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Revisions to the Guidelines for U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation and Prospects for the Asia Pacific Security Order

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On April 27, 2015, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe made a state visit to the U.S. and held a summit with President Barack Obama. Subsequently, the Secretaries of Defense and Foreign Affairs of both countries jointly announced a new revision of the Guidelines for U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation (2015 Guidelines) and other important documents. South Korean media reports focused on whether or not Prime Minister Abe would express any recognition of historical issues. But, as South Koreans, what is really needed is an in-depth review of the contents of the 2015 Guidelines and other agreements that were made by two powerful countries with the world's first and third largest economies in response to the changes they foresee in the order of the Asia-Pacific region.

The groundwork for the Obama administration's current policy for the Asia-Pacific region began back in 2010. The U.S. has traditionally regarded guaranteeing security in both the Atlantic and Pacific as the core objective of its foreign security policy. In order to accomplish this goal, the U.S. organized the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) made up of key players including the United Kingdom, France, and Germany; and in the Asia-Pacific region the U.S. has chosen a strategy of maintaining order through bilateral alliances with partners such as South Korea, Japan, Australia, etc. It may be said that the U.S. has traditionally put Europe first, but the Obama administration

has begun emphasizing a policy of rebalancing toward the Asia-Pacific, a region teeming with economic potential, and especially addressing the need for a strategic policy dealing with a rising China. China's rise into the world's second largest economy, its advance into the East and South China Seas, and its challenge to the existing regional order were all main factors considered during the rebalancing move. The ongoing conflict with ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) following the end of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars also exerted significant influence on the U.S. decision-making process.

In the "Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership" report published in January 2012, in the "Quadrennial Defense Review" published in 2014, and in the "National Security Strategy" report, published in February 2015, the U.S. defined itself as a "Pacific power." In order to deal with China's rise as well as its strengthened air and sea power, North Korea's nuclear and missile development along with military provocations, and also the unstable situation in the Middle East, the U.S. has consistently confirmed the strength of its alliances with Korea, Japan, and Australia as well as its partnerships with other countries.

One of the nations that responded most actively to the American policy of rebalancing to Asia was Japan and the Abe administration. Mr. Abe, who entered office in the latter half of 2012, is nothing but a problem child who causes trouble in regards to historical issues

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and territorial disputes from the point of view of Korea and China. But to the U.S. with regards to perceptions and policies towards the Asia Pacific region, Mr. Abe is an ideal partner who keeps in step and promotes U.S. strategies and policies. In its “National Security Strategy” and “National Defense Program Guidelines” released in December 2013, Japan also defines China’s modernized air and naval power and North Korea’s nuclear and missile development trend as latent dangers in the Asia-Pacific region. And Japan, in order to respond to these threats, stated it would expand its defense capability based on the concept of “integrated mobile defense capability,” as well as increase its security cooperation within the U.S.-Japan alliance and with South Korea and Australia. In the meantime, with this strategy in mind, the Abe administration has been pushing proactive defense policies including establishing a National Security Council, making the decision to approve the right to collective self-defense, repealing the three principles on restricting arms exports and adopting three new principles on redeploying defense equipment, strengthening space and cyber security response efforts, etc. These policies are considered by China and South Korea to be the path towards becoming a military power, but we should also bear in mind that, as seen in the report written by Richard Armitage and Joseph Nye, Jr. and published by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) entitled “The U.S.-Japan Alliance: Anchoring Stability in Asia,”¹ these policies reflect continuous U.S. demands.

¹ Armitage, Richard L. and Nye Jr., Joseph S. “The U.S.-Japan Alliance: Anchoring Stability in Asia.” August 2012. Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

During this mutual coordination, the American government authorized an official state visit by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. While in the United States, Abe made a speech at Harvard University and at a joint session of Congress. During this time as well, the Secretaries of Foreign Affairs and Defense signed the “2015 Guidelines” announcement which strongly emphasized that Japan can be an ally which helps the United States maintain the security of the international order not only in the Asia-Pacific region, but also globally. Comparing it to the “1997 Guidelines,” which were the previously amended version, the language in the “2015 Guidelines” greatly extends the range of the U.S.-Japan alliance as well as building up the alliance’s combined military readiness.

