

**XI JINPING-ABE SHINZO APEC MEETING:
AN ICE-BREAKING DIPLOMACY?**

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Executive Summary

1. For more than two years, the leaders of East Asia's two largest economies (China and Japan) did not meet, despite cajoling from all stakeholders in the East Asian region.
2. A golden opportunity arose in the form of an APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) meeting in November 2014 where the leaders of all Asia-Pacific countries (including Japan) met in Beijing for economic exchanges.
3. For six continuous months, Sino-Japanese senior officials at all levels furiously worked hard to make the Sino-Japanese meeting materialise at the APEC meeting.
4. Of particular significance was the meeting between the Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) Vice President Komura Masahiko and former Chinese State Councillor Tang Jiaxuan in Beijing in early May when the former mentioned the possibility of an Abe Shinzo-Xi Jinping meeting at APEC Leaders Meeting in November 2014.
5. The eagerness for Japan to arrange the 10 November 2014 talk and the Japanese agenda of setting up crisis mechanisms and hotlines indicated Tokyo's concerns about the lack of operational procedures to prevent conflict and its readiness to compromise on certain issues.
6. The officials who travelled to Beijing in the six months before the APEC meeting consisted of almost all *qinghuapai* or pro-Beijing factional leaders ("old friends" of Beijing or pro-China hands) in the LDP such as Yamazaki Taku, Masahiko Komura (former foreign minister who arranged Jiang Zemin's visit to Japan) and Yasuo Fukuda.
7. The positive atmosphere reached new heights on 7 November 2014 when the Chinese and Japanese media announced that they had reached four points of mutual consensus.

8. For Beijing, Point No. 3 of the mutual consensus indicating a difference in views about Diaoyu/Senkaku islands was the most important because, according to the perception of the Chinese government, it was the first admission in black and white that there was a difference in opinion between the two countries over the issue.
9. Abe also used the event to shore up his political legitimacy by declaring that he has followed a consistent policy of having good relations with China since his first term in 2006-2007 when he symbolically visited China shortly after taking office.
10. On 10 November 2014, President Xi and Prime Minister Abe met for slightly less than 30 minutes, generating another round of international media frenzy. This ritualistic play catered to the sensitivities of the domestic audience. The international media noted the uncomfortable handshake, stiff expressions and silence in greetings from the Chinese side.
11. In the short term, ties are unlikely to suddenly warm up as most media reports described the meeting as a “frosty”, “cool” or “stiff” handshake encounter. This by itself may not be insignificant since the bilateral meeting is considered as a ‘thawing’ encounter which implies there is much work to be done.