China and the Japan-US Alliance

by Akio Takahara

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The following remarks were delivered at the Japan-US Security Seminar: Public Panel Session at CSIS in Washington, DC on March 21, 2014.

China needs to be approached in a holistic, comprehensive way. When we look into its diplomacy, security, politics, and/or economics, we find that they are closely linked to each other. And it is especially so in recent years, as volatility has increased in Chinese politics.

The first question to address is, "how united is the Chinese Communist Party?" To answer that, we must recognize that Xi Jinping is in the process of consolidating his power.

Xi, like Jiang Zemin in 1989, does not have an institutional power base. This is different from Xi's predecessor, Hu Jintao, who had the Communist Youth League as a solid power base within the Party system. This may sound odd because we are often told that Hu was a weak leader while Xi is very strong. But Xi has to act forcefully and decisively, precisely because he does not have a power base to rely on, and up to now he has made two outstanding moves.

First, he introduced new organizations such as the National Security Council and the Leadership Small Group on Comprehensively Deepening Reforms that cover many areas and assumed a leadership position in them. Unlike the party chairman, which Mao Zedong used to be, the general secretary has little power. The CCP introduced this system of collective leadership in 1982 in the wake of the Cultural Revolution that saw excessive power concentration in the chairman. It seems Xi's move to concentrate power through the formation of multi-dimensional organizations has borne fruit. You hardly hear the word "liconomics" anymore, a word coined from the name of Prime Minister Li Keqiang, who should be in charge of national economic management but is now overshadowed by Xi, who leads the Leadership Small Group on Deepening Reforms.

Second, he has launched an ambitious anti-corruption campaign, with a target set on Bo Xilai, the former party secretary of Chongqing who could have been his rival, and Zhou Yongkang, the former boss of the public security apparatus. The Bo Xilai case is over and he has been sentenced to life imprisonment, but the latter has not seen a final outcome and all sorts of rumors are heard. The political atmosphere remains very tense because of this.

But even if Xi prevails, that does not mean that the party can be united. Deep divisions within the party will continue. The three reforms that former Premier Wen Jiabao repeatedly emphasized are not being taken up: breaking the oligopoly of state-owned enterprises in the most lucrative, key sectors of the national economy such as energy, telecommunications, finance, etc.; second, distribution system reform; and third, political reform. In a nutshell, vested interests are so solidly rooted that any substantial reform is politically extremely difficult. Some say that's why there has been an attempt to concentrate power in Xi Jinping. Perhaps, but power

concentration is yet to reach a level that allows him to implement the essential reforms in the core of the system, and I am sceptical at this moment that he has the will to do so. His remarks on politics have actually been rather conservative.

For example, there is disagreement over universal values. Whether you accept the concept of universal values and strive for implementing human rights, or not, is a very important question in deciding the direction of social development. The conventional position of the CCP has been to acknowledge the universality of human rights, but in recent years, with the rise in nationalism and conservatism, which tend to have close affinity to each other, the mainstream of the Central Propaganda Department of the CCP has started to argue otherwise, insisting that human rights are Western values and the Westerners call them universal values to impose them on China. The Xinhua News Agency did not report Hu Jintao's remarks during the joint press conference with President Obama at the White House in January 2011, when he said that there was universality in human rights. What is Xi Jinping's position? It seems that he is inclined toward the conservative side.

This is unfortunate because without respect for and establishment of the concept of human rights in society, there will be no rule of law. In fact, when Deng Xiaoping and his colleagues embarked on reforming China in the late 1970s and the early 1980s, establishing rule of law, together with reforming the planned economy, was one of the most important targets. But unlike the progress made in the economic realm in the past 30 years, establishing rule of law still has a long way to go. China's social order remains based on crude power. I call it *Pax Communista* – that is, an order that is supported by the outstanding power of the CCP.

On top of this, the general public is increasingly dissatisfied with the social situation. The Chinese public is dissatisfied with the present and anxious about the future despite the surge in per capita GDP. We are all familiar with the social problems in China such as rampant corruption, abuse of power, nepotism and the stratification of society which has almost shattered the Chinese Dream, air pollution and other environmental degradation including lack of water, decline of morals and ethics, and the aging society, etc. As a result, I would say the number of believers in religion is increasing very rapidly, and those with the means to do so are emigrating out of the country. The society, in a word, is increasingly fragmented, and remains immature and unsettled.

To integrate the fragmented nation and garner support for the authorities, Xi Jinping started talking about the China Dream of Realizing the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation. The official translation of the term, *Zhongguo Meng*, is "the Chinese Dream," but I believe it should be "the China Dream," because it is imbued in the minds of those who have lost the individual dream of making way in life through toil and sweat, calling on them to identify themselves with the nation or the state, which will be the champion of the world.

