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A View from Tokyo on Regional Political-Military Developments
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Dear Readers,

The first four months (sorry, a bit longer than a “quarter” this time) of 2015 have tested Tokyo’s political will to stand by the alliance with the United States as well as by the international community with which Japan shares the universal values. Shinzo Abe’s administration seems to be quite consistent at least so far. Abe not only survived a series of political challenges that could have damaged himself but also took advantage of them to enhance his political authority in Japan which Abe badly needs this summer.

Abe’s first challenge was the tragic deaths of two Japanese citizens at the hands of ISIL in February. The coverage of this tragedy was the first time since the 2011 Great Eastern Japan Earthquake that Japan attracted a great deal of attention among major US media. In the US, the event was another reminder of ISIL threats, while in Japan, the incident was a wake-up call or a 9/11 that Japan can no longer be immune from the security challenges from violent non-state terrorist organizations such as ISIL in the Middle East.

President Barack Obama has also faced similar foreign policy challenges. In Washington, 2015 began with another chaos in Ukraine where the pro-Russian forces challenged the ceasefire agreement reached in February in which the US had not been involved. This was followed in March by a worsening of US-Israel relations when the Speaker of the US House of Representatives John Boehner invited Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to deliver a speech at the joint session of US Congress.

Prime Minister Netanyahu delivered his speech on March 3, but the Obama administration refused to meet Netanyahu citing that the timing of his visit is too close to the Knesset election in Israel, criticizing Netanyahu that he is trying to leverage his US visit to better the chance of

his Likud Party's success in the election. Obama also made his frustration with Beoner clear for going against the diplomatic protocol and inviting Netanyahu without the White House's consent. Despite a slim margin, the victory of Likud Party headed by Netanyahu in the March 17 Knesset election means that the tension between the US and Israel will likely to continue, at least for the remainder of the Obama administration.

While the tension surrounding Netanyahu's visit to Washington and his speech at US Congress speaks to the not-so-amicable relationship between Obama and Netanyahu, the message Netanyahu carried in his speech—criticism against the ongoing efforts by the Obama administration to engage Iran in diplomatic negotiation to curb Teheran's nuclear program—speaks to the broader point of contention between the Obama administration and the US Congress on how to approach Iran. A series of multi-party diplomatic negotiations that involve the US, the UK, France, China, Russia, Germany and Iran is seen with great suspicions by the Congress, both among Republican and Democratic lawmakers. Although the "framework" agreement reached on April 2 in Geneva gave the Obama administration three months to win Congressional support for the deal, it will not be easy to overcome skeptics.

Aside from frustration with Putin, Netanyahu and Iran, the Obama administration has been largely preoccupied with ISIL and its affiliates. With ISIL continuing to expand its sphere of influence and other extremist organizations such as Al-Shabab aligning themselves with ISIL, it is painfully clear that the US has not been able to come up with effective policy steps to respond to this quickly emerging security threat. As the US and the rest of the international community struggles to respond, the violent terrorist activities have spread beyond the Middle East—the attacks against *Charlie Hebdo* on January 7 and against the Bardo Museum in Tunis were just two examples of how their extreme ideology continues to attract a certain population in Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

In the meantime in the Asia-Pacific region, China opened the New Year by accelerating the construction of port, airfield and other facilities on the artificial islands in the South China Sea. While the countries in the region, supported by the United States and Japan, decries China's tactics to achieve *fait accompli* in the South China Sea, the region so far has not been able to respond in a way to reverse the Chinese assertive behavior. And the passing of Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore marks the end of an era for Singapore.

It is in a time like this that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited the United States. Abe had a summit meeting with Obama on April 28 and delivered a speech at Congress on April 29 after

revising the US-Japan Guidelines for Defense Cooperation of 1997. Above all, Abe's visit was fairly successful as Rep. Steve Cohen, for example, reportedly said that Abe's "recognition of the deaths and sorrow that World War II caused was historic and appropriate," "His mention of women was also appropriate, and while he could have gone further he went a goodly distance and should be commended."

We hope you will find this short overview and the following analyses of Northeast Asian security developments helpful.

