

Miles to Go: My Vision for Japan's Future

A CNAPS Roundtable Luncheon with

Hon. Shinzo ABE

Acting Secretary General, Liberal Democratic Party

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Question and Answer Session

Transcript prepared from a tape recording.

DR. BUSH: Thank you very much, Representative Abe, for that forward-looking and candid statement of your views. Thank you also for leaving plenty of time for questions. I invite people in the audience to raise your hands. I will recognize people. Because we will do the question and answer through an interpreter, I ask you to keep your questions brief. We'll start with Ambassador Jack Pritchard.

AMBASSADOR PRITCHARD: Do you see a continuation of the evolution of the interpretation of the constitution by the government, or do you actually favor a constitutional amendment to Article 9?

REPRESENTATIVE SHINZO ABE: I do believe that with the current constitution, it is possible to exercise the right of a collective self-defense. However, I do believe that we have to revise our constitution.

MODERATOR: Professor Zhao Quansheng from American University.

PROFESSOR ZHAO: For the past few years we have seen two opposite trends of Japanese foreign policy. On the one hand, Japan has strengthened the relations with the United States. On the other hand, had some problem, or declined the relations with some of Asian neighbors, like China and Korea. So how do you see this problem? And is the idea of *datsua nyuo* [leaving Asia and joining Europe] still influential in Japanese foreign policy? Or is that not a factor today? So I just ask you that question.

REPRESENTATIVE ABE: Basically the Japanese government focuses and values their good relationship between Japan and the United States in U.S.-Japan alliance, and I believe that we are enjoying a very good alliance relationship with the United States. I don't think the following formula works: If you have a good U.S.-Japan relationship, you will have bad relationship with China or Korea. I do not believe it is a trade-off relationship. Rather, a good relationship with the United States, in the long run, promotes a good relationship with China or with Korea.

And Japan is enjoying very good relationships with most of the Asian countries, including ASEAN countries, India and Pakistan. However, as you are very aware, right now, Japan has some issues and problems in relationships with China and South Korea.

In terms of the relationships with China and South Korea, we always have the issue of how to look at history. I do not believe that we can wipe out this issue completely, no matter what. I think this is an issue which we have, and will always have with those countries.

And I think there is a big difference between the issues with China and with South Korea. With regard to the relationship with South Korea, the biggest issue is the Takeshima issue or Dokdo issue, and right now, effectively, Korea is the one who is ruling that island, and Japan is not making any challenge. *[See below for clarification on this point. -Ed.]*

So Korea is the one who is making all kinds of arguments, and are making it a big issue. So far as Japan keeps calm about this issue, I think it will go away, become calm, later on. Of course I'm not saying that we are not going to claim what is rightfully ours.

Now about China, there are many discussions along with the sudden or rapid economic development in China, and there are many Chinese people having disaffection and discontent, and also, they do not have any political freedom there. So there is just a pent-up frustration among the Chinese people. So it was expressed as an outlet for the anti-Japanese demonstration, and also, in the background, there is the fact that the Chinese government had given anti-Japan education for a long time.

So when it comes to the issues with China, I do not believe that we can solve them very quickly.

However, China is the largest trading partner for Japan and both countries enjoy the fruit from that trade between the two countries, and wise people in both countries know that any bad relationship or worsening relationship with China will be negative for both countries, and so I believe that both countries will try very hard to improve their relationship.

DR. BUSH: Ambassador Rust Deming.

AMBASSADOR DEMING: Thank you, Mr. Abe, thank you for taking your Golden Week vacation to come to Washington; it is very important to strengthen the dialogue between our two leaderships.

My question concerns the U.N. Security Council and Japan's interest in a permanent seat. Clearly, Prime Minister Koizumi has made this a major objective and Japan is putting a lot of political effort into it. The U.S. has supported this, at least since 1972, I think, when President Nixon met with Prime Minister Sato, and continues to support it.

But I would be very interested in Japan's overall strategy for achieving this objective and specifically what more you would like from the U.S. in this regard.

REPRESENTATIVE ABE: Japan supports the reform of the United Nations and it should be done within this year, Japan thinks. And also Japan supports a reform of the Security Council and Japan would like to become a permanent member of the Security Council, so that Japan can increase its contribution to the world.

And there are two plans for the reform, A and B, and Japan supports plan A.

The United Nations was established almost 60 years ago, and it was established by the countries which won World War II; and also, the permanent seats of the U.N. Security Council were occupied by the winning countries. At that time there were many Asian and African nations which were not independent, and now those nations are independent and they are also the members of the current U.N.