Thus, the party is divided and society is fragmented, but the system of one-party rule does not have effective mechanisms to absorb and reflect different views and coordinate divergent interests.

This brings me to my second key question, "Given this domestic context, what is the nature of China's maritime advancement and what is the Japan-US alliance facing?" Various

factors explain China's maritime advances. The first is the increase in its national power, which is the basic condition for China's foreign policy. The second is the increase in its interests overseas. Beijing needs to protect them, including the sea lines of communication. Third, there is the relative decline of the United States, seen by some Chinese in the 2008 Lehman Brothers' shock and the financial crisis that followed, which shattered the authority of the US model or the Washington Consensus.

What China is targeting for now, in the so-called "New Type of Great Power Relations," is equality with the United States. As Xi Jinping says, "the Pacific is big enough to accommodate both China and the US." This should mean, at the end of the day, or the century, that China wants half the Pacific. This means that, in the minds of the Chinese, Taiwan is no longer the focus of contention with the US. Especially since 2008, when Ma Ying-jeou of the KMT became president, Taiwan has not been an object of struggle, neither against the Taiwanese nor against the United States.

There is another factor in the struggle with Japan over the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea: the convenience of having an object of struggle for the unity of the party and the nation. Especially since the Japanese government's purchase of the Senkaku Islands in September 2012, Chinese diplomacy and propaganda policy have been in the struggle mode, and not in cooperation mode. According to an enlightened Chinese friend, the government never ceases efforts to bring up issues to criticize Japan. Recent ones include the court in Beijing taking up a case of forced labor during World War II for the first time, and the establishment of a museum on the notorious 731 medical troop that conducted hideous human experiments during the war. Nationalistic propaganda of course started much earlier, but the current social psychology and the general sense of frustration and irritation among the public seems to provide a rich breeding ground for anti-Japanese sentiments in society, fed by the ferocious media campaign.

An increase in China's sphere of influence will have important impacts. Remember that World War II was a war in which the aggressors, Germany and Japan, were defeated. What followed was the independence of former colonies and self-determination of formerly oppressed nations. As far as the Western world, including Japan, was concerned, a rule-based international order emerged and was supported by the power of the United States. *Pax Americana* was not without mistakes, but in the past 40 years East Asia has enjoyed basic peace and stability thanks mainly to the US presence in the region, and the Japan-US alliance has played a large role in upholding this order.

Unfortunately, however, it seems the *Pax Sinica* that China aims for internationally is likely to be an extension of *Pax Communista* in the domestic context, if we are to judge from China's recent behavior and action. China keeps applying physical pressure on Japan by regularly sending patrol boats into its territorial waters and the contiguous zone around the Senkaku Islands, and it is dragging its feet on defining a binding Code of Conduct in the South China Sea. China insists on sovereign rights within the so-called nine dotted lines drawn on their map of the South China Sea, which violates the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

This brings me to the third key question, "what should Japan and the US do?" First, we need to create a common vision of the future. There are now two permanent members of the UN Security Council that are trying to change the status quo unilaterally by physical force, rewinding history back into the previous century. This is a deplorable situation. My hope is that when President Obama visits Japan next month, he will issue a joint statement with Mr. Abe on how we should restore the world order. Restoring a rule-based order should be at the top of our agenda.

The prime minister and the president should share notes on China and coordinate China policy. It is of utmost importance that they take their time discussing China in a candid and constructive way. The Japanese understand what the US is trying to do through its rebalancing policy, but we also need to know what the US policy toward China is in the bilateral context.

As we coordinate policies, we must understand that the Japanese tend to see China, and the alliance, mainly in the regional context, while some in the US mainly see China in a global context. We need to always take this gap into consideration. The importance and urgency of a crisis in the region is not necessarily understood immediately in Washington, although it could have global implications.

This does not mean that we want to exclude China from our common futures indeed, quite the opposite. There is a reservoir of goodwill toward China in both Japan and the US. We need China's sustainable development and soft-landing, and the Japanese government still provides ODA to China for this purpose.

Our hope is that there are moderate internationalists in China who share our values and sentiments, although Japan-bashing by the government is likely to continue for some time. The cooperation and exchange that we have had in the past 42 years of diplomatic relations - along with the long history of Japan-China relations - should not have been conducted in vain. It is interesting to note that the number of Chinese tourists visiting Japan in January hit a record high this year. My personal impression is that many Chinese love Japan no less than they hate Japan.

Biography

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Akio Takahara is a professor at the Graduate School of Law and Politics, University of Tokyo and a senior fellow at the Japan Institute of International Affairs. He graduated from the Faculty of Law, University of Tokyo and received his doctorate from the University of Sussex. He is currently a member of the 21st Century Committee for Japan-China Friendship.