

East Asian Security Quarterly
A View from Tokyo on Regional Politico-Military Developments
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October-December 2013

January 2014

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Dear Readers,

Many apologies for the belated new year's greetings from CIGS. It took us a while to fully analyze and evaluate Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's "surprise" visit to Yasukuni Shrine at last year's end. Obviously, the last three months have seen the biggest ups and downs in US-Japan relations since the beginning of EASQ.

On October 3 2013, the US-Japan alliance hit a new high when US secretaries of State and Defense and Japanese foreign and defense ministers gathered for the Security Consultative Committee (SCC) meeting in Tokyo for the first time. The positive momentum appeared to continue with Japan releasing its first-ever National Security Strategy, along with the revised National Defense Program Guidelines and the Mid-Term Defense Program—these documents all suggested that Japan is now ready to make a faithful effort to revitalize its national security policy, to become more "normal".

However, this positive atmosphere surrounding the US-Japan relations drastically turned sour after Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited Yasukuni Shrine on December 26. The loud outcry of criticism from China and South Korea were entirely expected: after all, Beijing and Seoul criticized Mr. Abe when he made offering in lieu of personally visiting Yaskuni earlier in the fall. What may have been unexpected by the Abe administration was a strong reaction from Washington. Completely unexpectedly, Mr. Abe's visit to Yasukuni Shrine may have revealed a critical gap in mutual understanding between Tokyo and Washington.

On the one hand, those in the United States involved in US' Asia policymaking, largely been informed through English-based media reporting and commentaries, continue to question Mr.

Abe's intention and his ultimate vision for Japan. On the other hand, silent majority in Japan, who is not vocally supportive of Mr. Abe's decision to visit Yasukuni, is frustrated with what they perceive as the continued foreign intervention to what they believe is essentially domestic affairs. They are particularly frustrated that the United States joint the rank of vocal critics of the visit, questioning US intentions. This is a potentially critical perception gap that could cost a great deal of goodwill that has been fostered between Japan and the United States throughout postwar period.

In North Korea, the purge and the following execution of Chang Song-taek by Kim Jong-Un raised concerns by those who observes North Korean situation closely. Chang was considered "the voice of reason" by many outside North Korea. The implication of his purge, particularly for the stability of Kim Jong-Un's power base within the regime and the impact of Chang's absence on North Korea's external behavior, will surely continue to be the subject of intense debate for some time to come. In the meantime, the approval rating for President Park Geun Hye continues to slip. Her public criticism of Prime Minister Abe is expected to continue, even to exacerbate following Mr. Abe's Yasukuni visit. Despite the strong desire at the working level, these give little hope that Japan-ROK relations can get back on the constructive path.

Japan-China tension reached a new high with China declared its own air defense identification zone (ADIZ) without any prior consultation or notification on November 23, 2013. The existence of overlap between Japanese and Chinese ADIZs stirred a new sense of urgency for some kind of workable crisis management mechanism between Japan and China.

We hope you will find this short overview and the following analyses of Northeast Asian security developments helpful.

<Tokyo>

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit to Yasukuni Shrine on December 26, quite a surprise for most in Japan including Mr. Abe's closest aides themselves, overwhelmed all the other developments in Tokyo during this period. Japanese media has focused on Intense (but entirely expected) criticism from South Korea and China, as well as unexpectedly strong US reaction, which was demonstrated by unprecedented issuance of the statement by US Embassy in Tokyo (which is, unlike the argument by some that it carries less weight because it was not issued by the Department of State in DC, is consistent with State Department's position) to express US "disappointment". Referring to the portion of the statement where it "takes note" of Mr. Abe's intention of the visit, some in Tokyo, including political leaders,

seems to think that Mr. Abe has made a tough political decision after taking into account all the potential fallout of the visit—reaction from Seoul and Beijing will be within the expectation, and the US may not be as frustrated as is suggested, and will not cause a lasting damage to the US-Japan relations.

