



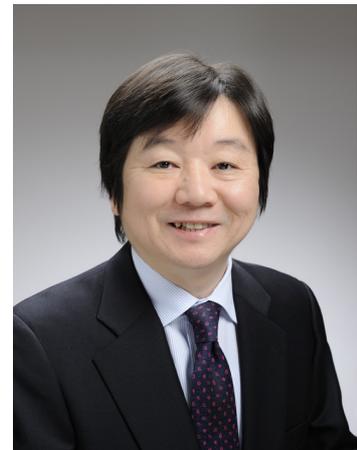
Evaluating the Statement made by Prime Minister Abe Shinzo

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I read the statement made by Prime Minister Abe Shinzo on August 14 (http://japan.kantei.go.jp/97_abe/statement/201508/0814statement.html) with a lot of sympathy. That is because Abe was successful in making a renewed appeal to the international community that Japan has adopted a completely different approach after World War II from that which it pursued before and during the war, and in taking the opportunity to establish future-oriented policies while making it clear that Japan is not turning its back on the past.

To fully understand the Statement, it helps to know that it is based on the three speeches Prime Minister Abe has made since the summer of 2014; namely, the speech he made at the Australian Parliament on July 8, 2014 (http://japan.kantei.go.jp/96_abe/statement/201407/0708article1.html); the speech he made at the Asian-African Summit 2015, a summit meeting held in Jakarta to commemorate the 60th Anniversary of the Asian-African Conference (Bandung Conference), on April 22, 2015 (http://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/1p/page3e_000325.html), and the speech he made to a Joint Meeting of the U.S. Congress on April 29, 2015 (http://www.mofa.go.jp/na/na1/us/page4e_000241.html).

During the speech at the Australian Parliament, Prime Minister Abe clearly stated that Japan is not turning away from its past.



KAMIYA Matake, Professor, National Defense Academy of Japan

Our fathers and grandfathers lived in a time that saw Kokoda and Sandakan.

How many young Australians, with bright futures to come, lost their lives? And for those who made it through the war, how much trauma did they feel even years and years later, from these painful memories?

I can find absolutely no words to say. I can only stay humble against the evils and horrors of history.

May I most humbly speak for Japan and on behalf of the Japanese people here in sending my most sincere condolences towards the many souls who lost their lives.



During his speech at Jakarta, while stating that he felt “deep remorse over the past war,” Prime Minister Abe reaffirmed Japan’s decision to become a peaceful nation after the war, relating it to the ten-point “Declaration on Promotion of World Peace and Cooperation” that was adopted at the 1955 Bandung Conference.

“Refraining from acts or threats of aggression or the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any country.”

“Settlement of all international disputes by peaceful means....”

Those are some of the principles Bandung affirmed. And Japan, with feelings of deep remorse over the past war, made a pledge to remain a nation always adhering to those very principles throughout, no matter what the circumstances.

Japan also resolved that among Asian and African countries seeking peace and prosperity under those Bandung principles, we should stand at the forefront.

Prime Minister Abe demonstrated the same spirit in Washington D.C. as he did in Canberra.

Pearl Harbor, Bataan Corregidor, Coral Sea.... The battles engraved at the Memorial crossed my mind, and I reflected upon the lost dreams and lost futures of those young Americans.

History is harsh. What is done cannot be undone.

With deep repentance in my heart, I stood there in silent prayers for some time.

My dear friends, on behalf of Japan and the Japanese people, I offer with profound respect my eternal condolences to the souls of all American people that were lost during World War II.

The Abe Statement of August 14 runs along the same lines as the speeches above.

Prime Minister Abe states that after World War I, “the movement for self-determination gained momentum and put brakes on colonization that had been underway,” and that “there emerged in the international community a new tide of outlawing war itself” as exemplified by the founding of the League of Nations and by the conclusion of the General Treaty for Renunciation of War. He then candidly admits that “Japan lost sight of the overall trends in the world” with the Great Depression setting in and the Western countries launching economic blocks. He says that as “Japan’s sense of isolation deepened,” “it attempted to overcome its diplomatic and economic deadlock through the use of force.”

