

February 17, 2015

# Japan as the Key Actor to Strengthen US-Indian Partnership

By TAKAMINE Koushu

The United States and India declared to strengthen mutual strategic partnership at the bilateral meeting at the White House last September. Both sides agreed to cooperate in security issues including maritime security and the War on Terror, support a rule-based international order, and endorse India's bid for permanent membership at the UN Security Council, and so forth.

However, some specific issues still remain. Regarding the nuclear deal which was obstructed by the nuclear liability act of India, both sides agreed to set up an integrated organization across the ministries and continue the negotiation furthermore. Meanwhile, American side did not announce much anticipated scale of investment to India. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the trend to boost the US-Indian partnership has been intensified, in general.

One of the most noteworthy points of this US-Indian summit is a mutual agreement to bolster the trilateral partnership among the United States, India, and Japan; specifically, both countries agreed to hold a foreign ministerial meeting among the three. This implies that Japan is the key actor to deepen the partnership between the United States and India. The shared strategic interest is indeed the fundamental reason for it, but the traditional pro-Japanese sentiment in India also lies behind it.

Quite a lot of intellectuals in India argue openly that Japan made a contribution to India's independence by World War II. A newspaper in India ran an article which even claimed that Prime Minister Modi should have visit Yasukuni Shrine during his stay in Japan.

The US-Indian relations have been bottlenecked by India's nonalignment policy since the Cold War, and both sides have not felt mutual sympathy up to the present. Prime Minister Modi launched the "Look East" policy and has given more weight to the relationship with the United States. In addition, there are some actions in search for a

breakthrough to the complicated relationship from before, such as the statement made by Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel declaring that it was necessary to understand strategic context of each other during his visit to India last August prior to the US-Indian summit. However, so far as reciprocal sentiments are concerned, Indo-Japanese relations are far better.

It is wrong to overestimate mutual sentiment when we talk about bilateral strategic relations, but we cannot underestimate it neither. It is quite unlikely that the United States and India declare to hold a foreign ministerial meeting among Japan, the United States, and India without consulting the Japanese government beforehand. I can reasonably believe that the three countries agreed on this before the bilateral summit. I would argue that the three countries share the understanding that Japan acts as a catalyst to develop US-Indian relations and Japan-US-Indian relations.

The structural outline as I described above is a great opportunity for Japan. Closer ties between the United States and India will obviously improve security environment for Japan, and the Japanese government itself has the potential power to turn the trilateral relations as such. It seems to me that the leverage effect of that would be greater than expected.

Japan and India are deepening policy coordination steadily in both economic and security issues. Japan's export of weapons and defense technology, and support of civilian nuclear technology to India are particularly important. If Japanese-Indian relations, and furthermore, Japanese-US-Indian relations grow stronger, the "encirclement of China" will be achieved consequently without intentional specific actions. Sino-Indian economic ties will remain robust, but that is nothing special with India. That is also more or less true to Japan and the United States, thus, it is necessary to separate economy from politics.

**(This is the English translation of an article written by TAKAMINE Koushu, Research Fellow, Okazaki Institute, which originally appeared on the e-Forum "Giron-Hyakushutsu" of GFJ on October 16, 2014.)**