If anything, initial US' reaction may have begun to alienate the silent majority in Japan. An opinion poll conducted by Kyodo News on December 28 and 29 indicates that 47.1% of the respondent said Mr. Abe's Shrine visit was "not good", while only 43.2% thought it was "good". Similar results were reported for the opinion poll conducted on January 4 and 5th. This indicates that the majority of the Japanese, while they may not be vocal about their opposition, remains wary of Mr. Abe's visit to the Yasukuni Shrine. Although this is probably what Mr. Abe did not wish to see, it clearly proves that the assertion made by China and South Korea (and some in Western media) that Japan is tilting toward "right" is simply not true.

At the same time, however, this majority also thinks that whether or not Japanese political leaders visit Yasukuni Shrine is essentially Japan's internal affair. Therefore, they are very critical of foreign meddling. While the Kyodo opinion poll in December showed that vast majority—as much as 69%—thought the Yasukuni Shrine visit ought to be determined with consideration to its potential diplomatic impact, overwhelming majority did not accept the criticism against the visit by foreign countries—70% was critical of Chinese and South Korea criticism, and nearly 60% did not accept US criticism. Finally, all the polls consistently show that the Shrine Visit had very little impact on the approval rating of Mr. Abe and his administration. Simply put, the majority of Japanese are not crazy about Mr. Abe's Shrine Visit. But they dislike foreign meddling in the issue just as much. It is very probably that Mr. Abe's approval rating escaped from going down because the public supported Mr. Abe *not* because they support his visit *per se*, but because they want to send the message that Japan should be allowed to decide how to mourn its own war dead. Subsequent Jiji polls show Mr. Abe's approval rating has gone up by 5.5%.

This is a trend that is critical to be carefully analysed and understood, particularly by policy-makers in the United States. Otherwise, Japanese public's sense of dismay—worse yet, betrayal—with the United States will only intensify, eroding the support that the US-Japan alliance has enjoyed over the past six decades.

From the alliance management point of view, this is also very regrettable, especially because of the number of important achievements made by the Abe administration to make Japan a more "normal" country. The accomplishments for the last several months include the

establishment of National Security Council, the release of Japan's first-ever National Security Strategy, the revision of National Defense Program Guidelines and the Mid-Term Defense Program, and the enactment of the Specified Classified Information Protection Act. In addition, with the approval by Okinawan Governor Nakaima for the landfill in Hennoko, Japanese government reached an important milestone in executing the relocation of Marine Corps Air Station Futenma—almost a two-decade old point of tension between the two allies.

<The United States>

The Obama administration's and Congress broke its deadlock over US federal budget in December by reaching a two-year budget deal. This agreement has brought much-awaited sense of stability in US federal budgeting, a development certainly welcome by the Pentagon.

However, President Obama's approval rating has hit a new low over the problems associated with the launching of so-called "Obamacare", a federal insurance system. Shortly after the enrollment period began, US government's insurance registration site malfunctioned due to its inability to manage a large volume of access. It turned out that President Obama's election promise in 2009—"if you like your insurance plan and your doctors, you can keep it"—was not the case because the requirements under the Affordable Health Care Act forced insurance companies to alter the range of insurance plans they offer, making it impossible for many to keep the same plan after this law went into effect.

The CBS News opinion poll conducted between December 5-8 indicates that 50% of the respondents did not support President Obama. This poll also indicates that 63% of the respondents felt that the country was moving in the "wrong direction". What is probably most worrisome for President Obama and his close advisors is that this poll shows two new trends. First, the poll showed that the more people (44% disapprove vs. 42% approve) did not approve President Obama's foreign policy—the area he has done consistently well. More importantly, the percentage of those who did not think they could trust President Obama hit the highest at 46% since 2009. Throughout his presidency, Obama has consistently scored high in this "trustability" question even though the voters have been divided over his policy initiatives. This decline in his "trustability" is worrisome for President Obama, as he goes into 2014 to face the Mid-Term election in November 2014.

