

Japan's "Proactive Contribution to Peace" A Mere Political Label?



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On Dec. 17, 2013, the Japanese government announced its first-ever National Security Strategy (NSS) calling on the country to make a “proactive contribution to peace” based on international cooperation. The strategy has prompted questions from the media both at home and abroad about the strategy’s real intentions and its vision. Questions have been raised, in particular, about the phrase “proactive contribution to peace”. What does the phrase mean? Is it a mere political label? What sort of path will Japan embark upon under this banner, and is this a cover for Japan’s return to pre–World War II militarism and a rejection of postwar pacifism? This article will try to answer some of these questions.

Why Now?

Foreign scholars and policymakers have long criticized Japan for lacking a security strategy and, for that matter, strategic thinking in its security and foreign policy, making Japanese policy unpredictable and unaccountable. Some have even argued that with the ongoing shift in the balance of power, Japan could disappear from the radar screen of international relations unless it shows where it stands with a clear strategy. The NSS is a response to such criticism.

Basic Policy on National Defense

Japan did announce a national defense policy — the Basic Policy on National Defense — on May 20, 1957, and this has guided Japan’s defense policy to date. But it is a very short statement of only half a page, stipulating that the “objective of national defense is to prevent direct and indirect aggression, but once invaded, to repel such aggression, and thereby to safeguard the independence and peace of Japan based on democracy.” The policy cites four specific policies to achieve this objective, namely (1) supporting the United Nations, (2) nurturing patriotism, (3) building up national defense capabilities necessary for self-defense, and (4) maintaining security relations with the United States until the UN becomes capable of maintaining international security.

After World War II, Japan adopted a policy of aligning its security and foreign policy with the position of the UN under the so-called UN-centered diplomacy. The UN did not function the way Japan anticipated due to the East-West divide of the Cold War, however, prompting the country to turn to its alliance with the US as the cornerstone of its security policy. Today, more than 50 years since the adoption of the Basic Policy on National Defense, Japan confronts new challenges and a vastly transformed security environment. Thus there is an urgent need to update its basic policy to adapt to the prevailing situation.

Changing Security Challenges

Over the past 50-plus years, challenges to Japanese security have evolved beyond the defense of territorial integrity. Security challenges have diversified to include terrorism, piracy, cyber attacks, energy resources, space, climate change, pandemics, failed states, international crime networks, and the illegal trafficking of arms and narcotics, to name just a few. These challenges, such as cyber attacks, are hard to predict. In a globalized world, moreover, Japan’s security has become indivisible from that of other countries. Terrorists from far-away failed states may target Japan, and Japanese nationals may become victims of attacks thousands of miles from home. For example, Japanese nationals were killed in Algeria in January 2013 when the plant where they were working was attacked by a group allegedly affiliated with Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. This showed that peace and stability in countries as geographically distant as Algeria have an impact on Japan’s security. Needless to say, piracy in the Gulf of Aden, which is a vital shipping lane, also affects Japanese trade.

The indivisibility, unpredictability, and diversification of security threats demand a more sophisticated, comprehensive, and integrated response. A long-term strategy is required, rather than ad hoc approaches to individual incidents.

Worsening Security Environment around Japan

Secondly, the security environment in areas around Japan has changed dramatically. In Northeast Asia, there are countries with large-scale military forces, and those either already possessing nuclear weapons or continuing with nuclear development. Recently, one of Japan’s neighbors has been asserting its position in the East and South China Sea by rapidly expanding and intensifying its activities in the seas and airspace around Japan, including by intruding into Japan’s territorial waters and air space. As *Military Balance 2014* observed, defense spending in East Asia has expanded

rapidly against rising tensions in the region. The shares of the region's increase in real defense outlays in 2013 were 46% for China, 5.7% for Japan, 5.2% for South Korea, and 40% for other countries — split roughly equally between Southeast Asia and South Asia.

The Japanese government must do all it can to deter any aggression in its neighborhood and make diplomatic efforts to enhance cooperation with its neighbors to prevent a crisis from occurring.

