



Regional Challenges for Japan by Yasuhiro Nakasone

Regional challenges are a matter of serious concern for Japan, specifically a volatile North Korea, the relationship between China and Taiwan, as well as the territorial dispute over four Russian-held territories off Hokkaido. To deal with North Korea, the government should be encouraged to join hands with the United States and China in urging the communist regime to abandon its isolationist policy and instead follow the example set by Deng Xiaoping, the deceased paramount leader of China.

North Korean leaders may be concerned that they will undermine the foundation of their regime if they adopt open-door policies to encourage the flow of people and information between their country and the rest of the world. From a long-term point of view, however, I believe in peacefully unifying the North and South after giving Pyongyang a chance to abandon its seclusionist policy and join the international community, while at the same time growing as a member of the Asia-Pacific region.

I am convinced that Japan, China, the United States and South Korea should agree to cooperate in extending financial and economic aid to the North to overcome the difficulties that are bound to ensue if Pyongyang follows Deng's example. It will undoubtedly be in Japan's interests to implement the four-party accord as part of its long-term policy toward North Korea.

Concerning the Taiwan issue, Japan and the United States should reiterate their promise to honor treaties they have signed with China and adhere to the spirit of statements adopted by the three countries.

Beijing, for its part, should demonstrate a determination to seek a unification with Taiwan through peaceful dialogue, and not through force. In return, Taipei should accept Beijing's call for three direct links between the two parties – airline services, the exchange of postal services and commercial trade – and should refrain from taking provocative action that could jeopardize the status quo. In addition, China and Taiwan should agree to continue maintaining and developing their relations in what will amount to the continuation of political systems on both sides of the Taiwan Straits.

Every member of the Asia-Pacific basin hopes to see Beijing and Taipei maintain their current positions for about the next 10 years, while at the same time striving to ensure peace and economic growth on both sides across the Taiwan Straits. Ten years on, China and Taiwan should again discuss their relations, taking into consideration the changes that will have taken place.

China has said that its "one-nation, two-systems" policy will apply to Taiwan too. However, I feel tempted to challenge China's warning about using force against Taiwan –

which Beijing has long insisted constitutes an inseparable part of its territory. Such an approach does not necessarily belong to the rule of virtue. At the same time, however, Taiwan should exercise moderation and self-discipline.

I am reminded that Deng once said his country would give itself 50 years to accomplish the unification goal. The Japanese have long admired China for having such a big heart. Such a magnanimous attitude will probably cause Taiwan to react differently in the future. China and Taiwan may be able to see a glimmer of hope for peaceful unification if they give themselves about 10 years of moderation and self-discipline in resolving the long-standing dispute.

On his part, Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui has recently made remarks that could be taken as a sign of a wish to see his island and China merge into "one China" by reconciling their antagonism as rivals across the strait. Judging from these circumstances, there is no denying that China and Taiwan will obtain positive results from their efforts to exercise moderation and self-discipline.

My belief in that kind of approach may be dismissed by China and Taiwan. However, I earnestly want Beijing and Taiwan to pay attention and consideration to my ideas.

Undoubtedly, it will be a formidable challenge for Japan, the United States and China to work to ensure the stability in Northeast Asia, according to the guiding principles I have proposed. However, the Japanese people should realize that a major task faced by their country at the dawn of the 21st century will be to work to accomplish that goal. I am convinced that that kind of struggle will constitute the central pillar of Japan's diplomatic mission in the 21st century.

Yasuhiro Nakasone was Japan's prime minister from 1982 to 1987. His comments are drawn from a longer commentary, "21st Century Government Needs Solid Leadership," published in The Daily Yomiuri, August 2, 1999.