



The Future of U.S.-Japan-China Relations

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Introduction

The single most important challenge for the three major powers in the Asia-Pacific region is to contain the disturbing trends towards strategic rivalry and to start on the long but necessary journey to developing a stable and cooperative relationship. It is impossible to imagine a bright future for the Asia-Pacific region in which China and Japan and China and the United States are bitter rivals.

In this spirit, the NCAFP has begun to co-sponsor with the Tokyo Foundation a series of conferences designed to explore ways of easing China-Japan and China-U.S. tensions. The first such conference took place in May 2014 in New York and the second was held in Tokyo in October 2014. (The participant list for the Tokyo conference is included in the appendix.)

On the positive side of the ledger, recent weeks have witnessed a marked improvement in both China-U.S. and China-Japan relations. At an APEC summit meeting in Beijing in mid-October, the American and Chinese presidents concluded agreements on climate change, military confidence-building, relaxation of visa requirements, and tariff reduction. Also on the margins of this year's APEC meeting in Beijing, Japan and China reached an artful understanding on managing serious bilateral differences in a way that could substantially ease tensions between Asia's two largest economies and place a festering dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands back on the shelf for future resolution.

* Several delegation members contributed to this report but not all members agree with each and every conclusion.

But major challenges remain. Perhaps the principal such challenge is whether the three powers can agree on the parameters of a regional security order. The U.S. and Japan, for their part, regard the U.S.-Japan alliance as the foundation of regional security. As one American participant pointed out in his presentation to the conference, "the purpose of the U.S.-Japan alliance is not to contain China but to sustain a balance of power in Asia and to foster U.S.-Japanese cooperation in dealing with a host of regional and global common issues."

But, as a Chinese analyst pointed out, "to the Chinese, the alliance is a bilateral arrangement." And although China "does not oppose the alliance totally," Beijing "opposes the alliance...insofar as it targets China and tries to involve itself on Taiwan and the East and South China Seas."

The following collection of essays includes a conference summary, and several essays based on conference presentations: four Americans, one by a Japanese participant, and another by Chinese participant.

Summary

The trilateral U.S.-China-Japan conference met for a day and a half at the Tokyo Foundation headquarters in Tokyo. Eleven Americans, six Chinese, and fourteen Japanese participated. The focus of the discussion was on trilateral relations—present and future. There was a presentation about the newly established Japan National Security Council with Deputy Secretary General Nobushige Takamizawa and another luncheon discussion on the second day with Professor Tatsuo Hatta on Abenomics. There also was an open forum on the future of U.S.-China-Japan relations with Shin Kawashima of the University of Tokyo, Sun Zhe of Tsinghua University, Gerry Curtis, and moderated by Tsuneo Watanabe.

At the first session on the current trilateral relationship, the Japanese presenter said that there is still some uncertainty about how successful Xi Jinping has been in consolidating his power and whether he is more a successor to Mao or to Deng. He argued that he is likely to be seen as a leader who carries forward Deng's approach of focusing on economic development. But there still is uncertainty about power struggles among the leadership and the direction of foreign policy. As for Sino-Japanese relations, he stressed that both Xi and Abe have been careful recently to avoid criticizing each other. In conclusion, there was some fragility in Xi's control and optimism about an Abe-Xi meeting at the time of the APEC summit.

The Chinese presenter argued that the three countries have done little together to try to ease tensions and, in his view, will continue to do little trilaterally in part because China sees the trilateral relationship as actually bilateral with the U.S. and Japan on one side of the table and the Chinese on the other. China needs to accept the reality that the U.S. will strive to maintain a balance of power in Asia and accept the U.S.-Japan alliance as part of that balancing strategy as long as it does not challenge China's core security interests. Balance is not containment. It is a neutral, not a negative term in domestic as well as international politics. So it is okay to have balance. As for domestic policy, Xi has changed a lot on internal reform issues, especially his crackdown on corruption, emphasis on the rule of rule, and structural reforms to reduce the role of the government in the economy. The national goal remains the modernization of the country, which is the China Dream, and its strategy of having foreign policy serve this national goal has not changed.

The American presenter emphasized that all three countries want to avoid conflict and have mutually beneficial economic relations, but the situation is fraught with dangers. Japan fears China and is hedging. China's historic wounds are both real and convenient in strengthening its hand in dealing with Japan. Both China and Japan see the U.S. declining. The U.S. is critical of Abe's views on history, and its relations with China are the worst since Tiananmen due to Xi's aggressive foreign policy, crackdown at home, and a perception of the U.S. as trying to contain China. The challenge for all three is to take advantage of the APEC summit to push forward constructive bilateral talks. For the U.S. and China, there is a lot that can be done on issues of climate change, combating ISIS and confronting terrorism in general, cooperating in Afghanistan, and working toward bringing China into the TPP. For Japan and China, the need is for Japan to decouple the history issue from security policy and to stress the positive history of its domestic development and foreign policy since 1945. All three countries need strong leaders and attention to domestic problems. Foreign policy begins at home, and home begins with these leaders.

Three points of particular interest emerged in the ensuing discussion. One was that Xi has made many promises about reform and many statements about new ideas and approaches (China Dream, new type of great power relations, new security architecture, Asia for the Asians, etc.), but there is still great uncertainty as to what they mean in concrete policy terms. A second was that there are signs of an improvement in China-Japan relations, or at least a decline in the hostile rhetoric both countries were directing at each other. There appears to be a recognition among the leaders of both countries that continued hostility will undermine rather than serve their national interests. The third point was the view that we should not be so pessimistic about the possibility of developing a mutually beneficial trilateral relationship and that we should think harder about how to develop a more integrated and strong Asia-Pacific community.

The second session was on regional security and managing regional tensions.

The Chinese speaker focused her remarks on China's development as a major maritime power. She emphasized the importance of structuring a close U.S.-China dialogue over maritime strategy to avoid misunderstandings and to reduce the potential for conflict.

