



## **Indian Ocean in India's Foreign Policy and China**

**Speaker:** Prof. Takenori Horimoto

**Chair:** Prof. Alka Acharya, Director, Institute of Chinese Studies

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Prof. Takenori Horimoto's presentation dwelt on the primacy of the Indian Ocean in India's Foreign Policy and the relationship dynamics among US, China, and Japan. Below is a summary of the main points made during the presentation. In the first part of his presentation, he elaborated upon the ongoing power transition in Asia. After the end of the Cold War, and particularly in the 2010s, US influence in Asia has undergone a relative decline. There has been a simultaneous rise of India and China in terms of national economy and defense. While US is still the only global superpower, China and India are both chasing the title, albeit a few successive laps behind each other. The primary challenge ahead of US, India, and other countries is how to cope with the rise of China.

There is ongoing Great Game from Land to Sea, with the Western Pacific Ocean as the main theatre and the Indian Ocean to a lesser extent. The US has rebalanced its pivot to Asia and the Trans-Pacific Partnership. India has shifted from a passive Look East to an active Act East policy under the new regime. Japan has been increasingly engaging in proactive pacifism. On the other hand, China has adopted a number of aggressive policies as well as 'String of Pearls', Maritime Silk Road, its territorial claims, and the establishment of Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank. Other Asian countries have largely maintained an ambivalent stance towards these developments.

The approach towards Indo-Pacific can be divided into two phases. The first phase was the 'Quad Approach' during the 2000s when Japan, US, Australia and India conducted joint naval training sessions. The second phase was the Post-Quad development which was marked by the retirement of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (2007), Australian Prime Minister John Howard (2007), and US President George Bush Jr. (2010). China's protests against the Quad Approach were also a contributing factor. In this phase, hedging moved at bilateral level. India and US signed a Framework Agreement on Defense in 2005, MoU on Defense Cooperation was signed in 2006, Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation between India

and Japan was signed in 2008, and a similar Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation between India and Australia was signed in 2009. These developments together signal the emergence of a new security order in the region. As such, the biggest challenge ahead of the US policymakers is developing a cooperative relationship with China while not undermining its close alliance with Japan.

In the second part of his presentation, Prof. Horimoto spoke about the Indian Ocean and the stakeholder countries. The Indian Ocean has significant implications in terms of sea lines of communication (SLOC), energy, security, and natural resources. Presently, there remains relative regional stability and fierce activities as seen in the Western Pacific, are yet to emerge. The US is still the basic security guarantor in the region and Indian and Chinese activities are still in their nascent stages.

China has heightened its interests in the Indian Ocean in the recent decades. China no longer sees the Indian Ocean as “an ocean only of the Indians” (*Asia Times*, January 2004) and asserts that India alone is not capable of handling security in the region “even if it regards the IO as its backyard and wishes no one to compete with it” (*China Blue Book* 2013). The speaker expects a gradual paradigm shift to occur in the Indian Ocean with the establishment of China’s naval base at Djibouti. The Chinese military presence would serve the purpose of protecting and securing China’s trade and economic development in the Indian Ocean and Africa.

Among the other prominent stakeholders, Japan has strengthened cooperation with the US and India as well as started sale of weaponry to India and other countries. It has conducted naval exercises with the US, India, and Australia and also established a naval base in Djibouti in 2011. The shift in the US’ Indo-Pacific policy prompted Australia to restock its naval capabilities with a new aircraft carrier and submarines. Indonesian President Joko Widodo has also shown a keener interest in boosting Indonesia’s naval strength. India has also gradually been building its navy with an expected 10 per cent increase in its naval fleet between 2012 and 2020. However, it sees greater threat at its two land borders (adjoining Pakistan and China) in comparison to the Indian Ocean. As a response to China’s support to the Pakistan navy, Prime Minister Modi has been engaging with countries such as Sri Lanka, Maldives, Seychelles, and Mauritius apart from the joint naval exercises with US, Australia, and Japan.

In the final part of his presentation, the speaker talked about India’s foreign policy matrix and India-Japan relations. The objective of India’s foreign policy is to become a major power, yet there has been a tendency among India’s diplomatic elites to resist its rise. India has acted with strategic restraint which could also be termed as its version of Deng Xiaoping’s mantra 韬光养晦 (*Taoguang yanghui*), of biding one’s time while strengthening oneself. India’s foreign policy could be analyzed at three levels. At a global level, India aspires to be a major power. It aims to cooperate with China and Russia vis-à-vis US and Japan and also plans to expand its economic and defense power. At a regional level in Asia, the Western Pacific, Middle East, Africa, and the Indian Ocean, it aspires to have a dominant presence by

cooperating with the US and Japan vis-à-vis China. At a sub-regional level in South Asia, India aspires to be a hegemonic power.

The speaker described India-Japan relations as the linchpin of stability in the Indian Ocean. The two nations have mutual strategic and economic imperatives to do so. They play complementary roles and share almost identical perceptions towards China. Japan harnesses the Indian markets while India seeks to attract Japanese investment, technology, and trade. The India-Japan relations are what could be described as 'convenient relations'. However, there is a difference in temperature and approach of both the nations in their foreign policy towards China. Japan adopts a proactive policy towards China while Indian policy's objective is to maintain stable relations with China. China has responded negatively to Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's attempt at containing its maritime strategy by introducing Asia Democratic Security Diamond whereby Australia, India, Japan, and the US state of Hawaii form a diamond to "safeguard the maritime commons stretching from the Indian Ocean region to the Western Pacific". (*Global Times*, October 2014)

The speaker stressed on the need for preserving good relations between India and Japan. He foresaw India and Japan along with Australia taking lead in shaping the global narratives on ocean governance in the (unlikely) absence of a proactive US. India's closer ties with Japan would also ultimately result in narrowing of the power gap between India and China. India should seek greater cooperation with Japan to balance the China-Pakistan alignment.

To conclude, Prof. Horimoto emphasized on the necessity of multilateral regional mechanism in Asia and Indo-Pacific region. It is of paramount importance to build inclusive multi-tiered mechanisms before any one power establishes its hegemony.

## **Discussion**

In the ensuing discussion session, questions were asked about the role played by other major international actors in the region. A number of other related questions were taken up, ranging from India's role in the South China Sea and China's involvement in South Asia, to the prospects of China-Japan-South Korea economic cooperation under the proposed Free Trade Agreement between the three countries. A brief discussion was held on the recent International Fleet Review hosted by the Indian Navy in which China also participated.

*Report prepared by Prateeksha Tiwari, Research Assistant, Institute of Chinese Studies.*

## **About the Speaker**

Takenori Horimoto is a graduate of the University of Delhi (MA Political Science). He is a Visiting Professor at Open University of Japan, Professor at Shobi University Graduate School, Project Professor at Kyoto University Graduate School, Visiting Professor at Takushoku University Graduate School and Presidency University, Kolkata. He is also Councilor of Japan-India Association and Senior Fellow, Center for Contemporary Indian Studies of the Association. He is a member of various study groups associated with Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Finance, which work on contemporary India and its relations with Japan. His specialization is contemporary Asian politics, with special emphasis

on India-US relations. He has solo authored & co-edited 14 books, some of which are India-Japan Relations in Emerging Asia, Toward the World's Third Major Power: India's Pursuit of Strategic Autonomy, Deepening Democracy. He has also co-authored 35 books and has more than 100 periodical articles. He has been a commentator on Asian issues in the Japanese media.

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