



EASTERN ASIA

Thierry de Montbrial, Chairman and founder of the WPC

Now, let us switch to Eastern Asia. Having been in this country, Korea, four times this year, and having spent almost a month altogether in Korea during the year 2014, I got this impression.

Richard Haass, President of the Council on Foreign Relations

You do not speak Korean.

Thierry de Montbrial, Chairman and founder of the WPC

I speak it better than you do, but we will test that behind closed doors later. I was struck by many things, but particularly by two points. The first is that relations between Korea and China are becoming quite warm. During all these visits and at the conference, I have not heard a single real criticism of China on the part of our Korean friends. My second observation is that there is a vague feeling that my American friends are not so happy about that. This rapprochement creates a little friction between Korea and America. My next question will be on Japan. Am I totally mistaken?

Richard Haass, President of the Council on Foreign Relations

Yes.

Joseph Nye, University Distinguished Service Professor, Center for Public Leadership, Harvard Kennedy School

The American concern with Korea is more about the relationship with Japan, as I mentioned in the question I asked previously. There is a view that a South Korean Chinese rapprochement goes beyond diplomatic convenience and trade is not likely. Think of it from the point of view of balance of power. Korea is a peninsula between two historically large, militarily powerful countries. If you ally with one or the other, you lose your independence. Therefore, you bring in a distant outside power to help you maintain a balance of power. That is the basis of the US Korea security relationship.

I do not think that has been changed at all by the types of things we have seen in day to day headline seeking. This has more to do with domestic politics than with underlying geo political reality. I do not think many people in the Pentagon or The White House are worried about the relationship between South Korea and China. However, they are worried about the relationship between South Korea and Japan. Something could go wrong in North Korea, and there is a significant possibility that that could happen. Therefore, the fact that Japan and South Korea are not working as closely together as they should be is dangerous for South Korea and Japan. It is also dangerous for the United States, which has 28,000 troops near here.

**Richard Haass, President of the Council on Foreign Relations**

I respectfully disagree with our moderator. I have heard of two areas in which our South Korean hosts are uneasy about China. One is a long standing one, which is China's relationship with North Korea. China quite simply does not use the influence it has to rein in either North Korea's nuclear programme, or more broadly, North Korean behaviour. There is a sense that China could and should do more, not to control North Korea, but to influence it.

Secondly, China has been quite robust in its representations to South Korea that it ought not to go ahead with the new generation of anti missile systems. It seems to me and to many South Koreans with whom I have spoken that the Chinese pressure is, shall we say, inappropriate. The only reason that South Korea would go ahead with this new system is to defend itself against the threat posed by North Korea. This again is the threat that China is not doing everything that is within its power to do something about. The principal areas of growth in South Korean relations with China have largely been in the economic sphere. However, in the political and military strategic area, there is still a degree of concern that I believe is quite understandable.

Thierry de Montbrial, Chairman and founder of the WPC

The last question is about Japan and Korea. You alluded to it, and I understand that the US is trying to play some role in this. Could you elaborate a little bit about the nature of that role first? Do you think that the US can contribute to a solution to that highly psychological and emotional problem? What might a reasonable outcome look like?

Richard Haass, President of the Council on Foreign Relations

Is this on Japan and Korea?

Thierry de Montbrial, Chairman and founder of the WPC

It is on Japan and Korea.

Joseph Nye, University Distinguished Service Professor, Center for Public Leadership, Harvard Kennedy School

I have spoken with a variety of Japanese officials, including the Prime Minister and other ministers, and other groups of Americans who have visited in the last year or two. The American message has been very consistent, and it is not broadcast as much. It is a quiet message, which is that we think it is essential to overcome these disputes in history and get on with a serious common defence policy.

Frankly, the more interesting question centres on whether the US can do anything about the relationship between Japan and China. This has been very difficult since the 2012 Senkaku or Diaoyu Island dispute. In 2012, Hillary Clinton asked me, Steve Hadley, Rich Armitage and Jim Steinberg to call on the Prime Ministers, both in Tokyo and Beijing. This was to make clear that the American position had two components.

One was a component of deterrence, which was that the islands were covered by the US Japan security treaty. The other was a component of mediation, if you want, though reconciliation is probably a better term. This is to say that we had a strong interest in making sure that this did not escalate out of control. There was a strong recommendation that Japan and China establish recommendations, by which a miscalculation did not lead to an escalation.



There has been some progress in that, and the military to military improvements in the US China relations help a bit on this. Among the things that could be discussed is the Japan China relationship. There are slight inklings of some improvements in the China Japan relationship. However, I think the issue of the US helping on Korea and Japan largely centres on saying they should get over the past and focus on the future. The relationship between the US, China and Japan is a little bit more difficult, but again, we are trying to see if we cannot find procedures which smooth this over.

Richard Haass, President of the Council on Foreign Relations

On the Korea Japan conversation, can I just say that I think it goes beyond Korea? It is a societal issue for Japan and Japanese society has to deal with some of these issues. There is also Japan's relationship with its neighbours and with the United States. It is not unique in the sense that it is a society which has not come to terms, to use that phrase, with its past. It is hardly unique in the word. I just spent the last year negotiating in Belfast in Northern Ireland, which is a society that has yet to come to terms with its past. These are extraordinarily difficult undertakings, politically as well as psychologically. However, in many cases, it is essential to do it before you can turn to the present and future.

In the case of China and Japan, I agree with Joe that it is critical. The good news there recently was the meeting between the Chinese Foreign Minister and the Japanese National Security Advisor. It seemed to me that it was not a solution, but in some ways an agreement to disagree and say, 'Let us manage this. We cannot solve it, so let us not allow it to preclude different kinds of confidence building measures and other arrangements.' To me, that was a welcome step in the direction again of managing a problem where you cannot solve it.

Thierry de Montbrial, Chairman and founder of the WPC

I want to thank our two highly distinguished friends, Joe Nye and Richard Haas, for their contribution, which was extremely interesting. My only regret, though it is not a real surprise, is that they agreed a little too much, in spite of my efforts.