<Tokyo>

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe kept busy in summit diplomacy in the first quarter of 2015. He began a new year by visiting the Middle East, including Israel. At home, he received the prime ministers from Germany and New Zealand. He also hosted on March 14 a meeting of the UN Disaster Prevention Conference in Sendai city, one of the cities in Tohoku that was hit most severely by the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake four years ago. In his speech at the United Nation University on March 16, he made a strong case for Japan's enhanced efforts in the UN reforms, including that of the Security Council.

However, what dominated his first quarter in 2015 was the hostage crisis that unfolded between from late January through mid-February. The brutal killing of two Japanese citizens—Haruna Yukawa and Kenji Goto—presented Abe a serious challenge on how Japan would respond to the threat by the terrorists. The incident also triggered some in Japan to be more vocal about their concerns for Abe's robust national security policy.

Another major development in Japan during this quarter was the establishment of the advisory commission on the anticipated 70th World War II anniversary statement by the prime minister. The commission has met five times so far, and the media reporting suggests that heated discussions have been held among the commission members on what the prime minister's 70th anniversary statement should or should not say.

Abe delivered a speech at the US Congress on April 29 and the following is what he said and it is crystal clear: "Post war, we started out on our path bearing in mind feelings of deep remorse over the war. Our actions brought suffering to the peoples in Asian countries. We must not avert our eyes from that. I will uphold the views expressed by the previous prime ministers in this regard." The day before the speech, Abe stated to President Obama as well as to the world, including his fellow conservatives in Japan, that the Abe Administration would not revise the Kono apology on comfort women.

The fact that Shinzo Abe himself said that is significant. Now that Abe said before the U.S. Congress that he will uphold the previous prime ministers' statements that Japanese conservative or right wing politicians may no longer be able to effectively challenge the Murayama statement. This could, hopefully and finally, contribute to the making of a minimum national consensus on history issues which is indispensable for Japan (especially for the parliamentarians in the Japanese Diet), in moving forward to start pursuing a real international reconciliation with our Asian neighbors. It is regrettable that this fact is yet to be appreciated by so many outside Japan.

<The United States>

The Obama administration's preoccupation with the threat posed by ISIL and its increasing influence that reaches beyond the Middle East continues. ISIL sympathizers' attack on the publisher *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris and the shooting in Bardo Museum in Tunisia are only two examples that show the extension of ISIL and its sympathizers' reach. The concern about the home-grown terrorists that are influenced by ISIL and other Islamic extremist groups is quickly emerging as a major homeland security challenge for the US as well.

On the diplomatic front, the Obama administration was also preoccupied with the Middle East. The administration's relations with Israel's Netanyahu government hit all-time low when Netanyahu visited Washington DC at the invitation of the Speaker of the House of Representatives John Boehner. Obama refused to meet Netanyahu during his stay in DC, questioning the wisdom of a summit meeting with the Israeli prime minister who was only two weeks away from the Knesset election. In response, Netanyahu delivered a speech at Congress that is filled with harsh criticism against Obama administration's diplomatic effort to reach an agreement to freeze Iran's nuclear program. The Knesset election ended with a victory by the Likud Party by a very slim margin, and Netanyahu is expected to remain as Israel's prime minister. But how the two leaders will begin to reconstruct the already bad relationship is unknown.

Obama administration also faced intense bipartisan pressure from the US Congress on negotiations with Iran. With "the framework" agreement reached on April 2 after a marathon negotiation among the US and other permanent members of the UN Security Council, Germany and Iran, the Obama administration will have three months to win Congressional support for the final deal. However, the probability that Obama can win such a support is not very high.

<China and the Republic of Korea>

Although his speech at the US Congress was generally well received in the US, Chinese and South Korean media denounced Prime Minister Abe for failing to issue a new apology for Japan's wartime conduct or to mention "comfort women." Nonetheless, there seems to be some difference in temperature between the Chinese and Korean governments. Chinese government spokespersons carefully avoided direct criticism against the speech by saying that "Whether or not Japan can keep a path of peace and development depends on what kind of message on the 'history issues' she dispatches to the rest of the world." Their South Korean counterparts, on the other hand, were much more critical about Abe by calling his speech as "deeply regrettable."