The American speaker focused his remarks on North Korea. Overall, he offered a very dismal assessment, saying that there was virtually no chance of convincing the North Koreans to abandon their nuclear weapons and missile development programs, and that it was only a matter of time before the DPRK had another nuclear test—which is essential for them to develop their weapons systems. He also argued that as the DPRK makes progress in miniaturizing its nuclear weapons and developing its mid range and inter-continental missiles, the U.S. will take compensatory actions, including the further deployment of anti ballistic missile systems. Although aimed at containing the DPRK, this policy will be perceived as threatening to China. For that reason alone, it is important for China and the United States—along with South Korea and Japan—to coordinate their policies toward North Korea and to try to restrain the further development of its nuclear program.

The Japanese speaker argued that there are four different kinds of challenges posed by the East Asia security environment: traditional state-to-state relations, terrorism, the disruptive impact of rising powers, and fundamental shifts in the power balance. Dealing with these challenges and avoiding their leading to hostility and potential conflict requires a number of things: a resumption of a China-Japan dialogue on maritime crisis management; trilateral and broader cooperation in dealing with cyber threats and in containing the threat of terrorism; encouraging the further integration of China into the existing system of international institutions and norms; and seeing China do more in providing international public goods. Overall, the Japanese speaker expressed optimism about China's future course and about the ability of the U.S., Japan, and China to move their relations in a constructive direction.

An animated discussion followed that touched on many topics, but the overall impression left by the comments of participants from all three countries was of a cautious optimism that relations, especially between China and Japan, are moving in a more positive direction. The problems posed by the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands dispute, along with the Yasukuni Shrine and history issues, remain serious impediments to improved relations; but the tenor of the debate did not reflect the rancor that has characterized Sino-Japanese discussions of these issues in the past. There was some disagreement about what Xi has in mind with his proposal for a maritime Silk Road. The general view is that it may be a good idea that is entirely compatible with freedom of navigation while actually contributing to the economic development of countries along the route, but it is still too unilateral and needs to be multilateralized.

At the third session, the American speaker led off with a panoramic overview of the history of China-Japan relations over the past century and a half. The main points stressed were: the future is necessarily built on the legacy of the past; strategic rivalry in East Asia is rising; every country has

an interest in avoiding war, but none has an effective strategy for controlling escalation; and China and Japan understand there is no sense in having a war over unimportant islands in the East China Sea, but they act as if they might let this become a war issue and thereby raise the danger that it possibly might become so. China and Japan have leaders with strong determination, but the question is whether they have a vision for a peaceful and stable East Asia. There is the possibility for a bright future for East Asia but the issue is leadership. Responsibilities are just as heavy as the future is bright.

The Chinese speaker expressed concern over the domestic situation in Japan, pointing out that Abe and others in the leadership have strong revisionist views, want to strengthen Japan's military power, and want to play a larger regional role. Young people do not know that war is hell, and the same can be said for a lot of young people in China. He expressed the view that it is difficult to make China-Japan relations much better, but steps can and should be taken to prevent conflict. It is especially important to restart regular diplomatic exchanges and to initiate military-to-military dialogues—which are more important than a meeting of the heads of the governments. China should try to stop the Japanese people's deteriorating feelings toward China and also influence public opinion in China to have a less prejudiced view of Japan. China needs to declare its fundamental attitude toward Japan and indicate under what conditions China would accept Japan as a so-called normal country.

The Japanese speaker at this session emphasized that no one country can deal singlehandedly with the ever expanding range of international public goods, including outer space and cyberspace. The speaker noted that the U.S., Japan, and China are the most important economic partners for each other, that there are 23,000 Japanese companies operating in China and around 20,000 American ones, and that the ever more integrated supply chain relationships across national borders create powerful incentives to seek ways to accommodate each other. China and Japan need to increase dialogue, establish emergency control measures to prevent misunderstandings and accidents, and seek to improve public opinion toward each other. The U.S.-China relationship is in better shape, but it too needs to be strengthened. Improvement of relations in East Asia cannot be accomplished without the involvement of other countries in the region. The East Asia Summit is a suitable forum for discussing regional issues. A key issue is whether countries in the region can agree to a set of governance principles including, democracy, freedom, and the rule of law.

Essay #1

China, Japan, and the United States are the world's three largest economies and preeminent regional heavyweights. To understand their intricate relations, one has to be part historian, economist, geopolitician, and psychiatrist. They seek to avoid conflict and have huge economic relations with one another. But vivid histories, shifting power equations, and rising nationalism make the region volatile and dangerous, though not destined for conflict. Of course, in East Asia, there are actors such as Russia, South Korea, and others that also play a large role in regional peace and security. However, for the purposes of this report we will concentrate on the bilateral relations between China, Japan and the United States.

Japan is suspicious of China and close to the U.S. Japan's fears are leading it to hedge against a rising China. It sees China overtaking it economically and diplomatically, infringing on its territory with air and sea probes, and Japan is resentful of China's focus on history. With the U.S., it continues to rely on the U.S. for security but is unsure of our staying power and wants to see fast track authority on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement. Prime Minister Abe wants to restore Japan's greatness—economically and in security—as well as responding to Chinese and North Korean threats. He is personally torn between his “heart,” i.e. his views on history, and his “head,” i.e. his pragmatism.

China suspects both Japan and the U.S. China's historic wounds with Japan are both real and convenient for regional and nationalistic purposes. Despite Japan's relative decline, China knows it is still its most powerful regional competitor. China sees the United States as a declining power but has healthy respect for continued American superiority for decades. It suspects the U.S. seeks to keep China down and believes it seeks to change China's political system over time. President Xi Jinping wants to erode U.S. influence in the region and to restore China's greatness as the Middle Kingdom in Asia. This is reflected in Xi's Sino-U.S. policy of a New Type of Major Power Relations, which seeks to avoid historical conflict between rising and established powers, promotes win-win cooperation and managing differences, but also probably means that China is now equal to the U.S. and its “core interests” must be respected. On the core interests that would involve a change to the status quo, Xi is using “salami slicing” tactics to slowly realize China's desires. In other words, while Xi has bold aims, he is careful to not to be overly provocative and believes that with time on its side, China can play for the long term. At the same time, Xi sees positive areas for cooperation in economics and elsewhere.