Prime Minister Abe further states:



With the Manchurian Incident, followed by the withdrawal from the League of Nations, Japan gradually transformed itself into a challenger to the new international order that the international community sought to establish after tremendous sacrifices. Japan took the wrong course and advanced along the road to war.

Abe then expresses his “feeling of profound grief” and “eternal, sincere condolences” to victims of the war Japan started, admitting the fact that “upon the innocent people did our country inflict immeasurable damage and suffering.”

On the 70th anniversary of the end of the war, I bow my head deeply before the souls of all those who perished both at home and abroad. I express my feelings of profound grief and my eternal, sincere condolences. ...

Also in countries that fought against Japan, countless lives were lost among young people with promising futures. In China, Southeast Asia, the Pacific islands and elsewhere that became the battlefields, numerous innocent citizens suffered and fell victim to battles as well as hardships such as severe deprivation of food. We must never forget that there were women behind the battlefields whose honour and dignity were severely injured.

Upon the innocent people did our country inflict immeasurable damage and suffering. History is harsh. What is done cannot be undone. Each and every one of them had his or her life, dream, and beloved family. When I squarely contemplate this obvious fact, even now, I find myself speechless and my heart is rent with the utmost grief.

Having said all this, Abe maintains: “The peace we enjoy today exists only upon such precious sacrifices. And therein lies the origin of postwar Japan.” The Prime Minister then reiterates Japan’s resolve to be a “nation of peace” toward the international society with the following words.

We must never again repeat the devastation of war.

Incident, aggression, war – we shall never again resort to any form of the threat or use of force as a means of settling international disputes. We shall abandon colonial rule forever and respect the right of self-determination of all peoples throughout the world.

With deep repentance for the war, Japan made that pledge. Upon it, we have created a free and democratic country, abided by the rule of law, and consistently upheld that pledge never to wage a war again. While taking silent pride in the path we have walked as a peace-loving nation for as long as seventy years, we remain determined never to deviate from this steadfast course.



Japan has repeatedly expressed the feelings of deep remorse and heartfelt apology for its actions during the war. In order to manifest such feelings through concrete actions, we have engraved in our hearts the histories of suffering of the people in Asia as our neighbours: those in Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia and the Philippines, and Taiwan, the Republic of Korea and China, among others; and we have consistently devoted ourselves to the peace and prosperity of the region since the end of the war.

Such position articulated by the previous cabinets will remain unshakable into the future.

I do not fully support what Prime Minister Abe has said and done with regard to the so-called History Issues. It is obvious, however, what kind of stance Abe has been trying to portray on these issues with this statement and the preceding three speeches, and I can support that. I believe that he is attempting to include in his August 14 statement the message that Japan was not the only country that invaded and colonized others in the past. At the same time, however, he clearly indicated in his statement that Japan did invade and colonize others.

History did not end in 1945. Seventy years, a time much longer than the pre-war and wartime periods that posed problems in Japan's "history issues," have passed since the war. The future that comes after this seventy-year period will be even longer. Japan has been a peaceful country for the past seventy years and has contributed to peace and prosperity in the world. The key responsibility for Japan from now on is to project those post-war seventy years into the future, and to play a proactive role in making the world a better place. At the same time, however, Japan has to recognize that there were times in the past when its actions were not consistent with its current standards of behavior.

We will engrave in our hearts the past, when Japan ended up becoming a challenger to the international order. Upon this reflection, Japan will firmly uphold basic values such as freedom, democracy, and human rights as unyielding values and, by working hand in hand with countries that share such values, hoist the flag of "Proactive Contribution to Peace," and contribute to the peace and prosperity of the world more than ever before.

Heading toward the 80th, the 90th and the centennial anniversary of the end of the war, we are determined to create such a Japan together with the Japanese people."

The people of Japan need to take on the attitude revealed at the very end of Abe's statement, that we will engrave the adverse past behavior into our hearts while taking pride in moving towards the future.



Translated from an original article in Japanese written for Discuss Japan. [September 2015]

Note: The views expressed here are the author's own and do not represent those of the National Defense Academy of Japan or of Japan's Ministry of Defense.

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