

East Asian Security Quarterly
A View on Regional Political-Military Developments
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Dear Readers,

There are some major foreign policy developments in the second quarter of 2015. The biggest news comes from Vienna on July 16 when the United States, United Kingdom, Russia, France, China and Germany reached an agreement with Iran over its nuclear program. US Congress, particularly Republicans, reacted to this accord very negatively. There is also a great deal of anxiety in both Israel and the Arab states, which Washington attempted to alleviate by extending the already planned trip by Defense Secretary Ashton Carter to the region. The Obama administration also won a big legislative victory on Trade Promotion Authority, and announced the reciprocal re-opening of the embassies between the United States and Cuba.

In the Asia-Pacific region, tension over the land reclamation by China in South China Sea continues to brew. In Shangri-La dialogue at the end of May, China faced a growing criticism from the countries in the region, but did not show any sign of willingness to adjust its course. US intensifies its rhetoric against the Chinese behavior, but it is unclear what US is willing to do to back up its strong rhetoric.

In Japan, the Abe administration has submitted a historic legislation to modernize the legal framework for its national security policy. The bill passed the House of Representatives on July 16, and now goes to the House of Councilors for the deliberation and vote. So far, the debate among Japanese elected officials have stopped well short of a broader strategic discussion on Japanese national policy that some had hoped for, and has been contained to a

technical legal argument that has been all too familiar. The public protest against the bill continues, and Prime Minister Abe's approval rating continues to fall. Although Abe is determined to enact the bill by the end of the current Diet session that ends on September 27, how the lowered public approval rating over the bill will affect his administration beyond September remains to be seen. On the foreign policy front, however, the efforts to stabilize Tokyo's relationship with China continue. Tokyo's relations with Seoul seem to have started getting back on track when two foreign ministers met, but their interaction over the registration of Japan's Meiji-era industrial sites as UNESCO world heritage reminded us of the challenges for the way ahead.

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

<Tokyo>

The Abe administration has submitted to the Diet a package of security legislations to modernize the legal framework of Japan's national security policy in May. Collectively called "*Anpo Hosei* (security bills)", the legislation package is designed to (1) provide operational flexibility for the JSDF in "gray zone" situation to better control the crises; (2) allow the JSDF to participate in the coalition operation in the areas beyond Japan's vicinity when a certain conditions are met; (3) clarify what the JSDF is allowed to do when it conducts the operation that is interpreted as "limited exercise of the right of collective self-defense", and (4) bring the rules of engagement for the JSDF that participate in UN-led peacekeeping operations closer to international standard.

However, the bill met strong opposition which only intensified after three constitutional scholars testified in front of the Diet's Research Committee on Constitution that they believed the proposed *Anpo Hosei* was unconstitutional. Although the bill passed the House of Representatives on July 16, the protests over the bill continue in front of the Kantei (the Prime Minister's office). The bill also affected Prime Minister Abe's approval rating: a Sankei-FNN poll taken on July 18-19 showed that the majority of the public now disapproves of the Abe administration, which is considered to be a reflection of the public sentiment toward Mr. Abe's approach so far on the security legislation. While the bill is almost certain to pass, there may be a lasting impact on Mr. Abe's ability to tackle other issues after the passage of the legislation.

<The United States>

The Obama administration had three major “achievements” in foreign policy in this quarter: a Vienna accord on freezing Iran’s nuclear program, another step toward the full diplomatic normalization with Cuba, and the passage of the bill to grant him the Trade Promotion Authority which is essential for the administration to try to achieve its goal of concluding Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) by the end of 2015.

Out of these three “achievements”, the nuclear deal with Iran is most controversial. U.S. Senate now has 60 days to review this agreement before they cast a vote whether to give its consent. The Republicans that holds a slim majority in the Senate has been voicing their criticism even before the deal was reached. Even the Democratic senators, while they praise the administration’s efforts in diplomacy, remain cautious and no one so far has stepped out as a strong supporter of the deal. Out of the political arena, however, the response to a deal is calmer. The experts in arms control policy community are by and large supportive of the deal. The policy community’s response so far has demonstrated that they have a realistic expectation of the deal—that the deal is only about Iran’s nuclear program, and it does not automatically lead to the further rapprochement between Washington and Tehran.

