

“Proactive Contribution to International Peace”

Japan’s Cooperative Strategy as a “Natural” Country



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Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is likely to be remembered as the first Japanese prime minister to clearly define his country’s national interests and a national security strategy. Indeed, I would be so bold as to say that the Abe administration is an administration that is willing to challenge the postwar taboo in Japan. This is manifested in the slogan “proactive contribution to international peace” — a concept emphasized in the Abe administration’s national security strategy.

The strategy is the public and unequivocal expression of Japan’s willingness to behave more proactively for the purposes of international peace and prosperity and explicitly addresses its military role as well. However, it is important to note that it does not limit the scope of discussions to military aspects. Indeed, given the administration’s difficulty in shedding its conservative image, it will need to demonstrate through the actual implementation of the new strategy that Japan’s pursuit of proactivity does not mean it is going to become a military superpower.

Generally speaking, it is by no means unnatural for a government to define the national interests and establish a strategy concerning national security, which lies at the core of the sovereign state. In Japan, however, successive administrations had shied away from this otherwise natural course of action.

The reason for this is the last world war. The military ruled Japan at the time. The state mobilized the entire Japanese population and used the military to invade areas ranging from East Asia to the Pacific, bringing them into its sphere of influence, all in the service of national interests. That was what the national strategy was developed for. This was indeed an excessive pursuit of national interests, a strategy that relied excessively on military means. It also entailed massive costs, as Japan in defeat was bombed and burnt to ashes and had to rebuild from scratch. Thus, in postwar Japan, terms such as “national interests” and “strategy” were often regarded with a measure of distrust and even aversion when they were discussed. However, as we are about to complete the seventh decade since the end of the war, an administration has appeared that is willing to discuss national security strategy more “naturally”. It is notable that the strategy emphasizes the importance of promoting international peace cooperation and human security as part of its national interests.

The UN, International Peace Cooperation & Japan

It was in his address on Sept. 26, 2013 during the general debate at the General Assembly of the United Nations that Abe announced the principle of “proactive contribution to peace” to the audience. He stated, “I will enable Japan, as a proactive contributor to peace, to be even more actively engaged in UN collective security measures, including peacekeeping operations. I believe Japan must continuously cultivate our human resources appropriate to UN activities.”

There are four points that deserve notice with regard to the prime minister’s address. First, obviously, was the emphasis on the intention to have Japan contribute more proactively to collective security measures by the UN. Second, the prime minister seeks a policy change that makes it possible for Japan to “exercise collective

self-defense” — a point that was purposely unmentioned in the address. Third, he emphasized the importance of the concept of “human security” and in particular positioned himself to revolutionize Japan’s domestic society and foreign diplomacy from the perspective of creating a “society in which women shine”. Finally, he pointed to the importance to Japan of developing human resources and otherwise creating an appropriate institutional framework for the purpose of more proactive international contributions.

On the first point, Japan’s full-fledged participation in UN peacekeeping operations, as is widely known, began after the International Peace Cooperation Act was enacted in 1992 during the administration of Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa. At the time, the peace accord had been achieved in Cambodia partly through Japanese engagement, and there were great expectations as well as a

need for support for its implementation through UN peacekeeping operations. Since Japan had made massive financial contributions in response to the 1990-91 Gulf War but had been subjected to strong criticism from the international community, including the United States, as a country that “shells out money but does not commit its people”, the Japanese government made a strong push to put a legal framework in place that would make it possible to dispatch Self-Defense Force personnel to Cambodia as a functional unit.

At the time, opposition parties in Japan strongly resisted the overseas dispatch of the SDF even for participation in UN peacekeeping operations. However, the bill was adopted, opening the way to participation in UN peacekeeping operations and international humanitarian assistance activities through the overseas deployment of the SDF that continues to this day. That said, although the Japanese contribution in terms of human resources gave the appearance of removing the stigma of the Gulf War, it should be remembered that Prime Minister Noburu Takeshita had already emphasized the role of “Japan contributing to the world” and had begun dispatching civilian officials to UN peacekeeping operations. He had believed that it was important for Japan as an economic power built on international trade and reliant on overseas resources to contribute to world peace and economic stability. In this manner, Japan has engaged in a wide range of activities, including its earliest activities in monitoring elections in Angola and mobilizing engineering forces in Cambodia, through efforts aimed at stabilizing the Golan Heights and East Timor, to the latest infrastructure development activities in South Sudan, again by its engineering forces.