The United States is positive on Japan and mixed on China. We highly value Japan as a treaty power and democracy but are often frustrated by its moves on history. We welcome the changing security posture of Japan. This will mean more shared defense responsibilities, better coordination on defense of South Korea, and greater regional balance. Japan's policy is distorted and hyped by China, but the U.S. is irked by Abe's historical missteps and timidity on economics.

Meanwhile, the U.S.-China relationship is sweet and sour, a mix of cooperation, competition, and confrontation. Relations stay within a floor and a ceiling. The U.S. rebalancing policy is not meant to contain China but rather reflects the vital importance of the region. It has significant economic and political aspects and is not just an upgraded military posturing. We seek cooperation on a broad front while maintaining strong alliances and keeping our powder dry.

Of the three bilateral relationships, Japan-China relations is the most concerning and the most negative. Nationalism and polls in both nations reflect the tensions, and there is a risk of accidental conflict. U.S.-Japan relations are the most positive. We have shared values, a security commitment, and strong economic links. Our modest differences are tactical.

U.S.-China relations are the most complicated. A recent downturn is due in part to China's rise and Xi's aggressive foreign policy and crackdown at home. Moreover, China's virulent anti-Western propaganda incites negative public opinion toward the U.S. There is misunderstanding on issues like China's rise, American rebalancing, and U.S. alliances. There are many areas both of cooperation and tension.

So, what should be done?

China and Japan should build on the recent gains from successful envoy visits to each capital. It was now clear that Abe and Xi will meet on the sidelines of APEC. However, the meeting's scope and outcomes were still unclear. Abe can't publicly say that he won't visit Yasukuni again or acknowledge the existence of a territorial dispute with China over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, but he can acknowledge that there are problems in the relationship and indicate to China privately that he won't visit Yasukuni while serving as Prime Minister. It remains to be seen if the current rapprochement is a temporary tactical shift to improve the atmosphere for APEC or an indication of a longer process to improve bilateral relations. The challenge for all three sides is to take advantage of these various meetings and to maintain momentum after them.

Japan should permanently decouple World War II history from security policies and stress its positive history since 1945. China should reciprocate positive moves from Japan by reducing maritime patrols and toning down rhetoric. The U.S. and China should focus on strategic directions by talking about red lines, core interests, and creating a Pacific Community. This may not establish mutual trust but can create a framework for building blocks of cooperation on both sides.

The U.S. should work on major bilateral, regional, and global issues with China where cooperation is possible while managing differences. We must maintain the rebalancing policy despite preoccupations with other regions. Completing the TPP agreement would be a positive step because it has geostrategic implications, not just economic benefits. We have to continue to reassure allies without provoking China.

This presentation purposefully stressed bilateral relations. It is not clear that much trilateral cooperation is possible. The relationships require strong leaders who can tackle their formidable domestic problems. Foreign policy begins at home and the environment at home begins with those leaders. Abe and Xi must harness nationalism and ensure it reflects legitimate national pride, not a force that inflames public opinion. Obama, in the weakest position of the three, must refresh American leadership in the world and credibility in the Asia-Pacific.

Essay #2

To look to the future, we need first to look to the past, both for lessons and because the future is built on the legacy of the past. If you do not understand the past, you cannot build a secure future.

Here are some relevant facts to keep in mind.

1. From the Meiji Restoration in 1868 until 1945—a period of 77 years—Japan was involved in four major wars and a variety of military interventions, some large, some small.
2. From 1949 until 1979, the first thirty years of the People’s Republic of China, East Asia saw constant military conflict, including several major wars. These included:
 - a. The Korean War.
 - b. The 1958 Taiwan Strait crisis.
 - c. The 1962 Sino-Indian border war.
 - d. The Vietnam War.
 - e. The Sino-Soviet clashes on the Ussuri River in 1969.
 - f. The Sino-Vietnamese clashes over the Paracels in the South China Sea.
 - g. The Vietnamese incursion into Cambodia in 1978.
 - h. The 1979 Sino-Vietnamese border war.
3. For the first two-thirds of this period, China had hostile relations with the United States and poor relations with Japan.

The 1970s was a transitional decade. 1972 saw the Nixon visit to China and the establishment of Sino-Japanese diplomatic relations. In 1979, the United States and the People’s Republic of China established diplomatic relations. Since then, the East Asian outlook brightened remarkably.

1. From 1945 until 2014—a period of nearly 70 years—Japan has not been directly involved in any military conflicts.
2. Since 1979, East Asia has been free of military conflict.

3. The division of the region between the communist and non-communist worlds ended.
4. Japanese became a global economic power; its success spurred the economic growth of the four East Asian “tiger” economies.
5. China sustained the most rapid economic growth in history, rising in three decades to become the second largest economy in the world.
6. China became the largest trading partner of Japan and most of the economies of East Asia.
7. Region-wide consultative mechanisms emerged on a scale never seen before, some with the United States, some without.
8. Every East Asian country benefited from these developments, with the exception of countries such as the DPRK and Myanmar, who suffered from self-imposed isolation.

East Asia is again at a transition point.

1. Strategic rivalry between China and the United States is rising.
2. Nearly 70 years after the end of World War II, historical issues and territorial disputes have cast dark shadows over Sino-Japanese relations.
3. Japan’s relations with South Korea are severely strained.

The sky is not going to fall. The danger of large scale conflict is small. North Korea is pursuing a dangerous course, but it is pitifully weak and is not suicidal. China and Japan are too smart to let differences over uninhabitable rocks in the ocean lead to serious military clashes.

Japan, China, and the United States bear a heavy responsibility under these circumstances. They are the three countries who more than any other have created East Asia’s success story. They can manage their differences so this success story can continue. Or they can pursue courses that will raise tensions, divert development resources into military expenditures, and potentially divide the region.

All three are strong enough to protect their vital national interests. This will not change. What can change is whether the outlook for East Asia is one marked by peace and cooperation or by tension and quarrels.

It took two devastating wars in Europe for Germany and France to learn to get along together. Surely the lessons of the conflicts between 1949 and 1979 should be sufficient to overcome historical animosities.

