

Panel: East Asian Power Shift (RR)

Date/Time: Wednesday, April 23, 2014 / 09:00-10:15

Speakers: David Sanger, The New York Times (Moderator)
Kim Sung-han, Korea University
Soeya Yoshihide, Keio University
James Steinberg, Syracuse University
Yao Yunzhu, Academy of Military Science, PLA

Mr. David Sanger, National Security Correspondent for the New York Times, framed the panel discussion entitled, "East Asia Power Shift" by asking how each of the four main players in Northeast Asia—South Korea, China, Japan, and the United States - can work together toward a new security architecture to manage the rapidly evolving geopolitical realities of the region.

Mr. James Steinberg, Dean of the Maxwell School at Syracuse University, asserted that a collective security agreement negotiated at a multilateral forum is the only way to defuse a security dilemma that threatens to grow out of control. He suggested this agreement should be broad in scope and cover financial and cyber security as well. Mr. Sanger noted that rising powers such as China tend to be uninterested in these kinds of agreements while they are still rising.

General Yao Yunzhu, Director of The Center on China-American Defense Relations at the Chinese Academy of Military Science, weighed in on this issue by expressing concern felt within China that it is often excluded or even directly targeted by security agreements such as the US bilateral alliance system. She explained that China has made great efforts to demonstrate its rise is peaceful, but that it will be unwilling to participate in any security agreements until good faith and reciprocity is shown. General Yao expressed understanding that the US is a "Pacific" nation with important connections to the region, but still cautioned that American activities in the region make China uncomfortable. She also restated her belief that China needs to continue doing its part to assuage the suspicions of its neighbors and work towards resolving maritime security issues such as the islands of the South China Seas and Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands.

Dr. Soeya Yoshihide, Professor of International Relations at Keio University, expressed a regret felt throughout much of Japan at the "return of geopolitics" to the region after a lengthy period of relative peace and stability. The Japanese leadership has not yet developed a grand strategy to deal with these changes, and he expects the alliance with the US to remain the cornerstone of Japanese strategic thinking for the foreseeable future. Professor Soeya expressed concern regarding the vilification in foreign media of Japan's public discourse on becoming a "normal" country. He described critical viewpoints as distortions borne of misperceptions about Japanese intentions and the perception of who Japanese Prime Minister

* The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.

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Dr. Kim Sung-han, Director of the Ilmin International Relations Institute at Korea University, related that South Korea's dual strategy is to maintain the current bilateral US alliance while also pursuing a multilateral regional dialogue based on the EU model. China is the ROK's largest trading partner and therefore its security depends on peaceful coexistence between its two larger partners. Furthermore, South Korea's DPRK strategy relies on coordinated pressure from both the US and China so any strategic competition between the two threatens to derail South Korea's interests. Dr. Kim also expressed concern regarding Japan's pursuit of a collective self-defense capability and urged Japanese leaders to make clear their intentions are separate from those of the ideological right in order to alleviate the concerns of China and the ROK.