US-Cuba relations also reached another juncture when the two countries announced the reciprocal reopening of their embassies on July 20. However, there are several challenges toward further steps toward full diplomatic normalization including lifting the embargo, and the return of Guantanamo Bay naval base to Cuba (which Cuba has long demanded).

Finally, with the approval of Trade Promotion Authority (TPA) on June 24, the Obama administration has kept the hope of reaching a goal of concluding Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) by the end of 2015. The TPA bill was considered as “the most important bill of the year” (Senator Orrin Hatch, Chairman of Senate Finance Committee), and the administration and the Republican leadership in the Congress forged and sustained their coalition to pass the bill.

<China and South Korea>

A big contrast has been seen between China and Korea’s respective approaches toward Japan in the last several months. On the one hand, China seems to have made a tactical, if not strategic decision to stabilize its relations with Japan as early as in summer last year. Its response to Prime Minister Abe’s speech in front of U.S. Congress on April 29 this year was muted; while it is expectedly critical of the proposed security legislation, it did not prevent Japan’s national security advisor Shotaro Yachi from having a productive meeting with State

Councilor Yang Jiechi and Premier 李克強 during his recent trip to Beijing. Beijing has also been relatively quiet about Prime Minister Abe's anticipated statement on the 70th anniversary of World War II. It seems that facing an intense diplomatic pressure in the South China Sea and its continuously strained relationship with the United States have been driving Beijing to stabilize, if not improve, its relationship with Tokyo. However, the recent revelation of China's drilling activities in East China Seas has flared up another wave of negative sentiment toward China in Japan, which can complicate both governments' attempt to stay on the course in its bilateral relationship.

On the other hand, Japan-South Korea relationship continues to go through its now familiar ups-and-downs over the history issues. In the recent months, the South Korean government seems to have finally begun to soften its attitude toward Japan, with President Park Geun-hye beginning to talk about separation of the discussion on history issues from other pertinent issues for the two governments. The meeting between Japanese foreign minister Fumio Kishida and his South Korean counterpart Yun Byung-se gave additional hope among the officials that Japan-South Korea relations have finally got back on track. However, South Korea's last minute reversal attempt of its attitude at the UNESCO World Heritage Site meeting, trying to undo the agreement that was reached at Kishida-Yun meeting in the previous week, must have disappointed many in Japan.

<Southeast Asia>

Tension continues over China's land reclamation in the South China Sea. At the Shangri-La Dialogue, the countries in the region seem to have grown more openly critical of Chinese behavior, with the Philippines, for example, reiterating its commitment to bring the case in front of the UNCLOS court for the ruling. In June, China claimed that it would complete some of its reclamation in the Spratly archipelago of the South China Sea, while adding it would continue to build facilities on the man-made islands. It is still highly uncertain whether China permanently halted the reclamation or temporarily suspended for further developments.

Japan's engagement in South China Sea gave signals of stepping up. The Philippines' President Benigno Aquino III paid a state visit to Japan in June and both leaders decided to initiate negotiations to conclude an agreement on the transfer of defense equipment and technology. In addition to the provision of 10 patrol vessels to the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), Japan showed interests to strengthen consultations towards the further enhancement of Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) of the PCG. Potential items of defense equipment transfer to the Philippines can go further, including multi-purpose aircraft and surveillance assets. Japan and the Philippines also began discussing for Japan's Visiting Force Agreement

(VFA) that will allow JSDF to access to the bases in the Philippines primarily for the Humanitarian and Disaster Relief (HA/DR) operations and trainings.

All in all, everybody seems to be waiting for the Abe statement either on August 14 on the 70th anniversary for Japan of the end of the World War Two. We will send you an additional short memo on the statement after it is issued. Stay tuned!