

Shangri-La Dialogue 2013 Second Plenary Session

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(This is a provisional translation. The original text is in Japanese.)

Introduction

Director Chipman, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, it is my great pleasure to address the Shangri-La Dialogue, which has a long tradition of influence and esteem in the Asia-Pacific region. I wish to thank the International Institute for Strategic Studies and the Government of Singapore for hosting such an important dialogue.

As you know, a new Japanese government, led by the Liberal Democratic Party, started office last December, and I was appointed the 12th Defense Minister of Japan.

My home town, Kesennuma City of Miyagi Prefecture, suffered a devastating damage from the Great East Japan Earthquake that occurred in March of 2011.

The tsunami wave caused by the earthquake swept away both my parents' house and mine. Our families were forced to evacuate with so many others that were displaced from their homes.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my deep gratitude for the enormous support and encouragement extended by the international community after the disaster.

More than two years have passed since the unprecedented disaster. Since then, the people in the disaster hit areas, including Kesennuma City, have made a powerful recovery despite the damage and sadness the disaster caused.

Under the motto of "bring back a strong Japan," Japan's new government, formed last December, has introduced various initiatives.

For instance, Japan's economy has once again regained strength and is currently on the rise, as a result of the policy set forth by the government, known as "Abenomics," which

included the introduction of a bold monetary easing policy. Right now, Japan is just about to “bring back a strong Japan” under the leadership of Prime Minister Abe.

Toward the Revival of Strong Japan

A strong Japan does not only mean to play a role in leading the international community economically; a strong Japan will play a responsible role in the area of regional security and will exercise strong leadership as expected by the international community.

We believe it is essential to build-up a defense posture that will contribute to the enhancement of regional peace and stability. This is why the Japanese Government has increased its defense budget for the JFY2013, the first time in 11 years, and also increased the number of SDF personnel for the first time in eight years.

Moreover, given the increasingly severe security environment, the Japanese government is now undertaking a review of the current National Defense Program Guidelines, which we hope to complete by the end of 2013. The aim of the review is to maintain a defense posture that can firmly defend our territory, territorial waters, and territorial air-space by improving readiness of the Self-Defense Forces; to further strengthen the Japan-US alliance; and to contribute more to the improvement of the international security environment.

Furthermore, Japan is considering the establishment of a National Security Council in order to strengthen the functions of the Cabinet Office so we can better respond to unforeseen emergencies, and effectively form long-term national security and foreign policies.

In addition, we are discussing legal matters that are necessary for the SDF to play a responsible role as a member of the international community. Discussions over the Constitution, including debate over the right to use for collective self-defense, are ongoing.

Ladies and gentlemen, some say that Japan is tilting towards the “right” because of these initiatives.

Moreover, we sometimes hear criticism that Japan is abandoning its identity as a “peace-loving nation” and is attempting to challenge the existing international order.

However, these views are a total misperception. The aim of the aforementioned initiatives are to enable Japan to make a more proactive and creative contribution toward regional stability.

These efforts are crucial in pursuit of our national interest, which is in the maintenance and strengthening of an international order based on fundamental values of freedom, democracy, and the rule of law.

Japan’s national interest, which we have consistently pursued since after the end of World War II, is certainly not a narrow self-interest but is consistent with the interests of the international community as a whole as it pursues for the maintenance and the enhancement of international order.

Recently, a leader of Japanese opposition party and a local city mayor caused misunderstanding and mistrust to Japan’s neighboring countries by repeatedly making inappropriate remarks about past history of Japan. Let me assure you, the Abe administration never commits to such remarks or recognition of history. In the past, Japan caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people of many countries, particularly to those of Asian nations. Consecutive Japanese governments have humbly acknowledged such historical facts, expressed deep remorse and genuine apologies. Prime Minister Abe has also embraced the same position, which is shared by all Cabinet Ministers, including myself. Based on such recognition, we would like to look to the future and promote international cooperation with relevant countries.

Cooperation with ASEAN

As a tangible example of such a future-oriented cooperation, I would like to share some of our cooperative efforts with ASEAN.

As we have seen in recent developments in Myanmar, universal values such as democracy, human rights and the rule of law are increasingly embraced by ASEAN nations.

It is in this context that Prime Minister Abe when he visited Indonesia announced the “Five Principles of Japan’s ASEAN Diplomacy,” which clearly declared that Japan would jointly work as an “equal partner” of ASEAN in the pursuit of universal values, such as freedom, democracy and the rule of law, and will work to achieve prosperity through the network of economic cooperative partnerships.

Moreover, as this year marks the 40th anniversary of Japan-ASEAN Friendship and Cooperation, Japan has taken greater steps to enhance its relationship with ASEAN.

Specifically, Japan places importance on the following three areas. First, on maritime security, Japan believes in the importance of establishment, and of the compliance of maritime rules and norms.

Japan actively supports ASEAN’s efforts for the establishment of a code of conduct in the South China Sea. We also, in collaborating with relevant countries, hope to play a greater role in upholding the fundamental principles of freedom of navigation and to the adherence of maritime laws, that are centered on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

Yet since rules are the minimum level of norm, just keeping them may not prevent an incident in which one party misunderstands the other’s intention. A well-known Chinese proverb says, 'do not step into a field of melons, and do not straighten your crown under a plum tree. What this means is that a person with good manners does not do things that invite unnecessary suspicion.' Therefore, in addition to the establishment of rules and norms, Japan will promote the practice of 'Good Seamanship,' which will help prevent unintended collisions or conflicts caused by misunderstandings.

