

Japan Militarism Evocative of that Preceding World War II

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At the end of 2012, the Liberal Democratic Party in Japan won the country's election. Its significance for Japan's politics goes much further than the election itself.

Japan's economy is suffering. While Japan's political parties are struggling to come up with policies to save the country, territorial disputes and the "China threat" theory ignite public sentiment. There is no doubt that newly elected Prime Minister Shinzo Abe will make use of these issues.

Japanese leaders should have the strategic vision and courage to acknowledge the significance of a resolved Sino-Japanese relationship and the negative impact of the two remaining in a spat.

The initiative lies with Japan, or Abe specifically, to restore relations. However, the recent actions of Abe and his cabinet are worrying.

Abe is kicking off a visit to Southeast Asian countries to boost ties. He is also reportedly going to write a letter to NATO in the face of China's rising power. Meanwhile, he is seeking to amend the Peace Constitution and strengthen Japan's Self-Defense Forces, which will increase tensions.

The current situation Japan faces is similar to what it experienced prior to World War II. A gloomy economy has led to the spread of militarism both among the public and politicians. Its neighboring countries are worried that Japan may take the path of militarism and nationalism as it did in the past. A wise politician is needed to save Japan from the desperate situation it is in now. The following aspects are worth Abe's consideration.

First, the leaderships of both sides need to restore mechanisms to boost mutual trust as soon as possible. In 2006 after the bilateral relationship worsened due to then prime minister Junichiro Koizumi, Abe paid a visit to China to mend ties. Now, China has lost confidence in Japanese leaders. It is Abe who should take the initiative to restore mutual trust.

Japan should also give up the so-called "nationalization" of the Diaoyu Islands and wait for opportunities for bilateral negotiations. Abe and his cabinet should communicate with China and make proposals and commitments to turn the East China Sea into an area for joint development and shared interests. Meanwhile, Japan should keep a cool head toward China's development.

Last but not least, both should seek common ground while putting aside differences. A joint declaration can be signed to solve territorial disputes by either shelving them for future settlement or trying to resolve them now. Building a rational and comprehensive relationship is still essential for both.

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