When Obama is politically weak at home, he was frustrated by the provocative behavior by the leaders in East Asia. It was said that Obama was livid at the Chinese announcement of its ADIZ, primarily because the announcement came as a surprise. Although Vice President Biden struck the tone that focuses more on emphasizing the need of crisis management

mechanism and mutual self-restraint rather than pressing Beijing to retract (or not implement) the announced ADIZ, this incident deeply affected US view of China, particularly on whether China's willingness to emerge as a responsible stakeholder in the international community. Militarily, the announcement was interpreted as a blatant challenge to US presence in Western Pacific. Dispatch of B-52 in response to China's announcement was a clear sign by the Pentagon that it would refuse to accept China's attempt to create a "new normal" in air and maritime domains in this area.

As Washington tries to calibrate its response to China's ADIZ announcement, Prime Minister Abe's visit to Yasukuni equally frustrated him and other senior officials in the Administration, namely Secretary of State Kerry and Secretary of Defense Hagel. Following Mr. Abe's visit, despite a strange sense of unfounded optimism in Tokyo, was an argument that US government should be more open about its views of the revisionist views of pre-World War II history held by some in Japan. And this argument is quickly gaining traction in the discourse among Asia (not just Japan) policy experts in Washington. Even those who take the position that Japan has the right to pay respect to its own wardead questions the wisdom of Japanese high-profile political leaders paying homage to Yasukuni Shrine, given the expected diplomatic fallout and the challenges they present for the US-Japan alliance.

<China and South Korea>

No new positive developments have taken place over the past three months in the Japan-China as well as Japan-South Korea relations. Moreover, as noted above, overwhelming majority in Japan did not accept the criticism against Mr. Abe's shrine visit by foreign countries—70% was critical of Chinese and South Korea criticism.

This may imply that the great majority of the Japanese are "getting tired" of such continuous Chinese and Korean criticisms and are almost giving up on those bilateral relations at least for the time being. The reason is that the many Japanese are now aware that, both in China and in South Korea, such anti-Japanese criticisms are at least partly a product of their respective domestic politics.

Mr. Xi Jinping, for example, is reportedly still busy in solidifying his new power bases by confiscating the existing vested interests, such as those in oil or in railroad, from the departing high party officials and redistributing them to Mr. Xi's new supporters. This political move carried out in the name of "anti-corruption campaigns" will likely continue for a while until Mr. Xi's authority is comfortably established. At least before that, it is highly unconceivable for Mr. Xi to seriously start working on the bilateral relations with Japan.

In South Korea, Ms. Park Geun-hye is also struggling to maintain her authority as President. Reports from Seoul have strongly suggested that the new conservative president, still trying to strengthen her political authority, is now fighting the leftist and liberals who would criticize her as being too soft on and too friendly to Tokyo. As compared to China's strategic move, South Korea's anti-Japanese behavior is essentially a tactical product of their domestic politics.

<Southeast Asia>

Contrary to the above, Japan's diplomatic engagement in Southeast Asia continues to be proactive. Since his inauguration, Prime Minister Abe visited all 10 ASEAN member states within 10 months. This unprecedented engagement to Southeast Asia was wrapped up by the Japan-ASEAN Special Summit Meeting in Tokyo on December 14th.

The Japan-ASEAN summit commemorated 40 years of bilateral cooperation, and adopted three joint statements (Vision, Implementation Plan, and regional/global challenges). Both sides agreed wide ranging issues of mutual interests including security, economic relations, and socio-cultural cooperation.

Special attentions were paid, how ASEAN might collectively address to the issue of China's establishment of the Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ). They agreed to include "ensuring freedom and safety of navigation and overflight, in accordance with the universally recognised principles of international law". The statement does not single out any particular country but was thought to be an allusion to the ADIZ, unilaterally declared by China in late November.

The main challenge for Japan's security policy towards ASEAN is to deal with ASEAN's complexity over its major power relations. The member states of ASEAN is divided over how best to deal with regional security issues due to their different national interests, geopolitics, and preferences of their diplomatic relations with China. ASEAN continues to prefer to avoid facing with a strategic choice whether to take side of U.S., Japan or China. Instead, ASEAN is interested in maintaining the balance of power among major states, preferable to ASEAN's strategic position. A series of Japan-ASEAN joint statements are cementing strategic ties, but only at the level where ASEAN maintains such position.