
Panel: Responsibility to History (R2H)

Date/Time: Tuesday, April 23, 2014 / 17:00-18:15

Speakers: Douglas Paal, Vice President for Studies at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; Andrew Browne, Senior Correspondent and Columnist at the Wall Street Journal; Lee Hawon, Editor at TV Chosun; Simon Long, Columnist at The Economist; David Sanger, National Security Correspondent at the New York Times

Douglas Paal, Vice President for Studies at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, focused the panel broadly on the challenges for Northeast Asia and specifically on the tensions between Japan and South Korea. Despite challenges in Japan-South Korean relations, it is possible to place them in a constructive context.

David Sanger, National Security Correspondent at the New York Times drew attention to areas that did not receive adequate discussion during the conference. Specifically, projects that could be used to overcome historical tensions, such as coordination on climate change, or the role of the young generation, and its use of technology have not been fully explored. Moreover, it will be critical for countries like South Korea and Japan to rethink what serves their national interest: recounting the past is unavoidable, but areas of potential cooperation should not be ignored.

Lee Hawon, Editor at TV Chosun, presented a photo of right-wing Japanese protestors and expressed his discontent with Prime Minister Abe’s approach to the comfort women issue to frame his larger objections to current Japanese policy.

Simon Long, Columnist at The Economist, contrasted the Northeast and Southeast Asian security environment. While there are multifaceted tensions in Southeast Asia, fears of a full-scale military clash still appear to be less than in Northeast Asia. This disparity is partly attributable to Southeast Asian benefits from ASEAN. The leadership in forming ASEAN has yielded lasting benefits, including providing its members a framework through which to manage its conflicts.

Andrew Browne, Senior Correspondent and Columnist at the Wall Street Journal, returned to Mr. Sanger’s previous remarks about the role of the young generation’s utilization of technology to ameliorate tensions. The young generation could ease tensions, but its use of technology can also be used to perpetuate conflict. Politically, there is a necessity for visionary leadership in Northeast Asia; this caliber of thinking from Japan on its national strategy is currently lacking.

During the discussion section, Dr. Paal posited that leaders in Northeast Asia might be incentivized to behave in adverse ways for domestic political benefit. Mr. Sanger noted that this behavior has actually occurred throughout history; what is important is that situations do not escalate to the point of eruption.

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Session Sketch

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Mr. Hawon brought attention to President Obama’s trip to Japan and South Korea, noting that South Koreans will be closely monitoring his actions and statements, particularly relating to the comfort women issue.

Responding to a question regarding Japan’s lack of forward thought on national strategy, Mr. Sanger pointed partially to the U.S.-Japanese alliance. Japan’s reliance on the U.S. for security has wiped out two generations of strategic debate about Japan’s security policies. Once Japan has a bit of distance from the U.S., it may realize the importance of allies such as South Korea.

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