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# The Sino-Korean anti-Japanese Axis on Yasukuni Failed

By SUGIURA Masaaki

From my long experience in watching foreign policy and national security, I found that things can develop dramatically from slight symptoms in many cases. Despite Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's fatal mistake to visit the Yasukuni Shrine, global anti-Japanese campaign led by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi has not made much success, and vehement criticism to Japan by South Korean President Park Guen-hye has grown weaker at the beginning of this year. Currently, security environment in the Far East is unprecedentedly strained and continually volatile, but the alliance with Japan will remain a strategic cornerstone for the United States. Still, China and South Korea will not give up exploring to found an anti-Japanese axis, and this year, Japan should make every effort to "harness" US Asia-Pacific strategy to decouple them. The most unpredictable danger in this region is Kim Jong-un of North Korea. Having executed his uncle, Kim would turn his attack overseas. It is rumored among Korean peninsula watchers that North Korea will test nuclear bomb and ballistic missile, and resort to military strike to South Korea, from January to March. On the other hand, while China has set the Air Defense Identification Zone around the Senkaku Islands unilaterally, domestic riots and terrorism can grow into "civil wars", and therefore, Xi Jinping may divert public attention to Japan's wartime misconducts to override ongoing crises. The likelihood of accidental military clash around Senkaku will remain high. The Cold War in the Far East can develop into the worst scenario this year, as it was before.

Meanwhile, there is no denying that Abe's visit to Yasukuni can turn our national security at risk. Abe repeatedly insists that leaders all around the world pay tribute to those who dedicated their lives to defend their country, but we must remember that the Yasukuni Shrine is translated the War Shrine Yasukuni in English. Associated with this name, his argument is understood a praise of wartime Japan's misbehavior, and it is utterly impossible that the global public opinion accepts such a viewpoint. To begin with, we must request the media to correct such a provocative translation through embassies of the United States and other major powers, in order to convince the global community that the Yasukuni visit is nothing but an homage to war dead. In addition, attendance

to Yasukuni ritual at this stage contradicts Abe's vision, which is a departure from the postwar regime. Rather, that will reinforce the postwar regime, because China will use Yasukuni to call for "solidarity of victorious nations". This is the vital point that Wang Yi wants to appeal to the world, and he actually pushes the propaganda in this direction. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov agrees with him completely. Also, Yasukuni visit makes China and South Korea closer. It is quite likely that Xi Jinping will visit South Korea this year, and he will demonstrate close Sino-Korean relations.

As mentioned above, Abe's visit to Yasukuni provoked China and Korea, which has led Japan to foreign policy deadlock furthermore. However, this visit served a "reconnaissance" role to examine the degree of negative effect of Yasukuni. We can learn something from Maruhashi Chuya, an anti-Tokugawa samurai who staged an uprising against the Shogunate in the 17th century. In order to examine Tokugawa's defense system at Edo castle, he tried to deceive the guard by pretending himself drunk, and walked around the castle for reconnaissance. Abe's action helped us to understand how the United States will respond to such a revisionist conduct, as Maruhashi's spy activity helped his anti-Tokugawa comrades to prepare for an uprising. Shortly after Abe's visit, US Ambassador Caroline Kennedy announced an unprecedented statement, "The United States is disappointed that Japan's leadership has taken an action that will exacerbate tensions with Japan's neighbors." However, the statement adds, "We take note of [Japanese Prime Minister's] expression of remorse for past and his reaffirmation of Japan's commitment to peace." This implies that the American side understands Abe's "commitment to peace" to some extent. In my view, Americans want to overlook Abe's behavior deep in their heart, if he shall not do it again. This is because it is unlikely that the United States change current direction of restructuring and strengthening the alliance with Japan, as stated when Secretary of State Kerry and Secretary of Defense Hagel visited Japan last October, in view of US strategy in the Far East. Nevertheless, the word of "disappointment" is very strong, because Americans did not use it when Koizumi visited Yasukuni. This shows that the Chinese and the Korean lobbies penetrate further into American political corridor in 8 years since then.

Certainly, it is important to increase defense spending, but the budget for diplomatic maneuver at the embassy is much smaller than that for defense. Abe should understand that more spending is necessary to rival lobbying activities by China and South Korea. The settlement to move Futenma Air Base to Henoko is the most successful achievement for the US-Japanese alliance these days, and Japan should appeal it to the United States without hesitation. The United States will have a

strategic hub in the Far East. Japan should “make use of” American Far East strategy, in order to drive a wedge between China and South Korea. Regrettably, Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida does not seize this opportunity. Apparently, he is not the right person for this position. Park moves her country excessively close to China, despite economic interests. China was an enemy in the Korean War, and once North Korea start the war, China is likely to help Pyongyang. In such a case, the US-Japanese alliance will defend South Korea, along with the US-South Korean alliance. Park is too near sighted to give consideration to this point. If she continues to court Xi Jinping, South Korea will fall into a critical crisis of national security. Meanwhile, there are some signs that Park is “modifying” her diplomatic stances.

At the New Year press conference, she told “I have never said that I reject to have a bilateral talk with Japan,” and added, “The bilateral summit must be well prepared beforehand”. Probably, Park is concerned with criticism to her exclusive devotion to anti-Japanese policy in her country. On the other hand, Wang Yi’s global anti-Japanese campaign failed in the end. He telephoned one country after another, but only Lavrov and South Korean Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se agreed with him. This does not upset the Japanese government. As to Russia, Abe’s close personal ties with President Putin will offset the damage by Yasukuni. In ASEAN countries, apart from the media, none of governmental leaders denounced the visit. Even in China, though the Foreign Minister launched a campaign, this position corresponds to just the Deputy Minister in Japan, and Xi Jinping and other members of the State Council, which is the real equivalent to Japan’s cabinet; do not blame Japan publicly at all. Anti-Japanese rallies by students are suppressed. Probably, this is because the Communist Party worries that strong public demonstrations can turn their target to corrupt autocracy, and this is a noteworthy trend. As mentioned above, Abe barely managed to prevent anti-Japanese voices spreading beyond China and South Korea, but he should not commit such a risk of jeopardizing our national interest by visiting Yasukuni again.

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