I believe that the United Nations should be reformed to be more suitable for the situation of the current world.

And so far, the United States has supported only the permanent seat for Japan. However, if you are supporting only for Japan, it will not lead to a United Nations reform, in the way I have explained. So I would like the United States to support what I have just said, for including other nations.

DR. BUSH: Gordon Flake from the Maureen and Mike Mansfield Foundation.

DR. FLAKE: As you're well aware, Japan has cooperated very closely with the United States in the six-party talks process, addressing the mutual threat we face from North Korea. However, there seems to be a growing concern here that North Korea will not come back to the talks, that they may be in fact dead.

I wonder if you might address what Japan's appropriate response might be to the failure of North Korea to come back to the talks. How will Japan, in the future, address its security concerns in regards to North Korea?

REPRESENTATIVE ABE: Ideally, I think this issue should be dealt with at the U.N. Security Council, not at the six-party talks. However, North Korea withdrew from the NPT and they expelled the IAEA staff from their country, and they, as a matter of fact, declared that they owned nuclear weapons. But I think that this should have been dealt with at the Security Council.

So although this should have been to the U.N. Security Council, we have given this opportunity to North Korea to discuss the issue at the six-party talks. So this should be a good opportunity for North Korea. However, they are playing a game, in saying they might come, they might not come.

I think the big issue here is whether North Korea recognizes the fact that if they boycott six-party talks, then at the U.N. Security Council we are going to discuss the possibility of sanctions towards North Korea.

Let us talk about this six-party talks mechanism. China is serving as chairman of these talks and China has a tremendous, overwhelming influence and leverage over North Korea, and if China decides to stop supply of energy or food, then North Korea cannot survive as a nation. In that context, I strongly hope that China will put stronger pressure on North Korea.

DR. BUSH: Sook-Jong Lee, SAIS.

DR. LEE: Hi. I just want to make a brief comment about Dokdo/Takeshima controversy because I find that there is a tremendous perception gap between Japanese politicians and Koreans. Most of the Koreans think the challenge came from Japan, because your prefectural assembly included Dokdo, as Takeshima, in Japanese territory recently. So many people can see that there's a challenge, and as you know, Dokdo is not just a territory issue. It is related to past colonial imperialism issues. So that's my comment.

And my real question is, I wonder if you see the clear linkage between Japan's security role and Japan's history issues, because all these history issues are not resolved yet, and that's the very popular position from China and South Korea. And I think that issue, if it occurs on and on, is going to weaken the U.S., South Korea and Japan security cooperation.

And also that issue, if you want to just be happy with expanding ties with USA, and proclaiming your role in the Taiwan Strait, that will obviously provoke China, and stir instability, tremendous instability in Northeast Asia.

Do you see the kind of linkage, seriously, between this, the contemporary Japanese role and history issues?

REPRESENTATIVE ABE: With regard to the Takeshima issue, it is not that Japan just declared something new, a new policy, or new thinking about Takeshima, but, rather, Japan historically, traditionally has said the same statement, which is that Takashima is Japan's territory.

Since the Edo period, Japan always claimed that Takeshima was Japan's territory, and this time the issue was that one prefectural assembly declared, or they had a resolution declaring, that Takeshima was Japanese territory.

But it is just a local prefecture. It is not that the Diet (or national parliament), have said something to agitate people about this issue.

Of course Takeshima being Japanese territory, is the Japanese government's basic policy, but the Diet has not declared this this time.

With regard to this resolution passed by Shimane prefecture, most Japanese people did not know about it until this became an issue in South Korea.

Now about the history issue, all the nations which have neighboring countries have had a history of conflicts, and also the issue of national borders, and also there is a history of aggression.

When it comes to the issues between two nations, we conclude a peace treaty in order to bring a period, in order to bring a conclusion to that conflict, and I think that is actually the wisdom of humankind.

So with South Korea, we concluded a basic peace treaty in 1965 and accordingly, we made compensation to South Korea. And with other countries likewise we concluded treaties, peace treaties, such as San Francisco Peace Treaty with the U.S. and different treaties with other different countries, and also made compensation.

So that is the way to bring closure, politically, and with China, also, we concluded a Japan-China peace treaty, and that's brought the conclusion.

To Chinese government, Japan has formally apologized twenty times. So at the Bandung conference, the prime minister made the 21st formal apology. And at the two-plus-two meeting, we stated that we hope for a peaceful resolution for the China-Taiwan issue. In other words, we are not hoping for any resolution with using force, and I think because of that, this contributed to stability of the region.

