



Abe's Diplomacy Is Bearing Fruit

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Prime Minister Abe Shinzo's high powered visits to forty-seven countries



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Prime Minister Abe Shinzo is reported to have visited forty-seven countries as leader of the government over nineteen months. These were multifaceted, strategically important visits. Abe explained Japan's expanding role in security and promoted Japan's leading sales products such as nuclear power, high speed trains, and Japanese cuisine. He carried out diplomacy with a global perspective. The world's way of looking at Japan is now changing.

Two months after the prime minister set out with his present cabinet he started with a visit to Washington. He made a strong presentation of Japan announcing that "Japan Is Back" (the title of his Washington speech). Following this he attended and made speeches at the Davos World Economic Forum, the NATO North Atlantic Council, and the Shangri-La Conference in Singapore.

He also attended the opening of the Bosphorus Strait Undersea Tunnel, the opening ceremony of the Sochi Winter Olympics, and he was at the International Olympic Committee meeting in Brazil to promote the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. He has shown considerable energy. In the meantime, Abe visited all the ASEAN10 countries, and Mongolia, India, Australia and Papua New Guinea, and got a footing in all countries in the vicinity of China. These were strategically important moves. In addition, he visited a number of countries in the Middle East, Europe, Africa, and central and southern America. This was a diplomacy appropriate for a major nation.

The U.S. Congress is taking more notice of Japan and in March 2014, sixty-two members of the House of Representatives formed a cross party Japan Caucus. Twenty-six members of both houses of Congress visited Japan in 2013, but as of April there had been fifty visitors for 2014 already.



Abe's diplomacy uses the theme "rule of law" as a check to China

However, regrettably, although Abe has been in power for nineteen months he has not visited China or South Korea. East Asia and the Western Pacific areas are directly related to Japan's security, and so the value of Abe's diplomacy is being called into question. The China-Japan standoff over the Senkaku Islands and the issue of China's unilateral setting up of an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ), together with Abe's visit to the Yasukuni Shrine, have made for a marked worsening in Japan-China tensions. There have only been slight signs of easing during the middle of 2014. Also, because of a standoff with Korea over the issues of comfort women, Takeshima, and historical awareness, which became a setback to security cooperation between the two countries, the United States stood between them and at last was able to bring together a trilateral conference of the top leaders. In the early part of August 2014, at the ASEAN Regional Forum, Japan and Korea and Japan and China were able at last to have a meeting of foreign ministers.

Accordingly, Japan may be able to break out of the present stalemate and summits with China and Korea may be achieved in the near future. So in this time of cooling relations with China and Korea the Abe administration is working to strengthen ties with countries around the periphery of both nations, thus gaining a strategically favorable position in relationship to Korea and China, and this is succeeding.

It will be recalled that on last May 31, Abe gave the keynote speech at the Asia Security Conference convened in Singapore (officially known as the Shangri-La Dialogue). This is a conference which the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) called in 2002, and it gathers together about 400 defense ministers and security specialists. It is one of the biggest and most authoritative conferences in the Asia-Pacific. At the evening banquet on the first day of the conference, a keynote speech is given by a national leader, and this year Prime Minister Abe performed that function. This thirteenth conference was the first occasion that a Japanese prime minister has been invited, suggesting that appreciation for Japan has risen.

At the banquet Abe made a speech with the theme, "Peace and prosperity in Asia, forevermore. Japan for the rule of law, Asia for the rule of law, and the rule of law for all of us." The speech, which was very well received, was clearly a check on China, which is seeking to change the existing situation through military power. After the speech, when he was taking questions, the prime minister declared, "Japan wants to make every effort for peace," which was greeted with acclamation from the floor. The next day at plenary sessions of the conference the foreign ministers spoke in turn and several made reference to Abe's speech saying, "As Prime Minister Abe said last evening ..." speaking strongly of the need to settle regional disputes through international law.



