



**SIXTY NINE YEARS AFTER WAR: A GOOD GERMANY;**  
**AN UNAPOLOGETIC JAPAN**

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German President Joachim Gauck recently finished his three day long visit of India. His visit comes after the successful high profile visit of Japanese Prime Ministers Shinzo Abe's. It is India which stands to benefit from the attention it has been getting from the two economic powers of the East and West. There is likely to be more coordination among the G-4 states for the permanent membership of the United Nations Security council<sup>i</sup>. This insinuates that Germany and Japan both are eager to play a more active role at the international level. In his address at the Munich Security Conference on 31<sup>st</sup> January the German President spoke of a greater role for Germany in world affairs. He said that the "culture of restraint" has made Germany appear like a "shirker in the international community". He further urged Germany to shake off its sense of guilt stemming from World War II and to take more responsibility in shaping international affairs. He added that "Let us thus not turn a blind eye, not run from threats, but instead stand firm, not forget, neglect or betray universal values, but instead uphold these values together with our friends and partners."<sup>ii</sup> The ideas of both the German President and Japanese Premier appear to be similar in many ways. Both are pushing for their respective countries to play a more prominent role in international affairs after years of aloofness.

The post World War II history of Japan and Germany might not appear similar but in few areas they have been similar. For instance, both were occupied by U.S. after their defeat in World War II. Both have outsourced their security into the hands of the United States. While Japan has a separate security treaty with U.S., Germany is a member of NATO since 1955. Until recently the leaders of both Germany and Japan were against any muscular role involving the

military in international affairs. This was mainly due to the kind of apprehension the public in general has about full rearmament of the country. But now partly due to the call from the U.S. and its allies and partly because of their own willingness, Germany and Japan are gearing up to get back into the international arena as military powers.

Germany and Japan have both been criticized by Washington for not undertaking their share of responsibility in world affairs. So both countries are slowly trying to get themselves acknowledged as responsible political power. Hence the role of military is going to be restricted only to peacekeeping operations and humanitarian intervention. Nevertheless, it marks a visible shift from the pacifist stance both countries have been taking for quite a long period of time. Germany would most probably be leaving behind its soldiers in Afghanistan when NATO starts pulling out its troops by the end of this year. Japan too is considering deploying its Self Defence Forces in combat role in Afghanistan for the protection of the Japanese and other workers who are engaged in rebuilding exercise.

Like the Japanese Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister and the Defence Ministers are going from country to country to garner support and take other countries into confidence about Japan's intention of playing increased role in international affairs, as is expected off it. German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeir also plans to mobilise support within the country and elsewhere to convince people that the time to move on from the reflexive and moralizing pacifism has arrived<sup>iii</sup>. Many believe that the idea has gotten tacit approval of the German Chancellor Angela Merkel as well.

However there is a twist to the story. On one hand Germany, the economic power house of European Union, is being urged by its neighbour France and Britain to take up a more

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responsible role in international affairs. On other hand Japan's neighbours China and South Korea harbour deep suspicion about Japan's real intention if it is allowed a full re-militarisation. The reason for this might be the fact that while Germany has atoned for its World War II aggression and related crimes, Japan has not really shown a sense of regret for the atrocities committed by its military in occupied territories. Instead of apologising, some Japanese leaders have tried to deny the extent of atrocities and even justified the controversial and inhuman practices<sup>iv</sup>. To top the list, Japan enshrined the souls of 14 convicted Class-A war criminals at the Yasukuni Shrine and its Prime Ministers [Koizumi & Abe] and other lawmakers continue to visit the shrine to pay homage to the war criminals.

This clearly illustrates that instead of coming to terms with its past, Japan is taking an increasing unapologetic stance.

India has a strategic partnership with both Germany and Japan and they also figure in its list of top 6 strategic partners. While the economic cooperation with Germany and Japan is making significant progress, India needs to enhance the level of cooperation on political front too. The NATO pull out from Afghanistan is going to have more impact on India's security than Germany and Japan. So India needs to plan a coordinated strategy with Germany, Japan and U.S. to deal with the problems that are likely to emanate from Afghanistan after 2014.

However, cooperation on all fronts with Japan and Germany may not be practical for India. A former Singaporean diplomat doubts whether the G-4 formula may be of any help to India's quest for a permanent seat at UNSC<sup>v</sup>. He says that the chances of another European country gaining permanent membership is quite low and Japan might not get permanent seat due to stiff opposition from China. The UNSC reforms are nowhere on the horizon at the moment but if and when UNSC is reformed it would be interesting to see if India would stick with the G-4 or will try something new.

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This year marks the centenary of the First World War and hopefully countries have learnt their lessons from the Great War especially countries who were involved in it. The German President believes that his country is now “a good Germany, the best we’ve ever known” and the Japanese Prime Minister proclaimed that “Japan is back”. Germany and Japan, members of rival camps in the First World War, now look forward to make their due contribution towards world peace.

*(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies CAPS)*

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<sup>i</sup> Sandeep Dikshit, “German President begins visit after skipping Sochi Olympics”, The Hindu, 7 February 2014. Available at: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/german-president-begins-visit-after-skipping-sochi-olympics/article5661647.ece>

<sup>ii</sup> “Gauck Opens Munich Security Conference With Call For More German Engagement”, en.haberler.com. 31 January 2014. Available at: <http://en.haberler.com/gauck-opens-munich-security-conference-with-call-363117/>

<sup>iii</sup> “No More Shirking”, The Economist, 8 February 2014. Available at: <http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21595956-germany-ready-have-foreign-policy-proportionate-its-weight-no-more-shirking>

<sup>iv</sup> “New NHK head's 'comfort women' remark stirs controversy”, Japan Today, 26 January 2014. Available at: <http://www.japantoday.com/category/national/view/new-nhk-heads-comfort-women-remark-stirs-controversy>

<sup>v</sup> Kishore Mahbubani, “To the new order, strategically”, The Indian Express, 4 February 2014. Available at: <http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/to-the-new-order-strategically/>