There is no magic formula that will make this possible. What is required is leaders who have the vision and determination to make this happen. China and Japan both have strong leaders filled with determination. The question is whether they have the vision.

The United States cannot make this happen, but this is the direction in which it wants to go. I cannot imagine a bright East Asian future in which China and Japan are bitter rivals. The same goes for China and the United States.

The need for a new model of major power relations applies as much to Sino-Japanese relations as to Sino-U.S. relations. The United States and Japan already have such a model. To a significant degree the question of whether the outlook for East Asia will be bright or gloomy rests in the hands of our three countries. History will be the judge of whether we have the wisdom and courage to manage our relations so that the East Asia success story can continue.

Essay #3

The United States, China, and Japan are at a pivotal juncture in their longstanding efforts to deal with the serious challenge to regional peace and stability that is posed by North Korea. How they deal with this challenge in the coming months may well determine whether or not the international community will have to live with a nuclear-armed North Korea for many years to come.

Before assessing the major elements and implications of this challenge, it is worth reviewing North Korea's current actions.

North Korea is in the midst of an unusually intense period of diplomatic outreach. In recent months, the world has witnessed high-profile diplomatic engagement by the Pyongyang regime on a number of fronts. DPRK Foreign Minister Ri Su Yong traveled to New York City in September to address the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)—the first such participation by a North Korean foreign minister in the UNGA in 15 years. While Ri scrupulously avoided contact with U.S. officials, and his staff turned away requests by influential American experts and former officials to meet with him, Ri did meet with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and delivered a letter to Ban from North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

Other senior North Korean officials have also been busy on the diplomatic front.

For months, Pyongyang has been engaged in intense talks with Japan to resolve the fate of missing and abducted Japanese citizens. In September, the North Korean Workers' Party secretary for international affairs, Kang Sok Ju, travelled to Europe as a special envoy of the North Korean leader, meeting with senior officials in several capitals.

More recently, Pyongyang released one of the three Americans being held for alleged offenses committed in North Korea in a gesture that some have interpreted as an effort to jump-start talks with the United States.

There have also been reports of intensified Russia-North Korea dialogue aimed at improving relations and expanding economic cooperation.¹ North Korean diplomats in New York and Geneva have also been unusually active and outspoken in defending their country's human rights record, and Pyongyang has even indicated a willingness to engage in discussions of its human rights record.

But perhaps the biggest diplomatic “splash” by the North occurred in relations with South Korea when three senior DPRK officials (Choe Ryong Hae, Hwang Pyong So, and Kim Yang Gon) traveled to Incheon to attend the closing ceremonies of the Asian Games. The dispatch of Hwang and Choe, generally regarded as the second- and third-ranking figures in the North Korean regime, to the South to meet with ROK counterparts made major headlines in the South Korean press and was viewed by many in the South as a harbinger of the resumption of long-suspended North-South high-level talks.

What explains this North Korean activism? Pyongyang's diplomatic offensive seems motivated by at least three factors.

The first is the DPRK's desire to reduce its political and economic isolation. While international sanctions, including UN Security Council measures, have not been able to end the regime's ability to fund its nuclear weapons—and missile-related development programs, sanctions have nonetheless had some “bite.” They have constrained the regime's ability to finance these programs, compelled the Pyongyang to expend increasingly scarce financial resources on them, and reminded the regime of the inherent contradiction of its policy of pursuing simultaneously economic and nuclear weapons development.

By reaching out to the international community, Pyongyang may be acknowledging that isolation has taken a toll, one that requires the regime to engage in creative diplomacy in the hope of easing sanctions and creating the possibility of new sources of trade and aid.

The second factor involves the state of the regime's difficult relations with China. Beijing has been conspicuously absent as a target of Pyongyang's diplomatic offensive, probably reflecting the current coolness in bilateral ties and the DPRK's desire to look elsewhere for support.

China's leader has yet to hold a summit with North Korean counterpart Kim Jong Un, even though President Xi Jinping has already met South Korean President Park Geun-hye five times, including during a state visit to the ROK (the first time a Chinese leader has ever travelled to the South before visiting the North). Senior Chinese officials have voiced concern over provocative North Korean language and actions, and many analysts believe China is holding off on a summit or improvement in ties as a way of pressuring the DPRK not to carry out a nuclear test or other provocations.

¹ Subsequently, Choe Ryong Hae, Workers' Party Secretary and close confidant of Kim Jong Un, travelled to Moscow as the North Korean leader's personal envoy.

Nevertheless, China remains one of the DPRK's few "lifelines," providing essential aid, a modicum of diplomatic support, and a safe environment for North Korean firms to operate away from the watchful eye of international sanctions monitors. The net effect of international sanctions and isolation on the North has been to increase this dependence on China—a situation that does not sit well with a Pyongyang regime that prides itself on its independence, self-reliance, and unique brand of hypernationalism. Accordingly, and particularly in the absence of the valuable endorsement that a PRC-DPRK summit would offer, Pyongyang appears to be seeking to diversify its political and diplomatic lines of communication in an effort to ease its growing reliance on its huge neighbor.

The third factor represents an important new phenomenon: the potential for international concern over North Korea's abysmal human rights record to affect the DPRK regime.

Close observation of the recent North Korean diplomatic outreach suggests strongly that the major driver of this initiative has been the regime's profound concern over the international attention being given to the UN Commission of Inquiry's (COI's) devastating report on the DPRK's human rights situation. Pyongyang seems deeply fearful that the UN General Assembly, and even the Security Council, might take action on the COI's report and hold the North and its leadership accountable for the regime's human rights record.

North Korea's vehement denunciation of the report suggests that the inquiry has struck a raw nerve in Pyongyang, compelling the regime to mobilize its diplomatic resources in an unprecedented way to prevent further UN action, including by inviting human rights monitors to visit the country. The COI report has thus shown a remarkable ability to mobilize the international community's outrage over the DPRK's treatment of its people.

Importantly (and ironically), years of international pressure on the regime over its nuclear and missile programs, its violation of its international obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, its military provocations against its neighbors, and its threats to use nuclear weapons against others have not elicited the reaction that the COI report has received from the international community. As the international community ponders ways to affect the regime's behavior in the future, the value of pursuing action based on the North's long history of human rights abuses—which have now been authoritatively and definitively documented in the COI report—should not be underestimated.

