



Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS)

Forum for National Security Studies (FNSS)

CAPS FELLOW SEMINAR RAPPORTEUR'S REPORT

CONTEMPORARY POWER POLITICS IN EAST ASIA AND RISE OF CHINA

Chairperson: Ms. Chandra Rekha, Associate Fellow, CAPS

Speaker: Ms. Swati Arun, Associate Fellow, CAPS

Rapporteur: Ms. Manisha Chaurasiya, Research Associate, CAPS

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Is the world going to witness an inevitable conflict or peaceful transition of power? This particular dichotomy is central to contemporary rise of China as a potent threat to the US hegemony and its presence in East Asia. This particular theme has dominated the literature and discussions almost all over the world. The weekly Fellow Seminar titled, "Contemporary Power Politics in East Asia: Rise of China", presented by Ms. Swati Arun, on July 03, 2015, was certainly an interesting and an apt dose of the contemporary international situation and power shift within.

The chairperson, Ms. Chandra Rekha, introduced both, the speaker and the theme of the seminar elegantly; along with identification of the chief challenge ahead of China as, setting up its value and identity in the region on an existing and sustained value system. According to the Chairperson this holds the key to sweep aside the 'accepted' assumption of China as a threat in the East Asian region. The speaker, Ms. Swati Arun's presentation was focused on understanding why the rise of China is such a crucial event today and how this will challenge the position of the US in the



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backdrop of “Rise of China”. She began her presentation with a realist all weather assertion that ‘the supreme power alone creates order’, it addresses an important characteristic feature of China. The maximization of comprehensive national power: economic, military, technological and diplomatic is high in salience as without it the rejuvenation remains incomplete. Maintenance of the internal order and pacifying the periphery both have been identified by China as crucial areas in its ambitions.

Ms. Swati elaborated on the assertive claims of China in the strategic realm, owing to dissatisfaction with the existing order, its ambitions, historical glory interwoven with realistic reasons. Her graphical analysis of nationalism in China, in the twentieth and twenty first century was worthwhile. Her study revealed an interesting point about the assertiveness and un-peaceful rise of China; it proved that nationalism and assertiveness have multiplied manifold since 2010. She then questioned the laws which were written by consensus in China long ago to be leading to a particular and rigid interpretation of international relations and law; the UNCLOS and EEZ demarcations for instance needs to be revisited. Rewriting them as per the present with another consensus was identified as the ultimate need of the hour. It was interesting to know that one of the leading elements in the Chinese strategic thinking is ‘sphere of influence’, which holds unparalleled importance for it. ‘Asia for Asians’, the proclamation by Xi Jinping in Shanghai last year, mirrors the Monroe Doctrine’s ‘America for Americans’, which was forwarded by USA for furthering American sphere of influence in the Latin America. The ‘Middle Kingdom’ concept was discussed at this point by the speaker to feed the fuelling curiosity of the learned audience. The speaker in a very lucid manner assertively claimed, backed with facts from her study, that China was presently clearly balancing against the USA. Balancing was explained by her, as an act of punishment which goes much beyond deterrence. The Chinese interests can be summed up as replacing US as the primary power in the East Asian region, weakening of its alliance system, undermining its credibility, posing Chinese economic power to overshadow the US economic model and increasing the PRC military capability.

At this juncture, the speaker pointed out a loop-hole in the Chinese strategic thinking that was proving its efforts counterproductive, that is, it paying less attention on winning legitimacy of order



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for itself from the region, where it continues its historical assumption of itself to be on a greater footing than the rest of the states of East Asia. The region on the other hand, has realised well that, 'when two elephants fight it is the grass that is trampled'. Therefore, the speaker's mention of the response of US and secondary states to the rise of China holds crucial salience. Japan's phenomenal rise of military budget, East Asian state's modernization of military in general and alliance with the US were discussed. Further, any understanding of the East Asian region stands incomplete without an understanding of the US interests and future aspirations. Ms. Arun then revealed the US interests as reducing and deterring the threat of conventional and unconventional attacks on US and its territorial possessions from China. The discussant, Ms. Hashmi, while providing the fellow researchers with a detailed analysis of Ms. Swati's paper, mentioned that hegemonic transition in East Asia, according to a school of thought is speculated to be even multipolar, especially when chances of China being a direct threat to mainland USA stand bleak, but to the allies and the East Asian region in general are healthy. She congratulated the speaker on her holistic yet lucid analysis of a giant subject- East Asia and the rise of China. The Discussant threw light on some more salient and unavoidable sources for the paper. She suggested the speaker to involve more primary sources from China and views from East Asia on the issue, which she believed would add value and offer a variety of opinions to the paper. The session was followed by a healthy and interactive discussion which was welcomed by the chairperson and the speaker warmly. Questions on the role of Russia in the East Asian theatre along with the role of the west in the economically prosperous China, rose in the session. The limits, if any to the ambition and role of China in East Asia was then tried to be deciphered. The mistake Chamberlain committed underestimating Hitler's territorial ambitions got a mention. Dr. Manpreet Sethi at this point made a brilliant comment on the giant responsibility China has undertaken to become the security provider of the region; which in her opinion is immature in the present circumstances, although it is trying hard to undercut the existing alliance system in the region. Ms. Swati encountered a variety of questions with her detailed research on the topic along and accepted most suggestions and fresh views of the audience for her project refinement.



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(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of the speakers and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS])

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