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**PRC-Japan Relations: Will an Apology Bring Reconciliation?** by Ralph A. Cossa

Beijing has demanded that Japan issue a detailed, specific written apology for its past aggression against China when President Jiang Zemin visits Japan on November 25-30. China is reportedly seeking "a clear and accurate picture" of past transgressions such as was contained in the "heartfelt apology" provided to South Korean President Kim Dae-jung during his visit to Japan last month. (In that statement, Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi "humbly accepted the historical fact that Japan's colonial rule inflicted incalculable damage and pain on the Korean people.") Obuchi has given every indication that Japan will provide a similar apology to Beijing . . . as well it should.

The time for redressing past wounds between China and Japan is long overdue. A written statement of apology and remorse will help speed up the healing process . . . provided the patient really wants to get well. This remains to be seen. After all, Japanese leaders from the Emperor on down have issued apologies to China before. Indeed, Obuchi's predecessor, Ryutaro Hashimoto, made a fairly explicit statement of remorse just last year during his visit to China.

To date, these Japanese acts of contrition have failed to satisfy Beijing's need for still more mea culpas. Beijing has steadfastly refused to put the past behind and judge Japan based on what it is today and what it has done in the past 50 plus years since the end of World War II. Will this time be different? Much, of course, depends on the nature of the apology. But, if Obuchi gives Jiang the specific written apology he wants, it seems fair to ask what Japan will get in return.

President Kim Dae-jung, in the Joint Declaration containing Obuchi's apologies, "sincerely recognized and appreciated the prime minister's honest interpretation of history" and further pledged to "build a future-oriented relationship based on a spirit of reconciliation and friendship." Jiang should be expected to make the same pledge.

It is also time for China to publicly recognize that without extremely generous Japanese developmental assistance and direct financial investment, China would not be experiencing the level of economic growth it enjoys today. Japan has truly been a friend in need to China. Beijing also needs to acknowledge that Japan's three non-nuclear principles and its decision not to develop an offensive military capability have contributed to peace and stability in Asia while demonstrating Japan's non-threatening nature today. Obuchi should demand

an end to constant Chinese harping about Japanese remilitarization (especially since China's Peoples Liberation Army, even after its planned downsizing, will be fully ten times larger than Japan's Self Defense Forces).

Prime Minister Obuchi should also be prepared to challenge Chinese criticism of Japan's decision to put a modest amount of research dollars toward theater ballistic missile defense (TMD).

If the past is any guide, Jiang's meeting with Russian President Yeltsin (which immediately precedes his Japan visit) will result in yet another condemnation of TMD, if not the broader U.S.-Japan defense relationship. When Russia's defense minister [Igor Seregeyev] visited China in late October, he and his Chinese counterpart [Chi Haotian] were quoted as criticizing "certain countries" whose plans to develop a TMD system "will arouse a new arms race."

President Jiang should be asked to explain this remark, if not by Obuchi, then by the Japanese or international press. Does this mean that China believes that Japan does not have the same right to self defense that every other sovereign state enjoys -- a right that China exercises by developing long range missiles and bombers and nuclear weapons and that Japan exercises by aligning itself defensively with the U.S. while voluntarily foregoing such offensive weapons? Or does it mean that China, which has sworn never to be the first to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons, plans to accelerate its offensive missile capability if Japan is better able to defend itself?

During a recent visit to Beijing, Chinese officials counseled me to be more understanding and less critical about North Korea's desire -- and sovereign right -- to develop a missile capability in order to defend itself (by threatening others?). Yet Beijing seems unable to grant Japan the same right, even when exercised in a far less threatening way. Would Beijing prefer that Japan defend itself by developing a counter-strike offensive missile capability, like Pyongyang and others (Beijing included) have?

What is needed when the two leaders meet is not just an apology but a mutual commitment to cooperate to build a better future. When Kim Dae-jung visited China earlier this month, their joint communique spoke of their mutual commitment toward building a "cooperative partnership for the 21<sup>st</sup> century." It is time for China and Japan to likewise pursue such a goal.

A sincere written statement of apology and remorse will provide further evidence that Japan has in fact come to terms with its past. The question then becomes, will China agree to move cooperatively into the future?

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