



TALKING POINTS

Asan Plenum 2013: “New World Disorder”
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RELEASE EMBARGO DATE: APR. 30, 2013 AT 9 AM

Panel: Challenges for the ROK-US Alliance (Regency Room)

Date/Time: Tuesday, April 30, 2013 / 15:30-16:45

Talking Points for: Victor Cha, Center for Strategic and International Studies

One challenge for the ROK-US Alliance is the “Korea-Japan cold war.” There is a wide-perception gap and a “tone-deafness” in the relations where the pitch cannot be restored in the relationship no matter what either side does.

- On the Japanese side:
 - Shinzo Abe’s CSIS speech in February 2013, where he was asked how he will improve relations with Seoul. He said he has a forward looking view, and then cited how his grandfather Kishi Nobusuke was good friends with Park Chung-hee
 - This was not received well in Korea – even though he was trying to personalize his own experience. “Abe managed to contextualize an already complex relationship within the even more complex domestic politics of South Korea.”
- On the Korean side:
 - Example of an academic conference a designed to discuss Japan-Korea relations. in Seoul with live satellite feed from Dokdo greeting the participants
 - While Americans chuckled at the display of nationalism the Japanese walked silently and later sparked a discussion
- Cold War
 - In the past, it was okay for third parties like the US to encourage improving Seoul-Tokyo relations
 - But these days the reactions are “fierce and it is laced with an acute sense of self-righteousness.”

What has Abe done since taking office?

- Is back and is focused on economic recovery “Abenomics”
- Not make Takeshima Day a national holiday
- Not bringing the dispute for international arbitration
- Not revising the Kono Statement
- Hence, Tokyo feels “the ball is now in Seoul’s court to reciprocate.”

Reactions from Korea

- Believed it has reciprocated in the past, only to see its efforts hurt by the textbook controversy, Yasakuni shrine, and Japanese politicians statements
- Seoul feels it is both a critical regional player and a global player, therefore is does not tolerate what it perceives as demeaning statements from Tokyo.

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Two dangers

1. “North Korea’s threats and provocations pose real security concerns” for Japan/Korea
 - The lack of cooperation – at least until the Japanese upper house elections in July – makes NO SENSE.
 - Need better security cooperation in the face of North Korean provocations
2. Current geopolitics situation can go downward
 - New gov’ts want new policies
 - Park/Abe wants to improve relations with Obama, but have to also manage relations with Xi.

What is the potential consequence?

- As Mike Green has argued, it can “have the unintended effect of worsening Seoul-Tokyo relations.”
- Both Seoul/Tokyo might want to improve relations with Beijing from distancing each other, but this CAN be better accomplish if there was a stronger Bilateral ROK-Japan relations in the first place.

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