In the “1997 Guidelines,” the U.S.-Japanese alliance’s range of application is based on the situation around Japan and the possibility of Japan being attacked directly. However, in addition to this, the “2015 Guidelines” include the case for armed conflict even where Japan is not directly involved. It also enlarges the scope of security cooperation in space and cyberspace for the mutual benefit of both nations. When the “1997 Guidelines” were enacted, Japan’s government explained that “Japan will not go to the other side of the world to participate in an American military intervention.” But now, with advancements in the internet and space travel, Japan can no longer be considered to be on the other side of the world. Therefore, the scope of U.S.-Japanese security cooperation has increased.

Also in the “2015 Guidelines,” the two sides agreed to install an “alliance coordination mechanism” for Japan’s Self-Defense Forces and the United States’ military

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to allocate tactical duties. Because operational control is held by each individual nation, the effectiveness and efficiency of combined military forces is sometimes called into doubt, unlike in the ROK-U.S. alliance. In order to correct for this, a Consultative Committee for Joint Military Operation will be installed in Japan’s Defense Ministry.

Meanwhile, the “2015 Guidelines” do not explicitly address how the U.S. and Japan are going to react to the issue of arising China. Because of this, the U.S. is still able to implement its careful policy of containing China while at the same time pursuing cooperation with China. However, when the “2015 Guidelines” were released, the Foreign Affairs and Defense Secretaries from both the U.S. and Japan released a joint statement entitled the “U.S.-Japan National Security Council Joint Communiqué.” The communiqué stated that territorial disputes surrounding the Senkaku/Daioyu Islands between Japan and China would be a situation in which the U.S.-Japan mutual defense treaty would be evoked. Although it was not included in the main body of the guidelines, Japan wanted a reaction to China explicitly stated. However, through the shape of the 2+2 Joint Communiqué, it is clear that both parties negotiated their position excellently.

Through this kind of mutual agreement, the U.S. will see Japan, which has been constrained under its pacifist constitution, raise its role and security capacity to that of the ranks of NATO alliance members such as the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, among others. For Japan, revisions to its pacifist constitution through the globalization of the U.S.-Japan alliance will likely accelerate Japan on the path toward becoming a state with a more normal military posture.

The question of how much remorse over historical issues was captured in Prime Minister Abe’s address during his U.S. visit was a pressing concern for Korea and for some in the U.S. Aware of these kinds of critical opinions, during his address to the joint session of Congress and during a question and answer session at Harvard University, Abe declared that “I would like to express remorse about World War II” and that he has inherited the views of previous Prime Ministers regarding historical issues. These kinds of explanations cannot be acceptable to the sentiments of Koreans, but from the point of view of the U.S. it might be seen as somewhat reasonable.

As Koreans we need to pay attention to Prime Minister Abe’s U.S. visit and address as well as the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ cautious and calm assessment of the globalization of the U.S.-Japan alliance. In fact, prior to his visit to the U.S., Mr. Abe attended the Bandung Conference held on April 22, 2015 where he met with President Xi Jinping and reached an understanding on the direction of relations between the two countries. Xi Jinping also announced his vision for an economic community that includes China, Korea, Japan, and ASEAN countries through a speech at the Boao Forum held on March 28, 2015. For the first time ever on May 26, China’s Ministry of National Defense issued a document entitled “China’s Military Strategy” that included a reply to the United States’ 2015 National Security Strategy and the jointly published 2015 Guidelines. The document published by the Chinese points out that the U.S. is intensifying military alliances within the region and that changes to Japan’s national security policy will increase regional instability. In the document, China also states that despite enlarging the role of its

2nd Artillery Corps and armed forces according to the concept of “active defense,” China will advance a new model of military relations with the U.S. as well as military cooperation based on friendship, sincerity, reciprocity and inclusiveness with neighboring countries. According to this strategy, China is promoting cooperation within the mutual competition between the U.S. and China through the U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue and Strategic Security Dialogue channels. With respect to Japan, China is also pushing ahead with a working level dialogue between the national defense authorities of the two countries in order to establish a maritime communication mechanism. For the foreseeable future it seems the game of competition and cooperation between the U.S., China, Japan and other major countries in the Asia-Pacific region to secure and retain influence in the region while preventing crucial catastrophes will continue to develop.

The coexistence of competition and cooperation, rather than unilateral opposition or conflict, between the major countries in the region can be a window of opportunity for Korea to actualize its national interest through its foreign policy. Korea can increase the prospects of regional multilateral security cooperation within the lines of collaboration between existing major powers. It is also important for Korean foreign policy to stress forming an international consensus on the path for solving the North Korea problem. ■

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