Yet for all of its attempts to expand its diplomatic room for maneuver and ease international pressure and isolation, North Korea's current offensive seems unlikely to succeed. The level of international concern over its human rights record is proving too strong and the DPRK's concerted efforts at UN fora in New York and Geneva are unlikely to stop it. It is hard to imagine how the notoriously defensive and closed regime could ever satisfy the demands of human rights organizations. At the end of the day, the fate of the UN's action on the regime's human rights record is much more likely to be determined by a Russian or Chinese veto than by the North's strident rejection of the COI report.

Meanwhile, attempts to parley high-level diplomacy into renewed talks with Seoul (and restart the aid benefits that might flow as a result of these talks) have already fallen short. The ROK has proven unwilling to meet the North's conditions and the military provocations in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) and in the waters of the West Sea that accompanied the North's outreach clearly unnerved Seoul, causing it to back away. Despite Seoul's keen interest in renewed dialogue, the North will have to do much more to ease the ROK's concerns prior to any resumption of bilateral dialogue.

It also remains to be seen whether North Korea will be able to meet the high expectations that many Japanese have for talks on the fates of the many Japanese citizens believed to have been abducted by Pyongyang. At the same time, the release of a single American as a humanitarian gesture while others are still being held seems unlikely to sway the minds of U.S. policymakers, who remain determined to hold North Korea to its past denuclearization commitments and who will not in any event be interested in "trading" a moderation of this principled position for incarcerated Americans.²

But perhaps the biggest shortcoming of Pyongyang's diplomatic offensive is that the DPRK's position on its weapons of mass destruction programs remains unchanged, and therefore unacceptable to the international community. North Korea appears as committed as ever to the development of its nuclear weapons and missile delivery systems. North Korea's nuclear weapons status has now been enshrined in its constitution and the enhancement of this capability now stands as one of the two pillars (the other being economic modernization) of its national development program.

North Korean envoy Kang Sok Ju did little to ease international concerns over the regime's nuclear aspirations when he suggested to some European interlocutors that North Korea was prepared to engage with the United States in dialogue as "one nuclear state to another" and when he suggested that as a nuclear weapons power the DPRK was prepared to adopt a "no first use" policy.

Meanwhile, according to reliable reports, North Korea is working on new delivery systems for its nuclear weapons; has constructed new launch facilities for medium- and long-range ballistic missiles; is engaging in materials and explosives testing necessary to miniaturize an effective, deliverable nuclear weapon; and may now have a second uranium enrichment facility at Yongbyon—giving it additional capacity for producing fissile material for weapons.

² In the event, the subsequent release of the remaining two American "hostages" (the word used by President Obama upon their release) does not seem to have altered U.S. insistence that the DPRK needs to take a concrete step to reaffirm its commitment to denuclearization before multilateral talks can recommence.

As the only country to have threatened the use of nuclear weapons in the 21st century, North Korea is a unique outlier in the international community. North Korean officials have told their American and other interlocutors that the regime intends to keep its nuclear weapons, which they describe as a “strategic deterrent.” Despite its formal commitments in 1994, 2005, and 2007 to freeze, open for international inspection, and eventually dismantle its nuclear weapons production facilities, North Korea has rejected the idea of returning to Six-Party Talks designed to implement these commitments.

This track record leaves the international community, and the three countries represented at this forum, with a series of major challenges.

First is the strong likelihood that the DPRK will conduct individual or multiple nuclear weapons tests. Having paid a significant political price for its determination to have nuclear weapons, and having repeatedly stressed the centrality of these weapons to its national survival, North Korea must at some point demonstrate that its “strategic deterrent” actually works. The international community should be prepared for the DPRK to take this step at a time of its own choosing.

The international community should also prepare for further testing of medium- and long-range ballistic missiles by Pyongyang. There is little credibility to a “strategic deterrent” that cannot be accurately delivered over significant distances. At some point the North will demonstrate that it has this capacity.

Another major challenge is the North’s propensity to proliferate nuclear technology and materials. Pyongyang has a demonstrated track record in this regard, and as its technical capabilities improve there is reason to be concerned that the regime will once again be tempted to share its know-how, or work with others in the development of nuclear weapons.

As we reflect on the complicated and difficult history of past denuclearization negotiations with North Korea (negotiations that have seen the United States and others offer significant inducements to Pyongyang), another challenge the international community may face is the possibility that there is no inducement or package of inducements that can deter North Korea from continuing its single-minded pursuit of nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them. If everything that might be offered has been offered, and if it has not succeeded in convincing the DPRK not to pursue nuclear weapons, what does that say about the future of negotiations with Pyongyang?

Meanwhile, we are faced today with the absence of a diplomatic dialogue process that might stop, or even slow, North Korea’s pursuit of a greater nuclear weapons capability. The Six-Party Talks have been in suspense for six years and the failed U.S.-DPRK “Leap Day” dialog in early 2012 left a bitter taste in the mouths of U.S. negotiators, who appear determined not to go down that path again.

Where does this leave us—the United States, China, and Japan—at this juncture? What are the implications of these challenges for us?

When North Korea does finally demonstrate that it has the credible capacity to do what it has threatened to do—use nuclear weapons against regional targets—it will have a profound effect on the region:

It will change the security calculus and perceptions of many of the region's actors, who will now have to take into account a new dimension of threat and instability.

- It will raise concerns among North Korea's neighbors about their vulnerability to intimidation and nuclear blackmail by Pyongyang.
- It will raise questions among United States allies about the U.S. deterrent and about the assurances they have received from Washington to come to their defense.
 - This could, in turn, spark a debate in Seoul and Tokyo about whether the ROK and Japan need to consider developing their own deterrent.
- Uncertainty among U.S. allies and partners will require the United States to make its deterrent commitments and assurances even more explicit.
- It will also probably require the United States to take other measures, including new missile defense-related deployments, as well as conduct additional exercises and consider the deployment of other necessary technologies and forces in order to provide adequate deterrent capabilities in the region and reassure U.S. allies and partners.
- Despite U.S. assurances to the contrary, some of the steps that the United States might take may be perceived by the PRC as directed at China or as a way of neutralizing China's own strategic forces, using the pretext of a North Korean threat. This could undermine trust between the United States and China and seriously complicate bilateral relations.

