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The Indo-Japanese Growing Bonds

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Japan now totally pulls India's lines on geo-strategic matters and commercial interests in the Asia-Pacific region. The two nations are too close now giving a common response to several issues from the South China Sea to South Asia. The 12th annual summit dialogue between India and Japan was held on 13-14 September when Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe toured New Delhi, Ahmedabad, and Gandhinagar. Abe is the only Japanese Prime Minister who visited India four times. Earlier, he visited India in December 2015, January 2014, and August 2007. Abe is an admirer of India and he wrote a book titled *Towards A Beautiful Country* in which he called for enforcing a strong strategic partnership with India.

The growing Indo-Japanese relationship is in fact countering the Sino-Pakistani moves and the collaboration taking place with Russia – a new geostrategic alliance and partnership in the global context. Together India and Japan formed a GDP of US\$ 7.1 trillion, which is far below than China's GDP of over US\$ 11.2 trillion and if Russia's GDP of US\$ 1.2 is added, the India-Japan GDP strength is just half that.

The economic clout of China is thus unable to meet for them but they would be keep influencing the geostrategic environment of South Asia as Japan virtually has no way except to influence the region with Indian support and calling for the Indo-Pacific region with crucial importance given to India to encircle China and Pakistan and their rising influence.

Pakistan by no default is obstructing Japanese moves in South Asia. However, Japan's own tilt toward India and siding with it on crucial disputes against Pakistan, has diverted the bell against Japan's interests in Pakistan. Today, both Japan and Pakistan live apart and follow a divergent path of interests in the region and in global issues especially terrorism and economic interest. Japan's influencing is flagging day by day in Pakistan.

Japan has its own historical disputes with China but it takes Pakistan also accountable for Chinese moves toward South Asia. Therefore, Japan's is also unconsciously towing Indian interests in the region. This is the Sino-Japanese new "Cold War" toward South Asia and the Asia-Pacific – BRI versus the Indo-Pacific rise.

The Indo-Japanese strategic cooperation and commercial ties will thus further consolidate in coming years. They virtually became "natural partners" against the tide set up by the China-Pakistan collaboration under the economic corridor and all other five economic corridors being designed by China for regional connectivity, which both India and China are repudiating.

Countering China, Japan would keep pouring money into the Indian market for seeking enhanced influence in South Asia. The Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Japanese counterpart Shinzo Abe have signed fifteen agreements at New Delhi. The Mumbai-Ahmedabad bullet train worth US\$ 17 billion, to be rollout by 2023, is the first manifestation to counter the Gwadar-Kashgar economic corridor and all other projects. India and Japan ram up many projects to alleviate their existing economic ties to new heights.

Their strategic and political tone was in fact anti-Pakistani as they signed the Joint Statement. They mentioned the Mumbai attacks, North Korean nuclear program, terrorism etc and indirectly accused Pakistan in all such baseless allegations. Japan needed to be kept away from the complicated Indo-Pakistan disputes but unfortunately it has sided with India, damaging its long neutrality toward South Asian crises and friendly ties with Pakistan. Japan also needs to take into account other South Asian countries while consolidating ties with India. A one-sided approach is detrimental.

The Indo-Japanese Joint Statement has been accusing Pakistan for terrorism in South Asia, which reflects a change in Japanese disposition toward Pakistan in recent years. India and Japan also agreed to strengthen cooperation against terror groups like Al-Qaeda and Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Tayyaba, and most importantly, named Pakistan, in the Joint Statement saying: "The two Prime Ministers also called for Pakistan to bring to justice the perpetrators of terrorist attacks, including those of the November 2008 terrorist attack in Mumbai and the 2016 terrorist attack in Pathankot."

Erstwhile, Japan eschewed from this complex phenomenon of terrorism in South Asia and passed neutral remarks. This is a change to be understood by Pakistani policy-makers. For Japan, its support to India against terrorism and accusation against Pakistan for the so-called harboring of terrorists groups is in line with Washington's new policy against Pakistan. The new Japanese policy has greater

chances to be backed fire and may create scrapes and fixes for its interests in the future.

Both Modi and Abe criticized the Belt and Road Initiatives and especially the CPEC and called upon for an open, transparent, and non-exclusive manners and called for respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity – again an unfounded criticism against CPEC and BRI. This also means that Japan has joined the anti-CPEC move along with India and this has been decided at the Prime Minister level without consulting those Japanese corporations that were willing to participate at the CPEC projects to expand business under regional connectivity.

Their business chances have been trimmed by Abe in India at the highest level and Japanese policy has become more controversial for South Asia with Abe totally ignoring to open a dialogue with Pakistan and by not visiting the country. The Pakistani-Japanese issues are in limbo, which need to be iron out and fixed.

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