

A peaceful Asia and the Article 9 of Japanese Constitution

Remarks by Mr. Yasuhiro Tanaka, director of Japan AALA at the Session of Peace and Human Security of ACSC/APF 2017, November 10 -14 in Manila.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Ladies and gentlemen. I am great honored to be here and appreciate for having an opportunity to speak in such an important session. First of all, allow me to introduce myself and my organization. I am the president of board of directors of Japan Asia Africa Latin America Solidarity Committee. Japan AALA founded in 1955, 62 years ago. Inheriting the spirit of Bandung Conference which sought peaceful coexistence and cooperation among Asian countries, we have been solidarity with the national liberation movement in Asia Africa and Latin America. Holding up protection of rights of self Determination of the peoples, we oppose racism, colonialism and any kind of interference in the internal affairs of other countries. Opposing infringement of sovereignty by pressing neoliberal and big business priority politics, we are working for a just and peaceful world without nuclear weapons and a new Japan of no military alliance with no foreign military bases. We are working with peace organizations of Asian countries, calling for a creation of a community of peace and cooperation in East Asia.

Tension is increasing in East Asia

When we look at actual situation in North East Asia, tension increases to the extent that the community of peace might to be just a fantasy. North Korea has been intensifying its military provocations recent years. This year it launched an ICBM flying over Japan twice in July before conducted the sixth nuclear test in September, Meanwhile, the US and South Korea have been intermittently carrying out large-scale joint military exercises near the Armistice Agreement line with a massive US military deployment including 3 aircraft carriers and B1 strategic bombers. Both Kim Jong Un of North Korea and Us President Trump are inflaming the situation referring the use of nuclear weapons which could lead unforeseen circumstances.

China is launching more assertive diplomacy, showing off its military muscle beyond its territory. In the South China Sea, China claims to have interests and jurisdiction over 90 % of its sphere. China had constructed a large scale reclamation and artificial islands in seven reefs of the Spratly Islands and completed construction of the airfield of 3,000

meters runaway in three of them before 2016. These conducts have evoked serious concerns of neighboring countries and been condemned as "unilateral change of status quo by force". The Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) invalidated China's claim to the South China Sea as groundless in terms of international law in July 2016. China strongly rejected the ruling as a "farce". It is undeniable that these Chinese behavior are raising tensions in East Asia.

A militarization of Japan

We believe that under these kind of circumstances, Japan should stand a neutral and independent position to take more actively the initiative of peace with the aim of easing such tensions and resolve the crisis. But the Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's administration is taking the opposite way. P.M. Abe has reiterated full support of the Trump administration's belligerent posture that all options are on the table, expressing his opposition to the dialogue between US and North Korea. Prompting fears through inflated media accounts, he uses the crisis for strengthening the Japan-U.S. Military alliance and pushing its agenda "the militarization of Japan". The Abe administration strengthened the joint operation strategy between the US military and the Japanese Self Defense Forces (SDF) by a new agreement. It started construction of a huge US military base in Okinawa in defiance of overwhelming opposition by the people in Okinawa. Okinawa makes up only 0.6 % of nation's land area, yet 75 % of US bases in Japan are located there, putting an excessive burden on them, including serious human rights violation and violent crime such as rape and murder by US servicemen. (578 cases 1972 through 2016 according to Defense ministry report).

On the domestic side, the Abe administration took measures to suppress oppositional public opinion by enforcing a series of Bills such as Secret Protection Laws and Conspiracy Law. Then, by overturning the accepted interpretation of Article 9 of the Constitution preventing the exercise of collective self-defense rights, it had forcibly enacted the new security legislation that the SDF could participate in military actions of the US military outside the territory of Japan. His push away from pacifism and attempt to militarize Japan has been a major part of his agenda since he entered politics which is inextricably linked to his ambition to restore the imperial power of Japan. In the face of the rise of China he is getting impatient to advance his plan.

Using the threat and fear of North Korea

Last month, Prime Minister Abe suddenly disbanded the National Assembly to rally in the general election, with the aim to recover his popularity and consolidate his power. His popularity has been falling down drastically in recent months and his Liberal Democratic party suffered stunning defeat in the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly election in July. In the snap election campaign, he used utmost the fear or threat of North Korea to justify his policy, appealing for a revision of the constitution, in particular war renouncing article 9. His election gamble has been paid off at least in part. His ruling coalition of Liberal Democratic and Komei Parties gained a two-thirds majority, enough to propose a revision of the constitution in the parliament.

However looking at the depth of the scene, we can see another picture. The LDP now accounts for 61% of all seats of the Parliament, although its share of votes in the proportional representation block was only 33 %, or 17.3 % of all eligible voters. The majority seats of the ruling coalition were brought about by the divided opposition alliance and the single-seat constituency system which solely serves the interests of major political parties. On the other hand, opposition parties and citizens alliance to defend the pacifist constitution achieved a significant advance.