This presentation has sought to highlight the increasingly complicated nature of the threat posed by North Korea's nuclear ambitions—a threat that shows every sign of becoming more serious in the months and years to come. The prospect that this threat could also roil intra-regional relations, as well as undermine peace and stability in the region, is quite real.

If nothing else, perhaps today's discussion will offer an opportunity for American, Japanese, and Chinese experts to exchange views about how to more effectively contend with this rising challenge. It is not for this author to tell the Chinese and Japanese colleagues gathered here today how their governments could work better together and with the United States to deal with this challenge. But let me suggest in closing that it is essential that we do so, including by working together to convince Pyongyang that it cannot succeed in its attempt to pursue economic modernization and nuclear weapons development. If we can demonstrate solidarity in showing Pyongyang that its game plan is unachievable, we may also be able to convince the DPRK that its only real choice is a negotiated end to its nuclear weapons ambitions.

Essay #4

In my remarks today I want to emphasize four points:

First, the U.S.-Japan alliance is stronger than ever because it has evolved to retain its relevance and importance in an international system that is very different from the one that existed when the alliance was created more than half a century ago.

The U.S.-Japan alliance was founded in the crucible of the Cold War as part of a global U.S. containment strategy vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. In that bipolar system, the U.S. commitment to Japanese security was ironclad, making it possible for Japan to feel secure without engaging in a major rearmament of its own. Although China was on record as opposing the U.S.-Japan security treaty when Henry Kissinger made his secret trip to Beijing in 1971, he convinced Chou En-Lai that the alliance served Chinese security interests by acting as a restraint on Japan's remilitarization.

The world now is a very different place and so is East Asia. Bipolarity has given way to a fluid, uncertain multi-polar system. China has not replaced the Soviet Union as the object of a containment policy, either on the part of the United States or Japan. Containment of China, contrary to what many Chinese (and some Japanese and Americans as well) seem to believe, is not a U.S. or Japanese goal and it would be unobtainable if it were to be adopted as a goal. If the U.S. or Japan were intent on containing China they would not be investing in China, welcoming China into the WTO and expanding trade relations with it, and making a major contribution to China's emergence as the second largest economy in the world. The national security interests and the prosperity of Japan and the United States are served by the rise of a peaceful and prosperous China. Those interests are reflected in their respective policies.

The purpose of the U.S.-Japan alliance is not to contain China but to sustain a balance of power in Asia and to foster U.S.-Japanese cooperation in dealing with a host of regional and global common issues. Chinese who believe that the purpose of the alliance is to contain China and to encourage Japan's revival as a major military power should ponder what an American withdrawal from the alliance and retreat from Asia would mean. It would leave the Japanese feeling intensely vulnerable and insecure and would result in a major Japanese military buildup. The purpose and the actual effects of the U.S.-Japan alliance are to contribute to stability in the East Asian international system.

Second, there is less change than meets the eye in both U.S. and Japanese foreign policy. In the U.S. case, the idea that the U.S. is in decline, that the credibility of its commitments is in doubt, that its focus on Asia has been lost because of crises in the Middle East and the Ukraine, Iran's nuclear quest, and so on is grossly exaggerated. Unfortunately, the image of President Obama as being an uncertain leader who is more aware of the limits on American power than he is of America's ability to exercise global leadership have contributed to this perception. When the American President talks of being satisfied hitting singles and doubles instead of home runs, he creates the suspicion—deserved or not—that U.S. global leadership is waning.

In Japan and elsewhere, people exaggerate the extent to which U.S. foreign policy change should be attributed to President Obama and fail to appreciate that structural factors—the end of bipolarity, the rise of China, the American government's fiscal constraints and so on—are driving change far more than the personality of the incumbent President. The next President will have a different style than President Obama; but regardless of who becomes President, it is certain that continuity rather than dramatic change will characterize U.S. foreign policy strategy.

In the case of Japan as well, there has been less change than many people believe to the extent that there have been important foreign policy changes that have more to do with a response to the structural transformation of the international system than with the personality of Prime Minister Abe. Since becoming prime minister in December 2012, Shinzo Abe has established a national security council, eased the ban on the export of weapons and weapon technology, got the Diet to pass a controversial classified secrets law, had his cabinet adopt a reinterpretation of Article Nine of the Constitution to permit collective defense, and declared his intention to beef up the ability of Japan's naval and air forces to defend islands at the far reaches of Japan's territorial waters.

This is an impressive list of accomplishments but do they amount to a change in Japan's national security strategy? If the Democratic Party of Japan's (DPJ) Prime Minister Noda had had a secure majority in both houses of the Diet as Prime Minister Abe does now, would his security policies have been very different from the strategy Abe is pursuing? If Abe were to vacate the prime minister's office tomorrow, would anyone whom one could reasonably imagine succeeding him push policy in a fundamentally different direction? The answer to these questions is no.

When the DPJ's "dovish" Naoto Kan was prime minister the government adopted new national defense program guidelines that called for establishment of a "dynamic defense force." Under "hawkish" Shinzo Abe, the government's new defense program guidelines call for a "dynamic joint defense force." Other than adding the word "joint" (to emphasize the importance of cooperation between the Ground, Maritime and Air SDF), there is no difference between them.

The DPJ advocated establishment of a National Security Council, as did previous Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) governments; the Abe Administration implemented this longstanding recommendation. In July 2012, Prime Minister Noda said in the Diet that he might consider

reinterpreting Article Nine to permit collective self-defense. In July 2014, Prime Minister Abe did so. Prime Minister Noda was constrained from increasing the defense budget because of a sluggish economy. Prime Minister Abe did increase it for the first time in eleven years, but the increase hardly represented a dramatic break with previous policy: it went up 0.8 percent in 2013 and 2.7 percent in the 2014 budget. Annual increases of less than 3 percent are projected for the five fiscal years from 2014-2018. Abe has accelerated the evolution of Japan's security policy but has not set it off in a new direction.

