

Japan PM Abe's address to joint session of U.S. Congress

Yuji Hosaka, Professor of Politics at Sejong University

On April 29, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe will address a joint meeting of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives. Prime Minister Abe will be the first to address joint session of US Congress as Japanese Prime Minister.

However, criticism has been voiced over this scheduled speech of Prime Minister Abe. Since his inauguration, Abe has justified Japan's invasion to Asia and the colonization, arguing that "the definition of what constitutes an "invasion" has yet to be established in academia or the international community".

Unlike its top leader's senseless remarks, Japan endorsed the UN resolution which defines invasion as all acts of an invasion of a state by the armed forces of another state with ignoring legitimate procedure. The Abe administration has been repeating the act of justifying Japan's invasion to Asian nations, arguing that an "act of aggression" will look differently depending on which side you view it from.

Prime Minister Abe has promoted visits to Yasukuni Shrine which was a spiritual device for accomplishing its war of aggression until 1945 and currently commemorates 14 Class-A war criminals. As such, marking one year since his inauguration on December 26, 2013, he visited Yasukuni Shrine in person and has made the offering on his behalf at every spring and autumn ritual ceremony. The US government spoke diplomatic language of "disappointment" through its embassy in Japan to express a high degree of regret over his visit to Yasukuni.

PM Abe publicly proclaimed that he respects Yoshida Shoin, one of the intellectuals of encouraging invasion to Asia and a spiritual leader of Meiji regime. Yoshida Shoin was a philosopher from Yamaguchi Prefecture which is Abe's hometown and

launched Meiji regime by developing the movement of overthrowing Tokugawa shogunate in the Prefecture. In particular Yoshida Shoin made a case for invading Korea, recognized it as a foothold into Asia. Every year Abe visits Yoshida Shoin's shrine in Yamaguchi Prefecture. Indeed his hometown Yamaguchi Prefecture is home to many pioneers of Japan's modernization, most of whom were the followers of Yoshida Shoin. Ito Hirobumi, a four-time Prime Minister who established constitutional government and parliament was also a disciple of Yoshida Shoin. Ito Hitobumi became Resident-General of Korea in his later years and spearheaded the invasion of Korea. Viscount Miura Gorō, Resident Minister of Korea who murdered Empress Myeongseong was one of the followers of Yoshida Shoin's disciples.

Far from reflecting on the fact that his grandfather, Nobusuke Kishi was Class-A war criminal, Abe has an ideology that the Tokyo trials held by International Military Tribunal for the Far East which sentenced 14 Class A war criminals was just a "political show" created by the Allied Powers. During the Tokyo trial, among the seven judges, the only judge who insisted all 14 defendants were not guilty was Radhabinod Pal. This made Prime Minister Abe regard highly of Pal and visit his grandson even to honor his "achievement".

What this proves is he does not accept the ruling of International Military Tribunal for the Far East. Article 11 of San Francisco Peace Treaty concluded between the Allied Powers and Japan states that Japan accepted the judgments of the Tokyo trial. Based on the acceptance, Japan was able to regain its independence on April 28, 1952. Abe seems to have no intention to keep that international promise.

Not acknowledging them as war criminals, Yasukuni Shrine enshrines these Class-A war criminals as gods. The fact that Abe visits there and makes offering on behalf of Prime Minister every year should be a problem to be considered seriously.

In his mind, Class-A war criminals do not exist at all and as such he has a strong perception that the Pacific war was not a war of invasion. Japan's right wing has

maintained a distorted idea that the Pacific war was never a war of invasion rather a war of liberation to make Asia free from the white invasion and Prime Minister Abe is a representative figure of these right wing politicians.

Japan's right wing and Abe have a misleading belief that the reason behind Japan being disgraced as invading country or war criminal country is not because it did invade or commit war crimes but because it lost in the war. They argue that Japan was defeated in the World War II due to a bad luck and otherwise it would have a different position. For them Japan's biggest mistake was to fight against the US. Therefore, Abe wrongly believes that the country needs to fight on the same side with the US in a war to clear its name and overcome any sense of inferiority remaining in the mind of its people. Accordingly Abe simply changed the interpretation of the Constitution defended for more than six decades and concluded in the cabinet meeting that Japan should be able to exercise its collective self-defense.

The US allows Prime Minister Abe to speak before joint meeting of US Congress. The problem is if there is no sincere reflection and apology for the past wrongdoing in his speech, it may look like the US grants immunity to Japan, which will likely turn into a vehement criticism toward US Congress. In other words, US will have no choice but to face criticism that it sacrifices the victims of history such as Korea in exchange for its own interest and Japan which will gain confidence through this opportunity will behave whatever it pleases against Korea. In Japan, there have been more and more intimidating demonstrations targeting Koreans, which puts Koreans residing within Japan in jeopardy. So, misguided Japan's right wing will target Koreans even more. If Washington wants to side with Japan for its own interest, at least it should do its utmost efforts to keep a lid on the ludicrous statement by Japanese leaders and their wrong behaviors which cause tremendous pain to the neighboring countries.