

Japanese UPF and Institute for Peace Policies Initiative: Seeking a Model to Avoid Violent Conflict

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The lecture covered a topic of immense importance to East Asian security.

Recently regarding the Asian Pacific region of the world, Richard N. Haass, president of the Council on Foreign Relations, stated, "After decades in which the history of this part of the world has been dominated by economic issues, we are beginning to see the reemergence of geopolitical concerns, the competition of nationalism.

The real question is: Can the diplomacy of the Asia Pacific region handle these new pressures? If we begin to see the tectonic plates really moving, the danger is that twenty-first century Asia could begin to go the way of twentieth century Europe." He made these comments in an online multimedia presentation "China's Maritime Disputes," produced by the council he heads. An event held in Japan directly addressed the nightmarish scenario Dr. Haass described, one in which the most violent century in history, largely because of wars based on European soil, would be repeated in Asia in the century we are currently living through. The viewpoint of the organizers of a recent series of talks in Japan mirrored that of the Council on Foreign Relations -- the challenge is to have mature diplomatic mechanism in place to deal with disputes before they become armed conflicts. The theme of the event was "Towards Asia's Community for Peace Based on the EU Model "War, Never Again! -- A System of Peace Overcame Hostilities."

Rising heat in Asia

Currently, China claims 90 percent of the territory covered by the South China Sea. Its claims to the sea itself raise a territorial issue with Vietnam, Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines and Taiwan, because the area of the South China Sea these nations claim as national territory overlap China's claims.

Vietnam, the Philippines and China each claim the Parcel Islands and Spratly Islands in the South China Sea as its national territory. Meanwhile, the Philippines and China dispute ownership over the Scarborough Shoal (also known as the Half Moon Shoal) which is also in the South China Sea. These disputes according to Vice-Dean Shen Dingli, head of the Institute of International Affairs at Fudan University in China, who appears in "China's Maritime Disputes," are "largely about economics, fishery and the seabed." By the seabed, he is referring to oil and gas reserves beneath the seabed. Some experts estimate the South China Sea contains 80 percent of the oil reserves to be found in Saudi Arabia.

On the other hand, the territory dispute between Japan and China, named the Senkaku Islands or Diaoyu Islands by the two claimants respectively, are another matter. Vice-Dean Shen Dingli calls this dispute a political matter. "China sees that we were invaded by Japan and Japan stole our island."

Addressing the issues

Dr. Willem Frederic van Eekelen, former defense minister of the Netherlands and a former secretary general of the Western European Union was the key speaker at the Japan-Europe Special Lecture, given in Nagoya on November 15, Fukuoka on November 16 and in Tokyo on each of the following two days. At the final event, about a hundred leading figures, including diplomats, scholars, religious leaders and journalists listened to Dr. Eekelen's keynote address: East Asia's Security and Prospects for Japan–Europe Cooperation.

The forum began with remarks by Mr. Masahisa Hayashi, professor emeritus of the Waseda University and director of the Institute for Peace Policies, followed by comments made by Eiji Tokuno, president of the UPFJapan, representing the two organizers.

Stressing the international status of the Netherlands, Director Hayashi said, "Holland was actively involved in the reconstruction of Europe, as it was one of the five founding nations of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), which was the harbinger of the European Union." In addition to the Netherlands, the founding nations of the ECSC included France, Germany, Italy, Belgium and Luxembourg. The French foreign minister, Robert Schuman, proposed the ECSC in 1950. The member nations pooled their coal and steel resources. They removed tariffs and other restrictions on imports and exports between the member countries and unified their labor markets.

The Treaty of Paris signed in 1952 established the ECSC. The most important addition was Germany. The German economy was seen as the engine of Europe. A widely held belief was that Europe's recovery from the economic devastation of World War II would not have been possible without Germany.

Thus, despite the fact that German military resurgence was deeply feared, Europeans wanted and desperately needed Germany's peaceful economic cooperation. The ECSC was the beginning point of what would grow into the European Union, which began as the European Economic Community in 1957. It might be said that countries in China's neighborhood are nearly as leery of China today as European countries were of Germany in 1950, when France proposed the ECSC.

President Tokuno said about Dr. Eekelen's address, "It will be interesting for us to hear the example of the EU, which received the Noble Peace Prize, with a view to applying their process in East Asia." President Tokuno explained that Dr. Yeon Cheon Song, president of the Blessed Family Associations in Japan and chairman of UPF there, has known Dr. Eekelen for many years from the time when he (Dr. Song) was regional president in Europe. President Tokuno added, "Dr. Eekelen helped UPF organize many symposia on peace in several European countries. Thanks to their friendship, Eekelen accepted Dr. Song's invitation to visit to Japan this time."

In his welcome remarks, Dr. Song referred to Dr. Eekelen's previous visit to Japan four years ago in order to appeal for "freedom of faith and human rights." Dr. Song continued, "The East Asian region faces variety of geopolitical challenges such as China's hegemony- seeking expansion, North Korea's nuclear adventurism and frictions over Japan's history." Dr. Song explained the significance of the forum by saying, "The European continent underwent many upheavals including two world wars, the cold war and trials and errors involving ethnicity, race and religion. Dr. Eekelen will offer precious advice to Japanese leaders."



From left, National Leader Tokuno; President Song and Dr. Willem Frederic van Eekelen

German cooperation and peace

In his keynote address, Dr. Eekelen first explained the meaning and process of the EU's establishment.

"Based on past experiences up to World War II, Europe was determined never to go to another war. Leaders of the time attempted to set up a system (though not quite perfect) that would prevent a war by overcoming hostilities; this made a strong impact upon Europe."

Dr. Eekelen said, "Germany has become one of the most democratic nations in Europe. My country, Holland, was occupied by Germany during the war, but our people have empathy with the contemporary Germany." He mentioned an episode involving Poland's then foreign minister, Radoslaw Sikorski (2007–September 2014), who paid a visit to Berlin several years ago. Mr. Sikorski told the Germans, "In the past we used to be annoyed by Germany's assertive behavior, but at present we are annoyed by Germany's inaction."

Incidentally, during the time that Dr. Eekelen was in Japan, his wife separately attended a ceremony of reconciliation between Japan and Holland under the auspices of Japan's Foreign Ministry in the city of Nagasaki, west of Tokyo. She was one of fourteen invited relatives of Dutch people that had been interned in prison camps in Indonesia by the Japanese army during World War II.

Dr. Eekelen introduced her positive impression about a new, democratized Japan. Mindful of Japan's difficult relations with South Korea, Eekelen suggested, "Why doesn't Japan apply a similar program with South Korea?"

Finally, Dr. Eekelen pointed out, "As demonstrated internationally by UPF, if we can understand why your counterparts in China or South Korea act this way or that way, the mutual understanding could bring about agreement and cooperation with them. That was what Europe has done right."

Before the final forum in Tokyo, Eekelen held a press conference with reporters of major media organs on November 18 at the Japan National Press Club. Dr. Eekelen expressed his conviction, "For security considerations, one of the most vital elements is to understand circumstances of your adversaries." Along this line of thought, he mentioned, "One of the most significant international projects conducted by the UPF is the Middle East Peace Initiative which promotes reconciliation between Israel and Palestine.... Democracy is a superb system because it respects the minority, as well." This was to stress the importance of reconciliation among groups in conflicts. Another point he made in response to a reporter's question was "Freedom without responsibility is useless.... The rule of law could be abused when a government applies it according to rulers' whims."

He warned about social prejudices and about indulging in superficial slogans about freedom, democracy or rule of law.