However, there still exist persistent voices expressing wariness at policy changes made by the government under what they regard as the “pretext” of “proactively” promoting “pacifism”. The liberal newspaper *Asahi Shimbun* did not hide its suspicions in its editorial that took up Abe’s UN address, stating that “Abe seems to be using the term ‘pacifism’ only as a means to win public support for his attempt to allow Japan to exercise its right to collective self-defense by changing the government’s interpretation of the Constitution concerning this issue” (*Asahi Shimbun*, Sept. 28, 2013).

Abe did not take up the issue of collective self-defense in his UN address. This issue is rooted in the fact that all the postwar cabinets have adhered to the position that Japan cannot exercise the right to collective self-defense because of the Japanese Constitution although it is a right that was recognized for all nations by Article 51 of the UN Charter. Specifically, the interpretation is adopted that engaging in joint defense activities with a country with which Japan has a close relationship (e.g. the US) that has been attacked even though Japan itself is not being attacked would be in violation of Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution as long as one maintains the position that Japan’s self-defense “must be restricted to the minimum necessary to defend Japan.” Abe believes there is no doubt that Japan, like any other country, should be able to exercise the right to collective self-defense as tensions rise in the security environment because of the

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Prime Minister Shinzo Abe addressing the UN General Assembly (September 2013)

nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs of North Korea and the projection of maritime power by China.

The exercise of collective self-defense by Japan is in the first instance discussed within the context of the alliance with the US regarding hypothetical cases involving the protection of US military vessels in international waters by the SDF or the interception of ballistic missiles aimed at the US. However, there is room also to consider activities such as guarding detachments from other countries that are conducting operations in the same areas in UN peacekeeping operations or logistical support for multinational forces organized under UN resolutions. It will become increasingly important for Japan to develop its system from a realistic perspective not only for cooperation within the Japan-US alliance but also with regard to the situations that will be encountered at the frontlines of international peace cooperation.

Human Security as an Element of National Security

It may be impolitic to call it surprising, but the fact that a realist political leader has emphasized human security in addition to the security interests of the state is significant. Human security is, in the words of Sadako Ogata, former UN High Commissioner for Refugees, “a way of thinking [in the world community] that focuses on each individual, placing the highest priority on his/her safety, and emphasizes the promotion of safety and development by the hands of the people themselves.” Traditionally in the world community, security and prosperity were always pursued at the national level, while the well-being of the individual was typically not a concern. This was due to the fact that non-intervention in the domestic affairs of other states was considered to be one of the most fundamental principles for the maintenance of international order. Indeed, although the world community recognizes the importance of norms regarding human rights, the reality is that their implementation is left up to national governments. Thus, taking an interest in the security of not only people in one’s own country but also those living in other countries



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Japanese SDF in South Sudan as part of UN peacekeeping operations

and extending one's hand of protection signifies a paradigm shift.

That said, the concept of human security, which the Japanese government among others promoted and has now become a common understanding through a UN General Assembly resolution, takes a moderate approach in which necessary assistance is provided with the consent of the country receiving the assistance and which absolutely excludes pressure against sovereignty and political systems such as military intervention (see UNGA Resolution A/RES/66/290 adopted in September 2012). That is why the resolution states that human security means “an approach to assist Member States in identifying and addressing widespread and cross-cutting challenges to the survival, livelihood and dignity of their people.” In this regard, intervention in more extreme situations, where the world community comes to the aid of people subject to serious humanitarian crises under a malevolent regime, is considered under the different concept of the “responsibility to protect”. Unless this distinction is made, assistance to people whose lives may be saved by the human security approach may not be able to be extended because the country in question mistrusts and rejects it for fear of impinging on its own sovereignty or political regime. Thus, it is important to share a clear understanding on this point.

It is also significant that Abe used much of his UN address to emphasize the importance of issues regarding human security, particularly for women, and efforts to come to grips with them and the significance in particular of women being the human resources resolving the problems. It should not be overlooked that women are placed in the most vulnerable and desperate situations when it comes to matters of peace and safety. There are high hopes that capable Japanese women can extend their global networks and flourish as experts tackling women's issues and gender issues.

Growing Need to Generate Human Resources for Peacebuilding

As the need for activities geared to the resolution of a wide variety

of conflicts around the world as well as post-conflict reconciliation and reconstruction and peacebuilding grows, highly motivated, knowledgeable and skilled professionals who will be accepted and deeply trusted by local populations will play major roles as human resources in meticulously designing and implementing not only the reconstruction of government functions of the recipient states at the macro level (institutions of governance, the security sector, rule of law, etc.) but also effectively addressing the survival, livelihood and dignity of the individual and other such micro-level concerns.

