

South Asia Analysis Group

Published on *South Asia Analysis Group* (<http://www.southasiaanalysis.org>)

[Home](#) > Russia's Japan Policy on wrong side of Geo Political Realities:

Russia's Japan Policy on wrong side of Geo Political Realities:

Submitted by asiaadmin2 on Tue, 01/22/2019 - 13:00

Paper No. 6483

Dated 22-Jan-2019

By Dr Subhash Kapila

Russia seems in 2019 to have got its geopolitical realities wrong going by the condescending and arrogant statements of Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov made at an annual conference directed at Japan on the controversial issue of Japan's claims on Russia to restore the Northern Islands which Russia had captured after Germany's defeat in Europe in 1945 invoking Japan's defeat subsequently.

Contemporaneous and potential geopolitical developments globally and specifically in Indo Pacific Region do not permit Russia to adopt condescending imperial postures towards Japan. Japan is today an Evolved Major Power in its own right and on its own geopolitical and economic strength. Russia drawing World War II equivalences as statements below are flawed and out of place.

The insensitive statements made regarding Japan by Russian Foreign Minister coming days before Japanese P Abe's Moscow visit sends out two signals. First, that Russia is not serious about transforming its relationship with Japan. Secondly, it could also be a ploy to put Japan under pressure before the Putin-Abe Summit for multiple reasons. Russia seems to be hoping that Japan is presently under pressure arising from US President Trump's uncertain policy directions on Asia Pacific security and also under pressure of US trade policies could possibly lessen Japan's fixation on the Northern Islands issue and lead it to compromises.

To get a full import of Russia's underlying approaches towards Japan in 2019 it is necessary to quote verbatim some of the more significant but controversial statements made by Foreign Minister Lavrov recently. Russia seems to be complaining about Japan's foreign policy directions by first asserting that "We are still far not only from being partners in international relations but also in finding constructive ways to make our relations better." Further, implying that Japan was virtually opposed to Russia in international relations but also in finding constructive ways to make our interests, Minister Lavrov complained that "Japan was not with us but against us in all Resolutions that interest Russia in the United Nations."

The most insensitive remark by the Russian Foreign Minister was "Why Japan is the only country in the world that cannot accept the results of World War II in their entirety?"

Intriguingly for all foreign observers like this analyst the tone and tenor of Russian Foreign Minister on Japan's policy attitudes is far from the truth. Japan has consistently striven for political reachout to Russia not only for better Russo-Japan relations but also in the hope that Russia would not add its weight to China's strategic objectives against Japan over the Senkaku Islands dispute.

The Russian Foreign Minister then demanded that Japan should recognise Russian sovereignty over Kurile Islands for Russian talks to continue on ending World War II hostilities. It needs to be recalled that the Former Soviet Union had refused to sign the Peace Treaty with Japan at San Francisco along with other nations as it objected to the non-inclusion of a reference to Soviets sovereignty over the Northern Islands.

Contextual geopolitical realities have moved far ahead in 2019 where Russia has yet to emerge as an 'Independent Power Centre' globally aspired by Russian President and Japan is no longer the defeated nation of 1945 subjected to "Victors Justice" of war booty as the Northern Islands taken over by Russia falls into that category.

Japan along with India are the pillars of Asian security and respected in Asian capitals as responsible stakeholders in Asian security. In 2019 Japan and India are widely credited with being as 'Emerging Powers' in the global strategic calculus. Surely then, Russia cannot trifle around with Japan condescendingly as a defeated nation of 1945.

Russia in recent times has horribly gone wrong in adopting China-centric foreign policy formulations as part of the Russia-China Strategic Nexus rather than following balanced foreign policy postures which do not position Russia on the wrong side of geopolitical realities prevailing in the wider Indo Pacific Asia,. Perceptually, Russia is widely perceived as a mere camp-follower of China because of its China-centric priorities.