DR. BUSH: Bruce Stokes, National Journal.

MR. STOKES: Can you share with us your views on the North Korean missile launch yesterday how you currently feel about bilateral talks between the United States and North Korea as part of the six-party talks?

REPRESENTATIVE ABE: About the missile launch, this is an anti-ship missile, and they have done it before. It's very hard to guess their intention. Maybe they just wanted attention. Maybe they needed to test it. I don't know.

About the bilateral talks between the U.S. and North Korea: if, indeed, six-party talks resume, then I think it is natural for the U.S. and North Korea to have some dialogue.

TOMOHIKO TANIGUCHI: Thank you, Richard. Mr. Abe, how would you like to change the interpretation of collective defense, if I may ask you? Would you like to put it into a broader basket of constitutional debate? Then there's going to be a danger that that issue of collective defense is going to be mixed up together with lots of other issues. It'll take longer years, unnecessarily.

Or alternatively, would you like to do it by an executive order? Which you can, because it's just an interpretation that you're talking about. Thank you.

REPRESENTATIVE ABE: I have mentioned this issue in my speech and the way the Japanese government interprets this is very hard to understand. Indeed, this is a natural right, but if you cannot exercise the right, I do not believe that it is a right. So, because of our history of the Japanese government interpretation of this, it might be necessary for the Diet to pass some resolution.

DR. BUSH: Mike O'Hanlon, Brookings Institution.

DR. O'HANLON: Thank you very much for being here, sir. I wanted to ask about the U.S.-Japan alliance and your vision of that. Some people have said, with the "Armitage Report," for example, that the U.S.-Britain model is what should be our goal. Others have thought that's perhaps a little ambitious, and a better model might be the U.S.-Germany alliance, implying more peacekeeping under multinational auspices. I wondered if you had a comment on what your vision for the alliance would be, not just in the next few years, but even looking out ten, twenty, twenty-five years.

REPRESENTATIVE ABE: If Japan can exercise the right of collective self-defense, then as I said before, it will not only contribute to Japan-United States relations, but also there will be more contributions that Japan could make to international community.

Now the question is what kind of a style the alliance should be. I don't think it will be U.S.-Britain type or U.S.-German type, but, rather, U.S.-Japan type.

I don't think Japan will be next to the United States whenever there is some battle or conflict in the world, just like the U.K. It will be different.

And of course we are talking about the Japan-United States alliance. However, when we are to use force, it should be used in the environment of international collaboration.

In any case, the current interpretation of this right is very strict and very limited. For example, if Japan provides medical help and medical help activities, then the soldiers might get better, and they will go back to the battlefield, and so some people argue that it is an exercise of the right. But once we have a different interpretation, we will not have to worry about that. In fact, we now have a different interpretation for this particular case.

The example I just gave you were, if that example were the exercise of collective self-defense rights, then what Florence Nightingale did was also the exercise of the collective defense right.

QUESTION: Thank you, sir. Another question about North Korea, and then let me ask you in a different way, do you have any request or suggestions as to how the U.S. might deal with the North Korea issue? In other words, would you wish that the U.S. will handle this question differently from the way it is now?

REPRESENTATIVE ABE: North Korea is a rather difficult country to deal with, and if North Korea does not come to the table of the six-party talks by June, then we will have to go to the next step: that is to say, to discuss economic sanctions at the Security Council of United Nations, and I think that is the way we have to go.

As to the current American way of dealing with North Korea, I think it is fine.

Because Seoul is located very close to 38 degree line, very close to North Korea, we have to avoid any kind of use of force. So what we can do then is to have economic sanctions, so that we can pressure North Korea to change its policies.

DR. POSEN: Adam Posen, Institute for International Economics. Mr. Abe, you, to my pleasant surprise, chose to include some economics in your opening remarks, so if I could just follow up on that.

You made the strong case for how bilateral free trade agreements or economic relationships could help Japan liberalize and prepare for globalization. First, how do you prioritize, then, which countries Japan should be pursuing these relationships with? It could be, say, the Philippines, where you have the most pressure on agriculture. It could be, say, Mexico, where you have the widest economic interests. It could be, say, Korea, for much broader strategic purposes.

In your vision, how do you set the priorities?

Second, you made no mention of the multilateral trade talks as a potential for liberalizing Japan or helping Japan.

In your vision for the future, is there any leadership to come from Japan in the WTO?

