

Asia-Pacific Security and Japan

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Freed from the shared security concerns during the Cold War and now preoccupied with domestic economic difficulties, both the Europeans and the Japanese are little interested in mutual dialogue on foreign policy and security issues. The Japanese have become introverted and their external attention is riveted on economic relations and diplomacy within the Asia-Pacific region. The Europeans, for their part, seem to be looking at Asia only through the economic lens with focus on China.

But, the Japanese and the Europeans have many issues of common interest and concern outside the realm of economy and finance. Moreover, the Japanese and the Europeans share common grounds upon which they can cooperate on a broad range of global issues, ranging from environment to energy, from development to human security, from nuclear disarmament to peace-building, and so on. Of course, they can cooperate more to propagate freedom, democracy and the rule of law, let alone to strengthen the United Nations.

It is important therefore for the Japanese and the Europeans to deepen dialogue on foreign and security policy issues at the official level as well as on the second track. In this context, this paper presents a Japanese perspective with regard to Asia-Pacific security, with particular focus on North Korea, China, the Japan-U.S. alliance and regional cooperation.

From the Japanese perspective, North Korea is the most dangerous source of conflict and proliferation; China is a game-changer for the Asia-Pacific geopolitics; the Japan-U.S. alliance is the most important pillar of security in the region; and, regional cooperation is the key for partnership for peace and prosperity.

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Differences between Asia and Europe

It must be pointed out at the outset that, in sharp contrast to Europe, the end of the Cold War had little changed the Asian security conditions. Military confrontation still stays on the Korean Peninsula and the Taiwan Strait remains a flash point, not to mention the continued monopoly of power by communist parties in China, North Korea, Vietnam and Laos.

To aggravate the confrontation on the Korean Peninsula, North Korea's nuclear weapons and missile development has been in progress since the end of the Cold War. It must be noted that North Korea's nuclear programs are far more advanced than those of the Iranians, and also that Pyongyang's export of missile technologies to Iran would affect European security.

Despite increasingly closer economic relations between China and Taiwan, their difference on Taiwan's political status remains little changed, and the Chinese forces are poised to prevent Taiwan's independence.

On top of these legacies of the Cold War, the rise of China has brought about a prospect for tectonic changes in the Asia-Pacific geopolitics, from one that has been characterized as 'Pax Americana' to one in which U.S.-China rivalry would feature prominently.

Given all these, Asia-Pacific geopolitics will be undergoing a possibly long process of transformation, which will contain many risks and uncertainties.

North Korea

North Korea is the cause of major security concern to Japan. First of all, North Korea's 'military-first' policy and belligerent attitude toward South Korea, the regime's reclusiveness and defiance as well as the recent

succession of leadership to little experienced Kim Jong Un all add to the unpredictability of the already reckless country. A possibility of the sudden collapse of the North Korean regime cannot be ruled out either.

Secondly, the bilateral and multilateral efforts to dissuade Pyongyang from developing nuclear weapons and missiles have failed to produce any prospect for progress. The Six Party Talks, which is aimed at attaining a nuclear free Korean Peninsula, remains stalled since North Korea walked away from the process in December 2008. The process was initiated by China and participated by Japan, South and North Korea, Russia and the United States. The U.S. extended nuclear deterrence therefore remains indispensable for the security of Japan and South Korea; the point to be addressed later.

Thirdly, Japan is already within the estimated range of North Korean missiles called Nodong. Pyongyang also made a test-shooting of a longer-range missile, named Taepodong, over Japan in 1998, and is further developing missiles capable to reach U.S. territories. These developments have prompted Japan to engage in cooperation with the United States for the development of ballistic missile defense (BMD).

There is one issue that seems to be little known in Europe; that is the abduction of Japanese citizens by the hands of North Korean agents. The abductions were carried out in the 1970s and 80s, but the issue became public knowledge in 2002, when the then Japanese Prime Minister, Junichiro Koizumi, visited Pyongyang.

The North Korean leader of that time, late Kim Jong Il, admitted and apologized for the abduction of thirteen Japanese citizens. But, quite shockingly to the Japanese, it was told then that eight of them were already dead.