What is one witnessing in the Indo Pacific Region is Russia and China being geopolitically and strategically balanced existentially by the

cooperative combined geopolitical weight of the United States, Japan, India and Australia. With China being increasingly viewed in Indo Pacific capitals as a 'China Threat' persistently attempting to churn up security and stability in Asia, resultantly, Russia is also being type-casted as complicit in China's hegemonistic blueprint of the 'Great China Dream'.

Russia's over-dependence on China and aligning Russia with China's geopolitical end-game is widely attributed not to any ideological affinities or convergent long-term strategic objectives but to short term politically expedient transactional gains. The longevity of the Russia-China Strategic Nexus can therefore be termed as not one of long duration.

Russia also has to squarely face the contingencies stated above which gets further accentuated by Russia's misgivings on China's unconcealed covetous eyes on Russian Far East Provinces. These areas have already witnessed large scale illegal Chinese immigrants flooding Russian territories with some alleging that this is taking place with the tacit concurrence of the Chinese Government.

Also undeniable is the fact that Russian and Chinese national ambitions have clashing trajectories presently papered over by Russia as Russia sees no hope of the United States resetting its policy formulations on Russia.

Adding all of the above to the historical facts that Russia and China have been involved in armed clashes on the erstwhile territorial disputes and China's 'Swing Strategy' oscillating between Russia and the United States at various stages in the past makes China as an uncertain strategic partner of long standing.

Russia in light of the above brief analysis should be guided by strong imperatives to hedge its bets on China in preference for Japan. Russia would be unrealistic in expecting that Japan would give up its valued Alliance with the United States or dispense with US Forward Military Presence in Japan. While during the Cold War this was catering for Japanese security against the Soviet Threat currently in view of the more potent China Threat emerging in Western Pacific it is more than imperative for Japan to not only to maintain its security linkages with the United States but also to reinforce them.

Russia needs to appreciate that even within the framework of Japan's security arrangements with the United States, it has been the constant visible effort of Japan to strive for better relations with Russia both diplomatically and economically. Russia seems to be oblivious to the reality that in long term perspectives, Japan could contribute more to economic development of the sluggish Russian economy.

Russia also needs to recognise that the existence of the Russo-China Strategic Nexus can be analytically said to be the main stimulus for not only the arms race in Indo Pacific Asia but also impelling Japan in beefing up its military profile and military preparedness.

One would go that far as to assert that should Russia persist in its China-centric strategic priorities at the cost of not fostering regional security and stability and not adopt confidence-building measures to induce confidence in Japan's policy establishment that Russia would

also act as a counterweight to China's aggressive brinkmanship, dangers exist that Japan could be pushed towards acquisition of nuclear weapons, however distasteful the option may be for the Japanese public.

In 2019, there is another strong factor that should impel Russia to adopt reconciliatory approaches towards Japan as presently Japan is no longer alone in terms of meeting China's disruptive challenges to Indo Pacific security and stability. Japan has evolved strong security ties with India as the other Evolved Major Power with both sharing strong strategic convergences on the potential China Threat faced enveloping Asia.

Russia today is geopolitically on the wrong side of not only Japan but also of India arising from its obsessive attachment to the Russia-China Strategic Nexus which distorts Russian policy perspectives both in the Pacific Ocean Region and also in the Indian Ocean Region, characterised by its tilt in South Asia towards Pakistan at the expense of India to please China.

Concluding, the foregoing analysis should amply illustrate that Russia's policy approaches towards Japan are seriously flawed and on the wrong side of prevailing and potential Indo Pacific geopolitical realities. Russia is in no position to adopt imperial condescension towards Japan based on World War II outcomes. Russia must squarely face the serious question whether in 2019 and the decades to follow whether Japan needs Russia more or Russia needs Japan more?

Tags:

[japan](#) [1]

[Russia](#) [2]

Category:

[Papers](#) [3]

Countries:

[Russia](#) [4]

[Japan](#) [5]

Topics:

[Strategic Affairs & Security](#) [6]

Copyright ©2012. All Rights are Reserved.

Source URL: <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/node/2406>

Links

[1] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/11>

[2] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/275>

[3] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/papers>

[4] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/russia>

[5] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/japan>

[6] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/strategic-affairs-and-security>