The symbol of Japanese pacifism

The article 9 of the Japanese constitution stipulates that Japan renounce forever the sovereign right of war to resolve an international dispute and forbids holding of land, sea and air forces. Under this article Japan has to limit its military power to the minimum required only for self-defense. We believe that this article is the symbol of Japanese pacifism which was born and brought forth by sincere remorse of the past war of aggression committed by its imperial forces. PM Abe is pushing away from this pacifism by revising the article. But the majority of Japan wants the constitution to remain as it is. Many people in Japan see the antiwar stance enshrined by the constitution is more than just rules for military engagement. It is also a proof of a solemn pledge to Asian people not to wage a war ever and it is the best security for Japan to win the trust of Asian countries. It is true that the article was made in partly imposed by the US when it took effect just after the Second World War. But it is also the fact that it has endured political pressures for 70 years. People protect it and support it. That's why it is more than just an article. It is national consensus and part of people's identity.

Last July the first ever treaty to make nuclear weapon illegal was adopted at the United Nation Conference with support of 122 countries. We are deeply impressed by this historic step toward a world without nuclear weapons although it is embarrassing that Japan, the only atomic-bombed country, opposed it. Abe administration excused its position with North Korea threat and tensions in East Asia. In order to overcome this kind of argument and fight back the pressure, it is absolutely necessary for us to show the way and the breakthroughs to ease the tension and current crisis and to present a prospect of peace in place of the military alliance.

50 Years of ASAN

In this respect, we are paying attention to the activities of ASEAN which celebrated 50th anniversary this year. ASEAN was formed in August 1967, enacted its Charter in 2007 and declared the establishment of the ASEAN Community in 2015. ASEAN itself is still under development so that various problems are pointed out by member country's nationals, NGOs and others. ACSC/APF 2017 statement issued in last April expressed urgent need to end poverty, deprivation, injustice, inequality and discrimination in the region. Given the fact that each country has a long history of colonial rule and still has very different culture, religion, political system and size of economy, it is understandable that many challenges remain to be resolved. However from the viewpoint of us living in Northeast Asia where confrontations continue, another aspect comes visible. We think rather, that it is worthwhile to ask why Southeast Asian countries, which once caused great damage in the Indochina war, have kept peace by preventing various conflict from escalating into a major war for the following 50 years. We want to learn from this ASEAN's effort, experience and wisdom of peace. ASEAN countries have overcome the division and conflict in the past, avoiding interventions of major powers, establishing a relationship in which countries with different political systems cooperate each other. What has made it possible?

We believe that the principles of ASEAN diplomacy are quite important. ASEAN countries are keeping the Southeast Asia Friendship and Cooperation Treaty (TAC), as the standards of external relations, which includes the principles of mutual respect for independence and sovereignty of all countries, non-interference into domestic affairs, resolution of conflict by peaceful means, restraint of threat and use of force. Standing on these principles, ASEAN has successfully formed multiple layered frameworks of security dialogue in various fields and levels not only in South East Asia but also in

whole East Asia. In the East Asia Summit (EAS), currently 18 countries participate including the US, China, Japan. ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) is the important dialogue system in which North Korea joins. ASEAN signed the "Treaty of South East Asia Nuclear Free Zone" in 1995 and is calling on world nuclear powers to join. This is extremely suggestive, considering North Korea's problem and a perspective of denuclearization of Korean Peninsula.

We hope that the framework of East Asian dialogue based on these principles and philosophy will further develop and become a permanent organization ensuring peace and security. We had launched a signature campaign two years ago for a petition to the leaders of the countries participating in EAS to make an effort to create a community of peace by concluding a no-belligerency pact in East Asia. We have submitted more than 30,000 signatures to the government of Malaysia in 2015 and Laos in 2016, which assumed a chairmanship of EAS respectively.

Toward a creation of a community of peace in East Asia

Japan too, under the big business priority policy based on neoliberalism, poverty and economic disparity are increasing. Agriculture is declining. Environmental destruction is serious. Especially the damage of Fukushima nuclear power plant accident is enormous. Tens of thousands are still forced to evacuate their lives. We are working with other organizations in various fields to promote food sovereignty, improve people's living, and fight for environmental protection. We are seeking solidarity with the AALA people who confront the same challenges fighting neoliberalism. We would like to work with various national campaigns of ASEAN member states in an appropriate manner. For example, in the Philippines, the host country of the ASEAN Conference this year, we have already carried out various exchanges and solidarity activities through the campaign for removal of US bases and the movement to abolish nuclear weapons.

We were encouraged when the Philippine people had organized a big national movement to have successfully removed the vast and extraterritorial US military bases and discarded the Base Loan Treaty in 1991 with the courageous decision of the Senators. The Philippine Constitution provides important principles regarding non-nuclear policy and independent foreign policy which give useful suggestions to the Japanese people. We believe that it is possible and helpful for us to work with other ASEAN peoples' movement against poverty, disasters, environmental destruction and other issues. We would like to strengthen friendship and solidarity with Asian

people and organization on the bases of mutual respect for common causes. Let's work together for a world without nuclear weapons, without foreign military bases and a community of peace and cooperation in East Asia.

Thank you very much.

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