**Section (A)**

**Why do Japan and China have such a frosty relationship?**

Japan’s Shinzo Abe and China’s Xi Jinping have met face-to-face for the first time, but why do the neighbours have such an uneasy relationship?

The recent tensions have centred on uninhabited islands and rocks in the East China Sea that both countries say belongs to them. The Japanese, who have claimed the islands since the 19th century, call them the Senkaku Islands and that is how they are generally referred to internationally. In China they are known as the Diaoyu Islands.

Crucially, in 1968, potential undersea oil reserves were discovered. The territory is close to important shipping lanes and has rich fishing areas. The islands were returned to Japan with a 1972 treaty, but at the same time, the Chinese and Taiwanese both declared ownership.

Recently, Beijing has pushed its claim on the islands, coupled with its growing militarisation of the East China Sea. In an eight-month period in 2012, there were 40 maritime incursions and 160 aerial incursions by Chinese military ships and planes into the disputed waters, leading Japan to state that its neighbours were jeopardising peace.

The fear is that, with so much military and coastguard activity in the area, an “accidental” collision could lead to an escalation – and conflict.

Even a seemingly shallow exchange between the top leaders of the world’s second and third biggest economies can make a considerable difference. This is particularly true for military cooperation, with the hope that tensions over the Senkaku islands can finally be reduced. A starting point would be the establishment of a military hotline between Beijing and Tokyo.

Japan and China could help stabilize not just Asia but the whole world. China’s foreign minister and premier have both visited Japan this year, and the number of Chinese tourists following suit is expected to reach a record 8 million this year.

Japan is still an ally of the U.S., and it will avoid adopting any policies that could undermine U.S. policies. Therefore, we could expect ties to improve but the steps will not be huge.

**Section (B)**

**Dangerous drift towards world war in Asia**

The relationship between China and Japan has entered a period of détente after years of confrontation. According to Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, his country’s relations with China have finally returned to a normal track. Meanwhile, Chinese President Xi Jinping speaks of positive momentum in Beijing’s interactions with Tokyo.

This détente is almost entirely a collateral effect of the Trump administration’s assault on China – a moment of Chinese weakness that Japan has exploited. A healthier mixture of cooperation and competition between China and Japan would benefit Asia, especially if it is driven by business interests and market considerations.

The dispute, over a set of islands controlled by Japan, has not been resolved. But this year, on the 40th anniversary of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship, the two leaders are finding a way to put the two countries’ differences behind them, superficially at least.

Abe was treated to a full red-carpet welcome by Premier Li Keqiang, inspecting a guard of honor and being celebrated at a reception in the opulent Great Hall of the People.

On the economic front, the relationship between Tokyo and Beijing also tilts toward confrontation. Japan often leads international efforts to restrict China’s acquisition of advanced technology, an area that will define the course of great power competition in the coming years. Japan’s approach to this issue involves a mixture of strictly enforced regulations at home and ambitious outreach abroad.

And while trade interests sometimes bring China and Japan together, Japanese Trade Minister Hiroshige Seko recently joined the United States and European Union in signing a statement of concern addressing the “non-market-oriented policies and practices of third countries.” Coordinated countermeasures against China may follow.

Rather than cooperating with China to safeguard free trade and multilateralism, Japan’s priority is trilateral coordination with the United States and Europe.