

YUKIO OKAMOTO

Founder and President of Okamoto Associates, Inc., former Special Advisor to the Prime Minister of Japan

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We will move to Japan with Okamoto Yukio, who was former special advisor to the Prime Minister of Japan and is now the founder and President of Okamoto Associates.

OKAMOTO Yukio, Founder and President of Okamoto Associates, Inc., former Special Advisor to the Prime Minister of Japan

First of all, thank you very much for the interest shown in Asian affairs by this forum. Security and the fate of Asia is an integral part of a world in which Europe is one of the key members. I am appreciative of Dr Kim's presentation, because it laid on the table what kind of problems we face. Northeast Asia, as Dr Kim said, is an area where four out of the six largest military nations, in terms of numbers of soldiers are concentrated – China, Russia, North Korea and South Korea – and this is a precarious area.

We had thought in the 1990s that Asia was going for stability and that Japan was going to take a lead in bringing about cohesiveness to the region, but unfortunately Japanese economic strength receded in relative terms. There is a very strong current of nationalism in China and Korea, and at the risk of oversimplification, there is an emergence of maritime Asia and continental Asia. Maritime Asia is Japan, the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Singapore, Australia and the US, as against other countries in the continent which are increasingly drawn into the orbit of China.

Two months ago we saw a big military parade in China which was especially designed to commemorate the victory over Japanese imperialism. Mr Xi Jinping was standing on the balcony, and next to him were President Putin and President Park Geun-hye, and the Japanese people were shocked to see the Secretary General of the UN, who is purported to be running for the Korean presidential election. That was something of a symbol of the fissure that has taken place in Asia.

Where does India stand in this regard? We are expecting India to play a stabilising role; sandwiched between the problematic South China Sea and the Persian Gulf-Arabian Sea, India's role is very important for securing freedom of navigation. This is the reason Japan participated in the naval exercise which was conducted by India and the US, so that it is now a joint exercise between three countries.

I am glad Mr Kim talked about the subject of the new security laws in Japan. Mr Abe deserves credit for bringing Japan more towards a situation of normalcy, as even with that new legislation Japan will be unable to possess the full-fledged right of collective defence, as other countries, including Korea, exercise. Article 9 of the Constitution is still there, prohibiting Japan from engaging in a war to settle international disputes. The new legislation will fortify the Japanese position and secure the latitude of the Japanese Self-Defence Forces to contribute more to international peace, such as engaging in PKO.

For example, the Japanese Self-Defence Forces went to Iraq, but their role was limited to providing only water, as the SDF can only be used for such peaceful and humanitarian missions. However, with the revision of the law, Japanese soldiers can now go to Iraq and engage in providing security for the residents, as other countries, especially in Europe, are doing. It is a big step forward, but please, do not forget that Article 9 of the Constitution is still there, untouched, and is the backbone of Japan's peaceful military policy.



KIM Hak-Joon, President of the Northeast Asian History Foundation; Chairman of the Asia Journalist Association, Republic of Korea

I thought it was amended.

OKAMOTO Yukio, Founder and President of Okamoto Associates, Inc., former Special Advisor to the Prime Minister of Japan

No, Article 9 remains intact. Having said that, I want to focus on the issue of Japan's reconciliation with its neighbours. This July I went to the US with a delegation of a Japanese company, on which I sit as a board director, to apologise to American prisoners of war, because the legal claims have been settled by the San Francisco Peace Treaty, but there is something much more to it in terms of catering to humanitarian emotions, so we went, and it was a touching moment. The President of the American Ex-POW Association bowed his head to us, saying that this was the second time he was bowing to the Japanese. The first time was 70 years ago, when he had to bow as otherwise he would be killed, and the second was now, bowing to show respect to the Japanese who had the courage to come to the US to apologise. I almost wanted to cry, and I had a very strong feeling that the apology must be met with forgiveness. Forgiveness can only be given by the victims themselves, not by their children or their families.

The President is 95 years old, and while survivors are still there, we really have to come to a rapprochement with China and Korea as well, so we are engaged in talking to Chinese labourers who were forcibly brought to Japan during the war, and I think there will be an amicable settlement. However, as I said, there has to be forgiveness. Ms Merkel suggested that Japan should follow the model of Europe, but for Japan there is no France as in the case of Germany. I think for Japan France was the US, but the US cannot really bring China and Korea into reconciliation.

There is one more very important point as far as Japan is concerned, and that is the issue of education. The apathy towards repentance for war is a fact. The Japanese people are deeply remorseful and of course are pledging that they will never again engage in such atrocious activities. However, are we really teaching kids what we did in that vein? Personally, I feel that we lag behind Germany. We are not engaging in the kind of education Germany is giving to children. That is what we are doing, and we will revise the history curriculum to teach kids more about the history since 1931, when we engaged in our Manchurian war.

There is a slight sign of improving relationships with China, but not with Korea, and when the Korean President said in her major address that the relationship between the aggressor and the victim would not change for 1,000 years, it was almost tantamount to saying that she would not forgive Japan for 1,000 years, and in that case there is no hope, but we must try. My personal thinking is that the best we can hope for between Japan and Korea is the kind of relationship that exists between England and Scotland, a mild sense of rivalry, but even for the two countries to come that far, we will need another 50 or 70 years, if not 100.

Concerning the safety of Northeast Asia and settling the territorial disputes in the meantime, we are asking Korea to go to the International Court of Justice, and it is so obvious that we will be the status preservation forces. I only hope that there will be only a small step forward. Now we are at the low point in the Japan-Korea relationship, but within a year from now, or in the short term, there will be a change to a better environment.