



SESSION SKETCHES

Asan Plenum 2013: “New World Disorder”
www.asanplenum.org

Sources of Instability in East Asia

Panel: Session 5 (Regency Room)

Date/Time: Wednesday, May 1, 2013 / 14:00-15:15

Speakers: Anthony Nelson, US-ASEAN Business Council
Hong Kyudok, Sookmyung Women’s University
Huang Kwei-bo, National Chengchi University
Ren Xiao, Fudan University
Yamaguchi Noboru, The National Defense Academy of Japan

Rapporteur: Kyle Cassily, Seoul National University

In the past decade, East Asia has been more stable than it was throughout most of the 20th century, yet there are still potential flashpoints where conflict can occur, panel moderator Anthony Nelson said to open a wide-ranging debate. Nelson framed the discussion by highlighting the diverse challenges that currently pervade the region, including competition over dwindling water resources, the advent of social media that can aggravate nationalistic disputes among populations, and increases in national defense budgets. Nelson encouraged the panelists to tackle any potential conflict area and offer creative policy options to deal with it.

Hong Kyudok began by broaching a central issue to security in East Asia that was referenced frequently in the debate—North Korean nuclear weapons and provocations. After the 2010 sinking of the *ROKS Cheonan* and the artillery barrage on Yeonpyeong Island, South Korea created a new doctrine of pro-active deterrence, intending to respond to future provocations by striking back forcefully and quickly at a level of violence appropriate to the force used in the provocation. Hong said it is necessary to make clear to North Korea that South Korea will not tolerate such actions by using force in order to prevent future attacks. De-escalation, however, is the ultimate goal, which Hong believes can be best achieved through working with its regional partners in Japan and China.

Huang Kwei-bo took a broader approach to the issue of regional instability, citing

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

*The views expressed herein are panel overviews of the Asan Plenum. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the author or the institutions they are affiliated with.



SESSION SKETCHES

Asan Plenum 2013: “New World Disorder”
www.asanplenum.org

three main sources: subjective understanding of East Asian history, problems with good governance, and a lack of institutionalization regarding conflict management prevention. Without laying specific blame, Huang argued that East Asian nations distort history to their own ends and cannot agree upon a view of 20th-century history, which will cause endless disputes that will harm the region’s prosperity. Rapid economic growth fueled by foreign direct investment has also changed domestic dynamics in many nations, which necessitates more efforts at good governance in order to improve the living conditions of the people. Huang then said that despite the presence of ASEAN and other regional frameworks, the institutionalization of East Asia has been mostly verbal and in need of more deeds—not just words.

Noting first that East Asia has seen considerable positive developments in recent years, especially the stability seen recently across the Taiwan Strait, Ren Xiao then echoed the belief that historical burdens in East Asia are the source of considerable regional instability. Rather than demanding apologies from Japan, Ren suggested that reconciliation is a better path forward because it will force a two-way dialogue. Nationalism was also mentioned as a serious problem in every East Asian nation, which needs an antidote to dissipate the unhealthy sentiments. Emphasizing the role individuals can play in regional instability, Ren urged politicians to weigh their words and avoid irresponsible stands that can aggravate tensions.

Yamaguchi Noboru analyzed the role that the regional powers’ military capabilities have in achieving or hindering stability. He noted the dangers of high troop levels present in many nations, especially the hundreds of thousands of soldiers facing each other across the DMZ in the Korean Peninsula and the incredible density of soldiers in Taiwan, which is 7-8 Taiwanese soldiers per square kilometer. Yamaguchi next discussed the implications of China’s military spending relative to its large GDP. Chinese military spending as a portion of its GDP is similar to most nations, but to smaller economies in the region this relatively high spending causes fear and a possible security dilemma.

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

*The views expressed herein are panel overviews of the Asan Plenum. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the author or the institutions they are affiliated with.