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Beyond US-China Relations: Japan-ASEAN relations
in an Evolving Regional Order in Asia

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Arguments:

- (1) Asia is facing the challenge of whether it can sustain the rule-based regional order or not.

- (2) To tackle this challenge, we need to look beyond US-China relations.

- (3) Contrary to the conventional view, “the rest of Asia” (countries and institutions other than the US and China) will play the critical role in defining the future of Asia. ASEAN is the crucial player among “the rest of Asia.”

- (4) The ASEAN countries must free themselves of the misconception that they are sandwiched between the US and China, and play the role as a responsible regional player.

Challenges

- The pressing challenge facing Asia is whether we can sustain and enhance the rule-based regional order that has provided the basic foundation for peace and prosperity for the last several decades, or must leave the region at the mercy of power politics among the major powers.
- Asia should be a region where disputes are resolved by rules, not power.
- ASEAN could very much contribute to enhancing the rule-based regional order if the member countries free themselves of the misconception that they are sandwiched between the US and China and recognize their potential in evolving regional politics.

Beyond US-China Relations

- (1) Competition between the US and China continues to intensify, but we need to look beyond US-China relations to address the challenges facing Asia.
- (2) Asians are too much preoccupied with the mindset of seeing the future of Asia only from the perspective of the US-China competition. “ We are “sandwiched” between the US and China.”
- (3) This mindset prevents Asians from thinking creatively.
- (4) International relations of Asia differ from those of the past (the big powers defined the regional order).
- (5) Contrary to a conventional(old-fashioned) view, the future of Asia(Indo-Pacific) largely depends on how “the rest of Asia” will respond to the challenges facing the region.

Asia's Future scenarios(centered on the US-China relations)

From US hegemony, China's regional dominance, G2, to Cold-war type of confrontation:

None will happen

- 1) Neither the US nor China can sustain a regional order alone.
 - The US is no longer a full-fledged regional hegemon.
 - China is not a full-fledged rising power.
 - Both the US and China have a lot of vulnerabilities and constraints internally and externally.

- 2) Neither G2 nor the cold war type of the US-China confrontation will emerge

The huge gaps of policy preferences on the one hand,

The deepened economic linkages(Economic "MAD") and dense policy consultation mechanisms between two on the other hand

Crisis-Management mechanisms

Half-century's experiences managing difficult relations

The Era of “the rest of Asia”

- (1) “The rest of Asia” refers to the pivotal countries and institutions other than the US and China
- (2) Many major countries having substantial economic, political and military powers
- (3) Having political will and capability to play a substantial role in Asia. They are not pawns in the US-China competition/condominium, resisting the US-China centered regional order.
- (4) ASEAN is one of the “rest of Asia,” potentially having a big impact on Asia’s future, if acts collectively.

The US and China competing over “the rest of Asia”

(1) The US and China looking for support and help of “the rest of Asia” to implement their respective agenda.

1) US Pivot/Rebalance Policy, new security and economic partnerships with “the rest of Asia”

2) China: “periphery diplomacy” “Asian security by Asians”

“AIIB(Asia Infrastructure Development Bank) ” “One Belt One Road(OBOR)”

3) ‘The rest of Asia” having substantial bargaining powers in the “great game” over the future of Asia.

4) For "the rest of Asia," the rule-based regional order is indispensable, because this rule-based order protects them.

Strong rules protect smaller countries more than bigger ones.

Disputes will be resolved by rules, not power.

ASEAN and ASEAN-related Regional Institutions

(1) The critical player for the rule-based regional order is ASEAN.

(2) Today, ASEAN is engaged in establishing the ASEAN Political Security Community (APSC), one of the three pillars of the ASEAN Community.

(3) The APSC has two aspects: an intra-ASEAN aspect and an extra-ASEAN aspect.

1) First, APSC is aiming at harmonizing the internal (domestic) institutions of member countries according to liberal principles such as democracy, human rights, the rule of law and good governance.

Shared liberal norms and institutions among the members serve as a foundation for security in Southeast Asia.

2) Second, Southeast Asia is a region where extra-regional powers' interests intersect. ASEAN's security is, therefore, closely connected with what relationships are established between the ASEAN countries and extra-ASEAN powers.

3) ASEAN has been skillfully managing relations with the major powers through ASEAN-related regional institutions. ASEAN is proud of maintaining its “centrality” in managing regional institutions.

4) Power politics is coming back to Asia.

Now is the time for ASEAN to further enhance its efforts to construct the APSC.

APSC will help greatly enhance the rule-based regional order in Asia.

5) This, however, requires ASEAN countries to free themselves from the mindset or mental framework that they are “sandwiched” between the US and China.

They need to recognize more clearly their potential in Asia’s geopolitics.

6) If ASEAN countries could realize their potential, a variety of regional institutions underlined by APSC would be enhanced, contributing to managing power politics among the big players. *

Japan's engagement with "the rest of Asia" in the years to come

- 1, Getting more important, given the uncertainty of the US administration and China's unpredictable/assertive behaviors
- 2, Japan hopes that ASEAN demonstrates collective willingness and capacity to uphold the rule-based liberal order.
- 3, Japan is more willing to support capacity-building and play some coordinating role to enhance rule-based regional order with "the rest of Asia."
- 4, The collective endeavors among "the rest of Asia" contributing to sustaining deeper engagement of the United States that continue to be a stabilizing force of the regional order.
- 5, Putting a collective Asian voice into the US decision making processes (full of uncertainty and unpredictability today)
- 6, The way of "standing up to and getting together with China"

Thank you for your attention

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