

## Smart Talk No. 14

### Presenter

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### Moderator

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### Discussants

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This product presents a policy-oriented summary of the Smart Talk.

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## East Asia – Its Opportunities and Risks

March 7, 2011

On February 25, 2011, the East Asia Institute hosted a Smart Talk Seminar with Mr. Hitoshi Tanaka (Japan Center for International Exchange) who presented his views on the North Korean nuclear issue, the opportunities, risks, and challenges in East Asia, and the role of the related parties including China, Japan, South Korea, and the United States.

### Summary of the Seminar

The rise of China and the recent provocations by North Korea pose both traditional and non-traditional threats in East Asia. Assessing them as opportunities and risks, Tanaka Hitoshi suggests a 'Comprehensive Settlement' which involves more active engagement from the related parties: South Korea, the United States, Japan, and China. He draws these ideas from his own experience as a career diplomat and having conducted over 30 rounds of negotiations with North Korea.

Pointing out that North Korea is quite sensitive to international relations and that they actually try desperately to create beneficial relations with the other states, he noted the precondition for the North's negotiation has been provocation. For example, Pyongyang does not want to look weak while pursuing their national interests and that is why they revealed the existence of highly enriched uranium (HEU) facilities in November 2010.

An effective and immediate means to deal with the North Korean nuclear issue is called for, but the Six-Party Talks is a bit too

premature since it is merely for crisis management. In order not to undermine the interests of Seoul and Washington, the two major stakeholders of security on the Korean Peninsula, three sets of bilateral meetings are needed. Mr. Tanaka acknowledged that there is no common negotiation goal among the United States, Japan, and South Korea. Washington is concentrating on the nonproliferation while Seoul is focusing more on crisis management, and Tokyo wants to settle the abduction issue, denuclearization, and normalization of relation. He emphasized, though, that despite the clear difference in each agenda of the three, dialogue between the two Koreas should come first in a more comprehensive way, with assistance from the United States and Japan. In order to successfully conclude the dialogue, Seoul needs to make a decision on what they truly want to achieve through bilateral talks, by closely consulting with Washington and Tokyo.

Another opportunity and risk come from the fact that China is shifting the power balance in the East Asia region. In 2001 when China just had joined the World Trade Organization (WTO), it invested a great deal in improving political relations with Japan, the biggest economy in the region at that time. In 2010, however, China became more aggressive as seen in the case of conflict regarding Senkaku islands and it reflected Beijing's growing confidence following its rapid economic development, having caught up with Japan's economic size. Still, China's role in dealing with North Korea is crucial because when it comes

to North Korea, China shares a common objective with the other neighboring states. The bottom line for China is that they do not want to see North Korea collapse because of the territorial integrity issue regarding ethnic Korean minorities residing in China. At the same time, China does not support the further development of North Korea's nuclear weapons program either. China seriously considers the possibility of a nuclear domino in the region and would put some efforts toward the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

The year 2012 is critical for the Korean Peninsula as well as for East Asia. It is the year for leadership transition in South Korea, the United States, and China, and at the same time, it is when North Korea declared itself to become a strong and prosperous state. We need to plan ahead of time for these changes of circumstances in 2012 and prepare for both military and non-military contingency planning against North Korea. In the process, cooperation with China is indispensable and Japan and South Korea are capable of making the necessary changes in the international political environment in East Asia so that China will be able to change. At the same time, the balance can only be provided by the United States, so relation among the three is vital. We need to develop confidence in order to settle the Trilateral Summit of China, Japan and Korea and maybe another trilateral among the United States, China and Japan could be arranged. Furthermore, the improved relations among all of the above could contribute to the development of an economic and social policy coordination mechanism in East Asia. ■

## About the Speaker

### Hitoshi Tanaka

Hitoshi Tanaka is chairman of the Institute for International Strategy at the Japan Research Institute, Ltd. and a senior fellow at the Japan Center for International Exchange. He has also been a visiting professor at the Graduate School of Public Policy, University of Tokyo, since April 2006. He was Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan until August 2005. He has B.A. in law from Kyoto University and B.A./M.A. in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics from Oxford University. Mr. Tanaka has contributed many articles to various newspapers and monthly magazines. His latest publications include *Purofeshonaru no Koshoryoku* [The Logic of Strategic Negotiation] (2009: Kodansha), *Gaiko no Chikara* [The Power of Diplomacy] (2009: Nikkei Publishing), and *Kokka to Gaiko* [The Nation and Diplomacy] (2005: Kodansha).

## Discussants

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