Japan certainly has an unhappy history with regard to World War II, as well as experience in postwar reconstruction and recovery from major disasters, which are the source of its strong interest in conflict resolution and reconstruction. Thus, peacebuilding in post-conflict states is an important pillar of Japan's development aid policy. Since 2007, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) has been running a program based in Hiroshima for human resource development for peacebuilding. Through the seven years of its activities, the program has produced a large number of entry-level professionals for peacebuilding activities in the UN system and more broadly in the world community. But could there be ways to add more dynamism to the development of such human resources? It was from this perspective that MOFA created the eminent person's group concerning the Peacebuilding Sector in November 2013 to review Japanese activities to date in the peacebuilding field and make proposals to the foreign minister on how to make more effective contributions, particularly in terms of the human element.

The proposals, which I had a hand in formulating as a group member, were submitted to Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida. They include the need to develop not only entry-level but also mid-career and higher-level human resources, as well as the generation of paths to develop and effectively implement strategies to support peacebuilding jointly with the African people in addition to preexisting joint training with Asian personnel by creating the Japan Peacebuilding Support Center (name provisional). The council members hope that the new center will become the gateway to further collaboration with the relevant organs and human resource



Photo: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan

Submission of policy recommendations on peacebuilding to Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida

development institutions around the world. In drafting the proposals, we also laid emphasis on the mobilization of women as well as the expansion of experts with robust expertise in dealing with gender-related issues. Another feature of the proposals is the straightforward manner in which risk factors and compensation for sacrifices with regard to peacebuilding support are preconditions for full-fledged Japanese engagement in international peace cooperation, as these have been delicate issues to be treated with care in the domestic debate on peacebuilding.

From “Normal” Country to “Natural” Country

Postwar Japan adopted a unique security policy based on the experience of previous wars and self-restrictions under the Peace Constitution. The SDF were formed under a constitution that not only proclaimed the “renunciation of war” but also gave up “land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential”. Since their purpose was for defense only, the US would be relied upon through the Japan-US alliance for attack. While Japan was recovering from the devastations of the war, it adhered to the policy of prioritizing economic recovery and avoiding military investments as much as possible. Even after establishing itself as a major economic power, Japan was making contributions to the world community through economic cooperation using massive amounts of development aid as a diplomatic tool. The turning point came with the end of the Cold War and the experience of the Gulf War, as voices domestic and foreign grew saying it would be “natural” to contribute to international peace cooperation not only with financial resources but also with human resources. Indeed, as an academic, I believe that contributions at the political and diplomatic levels and through intellectual and conceptual means are important.

To look at this from the other end, it is highly “unnatural” to restrict thoughts and activities to national defense narrowly defined and fear that an expanding role will lead directly to resurgence as a major military power. Facing up to historical issues certainly is a difficult task. Moreover, given that history is created through interaction with others and there are countries near Japan whose regimes use the history card politically to reinforce their domestic support, these issues will not be easily resolved. It is important to avoid reacting to this by beautifying one’s own past, since narrow-minded nationalism itself carries a risk for security policy.

It used to be argued that Japan should become a “normal” country. It probably means that Japan should reject arguments and actions that are only acceptable domestically and instead be able to engage in activities that are “normal” within the world community. To put it another way, what is considered “natural” in the world community should be conducted as “normal”. But there is a distinction to be made between “normal” and “natural”. The expression “natural” contains within itself a history of legitimacy concerning the possession and exercise of natural rights in the world community, which makes it possible to some extent to avoid arbitrariness. The



US President Barack Obama and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe shake hands prior to their meeting at the Akasaka State Guest House in Tokyo on April 24, 2014.

right to self-defense (both individual and collective) and the principle of collective security should be considered in the context of this intellectual and legal tradition. Some may argue that it is dangerous to advocate being natural since it is natural, indeed, as a matter of human nature to be selfish and driven by the desire to dominate and overwhelm others. However, if it is proof of progress for humankind that individuals are imperfect yet social order is created through contracts that secure mutual freedom, it can be argued that containing personal freedom within boundaries that do not threaten coexistence with others is also part of the “natural” and rational rights and obligations of humankind, given the imperfect nature of each individual. The Japanese language contains the concept of *wa* (harmony). International peace cooperation also requires the wisdom to emphasize the natural and maintain harmony.

Johan Galtung, a pioneer in peace and conflict studies, has expounded on the importance of “positive peace” in addition to “negative peace”. Where negative peace is achieved by overcoming physical violence, positive peace reaches further to overcome structural violence. While making a full-force argument for national security, Abe emphasizes the importance of human security and constructs the principle of a “proactive contribution to international peace” by including international peace cooperation in defining national interests. At the core of this line of thought lies the potential for a comprehensive pursuit of peace that integrates negative peace and positive peace in a natural manner. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that Japan demonstrates that the strategy to seek peace proactively does not revert to its past and bring about a return to the path of becoming a major military power. **JS**

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