



TALKING POINTS

Asan Plenum 2013: “New World Disorder”
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Panel: Evolving New World Order in East Asia (Regency Room)

Date/Time: Wednesday, May 1, 2013 / 17:00-18:15

Talking Points for: Choi Kang, Korea National Diplomatic Academy

Overview: East Asia in Twilight Zone

Nowadays, East Asia is experiencing not only structural changes but also contextual changes. Thus the words such as fluidity and unpredictability capture the basic nature of East Asian strategic environment.

Interconnectedness and interdependency among the countries in the region are growing very rapidly across various fields. But this growth is asymmetrical. Asymmetrical interdependency, consequently, has become a source of concern for many countries in the region. Thus efforts to redress such asymmetrical interdependency are and shall be sought.

The so-called “Asian Paradox” has become very visible in recent years. On one hand, the level of cooperation among the countries has become very widespread. And, on the other, competition and conflict have also become an important concern for everyone. Cooperation in one area is not followed by cooperation in another area: no spill-over effect.

In other words, we are living in a twilight zone, where the old order has begun to disappear and a new order has not fully emerged.

Structural Change: Shifting Balance of Power

Until recently the U.S. has enjoyed its predominance in regional as well as global affairs. However, such U.S. predominance has begun to be challenged by the rise of China. China is catching up, or in some cases surpassing, the U.S. While the U.S. is trying to retain its predominance, it is quite difficult to reverse the current trend of structural change in East Asia.

In response, the U.S. has announced its policy of rebalancing toward Asia. On the other hand, China has announced “new great power diplomacy.” In the coming years, it is very likely to see some kind of collision between rebalancing and great power diplomacy.

Lack of Strategic Trust and Common Vision

Between the U.S. and China, there seems no strategic trust in each other’s intension—a kind of prisoner’s dilemma. In addition, there exists suspicion among the countries in the region.

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While everyone argues for peace, stability, and prosperity, and emphasizes cooperation, there is no shared vision about the future of the region, or desirable end state, which would provide cognitive background for cooperation. Rather each country has different set of agenda and strategic vision of its own. And while they are arguing for new norms and codes of conduct, which will govern the region in coming years, concrete efforts have not been whole-heartedly sought. In contrast, there exists mutual suspicion.

On-going cooperation among the countries in the region is rather ad-hoc and issue-based one, which might disappear one that specific goal is achieved.

Returning of the Old Issues and Rise of Nationalistic Sentiment

What makes the relations more conflict-prone is the resurgence of unresolved old issues such as territorial disputes and past history issues.

In addition, we have witnessed the rise of nationalistic sentiment in almost every country in the region. The combination of the resurgence of old issues and the rise of nationalistic sentiment will definitely constrain the development of community-building spirit and undermine the on-going cooperation.

Emerging Issues for Cooperation

In the meantime, on the other hands, issues and challenges, which require cooperation among the countries in the region, arise in recent years. Most notably, issues of human security or non-traditional security, have gained importance and made the cooperation possible.

There are many issues and challenges which require multilateral cooperation. Nuclear safety, health, HADR, climate change, environment protection, water resources, cyber security, and etc are some examples.

Opportunities and Approaches

Leadership changes can provide a momentum for enhancing strategic trust among the countries in the region. For that, it is necessary to have frank and in-depth dialogue among ourselves over the desirable end state of the region, or regional architecture. That is, we must start with the creation of cognitive background for the region. We have to think about the establishment of multilateral strategic dialogue. In addition, we must honor the universally accepted norms and regulations existing today, while we are trying to invent new ones.

Second, we should strengthen our efforts in coping with new security challenges. NTS issues must be seriously considered. This will breed habit of cooperation and make the people to recognize the benefit of cooperation.

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Third, we must follow the spirit of mutual consultation and agreement in seeking the solution for any problem or dispute.

Fourth, we must be able to control, or limit, the damage of one issue over others: damage limitation effort.

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