For China, silence is golden and Abe's speech must have been discounted because Abe and Xi Jinping of China already met for the second time in Jakarta a week before. For South Korea, Abe's speech and its US positive reaction may be an omen for South Korea's isolation in this history game. Presidents Park Geun Hye and Xi Jinping will visit the United States in June and September respectively and the game will continue.

In contrast, the reaction to Abe's speech in the US was more positive. His speech was interrupted 13 times by applause and standing ovations. A handshake between Gen. Lawrence Snowden, a marine veteran of the battle of Iwo Jima, and Dietman Yoshitaka Shindo, whose grandfather commanded the Japanese troops on the island symbolized the bilateral reconciliation. Vice President Biden stated that Prime Minister Abe "made it very clear that there was responsibility on Japan's part" adding that Abe's gesture to the US war dead was "much appreciated." The Republican senator John McCain described Abe's war comments as "historic recognition of two peoples reconciled with their shared history."

<New Defense Guidelines>

On April 27, the United States and Japan released the new Guidelines for U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation. The document, originally created in 1979 to set the parameters for the cooperation between the U.S. military and Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) in case of military attack against Japan, had been last revised in 1997 after the end of the Cold War. The second and most recent revision began in 2013 and is now complete. Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter hailed the New Guidelines as a mechanism that would "transform" the U.S.-Japan alliance.

The revision of the Guidelines was driven by both countries' realization that the increasingly fluid and transnational nature of security threats requires guidelines that allow greater flexibility for the defense planners in both countries. As such, the new Guidelines pursue

“seamless, robust, flexible, and effective” bilateral responses and provide “general framework and policy direction” for the cooperation necessary for such responses. Most notably to this end, the new Guidelines announced that the United States and Japan will launch a new standing Alliance Coordination Mechanism (ACM) to “enhance operational coordination, and strengthen bilateral planning.”

There are several notable features of the new Guidelines. First is the overwhelming focus on the bilateral defense cooperation in the situation that directly affects Japan’s security. In deed, 15 out of the 24-pages long document is devoted to spelling out how the two countries will respond to the security concerns that directly affect Japan’s security. Although the Guidelines assert that these security concerns cannot be defined geographically, it is clear that the primary drivers of articulating the modes of bilateral cooperation in such situations is to clarify when and how U.S. military will cooperate with the JSDF in what is often referred to as “gray zones” in East China Sea.

Second, compared to the very detailed description of bilateral cooperation in situations that directly impacts Japan’s security, the new Guidelines say very little about how the two countries will cooperate regionally and globally. This reflects the reality that, despite Japanese government’s decision to revise the interpretation of the Article Nine of the Japanese constitution to allow itself to exercise the right of collective self-defense, its scope is very limited. As the Guidelines refers to Japan’s new conditions for self-defense, based on the Cabinet Decision on July 1, 2014, the SDF will exercise the right of collective self-defense when the situation “threatens Japan’s survival and poses a clear danger to fundamentally overturn people’s right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness.” It also shows that the two governments cannot be perceived as trying to set the parameters for the upcoming revision of Japan’s national defense laws by the new Guidelines.

Third, the new Guidelines identified space and cyber as the two domains that hold the greatest potential for expanding bilateral cooperation. However, there is a vast capability gap between the United States and Japan in these two areas. It will be a tall order for Japan to develop its own capability, with appropriate investments, in space and cyber to be able to partner with the United States in these two domains.

Finally, the new Guidelines mention cooperation in defense equipment for the first time. With Japan’s revision of its arms export policy in April 2014, defense industrial cooperation between the two countries indeed has great potential. Still, in order to fully optimize this

potential, Tokyo must come up with a coherent policy on how it wants to nurture its defense industrial base, while ensuring fair and open competition for its own defense market.

Given the changes in global and regional security environment since 1997, the time was indeed ripe for Washington and Tokyo to revise the Guidelines. The new Guidelines offer a set of defense cooperation principles for both countries that are flexible and adaptive, so that they are not tied to emergency situations or contingency scenarios in specific geographic areas.

However, whether the new Guidelines can add real “meat” to this framework depends on how Japan will change its national defense legislation.