navigation and overflight as well as unimpeded lawful commerce.

China obviously seems to be the target of all these summations undoubtedly. China's lack of positive approaches to conflict resolution on conflictual issues like the South China Sea invites such references.

In terms of China's nuclear weapons proxies which acquired their disruptive potential- courtesy of China's nuclear weapons expertise, China again stands out in not restraining North Korea and Pakistan. China dilly-dallied in relation to the Six Party Dialogue for denuclearisation of

North Korea. In case of Pakistan, that virtual 'Terrorist Nation' stands encouraged by China's vetoes in the United Nations to shield Pakistani Islamic Jihadi terrorist leaders as designated 'global terrorists'.

Geopolitically, peeking into the future, it seems that Japan and India are destined to reinforce their Strategic Partnership with added substantial security contours so that they ensure Indo Pacific security by virtues of being democratic responsible stakeholders and nett providers of security in the wide expanse encompassing the Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean and the continental landmass of Southern Asia.

In Conclusion, it needs to be stressed that geopolitically no other Strategic Partnerships figure on the Asian horizon which could provide existential counterweights to China's dominating military rise. If nothing else, a strong and vibrant Japan-India Special Strategic and Global Partnership would provide a robust deterrence in the Pacific and Indian Oceans to China's unbridled military romping.

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