Avoiding Misunderstanding

In an age of complex and intertwined security challenges, many countries, such as the US (since 1987), Britain (since 2013), Australia (since 2013), and South Korea (since 2009), have announced respective national security strategies. This is probably because they feel the need to explain their long-term security strategies both at home and abroad to avoid misunderstanding. Given the changes in the security environment, it is essential for governments to explain in advance how they plan to maintain peace and stability and to protect their citizens, both during peacetime and in contingencies. Long-term security strategies must also be explained to other countries to avoid unfounded misunderstanding on specific policies and to promote bilateral as well as multilateral cooperation.

In an age in which the security strategy of one country will have a large bearing on that of others, and as security challenges become increasingly transnational, international and regional cooperation will be crucial in ensuring an effective response. Such are the factors that have prompted Japan, too, to announce its NSS.

What Is a “Proactive Contribution to Peace”?

Background

Japan has been criticized for not doing enough for international peace and security, even being accused of “free riding”. The question of whether it can participate in UN collective security activities has been left unanswered since Japan's accession to the UN in 1957.

In his letter of application for UN membership, dated June 16, 1952, submitted to UN Secretary General Trygve Lie, Japanese Foreign Minister Katsuo Okazaki wrote: “I, . . . having been duly authorized by the Japanese Government, state that the Government of Japan hereby accepts the obligations contained in the Charter of the United Nations, and undertakes to honour them, by all means at its disposal, from the day when Japan becomes a Member of the United Nations.”

The unspoken meaning of this phrase “by all means at its disposal” was that Japan would fulfill its UN obligations so long as they did not violate the Japanese Constitution. The question that remained was the means Japan could actually use, for Article 9 of the Constitution stipulates that “aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes. In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.”

The question of whether or not “by all means at its disposal” was a demarcation of its obligations and whether or not Japan can send its Self-Defense Forces on UN missions has been debated in the Diet since then. Soon after its accession to the UN on July 30, 1958, Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld asked the Japanese government to send 10 SDF officers as military observers to reinforce the United Nations Observer Group in Lebanon. Although the mission was to monitor a ceasefire and did not involve combat, the Japanese government declined the UN request because the mission might involve activities that were outside of the scope of existing domestic laws, including the Self-Defense Forces Law.

During the 1990-91 Gulf War, when Japan was accused of not doing enough despite its very substantial monetary contributions, it was likened to a cash dispenser, disbursing cash in piecemeal fashion without working up much of a sweat. In response to such criticism, the Diet subsequently passed the International Peace Cooperation Law (the so-called PKO Law) stipulating five strict conditions under which the SDF could be dispatched. Three of the conditions — the existence of a ceasefire agreement, consent of the parties for deployment, and impartiality — are the same as the UN's PKO principles. Japan added two more, namely, (1) should any of the above three conditions not be met, the government of Japan may withdraw its contingent, and (2) the use of weapons shall be limited to the minimum necessary to protect the lives of personnel. These stipulations were intended to make sure that the dispatch was not unconstitutional. Since the law came into force in 1992, Japan has sent SDF personnel to places such as Cambodia, the Golan Heights, and Timor-Leste. Japan is currently participating in a UN peace-building mission in South Sudan.

The current official interpretation of the Constitution is that “Japan has the right of collective self-defense, as stated in the UN Charter, but cannot exercise it.” This interpretation has constrained Japan's security role so far. Nevertheless, over the years Japan has been contributing to international peace, security, and prosperity through other means, including development assistance, capacity building assistance, and disaster relief, in addition to peace-keeping and peace-building activities.

What Does “Proactive Contribution to Peace” Mean?

As a basic concept, the NSS calls for Japan's proactive contribution to peace based on international cooperation. I wrote a policy recommendation on proactive contribution to peace over a decade ago in March 2001 in a National Institute for Research Advancement (NIRA) Research Report entitled, “Japan's Proactive Peace and Security Strategies”. I translated the concept as “proactive peace and security strategies” rather than a “proactive contribution to peace”. In the report I argued that:

Looking toward the 21st century, we Japanese need to make efforts to establish our identities as “Japan living in the global village,” based on the recognition that the existence of Japan is inevitably linked with other parts of the world. Undeniably, Japan's traditional peace and security strategies after the end of World War II in which we declared “not to become an

aggressor,” “not to possess nuclear weapons” and “not to export weapons” have contributed to world peace in no small measure. However, in the future, it is desirable to develop “proactive peace and security strategies,” where “Japan will proactively do something for world peace,” rather than reactive peace and security strategies.