At the plenary session Minister of Defense Onodera Itsunori followed U.S. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel as the second speaker and emphasized the importance of the rule of law and the need for China to show restraint. But the Chinese representative, who was not a defense minister but was instead the People's Liberation Army's Deputy Chief of the General Staff (Lieutenant General Wang Guanzhong), was moved to the last day for his speech. Wang took a position strongly opposed to that of Abe and Hagel. China's stance of opposing Japan and the United States came across clearly. Virtually all the delegates were critical of China's coercive foreign policy, such as the placement of an oil rig in the South China Sea. China was indeed isolated.

As became even clearer at the dialogue, since November 2013 when China acted unilaterally in setting up an ADIZ in the East China Sea and the United States refused to recognize it, the U.S.-China relationship has deteriorated. Japan and the U.S. both see China's ADIZ as different from that operated by other countries, as they consider it an enlarged air space. Both countries see it as one step in a policy of gradually excluding U.S. influence from the Western Pacific Ocean.

In June 2013, at a U.S.-China summit meeting in California, Chinese President Xi Jinping commented to President Barack Obama that the Pacific Ocean was big enough for both great powers, thus proposing the creation of a new type of great power relationship. Later, in May this year at the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), held in Shanghai, Xi spoke of the need for Asian security problems to be discussed by Asian people themselves. It is clear that the concept was of a Pacific Ocean sphere of influence that should be divided in two between China and the United States, and that West Pacific security matters should be advanced under Chinese leadership without U.S. involvement. In this case the U.S. troops stationed in Japan in the Western Pacific would withdraw, and of course this is a concept that Japan and the United States would not accept. Also, during a Chinese visit to Indonesia in October 2013 China proposed the concept of an Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank that would exclude the United States. Japan and the United States, together with the ASEAN countries and Australia, must treat this proposal as without any. In August, at the ASEAN Regional Forum in Myanmar, the majority of the countries attending were strongly critical of China's coercive foreign policy. Amongst the ASEAN countries, some like Cambodia and Thailand spoke against criticism of China, but the majority looked for Japan and the United States to promote a benign balance of power in the West Pacific. It can be seen that here too Abe's diplomacy is producing effects.

On July 1 of this year, the Abe administration revised the interpretation of Article 9 of the Constitution and a cabinet decision was made enabling the use of the right of collective self-defense. The move met with approval from the United States, as well as from Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, France and other countries. The ASEAN countries in particular, on one level or



another, uniformly gave support. In the end only China and Korea were critical. Despite that, segments of the Japan media were groundlessly critical, saying that Japan was isolated in Asia simply because of the criticism of Korea and China.

Response to a new dynamic in the Korean peninsula

In the changing balance of power on the Korean peninsula Abe's diplomacy is attempting to establish a favorable position and in one sense is succeeding. In North Korea since Kim Jong-un gained power, Pyongyang's relations with both Beijing and Seoul have deteriorated. North Korea is again seeking bilateral talks with the United States, but the United States is unwilling. To escape its isolation North Korea has started to approach Japan, which is using this situation effectively in a bid to solve the issue of abducted Japanese.

Meanwhile, South Korea had been trying to make common cause with the United States over the issue of Abe's visits to Yasukuni Shrine and has been stepping up criticism of Japan. Since U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry visited Korea in February 2014, however, attempts have been made to improve Japan's relations with Korea. Washington approved Japan's decision to pursue collective self-defense, in contrast to Seoul. Here, too, the Abe diplomacy strengthened the Japan-U.S. alliance and succeeded in checking Korea.

Since taking office, South Korean President Park Geun-hye has visited a number of foreign countries and in summit meetings has been forward in criticizing Japan for turning to the right and for not revising its view of history. This may reflect the confidence she has gained in running Japan down within Korea, but going around the international circuit and criticizing other countries is not a foreign policy that wins respect. In contrast, Abe is seeking stable foreign relations and emphasizing the importance of an active peace policy and the rule of law. He is also encouraging consultations over the transfer of military technology, and is winning approval. Also, the efforts directed against Japan by Park and her Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se are beginning to attract criticism within Korea, because if the Japan-China relationship improves and a Japan-North Korea relationship develops the Republic of Korea would be isolated. Yun attended the ASEAN Regional Forum in Myanmar this August and held talks with Japanese Foreign Minister Kishida Fumio, supposedly out of impatience at being outstripped by North Korea. In this way, Abe's diplomacy is beginning to put Japan in a favorable position in relation to the Republic of Korea as well.