Prime Minister Koizumi promised that Japan would provide economic assistance to North Korea upon the normalization of relations. But, politically, for North Korea to fully account for the abduction issue is a

precondition for Japan's agreement to normalize relations with Pyongyang, and the Japanese continue to suspect that Pyongyang has not fully accounted for what it had done, particularly the number of abductees and their fate.

Japan-China relations

As pointed out earlier, the rise of China has begun to cause tectonic changes in the Asia-Pacific geopolitics, posing complex challenges to Japan's foreign and security policy.

It is evident that politically stable and economically productive relations between Tokyo and Beijing are important not only for the two countries but also for the stability and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region. The scope of economic interdependence between the two countries is already broad and deep. Contacts and communications between the two peoples have been expanding at many levels and in many aspects of people-to-people relationship such as tourism, cultural, academic and student exchanges, to name a few.

But, as the recent anti-Japan demonstrations in China made apparent, the two countries' political relationship is precarious. Most symbolically, the Chinese claim on the Japanese islands in the resource-rich East China Sea, 'Senkaku Shoto' ('Diaoyu Dao' in Chinese), is a bone of contention. Chinese and Taiwanese patrol vessels and fishing boats often attempt to violate the Japanese control of the islands.

The Chinese reportedly argue that these islands 'have been an integral part of China's territory since ancient times'. But, the fact remains that the Senkaku Islands have been the officially declared Japanese territory since the 19th century.

The Japanese citizens once lived and worked on the islands without any challenge from foreign countries. More significantly, maps published in China, such as "The Republic of China New Atlas" of 1933 and "World

Atlas” of 1958, recognized the ‘Senkaku Gunto’ as Japanese territory. The People’s Daily’s article of January 8, 1953, which reported the ‘anti-U.S. occupation struggle of the people of the Ryukyu Islands’ in Japan, acknowledged that the Ryukyu Islands consisted of seven groups of islands including the ‘Senkaku Shoto’. Both ‘gunto’ and ‘shoto’ mean a group of islands in Japanese, and it is noteworthy that these Chinese documents used the Japanese name of ‘Senkaku’ instead of the Chinese name of ‘Diaoyu’.

It is only after the possible deposit of oil in their vicinity was reported as the result of a survey conducted by a UN committee in 1968 that China and Taiwan began to challenge the Japanese control.

The violent anti-Japan demonstrations which broke out in many cities in China last September were a surprise to the Japanese. The demonstrations were said to be in protest against the Japanese government’s decision to purchase a few of the Senkaku islands from a private Japanese owner. But, from the Japanese perspective, the Chinese had missed the point.

The central government of Japan decided to bring the islands under its ownership in order to prevent unpredictable—and possibly worse—consequences that might be brought about by a controversial purchase planned by the nationalist governor of the Tokyo metropolitan government at that time, Shintaro Ishihara. Furthermore, the central government bans any persons from landing on the islands without permission. For instance, it did not allow a survey team sent by the Tokyo metropolitan government to land the islands.

But, Beijing seemed to have interpreted the Japanese government’s moves only as provocation, and allowed the people to demonstrate violently against the Japanese embassy and consulates and to destroy Japanese factories and shops in China. It also sent their official vessels to challenge the Japanese control of the islands.

More worryingly, these demonstrations had the overtones of anti-Japan nationalism. In China, the bitter memories of the Japanese military

invasion in the 1930s and 40s remain the main source of flammable anti-Japanese sentiments. On top of it, the Chinese Communist Party has been promoting the so-called 'patriotic education' ever since the student demonstrations at Tiananmen Square in 1989. The patriotic education stresses the history of war against Japan, so that expressions of anti-Japan sentiment are considered as acts of patriotism.

It is also held that the war of resistance against Japan constitutes an important part of the Chinese Communist Party's claim to legitimacy.

By contrast, the Japanese, although angry, have generally reacted calmly to the Chinese actions against the Japanese interests. The expressions of nationalism are much subdued even to the extent of frustrating some Japanese nationalists.

The Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda stressed in his address to the UN General Assembly last September the importance of establishing the 'rule of law' and said that Japan would protect its sovereignty, territorial land and sea, in accordance with international law. To establish the rule of law is also essential for the South China Sea where China has been attempting to enforce its own claims in territorial disputes with its Southeast Asian neighbours.

There is no doubt that both Japan and China are responsible for ensuring regional stability. It is strongly hoped that the two governments will make their best efforts to find a way to make the bilateral relationship mutually beneficial and productive for the region.

Territorial disputes

Japan has two more unsettled territorial disputes: the one with Russia and the other with South Korea. The Russian illegal occupation ever since the end of World War II of the four Japanese islands, which Japan calls The Northern Territories, remains a subject of long going negotiations between Tokyo and Moscow. Consequently, a peace treaty to end World War II

between the two countries is yet to be signed.

The dispute with South Korea is about the islets called Takeshima in Japan and Dokudo in Korea. From the Japanese point of view, South Korea had unilaterally brought the islets under its control in January 1952, a few months before Japan recovered independence from the U.S.-led occupation under the San Francisco Peace Treaty. Seoul had since rejected twice Tokyo's proposals to together refer the dispute to the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

In spite of this historical background, the South Korean President Lee Myong-bak made an abrupt visit to the islet last August, the first time for a Korean president to do so. In protest to Seoul's demonstration of control in an unprecedented manner, the Japanese government proposed anew to together refer the case to the ICJ. Rejected again by Seoul, Tokyo is reportedly preparing to unilaterally refer the issue to the court.

U.S.-China relations

Of many developments in diplomacy with China, U.S.-China relations are most significant, for they would have defining impacts on the Asia-Pacific geopolitics.

It must be first noted, though, that policy objectives Tokyo and Washington pursue in its respective relations with Beijing are not always the same. Economically, the two countries are competitors in Chinese markets. Politically, Japan is far less enthusiastic than the United States about pressing China to protect human rights or to promote freedom and democracy.

Diplomatically, Japan is even anxious, if subconsciously, about a possibility that the country might be left out of the direct dealings to be made between the United States and China in their capacities of either the Permanent Members of the UN Security Council or the Nuclear Weapons States under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), or both.

Nevertheless, it is in the strategic interests of Japan to ensure stable

and predictable relations between Washington and Beijing.

Obviously, the United States and China need each other's cooperation economically and financially as well in terms of foreign and security policy. However, given the American self-righteousness and the Chinese self-centeredness as well as the equally proud and assertive characteristics of the two nations, diplomacy between the two countries could easily become confrontational.

The two countries' interests often contradict each other. For example, the protection of human rights and the promotion of democracy are the important part of the U.S. foreign policy agenda. But, China regards U.S. advocacy on these issues as interference in her domestic affairs. The non-interference in domestic affairs is one of the basic principles of Chinese foreign policy. Although this is true of all independent countries, China is particularly forceful in demanding others to respect this.

More fundamentally, it is said that the Americans and the Chinese distrust each other, and that the Chinese are feeling besieged by a U.S.-led group of countries. It is also held that the Chinese public opinion is driven by an urge to recover what their country had lost while the world was dominated by the West.

The expansion of China's military power

Against this backdrop, China's rapid military buildup and the increasingly blatant demonstration of its military power worry not only the Japanese and the Americans but also many peoples in the Asia-Pacific region.

China seems to be trying to attain what American defense planners call as an "anti-access and area-denial" capability; a capability with which China would be able to deny U.S. military interventions in China's efforts to prevent Taiwan's independence, and also challenge the predominance of

U.S. forces in the Asia-Pacific region. China also appears to be aimed at acquiring what the Americans call the 'asymmetrical capability', which is designed to undercut U.S. power projection in such areas as space and cyber space, where U.S. military capability could be vulnerable.

The lack of transparency on China's strategic goals, military budgets and force posture adds to concerns about the country's real intentions. It is also worried that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) would become increasingly influential within the Communist Party. It is assumed that the future leaders of the Communist Party, with little military experience, would have less control over the military than their predecessors.