Secondly, Japan believes in the importance of a strong ASEAN-centered institutional architecture.

We highly value the role of ASEAN-centered frameworks, such as ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting plus (ADMM plus), that promotes cooperation and the improvement of transparency among regional countries. We will continue to proactively support these frameworks.

For instance, as the Co-Chair of the Experts Working Group (EWG) on Military Medicine of the ADMM plus, Japan has played a leading role in preparing for the ADMM plus HADR/Military Medicine Exercise slated to be held in Brunei this month.

This multilateral exercise, the first field top exercise under the framework of the ADMM plus, will include participants from the region, the United States and China. The exercise is a testament of the positive evolution that ASEAN has achieved from a “talk-shop” to a practical and effective “framework of cooperation.”

It is necessary to generate a “custom of cooperation” and a “common perception for order” among regional countries by facilitating these efforts. Such custom and perception cannot be realized without regional countries’ considerable effort for improving their military transparency, which will contribute to mutual understanding and predictability.

Thirdly, on capacity building, Japan believes in the importance of capacity building in the area of defense and security. In recent years related Japanese ministries and agencies are working together as a whole to help with the capacity building of ASEAN countries.

These efforts include the enhancement of maritime security capabilities of ASEAN countries through the strategic use of ODA by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and through training opportunities led by the Japanese Coast Guard together with the maritime safety authorities of ASEAN countries.

In addition to these efforts, the Ministry of Defense has conducted seminars focusing on underwater medicine in Vietnam as well as PKO training for Vietnamese military officers. We have also worked with Cambodian Government in developing human resources in areas of engineering such as road construction. We have also conducted seminars on Oceanography in Indonesia. It is our understanding that these activities were appreciated.

We believe that such efforts are extremely important in increasing resiliency of ASEAN countries, and thereby the maintenance of stability of the Asia-Pacific region that is based on ASEAN centrality and unity.

Concurrently, such cooperative efforts should be backed by Japan's strong economic and proactive security policies.

Thus, bringing back a strong Japan is indispensable in achieving a stable regional order in which ASEAN is the major driving force. We hope to continue our engagement along with our ally and partners.

U.S. Engagement in the Asia-Pacific and Japan's National Interest

Ladies and gentlemen, the United States has played a critical role in maintaining an international order that is based upon freedom, democracy and the rule of law.

The military presence of the United States is indispensable in securing peace and stability of the Asia Pacific region. U.S. force presence in the region serves not only as deterrence against unforeseen contingencies, but also serves to create opportunities for dialogue and cooperation amongst the regional countries, that is crucial in a stable international environment.

For this reason, Japan welcomes the United States' rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific region.

The United States' rebalance cannot be realized without cooperation by its allies and partners. Japan will proactively support the U.S. presence and jointly work with the United States toward the stability of the Asia-Pacific region.

In light of the current international security environment and from the perspective of maintaining peace and security in the region, Japan and the United States are looking of the roles, mission, and capability of our forces, and are studying review of the Guidelines for Japan-US Defense Cooperation.

We are strengthening our commitment to the establishment of an international order based on freedom, democracy and the rule of law by deepening our cooperation with countries like South Korea and Australia, that share common values and interests.

Efforts on Preventing Conflict

I would like to talk about “conflict prevention,” which is the theme of this session.

As we all know, in the Asia-Pacific region, there exist many issues among countries over resources and territories, some of which could easily escalate into a military conflict.

It is important to take those issues and tensions and embed them into the mesh of institutions and rules and to create global order where a crisis can be avoided not by violence, but through dialogue.

In order to avoid any escalation of any situation, Japan will continue to take a restrained response.

At the same time, Japan strongly hopes, and is making every effort to avoid and to prevent unexpected contingences. Specifically, we believe that it is important to cooperate with surrounding countries toward the establishment of crisis-management measures, such as a Maritime Coordination Mechanism, at the earliest possible timing.

Increasing predictability in a crisis situation can prevent the occurrence of an accidental contingency. Japan hopes to establish such a crisis-management mechanism at the earliest possible timing.

We wish the outcome of our constructive effort with our surrounding countries may one day serve as an international model for conflict prevention.

North Korea’s nuclear weapons and missile program is a serious threat that undermines the peace and security of the international community and it is absolutely unacceptable. Japan, in close coordination with the United States and South Korea, strongly calls on North Korea to comply with the obligations pursuant to relevant United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR), and to halt acts of provocations, and to take concrete actions towards denuclearization.

Furthermore, North Korea’s abduction of Japanese citizens is a matter of grave concern that poses a threat to Japan’s sovereignty and the lives and security of the Japanese people. It is also a clear violation of fundamental human rights, which is a universal issue for the international community. We appreciate each country’s understanding and

support toward the complete resolution of this issue.

Conclusion

Ladies and gentlemen, the lesson that Japan has learned from its experience in World War II is that a unilateral pursuit of a parochial national interest and/or a foreign and security policy that do not pay attention to the interest of others will inevitably fail.

As a peace-loving country, Japan has pursued a national interest that is consistent with the common interest of the international community. Japan will continue to do so in the future.

This is why Japan must be strong; so Japan can do more in the maintenance and strengthening of an international order based on the rule of law.

In cooperation and collaboration with other countries, Japan will continue to play an active role in pursuit of its national interest that is open to the international community, and will contribute to conflict prevention.

Thank you very much.