Thus I placed “proactive contribution to peace” on the other end of the spectrum from the reactive and passive pacifism of postwar Japan. After World War II, as I noted above, Japan was cautious in playing a security role while it reconstructed and developed its war-ravaged economy. Japan wanted to remove its militarist image and wanted to portray itself as a peace-loving nation. In its public diplomacy, Japan avoided any image of militarism, even to the extent of not introducing traditional Kabuki and Noh plays in which samurai are portrayed. Also, Japan did not promote Japanese language education overseas — normally an important element of cultural diplomacy — until the 1970s because Japan’s prewar language education was strongly linked to military expansionism. Instead, Japan turned to the tea ceremony and flower arrangement to transmit a peaceful image of the country.

In the postwar period, it was sufficient for Japan to avoid talk of security issues to demonstrate its peaceful stance. And other countries did not expect Japan to play a significant role in defense and security, either. Today, however, in the face of the broadening, increasingly transnational nature of security issues, Japan can no longer ensure its own peace by doing nothing unless told. The international community, likewise, cannot afford to have the world’s third-largest economic power remain passive and reactive on security issues. We need to become more proactive in securing peace both at home and abroad. The basic principle of promoting peace has not changed, but we need to be more proactive.

In 2009 the Japan Forum on International Relations published a report entitled “Positive Pacifism and the Future of the Japan-US Alliance” which in its Japanese edition used the same phrase I had earlier proposed but used a different phrase — “positive pacifism” — for its English translation.

These were the ideas that eventually gave rise to the concept of a “proactive contribution to peace”.

Proactive Contributions Thus Far

Without using the label, though, Japan has already been proactive in its contributions to peace. One such example is the dispatch of Japanese SDF personnel and civilians on UN peacekeeping and peace-building missions. In recent years, Japanese nationals have participated in and even led UN missions in Cambodia, Timor-Leste, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and elsewhere and have also served as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

The unanswered questions about Japan’s participation in UN PKO missions still remain, however. When I was in South Sudan in July 2013, Hilde Johnson, the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General, complained to me that the SDF cannot be deployed to

dangerous zones, while Koreans are dispatched to unstable areas such as Jonglei. She hastily added, however, that she appreciates the high discipline of the Japanese contingent. This question is currently being debated by the Advisory Council on the Collective Right to Self-Defense, and a decision should subsequently be made by the government.

The second example of Japan’s proactive contributions to peace is the efforts made to mainstream and seek the implementation of the notion of human security. Since the speech by Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi in December 1998 announcing assistance for people hit by the Asian monetary crisis, Japan has promoted the broadly interpreted notion of human security embracing both freedom from fear (in such manifestations as conflict, terrorism, landmines, small arms, and human trafficking) and freedom from want (including currency crises, natural disasters, environmental degradation, infectious diseases, and poverty).

Some UN member states interpret the notion narrowly, focusing on the freedom from fear, while others view the concept as more broadly encompassing freedom from want. There are some who oppose the notion altogether, moreover, worried that “human security” might be used as a pretext to interfere in the domestic affairs of other countries with coercive measures. Concern has particularly been voiced over the notion of “responsibility to protect” which allows intervention with force in the event of massive genocide or other extreme cases.

Japan has led the discussions on human security, seeking a convergence of the various interpretations and eradication of concerns. Japan has tried to mainstream it by having a paragraph on human security inserted in the 2005 Outcome Document — the first mention in an official General Assembly document — and subsequently through the adoption of a common understanding of human security in UN Resolution 66/290. The resolution interpreted human security as embracing the right of people to live in freedom and dignity, free from want — that is, poverty and despair — and freedom from fear.

