Japan’s Geopolitical Worldview

What is the issue?

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Japan is trying to fill the vacuum created by the U.S.’s withdrawal from East Asian affairs.

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What is the need?

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- China’s ascent combined with the unreliability of a Trump-led U.S. is causing Tokyo to rethink its diplomatic initiatives in Asia.
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- While it has been under US’s security net for long, it no longer believes that the U.S. defence umbrella is sufficient for its security.
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- Also the US’s “America First Policy” is expected to lead to an overall withdrawal of US interests in the east Asian region.
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- Notably, Japan is in a restless neighbourhood, with North Korea’s relentless missile program and China’s aggressive posturing.
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What are Japan's recent responses?

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- Initiating new security dialogues and developing multilateral trade agreements are currently being prioritised by Japan.
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- **Constitutional Clause -** Japan has been having a pacifist constitution since the 2nd world war.
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- As, it was written just after the war devastation under US assistance and severely restricted military budgets and capacity expansion.

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- Notably, PM Shinzo Abe has currently promised to revise the restrictive sections to enhance military spending and capabilities.
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- **Commerce –** Chinese growing influence in the region through commercial and strategic partnerships is getting to be a concern for Japan.
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- Tokyo is focussing on its capital and technological expertise to influence countries in the region and beyond to counter China.
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- **Financial Power -** Japan is stepping up aid and investment in Southeast Asia.
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- Such financing has more than doubled in the last 5 years.
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- It has aided the construction of a train line near Manila, a seaport in Cambodia, war reconstruction efforts in Philippines and multiple projects in Vietnam.
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- The sales pitches have almost always been by contrasting their products with China’s in terms of safety and reliability.
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- **TPP -** With the U.S.’s departure from Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP), Japan has become the principal driving force behind it.
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- Notably, at the recent “Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit” in Vietnam, Japan convinced all members on board to agree on the “core elements” of the TPP deal.
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- **Quadrilateral Alliance** - The Quad (that has Japan, India, US & Australia as members) has been envisioned with the phrasing “a free and open Indo-Pacific”.
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- This is seemingly an open counter to China’s territorial claims over the South China Sea, through which nearly 30% of world’s trade flows.
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How does the future look?

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- Japan is aware that unilateral moves would invariably invoke images of militarism and expansionism, which is undesirable.
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- Hence, it wants to use the bilateral ties to create a multilateral architecture in the region.
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- However, Japan's aggressions during the 2^{nd} world war has generated considerable hatred for it in the region, which is challenging to mend.
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Source: The Hindu

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