Inevitably the United States seems to be starting to fear that in order to move the abduction problem forward Japan may considerably relax sanctions, potentially leading to a collapse of The Abe administration must pursue a policy of getting abduction victims and other Japanese people



in North Korea back safely while preserving the sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council. However, if there is some progress in Japan-North Korean relations it may be that Japan will find itself in an advantageous position in regards to the Republic of Korea and China.

South Korea, while maintaining its treaty with the United States, is also strengthening its connection with China in pursuing a kind of two-timing diplomacy aimed at preserving national independence and safety. But this unstable diplomacy is instead putting the country at a disadvantage. At the beginning of July, Chinese President Xi Jinping and South Korean President Park Geun-hye at a summit in Seoul confirmed that their countries are strategic partners and that they will cooperate in the political and security realms. The leaders of both countries then agreed that the Korean peninsula should be nuclear free. This removes the choice of the United States bringing nuclear weapons into the peninsula and is one step towards weakening Korea's treaty with the United States. Japan should take steps to halt this trend.

This relates to China and the Republic of Korea promoting a joint struggle against Japan over the historical awareness issue. China uses the historical awareness issue to denounce Japan, and with the emergence of the Abe administration China is showing a move to line up with the Republic of Korea. Xi, after receiving a request from Park, set up a memorial hall for An Jungun within the Harbin Station complex in January 2014. Then Xi, while visiting the Republic of Korea in July, suggested to Park that they cooperate in making 2015 the seventieth anniversary of victory in the war against Japan and the seventieth anniversary of Korean Independence (Gwangbokjeol festival) a joint event. Park apparently did not give an immediate answer to this but agreed to joint China-Korea historical research relating to Japan. Japan must develop effective diplomacy to counter such activities.

Even though Japan urges that the historical problem be discussed separately from core diplomatic issues, China and the Republic of Korea have a purpose of looking down politically on Japan, and though Japan continues to argue back that the comfort women issue has been dealt with legally it has virtually no effect. It would be effective as a way to lessen the anti-Japan criticism for Japan to change its existing attitude and raise foreign policy issues that are damaging to China and the Republic of Korea as counter arguments. These might be to demand what really happened at the Tiananmen Square in June 1989, or press hard for the truth about the reported barbarity of Korean troops against local women in the Vietnam War

Raising diplomatic efforts one step higher to increase international approval

Many countries are troubled by their diplomacy on neighbors rather than remote countries, and Japan is no exception. Even though diplomatic relations with a neighboring country may worsen, they



may be improved by patiently continuing with relations at the grass-roots level. As a result of Abe's economic policy the yen has weakened and Japan has seen a surge in inbound tourism. According to the Japan National Tourist Organization (JNTO), in the ten years from 2003 to 2013 the annual number of Republic of Korea visitors to Japan rose from 1.45 million to 2.45 million, while Chinese visitors rose from 0.44 million to 1.31 million. In the first half of 2014 alone there were more than 1 million Chinese visitors to Japan, an increase of 88% over the same period in the previous year. Hopefully, the sightseers from China and the Republic of Korea look at Japan with unbiased eyes. They hear in their home countries that Japan is rushing towards militarism and that Japan is an extreme right-wing nationalist country, but they then appreciate that this image is mistaken and go home with a good impression. In the long term this must have an effect on the policies of both these countries towards Japan. With rare energy, Prime Minister Abe is returning Japan to the stage and is succeeding in raising Japan's presence. By compensating for the worsening relations with neighboring countries through stronger ties with other countries in the area and more distant friendly countries, Japan can hope that a stable East Asia will be reborn.

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