



## **SINO-JAPANESE PROPAGANDA WAR: NOW IN INDIA**

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Shinzo Abe, the Japanese Prime Minister and the Republic Day parade honoured guest will only be landing in New Delhi on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2014 to consolidate the growing Indo-Japanese bilateral relations. However, the bitter Sino-Japanese propaganda war is already playing out in the Indian media. After criticising Japan's initiatives and the Japanese Prime Minister bitterly in Africa, China now appears to be targeting Japan in India. Unlike in Africa, where China's ambassador to the African Union (AU) did a press conference and showed photographs of victims of Imperial Japanese Army's brutality<sup>i</sup>, Japan is fighting China's propaganda back in India and the two countries have now locked horns in the Indian media. The ambassadors of both China and Japan to India published lengthy articles in *The Indian Express* newspaper remembering India's historic and economic relations with them. Nonetheless, it appears the intention of the ambassadors actually was not to highlight their relationship with India but to portray their adversary as a threat to the peace and stability of the world.

The propaganda offensive was launched by Wei Wei, China's ambassador to India. An article titled "Asian Imperative" appeared in *The Indian Express* newspaper on 10<sup>th</sup> January 2014<sup>ii</sup>. The ambassador talked about the current economic scenario and various challenges that need to be tackled in the first two paragraphs. Then from economic interdependence the topic suddenly jumped to World War II and how Japan is again trying to revive its militarism in order to upset the post World War II global order. Perhaps the Chinese are right in their perspective because China bore most of the brunt of Japanese aggression and

the actions by the Japanese leadership such as visit to Yasukuni shrine or increase of defence budget is likely to create unease in China. The ambassador also urged Indians to remember that “Indian and Chinese soldiers fought together against the Japanese aggression in India” and both countries should not let any county upset the regional peace.

On 16<sup>th</sup> January 2014, another article titled “A power with responsibility” appeared in the same newspaper. It was written by Takeshi Yagi, ambassador of Japan to India and supposedly was a ‘reply’ to the article of Chinese ambassador<sup>iii</sup>. The ambassador tried to explain the reason behind the visit of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to the Yasukuni Shrine. He reiterated Abe’s pledge for everlasting peace and his statement that “the intention of his visit was to pledge never to wage a war again”. He clarified that Abe’s visit to the shrine and his administrations national security policy are completely unrelated matters. He reminded that India and Japan share the fundamental values of democracy, respect for human rights and rule of law which was a cleverly veiled reference to China because China is not a democratic nation and is not really known for upholding human rights or rule of law. He mentioned that Indian economy is the key to the future of Asia and the world.

It is quite understandable that China has its own concerns about the “proactive” diplomacy of Japan in which military is increasingly being used as an active tool. A theory about “encirclement of China” by Japan is picking up in Chinese strategic circle but at the moment is mostly limited to ultra nationalists. Shinzo Abe’s visit to ASEAN countries, Middle East countries, Africa and now India is being seen as an attempt by Japan to mobilise a series of regions against China. Japan’s strengthening political and security relations are being viewed on its part with suspicion in China as part of a larger Japanese strategy of encircling China. China is trying to send a signal to India that any association with Japan will not be viewed favourably in China. Undeterred by China’s reaction, New Delhi has continued to pursue stronger bilateral relationship with Japan. Japanese Defence Minister Itsunori Onodera visited India in the first

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week of January and sought India's support on disputed islands row with China<sup>iv</sup>. Indian navy held four day maritime exercise JIMEX-14 with Japanese maritime self-defence force in the Indian waters last December. Indian and Japanese Coast Guards also held off their joint exercise *Sahyog-Kaijin* on 14<sup>th</sup> January near Kochi. The Emperor and Empress of Japan visited last November giving a significant boost to India-Japan relations. All these recent developments insinuate the kind of importance the two countries have accorded to each other in recent times.

However, Shinzo Abe's visit on Republic Day holds great significance for Indo-Japanese bilateral relations. It is for the first time that a Japanese Prime Minister is being welcomed as the Republic Day parade chief guest. Shinzo Abe and Manmohan Singh will also hold their annual prime ministerial summit. The chances of any major agreement to be signed are not really bright due to impending Lok Sabha elections in India.

Coming back to the propaganda war, Japanese ambassador appeared more reconciling in his view. He said that Japan considers the Japan-China relationship as one of the most important and believes that it is important not to let individual issues adversely affect the overall bilateral relationship. Abe himself has said many times since becoming Prime Minister that the door for dialogue with China is always open. However deliberate reluctance from China to engage in dialogue with Japan has not been of any help in diffusing the tensions between them.

Both ambassadors concluded their articles on the same note that for the continuance of peace and stability in Asian region and in world at-large by engagement in constructive dialogue and cooperation is a must. The economies of Asian countries are so intertwined that any conflict will be disastrous for the entire region. Hopefully China will understand that peace and stability can only be upheld by engaging in constructive dialogue and negotiations to resolve disputes and not by being assertive and defiant. The unilateral moves by China such as declaration of ADIZ over a disputed territory in East China Sea and ordering fishing vessels of "foreign" countries to seek permission for entering and fishing in South China Sea will only add to China's image of an assertive and non-cooperative nation<sup>v</sup>.

*(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)*

<sup>i</sup> Aman Sethi, "Sino-Japanese acrimony spills over in Africa", *The Hindu*, January 17, 2014. Available at: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/world/sinojapanese-acrimonyspills-over-into-africa/article5579223.ece>

<sup>ii</sup> Wei Wei, "Asian Imperative", *The Indian Express*, January 10, 2014. Available at: <http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/asian-imperatives/>

<sup>iii</sup> Takeshi Yagi, "A power with responsibility", *The Indian Express*, January 16, 2014. Available at: <http://m.indianexpress.com/story/1962305/hoped/oped/>

<sup>iv</sup> "Japan wants India's support on island disputes with China", January 9, 2014. Available at: <http://www.rediff.com/news/report/japan-wants-indias-support-on-island-disputes-with-china/20140109.htm>

<sup>v</sup> "US condemns 'provocative' Chinese edict over South China Sea fisheries", *The Guardian*, January 10, 2014. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/10/us-condemns-chinese-south-china-sea-fishing>