REPRESENTATIVE ABE: An FTA with Mexico has recently gone into effect. Also, we have already concluded an FTA with Singapore. With the Philippines, we are at the final stage. With Thailand, I believe that we made good progress and we are almost there. We have started our negotiations with South Korea and Malaysia. And with South Korea, I think we have already made some progress.

Basically, I think we have to expedite our negotiation and conclude FTAs with ASEAN nations and South Korea, and after that, India might come, and Australia might come. However, with Australia, there are some difficult agricultural issues.

About the multilateral agreement with ASEAN countries, it is very difficult to start multilateral without bilateral discussion. So first you start with bilateral discussion.

With regard to the WTO, we have to make it successful.

DR. BUSH: We are coming to the end of our time. I apologize to the number of people who have raised their hands and whom I have on the list. For the last question, someone who had his hand up a long time ago, Chris Nelson of the Nelson Report.

MR. NELSON: Thank you very much, Richard.

Thank you, Abe-san. Speaking as a journalist, I want to thank you for very clear, very concise, absolutely to-the-point answers. I wish you would stay here and give some lessons. We could use it in Washington!

Your answers on the history, and particularly the Korea questions, are very interesting. I found myself thinking that perhaps you had a sense that these disputes are almost cyclical, that they sort of come and go, and the best that you can do is to work to maintain good relations and they'll go down again because of the overall strong issues.

Some of us here in Washington, in the last few weeks, have been questioning whether that is, not right or wrong, but if that is a safe or prudent approach—

[Tape change.]

MR. NELSON: [continuing] sometimes of emotion, and we found ourselves wondering if there are some steps that need to be taken in Japan to change the structure or the nature of that.

So if I could ask, sir, in an Abe Administration, do you think that there are things that you would want to do to make it possible that such a high-profile emotional issue as visiting the Yasukuni Shrine, suddenly became a normal thing to have happen for a prime minister and for the emperor?

Are there things that you, as prime minister, would like to see happen at the shrine, that would make it possible for such a visit to take place, without China and South Korea and the Philippines all feeling very emotional about it? Thank you.

REPRESENTATIVE ABE: Well, you mention the visit of the prime minister to Yasukuni Shrine. Regardless, whether I become the next prime minister or not, I think the next prime minister after Mr. Koizumi should visit the Yasukuni Shrine.

And the Philippines has not raised an issue about this. They do not think it's a problem. Mainly, the country which raised this issue is China. And South Korea also, but as far as South Korea is concerned, there is some emotion, feeling among the people, but the South Korean government has not canceled the meeting of the president and the prime minister because of that.

Before Prime Minister Nakasone, traditionally, all the prime ministers visited the Yasukuni Shrine, but at that time there were no protests or demonstration.

However, when Prime Minister Nakasone made an official visit to Yasukuni Shrine, the Japanese mass media made it as a big issue, and also the Japanese opposition party at that time thought it was a big issue, and they took the issue to China and told the Chinese people that this is a big issue. After that, I think China started to protest.

I believe that Japanese people should be humble about history all the time. Just because we visit Yasukuni Shrine does not mean that we have become a militaristic country, or that we will invade another country. For the last 60 years, since the end of World War II, we have been a very peaceful country.

The leader of the country should pay respect to those people who have fought for the nation. That is not just of Japan. It happens all over the world. I think it is one of the responsibilities of the leader of a nation.

China is a communist country and there is no freedom of religion, and they do not have understanding of freedom of religion. I think what the Chinese government is doing is interference in domestic policies or domestic politics, and in the peace treaty between Japan and China, section one and section three prohibit internal policy interference. So they are clearly violating those two sections.

Right now, the Chinese government is saying that because of this issue, the president [of the PRC] will not negotiate with Japan. They will not meet with the [Japanese] prime minister. Something is wrong with that. Because there are problems, I think the leaders should meet with each other, try to solve the problem, and try to improve the bilateral relationship.

Fortunately, there are no Japanese who are burning the Chinese flag, and there is no demonstration going to the Chinese embassy in Japan. It is very important that we keep a peaceful and friendly relationship with China, and that is very important for economic and security reasons.

There are 10,000 people going between Japan and South Korea, and this has never happened before, and I think the relationship between the two countries has improved tremendously in the last ten years, and there is so much understanding gained between the two countries.

I think the cultural liberation by President Kim Dae Jung had a great effect but also, in Japan, many people like Korean culture, and the most popular movie stars or TV stars in Japan are actually Korean.

DR. BUSH: Representative Abe, thank you again.

[END OF TAPED RECORDING.]
