

HD Significance of Modi's visit to Japan

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The Indian Prime Minister's visit to Japan from August 31 to September 3 assumes great significance as it is taking place when the regional security environment in India-Pacific area is undergoing a paradigm shift. The common concerns of the two countries include the growing tension in the South **China** and East **China** seas due to aggressive **Chinese** activities which are aimed at shattering the strategic balance in the region, threatening freedom of navigation and **commercial** exploitation of resources in accordance with the international law. In addition, both realize that turning the South **China** Sea into "Lake Beijing" (to use Japanese PM's phrase), is only a step towards its final objective of establishing its hegemony in the Indo-Pacific region. Hence both the countries have agreed to raise the level of the bilateral relations to maintain status quo in the region.

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During Modi's visit, a defence agreement is likely to be signed between the two countries that would clearly mark a shift in Japanese policy. So far Japan has not signed a defence cooperation agreement outside its traditional allies i.e. US, UK, Russia and Australia. The agreement on defence cooperation and exchanges will include setting up of a framework for engagement in equipment **purchase** and production. This means the dialogue mechanism established during the earlier term of Japanese PM is set to be upgraded. There is likelihood of strategic partnership would be raised to the level of foreign and defence ministers of the two countries, who would now hold annual consultations which are presently held at the Secretary level since 2010. The Japan side is also looking for conclusion of negotiations on the **sale** of US-2 amphibian aircraft to India. India expects that the civil nuclear cooperation agreement would be signed soon. Another dimension of the visit is the possible talks on the actualisation of Asia's Democratic Security Diamond- a concept that Japanese PM has been pressing since his last term. He had desired that the four countries- US, Australia, India and Japan- should come closer to deal with **Chinese** plan to destroy strategic balance in the Indo-Pacific region. The navies of US, India and Japan had participated in an exercise last month. Japan's re-entry after a lapse of four years in the exercise reflected its desire to be proactive in view continued aggression by **China** in the Senkaku **Island** area. In July 2014, the Japanese Cabinet had taken the decision that recognised Japan's right to collective defence and thereby paving the way for enhancement of defence relations with other key partners. India too has realised that **Chinese** activities are creating instability in the region that is prejudicial to Indian **commercial** and strategic interests. Earlier India had decided not to go ahead with the concept of Asia's Democratic Security Diamond in view of **Chinese** pressure. India, today, is also facing increased **Chinese** incursions in the Indian borders and **China** continues to indulge in proliferation activities along with Pakistan. **China** is also strengthening its presence in the PoK. Besides constructing road and rail network to connect the Tibetan region with Indian Ocean, it is reported that it is also constructing a gas pipe line up to Gwadar in Pakistan. The Australian perception is also changing in view of **Chinese** aggressiveness. Recently Japanese defense minister Itsunori Onodera, US secretary of defense Chuck Hagel, and Australian defence minister David Johnston held trilateral defence ministerial talks in Singapore on May 30 on the margins of the IISS Shangri-La Dialogue. According to US press release, 'The defence ministers exchanged views on the regional security situation, including major threats to regional stability. They reaffirmed the importance of working together to build a rules-based regional architecture that supports the peaceful resolution of disputes. In discussing maritime security, the ministers underscored their shared interest in the maintenance of peace and stability; respect for international law and unimpeded lawful commerce; and upholding freedom of navigation and overflight in the East **China** and South **China** Seas. They also expressed their strong opposition to the use of coercion or force to unilaterally alter the status quo in the East **China** and South **China** Seas.' Significantly, the decision to change the Guidelines for cooperation between US-Japan and share the details with Australia and other regional allies was also

taken. The US secretary of state John Kerry at the ARF meeting and US-Asean meeting voiced support for preventive diplomacy and peaceful resolution of maritime disputes according to international law. He also supported the Philippines proposal for a freeze on escalatory actions in disputed waters. He also highlighted US efforts to support regional stability and regional inclusive growth in Southeast Asia. US authorities are also changing its policy towards Vietnam. US senators John McCain and Sheldon Whitehouse visited Vietnam in early August 2014 and met senior Vietnamese leaders including PM Nguyen Tan Dung and Communist Party general secretary Nguyen Phu Trong and discussed the issue of growing tension in the region. Later US joint chiefs chairman General Martin Dempsey visited Vietnam and assured help to build Vietnamese. These reflect that US may relax restrictions for the export of weapons to Vietnam. The above clearly indicate that all the four countries have now common concerns and are willing to take steps to check any change in the status quo in the region. Japanese PM may discuss the steps that need to be taken for operationalization of Asia's Democratic Security Diamond. Perhaps a **group** of strategic experts should be established to work out a plan. This **group** ought to have experts also from main disputants like Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei to ensure their support for the actualisation of the concept. A collective effort to deal with **China's** aggressive activities can hardly be underestimated.

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