

UPF and IAED USA Webinar Focuses on Japan's Complex Role in Northeast Asia

Michael Jenkins
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United States -- On April 6, 2021, the U.S. chapter of the International Association for Peace and Economic Development hosted a webinar on the topic "Japan's Complex Relationships with China, North, and South Korea." The conference attracted 125 viewers on Zoom and 535 on Facebook. Roger Wetherall (Coordinator, IAED-USA) welcomed attendees by describing the work and vision of IAED. He mentioned that through dialogue we can discover how to create a peaceful world by not only doing business for money but enhancing human flourishing. He said that the conference would look at the power of economics in Northeast Asia with a focus on Japan. Being that the complex history between Japan, China and North and South Korea is still under the influence of World War II tragedies, it was hoped that the webinar would shed some light for a more cooperative future between the nations.



The moderator for the conference, Dr. Michael Jenkins, (Chairman, Washington Times Holdings; President, UPF-North America; Director, Northeast Asia Peace Initiative) has been working on conflict resolution since 1980. He explained that UPF and IAED have been collaborating around the world to find ways to strengthen partnerships with Japan and the United States. He went on to say that at this moment, challenges are coming to all nations, especially those in North East Asia, and that we need a common goal to unite us and minimize threats. Dr. Jenkins put emphasis on Japan, Taiwan, Korea and the United States.

The first panelist introduced was Mr. Kevin Maher (Senior Advisor, MV Consulting), who is retired from

the U.S. State Department, where he served as senior foreign service officer. In his 30-year career he focused on Japan and Eastern Asia, leading a task force in Japan for the U.S. State Department after the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

Mr. Maher began by reflecting on the very difficult history in Japan and its relationship to China and Korea. There is still much suspicion surrounding Japan; however, a stable economy must exist for real peace to endure. Since the establishment of the Security Alliance, the region has become more stable. Japan is a quite different country than it was in the World War II era. The U.S. relationship with Japan is key. Under the Security Alliance, the U.S. strategy has always been for the defense of Northeast Asia, not only Japan. The strategic location of Japan has provided for numerous U.S. military bases. The bases in Korea are different in that they exist primarily for the security of South Korea. Overall, the security environment is changing dramatically involving Korea and Japan. Although tensions remain due to tragedies inflicted during the war era, the common threats from China and North Korea dictate that Japan and South Korea stay united and on good terms. He emphasized that economic prosperity in North Korea isn't going to work because its sole ambition is for the survival of Kim Jung Un's regime. Therefore, missile threats are of greatest concern for Japan, South Korea and the United States. Mr. Maher expressed doubts that North Korea actually has the capacity to deliver nuclear weapons at this time.



Mr. Maher continued to explain that trade between China and Japan is robust, but Japan is also aware of the Chinese threat. Hence, Japan has begun to strengthen its own military defense mechanism, of which Mr. Maher is in favor. He added that in his opinion, although China is more sophisticated and powerful now, it also is concerned about regime survival, making consistent cooperation with China difficult.

Chinese aggression in the South China Sea is motivated by economic issues as well as nationalism. The prevailing human rights issues in China must be dealt with also. Mr. Maher spotlighted that U.S.–Japan relations are very important now. Korea–Japan relations will continue to be strained simply due to the historical grievances against Japan. Japan has acknowledged and formally apologized over the decades, but Korea still holds deep resentment and animosity toward Japan, who considers those issues closed. The recent Two-Plus-Two meetings in Annapolis, Maryland, saw the United States advising that while Japan and Korea must work out their differences they must also unite against common threats from China and North Korea. Mr. Maher's final remarks were in support of Japan's buildup of its defense systems -- not only for Japan but in defense of Korea, too.

Ms. Shihoko Goto (Deputy Director, Geoeconomics, and Senior Associate, Northeast Asia Program, at the Wilson Center) is a leading expert on economics in Japan, Taiwan and South Korea and on U.S. policy in the region. She has been a reporter and analyst for Dow Jones, reporting from Tokyo and for UPI on the global economy.

Referring to the title of the conference, Ms. Goto remarked that this issue is growing in importance daily. Fortunately, the new U.S. administration has prioritized Japan and Asia relationships. She revealed that since 2010, Japan is no longer the biggest economy in the region. New economic challenges for Japan include changes in its demographics. Its society is rapidly aging. With a severely low birth rate, it lacks a youthful population with an ambitious hunger for success. Despite those issues, Japan is becoming global. Since the U.S. exited the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), Japan has taken more of a leadership role. New trends are forthcoming with transparency, rule of law, and market readiness.

Ms. Goto continued to point out that Japan has demonstrated global capabilities. She used as an example the stepped-up relations in Europe, including Great Britain post BREXIT. Another example is the Quad Agreement among Japan, India, the United States and Australia where there are mutual interests. Japan will finance the manufacturing in India for the COVID vaccine while the United States will step up production and Australia will work on the distribution throughout Southeast Asia. Ms. Goto reminded us that the legacy of war still exists, causing strained relations in business between Japan and its neighbors. Again it was emphasized that it benefits everyone to resolve these issues and unite on common ground.



Ms. Goto provided interesting analytical data concerning Japan and its neighbors. Seventy-two percent (72%) of Koreans have an unfavorable view of Japan, particularly Japan's politicians, and Japanese society has a 46% unfavorable view of Korea. With China the biggest trading partner for both countries, Japan is making selective collaboration with China while developing trade relations with other countries like Taiwan.

During the QandA session, China's Coast Guard laws were mentioned as being intimidating to its neighbors. Also, the Chinese Communist Party will continue to attempt to prevail in relations with anyone. China is actually facing its own age dilemma with its historic "one-child policy." Its demographics are on the decline and rapidly changing. It also faces economic inflation of assets. Its model of competitiveness is propped up by the Communist Party for now. Open cooperation is important without bureaucracy. Demographics are changing around the world with widespread low birth rates. Currently, the United States is not facing that problem due to immigration. One

advantage of the low birth rate is that it provides opportunities for the female workforce to advance, but this has been slow to materialize.

In concluding comments, Mr. Maher said he expects that the current Japanese leader will be retained after the September election. Although Prime Minister Suga is carrying forward the course of Mr. Abe, no outstanding leader like Abe has arisen and there remains division among political parties.

When asked about reunification of the Korean Peninsula, Ms. Goto said that unification isn't favorable to China. Japan would welcome it, but the Korean economy would decline initially. Immigration could also occur. She said that denuclearization would be a most favorable change. When asked about India and Japan and other nations having influence to persuade China to change its human rights policies, there was no clear answer. Her advice to the Biden administration was to treat allies as equal partners and to be realistic regarding China: It is driven by the Chinese Communist Party.