

HAN SUNG-JOO

Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea

Thierry de Montbrial, President and Founder of the World Policy Conference

Thank you very much, Richard. The next session is on the Korean Peninsula and we will concentrate entirely on it then and certainly go a little deeper into this issue. Let me also emphasise one of the many substantial comments that Richard made, which was about China. I will make just two quick points. Firstly, I think that Richard is absolutely right. People are equally afraid of a too strong China and a too weak China and the history of China shows that there are catastrophic developments regularly, such as major economic crises. Secondly, I was in Beijing at a small but relatively high level meeting just before coming here and my impression was that the Chinese do not yet really know how to position themselves in the issue of global governance. I am sure that that will be something that we will also need to discuss over the next two days.

Let me now move on to our host country and Han Sung-Joo. I will then continue with Mr Morgulov, who represents Russia, which is a country with two feet, with one in Asia and one in the West. Last but not least, we will have Mr Oshima.

Sung Joo, the floor is yours.

Han Sung Joo, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea

Thank you. In deference to the title of this session, which is Security Governance in East Asia and in Europe, let me try to draw a brief and rough comparison between the security situation and structure in Europe and that in Asia. In the post Cold War era, Europe has constructed what can be considered as a security structure, including OSCE, although of late it seems that it is becoming increasingly of little use and help. The only security structure that Asia has consisted of an alliance system, which one side, the Allies themselves, claimed to be in the interest of peace and stability, and the other side, China in particular, considers provocative and destabilising. As for the alliance system, there is a multilateral alliance in Europe, at least on one side, called NATO. In Asia, there are bilateral alliances, with the United States as the hub or lynchpin. In Europe, the behaviour of Russia is increasingly becoming, and I agonised over the description here, assertive and confrontational, whereas, in Asia, China, while strengthening its military capabilities, still considers cooperation with the other side important and useful in both the economic and security fields. In Asia, what can be considered pre 21st century geopolitics did not disappear even after the demise of the Cold War. In Europe, if geopolitics was receding for a while, it seems to be returning with a vengeance in a way that is more naked than in Asia.

With this backdrop in mind, let me try to talk about how each of the major countries in East Asia takes or reacts to two security related phenomena, the rise of China and what is known as America's rebalancing to Asia policy. With its rebalancing policy, the United States appeared to be placing more weight on its Asia policy and presence, but it now finds itself with problems elsewhere around the globe, including Ukraine, Syria, the Islamic State and Afghanistan, from which it is difficult to pivot away. Neither has the United States quite decided how it will compete and cooperate with potential and perceived adversaries. For example, the United States is overly sensitive to whether a country is becoming pro China or pro US. With this zero sum mindset, the United States seems to regard a country joining the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP), for example, to be pro US and joining China initiated plans, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), to be pro China.

China exhibits two faced attitudes, sometimes simultaneously and sometimes in sequence. China wants to find ways to cooperate with the United States but is also in a hurry to bring changes to the status quo. To others, such as the



Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), China says that it wants inclusiveness and consultation, while looking after its own comfort level. However, China cannot resist the temptation to flex its muscles and exhibit a big power attitude. China wants its newly gained power to be recognised, but it feels it is being pushed, contained and encircled.

Japan finds China's rise uncomfortable and the United States overloaded with problems worldwide and at home. In such a situation, Japan also finds the need, justification and even the opportunity to strengthen security cooperation with the United States and elevate its own military capability and role. The problem and dilemma for Japan is that it is pursuing this policy without accompanying success in reconciling and building trust and confidence with its neighbours, as the Japanese leadership seems to be becoming more aggressive in terms of historical outlook.

Korea still finds the threat from North Korea evident and present, with its nuclear weapons programmes, missile capabilities, belligerent rhetoric and unpredictable leadership. South Korea welcomes the US's policy of rebalancing to Asia, an important part of which is maintaining and strengthening bilateral alliances. This also helps to buffer Korea's tension with Japan. Korea would also like to see more attention and effort given by both China and the United States to limiting and ultimately removing North Korea's nuclear weapons capabilities.

As for security related structures, it is true that Asia did not inherit them from the past or build new ones. However, Asia has had an alliance system led by the United States. The United States and its allies claim that the alliances are for balance, while China suspects that they are for containment. From an objective perspective, however, neither the US led alliance system nor security guarantees that the US provides, such as the extended deterrence, are always disadvantageous to China. I think that this is true at present as well as being true in the future. For one thing, the nuclear deterrence and the alliances will have the effect of continuing to bind US allies, including Japan, as non nuclear weapon states. Furthermore, by giving security assurances to allies, it has had the positive effect of actually deterring potential conflicts and wars.

To the criticism that the alliances are a relic of the Cold War, there is the response that in Europe NATO is expanding and thriving, even after the end of the Cold War. All the same, Asia has to deal with the territorial disputes between China and Japan, frictions over history between Japan and Korea, mutual suspicions and rivalry between China and the United States, the North Korean nuclear issue and worsening relations between Russia and the United States, as well as the conflicts in the Middle East, including that with the Islamic State spilling over to Asia. These are problems that, even if Asia had some kind of multilateral security structure, it would have been difficult to handle, much less to resolve.

For the time being, the one thing that keeps any of these situations from flaring up into something more dangerous is the realisation by leaders that they are all interdependent in economic and security matters. They also recognise that they cannot afford to get into actual military conflict against one another. In the meantime, the alliance system in Asia still serves as an important and useful element of the security structure, not only for the allies themselves within the system but also for non allies outside of it.

Thierry de Montbrial, President and Founder of the World Policy Conference

Thank you very much, Sung Joo, for another extremely rich intervention. Let me just ask you two questions. Firstly, if there was a major incident today, such as a Chinese vessel sinking a Japanese vessel or vice versa, or some incident between Korea and Japan, what would happen or what could happen? What might the worst case scenario be? That is my first question.

Secondly, I made a slip in my speech this morning which made everyone laugh, including the President. I said that I had made this slip on purpose, which of course I had not. Do you think that there is a chance of something happening between Japan and Korea that would be similar to the process that seems to be starting between Japan and China? I would also like to emphasise one of your points on the possible contamination of Asia or East Asia by the Middle East



situation for a number of reasons. I think that this is a very important point that we might also discuss later. However, could you make some brief comments on the first two questions?

Han Sung-Joo, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea

On your first question, I obviously do not know much about the details, but I do not think that it would be anything that was planned or schemed in advance. In any case, there has been a move on the part of both the Japanese and Chinese leadership to play down the conflict and find some common ground, as they are very dependent economically and there is so much at stake in continuing good and close relations between the two countries, even with the competition and suspicions of each other. I therefore do not really think that this event will blow over into a major conflict of any kind.

On the second question, as you heard, the President mentioned the possibility of a three way summit meeting between Japan, China and Korea and short of an actual summit meeting, everything else has been going on between Japan and Korea, with ministerial meetings and all kinds of negotiations and consultations. I have sometimes wondered why people place so much emphasis on the summit meeting, which is often very symbolic. This is something that the Korean President, for moral, political or whatever reasons, cannot bring herself to entering into. As we have all the other contacts and communication going on with Japan, this should probably not be made into such a big issue. However, as you heard this morning, the President is trying to find a way into even having a summit meeting with the Japanese leader, so I feel fairly optimistic.