Consequently, the question of changing strategic balance between the United States and China will be bound to set the tone of not only the two countries' relations but also the agenda of security debates in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly that of the Japan-U.S. alliance cooperation.

It is for these reasons that Japan wants European countries to refrain from exporting advanced military technologies to China.

Russia

Russia's future position in the changing Asian-Pacific geopolitics is a question to be addressed in a longer-term perspective.

In the current global diplomacy, China seems to find common interests with Russia in undercutting U.S., or Western, influence. That China has been siding with Russia at the UN Security Council on Syria is a case in point. But, it is also plausible to assume that Moscow is wary of China's increasing economic and military power as well as its growing political influence. The scarcity of Russian population in the resource-rich Asian part of the country should add to Moscow's anxiety.

To cooperate with Russia for developing the economy of Siberia and the Far East could be an important agenda for future Japan-European cooperation. But, it must be first recognized that Russia's profile in the Asia-

Pacific region is low and that it remains to be seen if hosting the summit meeting of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) at Vladivostok last September would help to enhance Russia's engagement and profile in the region.

Japan-U.S. Alliance

As noted at the outset, the Japan-U.S. alliance is the most important pillar for security in the Asia-Pacific region.

The alliance is not against China, of course. Nor is it designed to antagonize North Korea. But, in the Japanese eyes, the post-Cold War risks and uncertainties described earlier have underscored anew the importance of the alliance, including the U.S. extended nuclear deterrence. Japan would also count upon U.S. forces for reinforcing Japan's Self Defense Forces (SDF) if deterrence were to be broken.

The question of the U.S. extended nuclear deterrence seems to be no longer salient in the post-Cold War European strategy. But, in Asia, particularly for Japan and South Korea, the U.S. extended nuclear deterrence is essential for deterring North Korean aggression and neutralizing potential threats Russian and Chinese nuclear arsenals might pose. Japan's National Defense Program Guidelines adopted in 2010, the fourth of the kind since 1976, recognized for the first time ever that the U.S. extended nuclear deterrence was essential so long as nuclear weapons would exist, and stressed the need for Japan to cooperate with the United States in order to enhance its credibility.

Japan, for its part, provides U.S. forces with bases and the financial 'host nation support' which is the most generous among the U.S. allies. Japan would be an indispensable staging area for U.S. forces' operations to defend South Korea. U.S. forces based in Japan, including an aircraft carrier task group and Marine Corps' expeditionary forces, are contributing to security and stability in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. With the so-

called U.S. 'pivot to Asia', or 'rebalancing' U.S. strategic focus to Asia, U.S. forces will be dispersed broadly in the Asia-Pacific region. But, the central importance of Japanese bases for U.S. strategy will not diminish.

U.S. force presence in Japan is not without problems. On the contrary, to attain the support of local communities for U.S. force presence is difficult, particularly in Okinawa where over 70% of U.S. facilities and areas provided by Japan concentrate. For instance, the Japanese government's failure to date to attain the local support has been hindering the progress of the officially agreed and politically important plans designed to relocate a Marine air station within Okinawa.

On the other hand, the operational cooperation between Japan's SDF and U.S. forces has been in steady progress, even though the pace might still be too slow in the American eyes.

Given the Obama administration's policy to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in U.S. deterrence strategy, the role the SDF would be expected to play in the conventional aspect of the common deterrence strategy will be bound to become broader. With this recognition, Tokyo and Washington are already working to ensure closer command level coordination, to increase joint training, joint surveillance and reconnaissance activities and to promote joined or shared use of facilities between the two forces.

It is worth noting in this context that the large scale disaster relief operation, called 'Operation Tomodachi (meaning friends)', which was jointly conducted by the SDF and U.S. forces in the wake of the earthquake and tsunami of March 11th, 2011, provided the two forces, particularly the SDF, with the valuable experiences of joint operations, involving all the services on both sides.