The main reason there is a widespread impression of major change since Abe has become prime minister is because of the impact of the so-called history issue on foreign perceptions of Japan. The concern, not only in China and Korea but among Americans and others as well, is that the revisionist view of the history of Japanese foreign policy in the first half of the twentieth century that has been put forth by Abe—and especially by some of his more right wing friends and associates—have created suspicions about his future goals and aspirations. Since his visit to Yasukuni shrine last December, Abe seems to have become keenly aware of the damage done to Japan's and his own reputation caused by these suspicions and doubts and has been careful not to roil the waters by making controversial comments that seem to be aimed at justifying or excusing Japan's prewar and wartime actions.

But the same cannot be said for some of his friends who continue to make comments that alienate Chinese and Koreans and sow distrust more widely. The comfort women issue is a case in point. Seeking to defend Japan's "honor" by defending the wartime sexual trafficking of young desperately poor women in Korea and elsewhere in Asia is self defeating. Rather than try to explain away shameful acts, the honorable thing to do is to accept responsibility and find pride in being able to admit what you are not proud of. Instead of protesting each time a memorial is dedicated to comfort women in some town in the United States, the Japanese government would be wiser to send a representative from the local Japanese Consulate to join with Korean Americans at the memorial to express sympathy for these women for the suffering they experienced.

Thirdly, I am cautiously optimistic about Sino-Japanese relations in the short term at least. The leaders of both countries appear to realize that hostility does not serve their interests, and both are trying to calm the waters around the Senkaku/Diaoyu issue and find a way to improve relations. There have been intensive back channel negotiations going on between Japan and China for many months now to lay the groundwork for a bilateral meeting between Prime Minister Abe and President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the APEC summit in Beijing in November. I am quite confident that such a meeting will take place and that it will be the start of resumed dialogue and cooperation at multiple levels and on a variety of issues of common concern.

Over the long term, however, Japan—like the United States—will be both deeply entwined with and also engaged in a strategic rivalry with China. Strategic rivalry cannot be eliminated but it can be managed and prevented from leading to conflict. As China grows stronger and as Japan does more for its own defense, there is the virtual certainty that a classic security dilemma will characterize East Asia with steps taken by each country there in the name of self defense being perceived as aggressive and hostile by others. China and Japan need to structure an on-going strategic dialogue both bilaterally and with the United States to reduce the dangers of misunderstanding and miscalculation.

Fourth and finally, Prime Minister Abe would be well-advised to combine an emphasis on the critical and central importance for Japan's security and East Asian peace and stability of alliance with the United States with recognition of the importance of developing new mechanisms and institutions to create a strong East Asian-Pacific community. It would be very much in everyone's interests if Prime Minister Abe were to make a speech in which he laid out his vision for Asia in 2025, the role he expects Japan to play in an inclusive and dynamic Asia Pacific community, and the initiatives he is prepared to take to move Asia in that direction. Asia can and should be a region of peace and opportunity and an engine for global prosperity and not an arena for beggar thy neighbor policies and military conflict. As the three major players in the 21st century Asia-Pacific drama, China, Japan, and the United States have an obligation to cooperate in realizing a common vision of a region that is prosperous and at peace.

Essay #5

Historically, ever since the U.S. began to show interest in the Asia-pacific region, U.S.-Japan-China relations have played a central role in the political, military, and economic development in the region. This is still true now. However, in the 21st century, the trilateral relationship and its influence need to be discussed in light of special features of this century that did not exist—or did not exist to this extent—before.

One feature is that the power one country can exercise has become relative and that no one country can lead the world to the extent that Great Britain or the U.S. did in the 19th and 20th centuries.

There are too many security problems to deal with; in addition to traditional security problems, there are religious radicalism, contagious diseases, climate change, pirates, and so on. International public goods have expanded to include outer space and cyberspace. No one leader country can handle these expanded security problems and maintain governance mechanism singlehandedly. Countries need to cooperate and coordinate their policies to do so.

In a narrow security sense, defense has become rather expensive. Nine countries joined to develop the F35, and the total cost of development is said to be about 1.5 trillion dollars. This shows that it is not just possible for a single country to develop the necessary capacity financially and technologically.

Another feature of the 21st century is a strong economic interdependence among countries. The U.S., Japan, and China are important economic partners to one another. For China, the U.S. and Japan are its No.1 and 2 export partners. For Japan, the U.S. and China are its No.1 and 2 export partners. For China, Japan is its No.2 investor, investing about 7 billion dollars in 2013. Singapore is slightly ahead of Japan, investing about 7.3 billion. Over twenty-three thousand Japanese companies are operating in China, and this number is the largest of all countries. The U.S. is the second with about twenty thousand companies.

We also saw, at the time of the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake, how a break in the supply chain caused serious problems for many automobile producers around the world.

These two features make it more difficult for countries to be antagonistic to each other than before and thus create more incentives for countries to seek ways to accommodate each other when faced with confrontational situations.

I believe the three countries understand that it is beneficial for them to work cooperatively in order to increase their mutual benefits. An important question to be asked is what kind of steps should we follow to facilitate the joint maximization of their mutual interests?

Given the present tensions between Japan and China, increased dialogue between the two countries at various levels, but especially at the top, needs to be increased. Emergency control measures have to be formally agreed upon and implemented. Continuous efforts must be made to improve the negative feelings of the public to each other. The U.S. and China seem to be managing their relationship better, but the relationship has to be strengthened.

Beyond that, we need positive mechanisms to elevate the trilateral relationship to a higher phase. Proceeding with cooperative projects is one way. Between Japan and China, cooperation in energy efficiency, clean coal technology, reducing PM2.5 levels the cleaning of contaminated lakes, and improving food safety are candidates.

Looking into the future, we need to push the relationship toward a more formal one to give greater stability to the relationship. Of course, this cannot be even started without the involvement of other countries in the region. The East Asia Summit is a suitable forum to discuss this.

