



TALKING POINTS

Asan Plenum 2013: "New World Disorder"
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Panel: Sources of Instability in East Asia (Regency Room)

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

Talking Points for: Yamaguchi Noboru, Professor and Director, National Defense Academy of Japan

Arms buildup in East Asia is significant in the last two to three decades while it has unique characteristics in comparison with those in other part of the world Europe during the Cold War period for example. Trends in nations' military buildup differ from a sub region to another:

- a) In Southeast Asia, a significant naval buildup has been observed among the nations surrounding the South China Sea. Capabilities of these navies except for the PLAN used to be well below the necessity for securing the surrounding seas and have been increasing their capabilities since early 1990's.
- b) In Northeast Asia, despite the demise of the Cold War, conventional military confrontations remain between nation states such as on the Korean Peninsula and over the Taiwan Strait. North Korea has been spending much on their nuclear programs as well as its long range missile projects.
- c) Another point worth mentioning is that some of the regional nations have not reduced and have even increased their military spending after the end of the Cold War. Examples are Japan in early 1990's until the collapse of its bubble economy and more recently China for the last twenty years. This development is based on the rapid economic growth in the region and does not necessarily represent excessive military spending since those spending except for North Korea's are modest in terms of their percentage of GDP.

Based on the nature of military buildup in the region stated above there are a couple of points that we need to be careful.

- a) Even though military spending in the region are to fulfill regional nations security responsibilities exemplified by ASEAN nations' naval buildup, there may be possibilities to be misunderstood by others and cause a security dilemma that could lead to an unnecessary

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arms race.

b) Most of the ASEAN countries are responsible for maritime security in the region centering on the South China Sea. Their naval buildup should be welcomed as far as they do not lead to a security dilemma and hopefully done in a way of a coordinated buildup to share security responsibilities.

c) As regional navies including the PLAN continue to be built up and modernized, interaction among these navies will significantly increase. This requires the regional countries’ serious efforts to establish a scheme to prevent accidents such as collisions between naval vessels or between aircraft. This is critically important to avoid unintended arms conflicts in the region.

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