BMD is yet another important area of the two countries' defense cooperation. Cooperation for cyber security will be on the agenda, too. It

must be pointed out particularly to the Europeans that the next-generation BMD interceptor Japan is co-developing with the United States, SM-3 Block II A, would be deployed for European defense, should the 'European Phased Adaptive Approach' on BMD be adopted by NATO.

Obviously, the improvement and modernization of the SDF's defense capability, including the increased mobility necessary to defend remote islands, and the promotion of closer defense cooperation with U.S. forces would require more defense spending on the part of Japan. The prospect that U.S. defense budgets might be reduced considerably in the coming decade would add to the need for Japan to increase its defense budgets.

This will be a difficult task for Japan, which has already been suffering from a long economic stagnation and large public debts. But, there seems to be no option for Japan to do otherwise, particularly given the growing challenge of the Chinese military power.

Regional cooperation

There is no doubt that diplomacy, particularly multilateral regional cooperation involving China, should be the central part of the efforts required for ensuring a prospect of cooperative regional order in the Asia-Pacific region. But, the existing mechanisms for regional cooperation are not capable of managing difficult political issues like territorial disputes.

The Europeans have been pursuing political, let alone economic, integration, after having solved territorial disputes and other questions requiring reconciliation. By contrast, Asian countries have been pursuing regional cooperation for the economic development of the countries involved, without squarely addressing territorial and other political issues related to history among the countries concerned.

Also in contrast to Europe, important multilateral mechanisms for regional cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region, such as APEC and the East Asia Summit (which now includes the United States and Russia), are

all not based on treaties. What countries would agree in these meetings is not legally binding either.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is the only treaty-based multilateral organization in the Asia-Pacific region. But, its decisions are to be made by the consensus of its members, in the so-called 'ASEAN WAY', so that the progress of their cooperation is slow and evolutionary.

ASEAN has often acted as catalyst for broader cooperation involving non-member states in the region at such forums as ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), in which EU participates, and the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus. But, ASEAN's catalytic function is limited, particularly on political issues involving the bigger neighbor, like China. This was testified by the failure of ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting (in July this year) to agree on a proposal to make a legally binding code of conduct for the South China Sea. China's opposition to the proposal was reportedly behind the unprecedented failure.

Japan' future

Robert Cooper, British diplomat with long career at the EU Commission and knowledgeable about Japan, wrote in an insightful book published in 2003, *The Breaking Of Nations*, that Japan was by inclination a 'post-modern state' similar to European countries.

He argues that were it not on the other side of the world, Japan would be a natural member of organizations such as the OSCE or the EU. But, he also points out that Japan is a post-modern country surrounded by 'modern states', which might, in his views, be prepared to use force against each other. Furthermore, he states: 'Postmodernism in one country is possible only up to a point and only because its security treaty with the US enables to live as though its neighbourhood were less threatening.'

'If China develops in an unpromising fashion (either modern or pre-modern), Japan could be forced to revert to defensive modernism' :This

prediction he made a decade ago could prove right. For, faced with the growth of the Chinese military power, Japanese public opinion is shifting to support increased defense efforts and closer alliance cooperation with the United States.

It must be stressed, though, that Japan will remain allied with the United States, for it is the optimal policy for Japan to take politically and economically, let alone strategically. In the context of the Asia-Pacific geopolitics, too, this will be stabilizing. For, a Japan allied with the United States would be more reassuring not only to Washington and Beijing but also to the other countries in the region than a militarily independent Japan.

It goes without saying that Japan will have to play a political role more positively in ensuring stable and predictable strategic relations between the United States and China. To this end, though, Japan will have to recover economic dynamism and more stable politics.

Although a prospect for such positive developments remains yet to be seen, the Japanese have not lost their perseverance, inventiveness and technological dexterity. Promising changes are also taking place in many aspects of life in the country, such as the rise of independent - minded young leaders, including women, and a sense of solidarity prevailing among the people in the wake of the devastations caused by earthquake and tsunami last year. That the ruling and major opposition parties cooperated in August this year to solve the long pending and politically difficult question of raising consumption tax was a silver lining of the long drifting politics.

Hopefully, challenges would guide the nation in the right direction.