

The Recent Japanese Elections Might Slow Down the US' "Indo-Pacific" Strategy

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Last Sunday's Japanese elections saw Prime Minister Abe's ruling bloc lose its two-thirds parliamentary supermajority needed to change the country's pacifist constitution, which could seriously slow down the US' "Indo-Pacific" strategy, especially regarding the formation of an anti-Iranian naval coalition in the Gulf and the possible military expansion of the joint Indo-Japanese "Asia-Africa Growth Corridor".

Prime Minister Abe's ruling bloc indisputably won last Sunday's elections, [but lost](#) its two-thirds parliamentary supermajority needed to change the country's pacifist constitution like he's promised to do for so long. The issue is extremely sensitive in Japanese society and is also ultra-controversial in International Relations too since the former Empire of Japan was one of the aggressor states that started World War II and also lost it, hence why it was prohibited by the post-war international community from maintaining a military ever again. The country has since exploited a loophole to create what it calls the "Self-Defense Forces", which even opened up their first-ever foreign military base in Djibouti in 2011 under the pretext of fighting regional piracy, but Japan's military capabilities are still far below what many objectively consider to be commensurate with its status as one of the world's leading Great Powers.

PM Abe wants to change that because he feels that it uniquely disadvantages his country vis-a-vis China, though that's precisely why the People's Republic is so concerned since it knows better than anyone else in Asia what happened the last time that Japan controlled the region's strongest military. This security dilemma is being masterfully exploited by the US, which recently declared its alliance with Japan to be "the cornerstone of peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific" in the Pentagon's recently released [strategy report](#) about this transoceanic mega-region. To get anywhere near the strategic trajectory that the US envisions for it, Japan will have to change its pacifist constitution and in the process revise the internationally recognized outcome of World War II. With America solidly behind it, however, it's unlikely that this unilateral abrogation of one of the post-war foundations of the international order will result in any tangibly punitive action by the other members of the UN Security Council no matter what they might say.

The only thing stopping this from happening, at least for now, is the Japanese people themselves, who deprived PM Abe of the two-thirds supermajority needed to make these constitutional changes. They were evidently more concerned about maintaining the status quo than changing it, but their leader still vowed to press ahead with gaining the support

needed to carry out his vision regardless. For now, though, the US' "Indo-Pacific" strategy has slowed down since America can't rely on Japan to speedily take on the transregional "[Lead From Behind](#)" role that it's intending to delegate to its ally, which is seen most clearly by PM Abe's reluctance to commit to joining the US' anti-Iranian naval coalition in the Gulf. Speaking to reporters on Sunday, he [said](#) that

"We've started to hear the United States' thinking on this and we want to keep listening carefully. At the same time, Japan also has friendly ties with Iran."

His position is understandable for two reasons — pledging support for the coalition might have scared away voters, and joining it would be seen as a hostile move by Iran.

It's this second-mentioned observation that's extremely important because it implies that a crack is emerging between the US' two "Indo-Pacific" pillars of India and Japan on the issue of joining the Gulf coalition. The South Asian state had no compunctions about [dispatching its naval and air assets](#) to the region despite how concerned Japan is that Iran would negatively react to such a move. Although India denies joining the US-led coalition, it's [admitted to receiving fuel and logistics support](#) from the US Navy as part of the LEMOA military pact that it clinched with it a few years ago, thus essentially making it part of this regional grouping. If the US had its way, India and Japan would both be active in the Gulf coordinating their naval and other activities with American support as a major first step towards their collective military interoperability in a real-life operational context. The end goal is to eventually militarize the nascent Indo-Japanese "[Asia-Africa Growth Corridor](#)" (AAGC) and hypocritically do the exact same thing that the US has fearmongered China would do with [BRI](#).

At the moment, these grandiose strategic goals are frozen after the Japanese elections saw PM Abe lose the easiest "legal" way to revise his country's pacifist constitution and set this chain reaction of military-related events into motion. That doesn't mean that the US' "Indo-Pacific" vision is defeated, but just that its rolling out has been slowed down for the time being until and unless Japan finds yet another workaround to "justify" its de-facto revisionism of World War II's outcome. Given the enormous momentum behind such a move even in spite of it being against the will of the Japanese people, it'll probably realistically happen sooner or later, but in any case, the latest elections made this more difficult to "legally" pull off than ever before. At the same time, it also shows that Japanese society isn't as firmly behind the Pentagon's "Indo-Pacific" strategic role for their country as their Indian counterparts are, which might ultimately lead to the US eventually considering the South Asian state to be the true cornerstone of its transregional vision for "[containing](#)" China.

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