Some people maintain that the EU is not a good model for the Asia-Pacific region to pursue. This is true if you look at where the EU is now, but we know that the EU started with cooperation in the economic field, namely the Iron and Steel Community; and this should serve as a model. Certainly this region would benefit from enhanced cooperation in the economic arena. We could strengthen our functional cooperation. There are many entry points; TPP and RCEP are two examples.

Cooperation and coordination of policies between Japan and the U.S. are well established. A key issue here is that we should do our best not to create confrontational situations between country groups.

Many elements come into play in trying to search for answers to these questions. To me, the most crucial one is whether countries can agree to a set of governance principles. For me, this has to be democracy, freedom human rights and the rule of law. Can countries agree on these principles? What are the meanings of these terms to each country?

An interesting recent development is, according to newspaper reports, China's announcement of reforms to its judicial system and the rule of law at the close of the fourth plenum of the 18th Communist Party of China (CCP) Congress held in Beijing in October.

While a huge gap still exists between their understanding of the rule of law and ours, maybe we can begin to be optimistic.

To end my presentation, I would like to cite a paragraph from Prime Minister Abe's speech delivered on October 19th in Tokyo at the 2014 International Bar Association's annual conference.

“The term ‘rule of law’ has its origins in Western civilization, but the idea is universal. The ‘rule of law’ is by no means limited to the West. From ancient times there were also similar concepts in Asia. The essential nature of the ‘rule of law’ is that power is not absolute. Rather, the law is a moral presence that exists above power; a presence that power must serve and by which power is bound. In Western philosophical thought this presence is referred to as the ‘general will of the people,’ while in Japan and the other countries of Northeast Asia, it is called the ‘Heavens’ or ‘Providence.’”

Essay #6

There is no triangular or trilateral relationship among the United States, Japan and China, at least as far as the Chinese are concerned. This is because the United States and Japan are close military allies. On security and even on economic issues such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), Washington and Tokyo are on one side and Beijing is on the other. Therefore, the relations are basically bilateral in nature; and when we talk about relations among the three countries, we really are talking about the impact of the third country, China, on the bilateral relations of the other two.

In the post-Cold War period, the U.S.-Japanese alliance has been very concerned with China, what it is preparing to do on Taiwan and in the East and South China Seas, missile defense, cyber and space security, and China's rise—including its military build-up. For its part, as a general principle, China has opposed the alliance between the United States and Japan for a long time. However, it does not oppose the alliance totally. Beijing opposes the alliance only insofar as it targets China and tries to involve itself on Taiwan and the East and South China Seas. For decades, Chinese leaders have asserted to American leaders that China recognizes that America's role in Asia and its security alliances are historical, and China accepts America's playing a positive and constructive security role in the region. But to the Chinese leadership, any involvement in China's "internal affairs," such as in Taiwan, and any threats to China's sovereignty and security in the East and South China Seas are neither "positive" nor "constructive." At the same time, a small number of policy people in China recognize that the U.S.-Japanese security alliance does have a positive and constructive function: to restrain Japanese military development and prevent Japan from developing nuclear weapons.

China never agreed to nor accepted the contention that the U.S.-Japanese security alliance is the "cornerstone" of Asian security. To the Chinese, the alliance is a bilateral arrangement. It only has the right to defend the two countries of the alliance, not to secure or defend others, including the entire Asia-Pacific region. This is because not all the countries in the region "elected" the alliance to secure the region, nor do these countries participate in the decision-making of the bilateral alliance.

Within the Chinese-American relationship, the United States has to care about what Japan is thinking, worrying and refusing to accept. The Americans must be careful not to let the development of U.S.-China relations weaken their bilateral alliance with Japan. Japan can live with relatively good relations between Beijing and Washington, but it has always worried that the two bigger countries might get too close and ignore Tokyo. The Japanese fear a recurrence of "the Nixon shock," when in the early 1970s the United States improved relations with China without consulting Japan. Now, Japan also worries about the possibility of a "G2" between the United States and China.

As to Chinese-Japanese relations, the Japanese consistently demand and expect American support when they have problems with China, such as with territorial disputes in the East China Sea and on historical issues. Japan also wants to work with Washington in calculating the rise of China and its military capacity.

In response, the Americans have been careful to support the Japanese in their disputes with China, in order to maintain and strengthen the bilateral alliance. Thus, the United States has stated clearly that the alliance covers the disputed islands of Senkaku/Diaoyu; it recognizes Japanese *de facto* control over the islands and opposes any unilateral action to change Japan's control. By contrast, on historical issues Washington has been careful not to take the same position as Japan, because these issues involve another America's alliance with the ROK and they could become issues in the U.S.-Japanese relationship if Japan goes too far.

To conclude, the three countries—the United States, Japan and China—do not have a standard trilateral relationship because two of them are in a close alliance. The relationship is very much bilateral in nature, between Japan and the United States, but China is a factor. Its policies have an impact on the other two countries. In fact, the policies of all three countries have to be carefully managed.

Conclusion

As stated in the introduction, the single most important challenge for the major powers in the Asia-Pacific region is to contain the disturbing trends toward strategic rivalry and to start on the long but necessary journey to developing a stable and cooperative relationship.

China and Japan should build on the recent APEC summit meeting held by the two leaders in Beijing which laid out a path for easing tensions and shelving the territorial dispute. The U.S. and China should follow up on their summit agreements on climate change, military confidence-building measures, relaxation of visa requirements and tariff reduction.

The three countries—the United States, Japan and China—should feel a heavy responsibility for managing their differences so that the East Asia success story of the past 40 years can continue. There is no magic formula that will make this possible. What is required is leaders who have the vision and the determination to make this happen. As three of the major players in the Asia-Pacific drama, China, Japan and the United States have an obligation to cooperate in realizing a common vision of a region that is prosperous and at peace.

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APPENDIX: TRILATERAL CONFERENCE PARTICIPANT LIST

THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE ON AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY'S (NCAFP)
FORUM ON ASIA-PACIFIC SECURITY AND THE TOKYO FOUNDATION PRESENT

U.S.-CHINA-JAPAN TRILATERAL CONFERENCE

OCTOBER 31 – NOVEMBER 1, 2014

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