

## Some Thoughts on Northeast Asian Security Cooperation

By ITO Kenichi

The U.S. view of China under the Bush Administration has moved from "strategic competitor" to "responsible stakeholder." And the state of relationship between Japan and China from "cool politics and hot economy" to "warmer politics and hot economy." The 17th Congress of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) held recently announced that China was facing a historic change in its relations with the rest of the world and that it would pursue the building of the "harmonious world." More specifically, the report of the Party Congress refrained from explicitly referring to the use of force against Taiwan. Coupled with the positive role China played in pressuring North Korea to shut down the Yongbyon nuclear facility, we may be able to say that the relationship between the three big powers in the region, Japan, U.S. and China, is as stable as ever.

If the ultimate aim of the six-party talks of permanently dismantling all nuclear facilities and the existing weapons by the end of 2008 is achieved, a new situation will emerge on the Korean Peninsula with a view toward final-status peace talks, though for the complete normalization of relations between Japan and North Korea the abduction issue must be resolved to the satisfaction of the Japanese.

It seems that a view to turn the six-party forum into an embryonic Northeast Asian peace and security forum is popular among experts and pundits in the U.S.. I agree that we need a security architecture in Northeast Asia as well. There must be some sort of stabilization mechanism installed in the region, which could mobilize a process of stabilization before any crisis develops into a war. I agree that it is worth seriously studying. However, in doing so, we must be aware of risks and pitfalls that lie ahead.

It is easy to mention China's defense budget, missile buildup, growing submarine fleet, and anti-satellite capabilities as well as Kim Jong-II's unpredictability in his handling of foreign and domestic affairs. However, here I will not dwell on them. Instead, I would like to call your attention to one of the voices I hear from not a few of my colleagues in Japan. They say, they are reminded of the historical fact that the Washington Conference of 1921, which in fact replaced the Anglo-Japanese Alliance with the 9-Power Treaty, put Japan astray thereafter. The implication is that turning the six party forum into a comprehensive regional security framework could result in the termination of the U.S. -Japan Alliance as the U.S. will probably throw every trouble into this new framework. As a result, every act of changing the status quo of the region, including the revision of Japanese Constitution and the installment of Japan in the permanent seat of the U.N. Security Council, will become subject to the approval of this new regional framework.

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