Japan has also advanced human security through official development assistance (ODA) to fragile states. This is corroborated in the August 2003 revision of the ODA Charter, which states that development should be approached from “the perspective of human security”, toward which end the protection and empowerment of individuals are important. Then in February 2005, Japan’s Medium-Term Policy on Official Development Assistance identified human security as a pillar of the nation’s ODA policy. This underscores the need for a human-centered approach and empowerment of local people — a thrust that has been embraced by the Japan International Cooperation Agency.

The United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security (UNTFHS) is the main avenue through which Japan has promoted the concept of human security. The Japanese government has continued contributing to the fund, donating a total sum of ¥42.8 billion (\$390 million), as of October 2013.

While initially the sole donor, Japan has persuaded other UN member states supporting the concept to contribute to the fund. In response, Slovenia has contributed \$47,000 and Thailand \$60,000

since 2007, and in 2010 Greece gave \$150,000 and Mexico \$5,000. As of October 2013, the UNTFHS has funded 210 projects in 85 countries.

Although the UNTFHS was initially regarded as just another aspect of Japanese ODA, the Advisory Board on Human Security revised its guidelines in January 2005 to mainstream projects that include a wider range of interconnected regions and areas and in which multiple international organizations and NGOs participate with the intention of integrating humanitarian and development assistance by strengthening people's capacity and seamlessly implementing assistance in the transitional period between conflict and peace.

The *Rapid Assessment of the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security*, published by Universalis in May 2013, reports that the human security approach at the project level has filled unaddressed areas; empowered stakeholders; is a valuable tool in promoting the three pillars of the United Nations — development, human rights, and peace and security — and overall has had a beneficial impact.

The third example of Japan's proactive contributions, related to the second, as the *Chart* shows, is its ODA disbursements. While assistance was initially offered to other countries in Asia, it is now provided worldwide, including Africa, contributing to the stability of the region. Japan not only assists conflict-ridden countries but also their neighbors, which could be affected by an influx of refugees or terrorists from failed states. Security and development are closely inter-related. When security is unstable and conflicts recur, the fruits of development could be wiped out. When a region remains undeveloped after conflict, local residents will not be at peace and may be unable to build a resilient society. Despite criticisms of the securitization of development, there is a nexus between security and development.

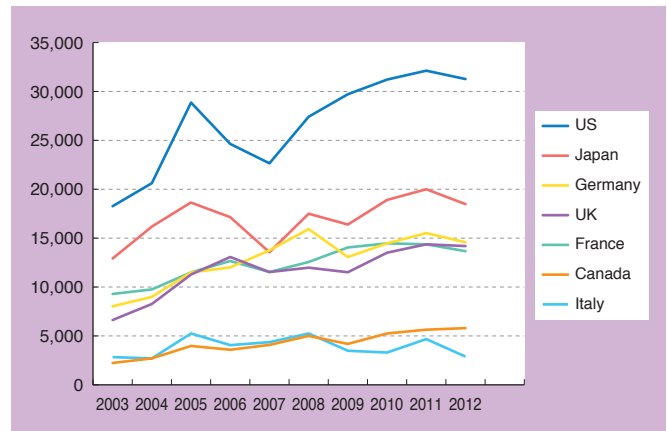
The NSS specifically mentions that "Japan has garnered high recognition by the international community, by its proactive contribution to global development in the world through utilizing ODA. Addressing development issues contributes to the enhancement of the global security environment and it is necessary for Japan to strengthen its efforts as a part of 'Proactive Contribution to Peace' based on the principle of international cooperation."

The fourth example is that the Japanese Ministry of Defense since 2011 has been providing capacity building assistance to other Asian countries in nontraditional security areas, including training for humanitarian assistance/disaster relief; non-combatant evacuation operations; training of coast guards for piracy control; training in peacekeeping operations focusing on infrastructure; and defense medicine. Such training and assistance would allow countries to utilize their own resources in dealing with crisis situations and can also deepen cooperation between Japan and the recipient countries, contributing to regional stability. Japan is also collaborating with Australia and others in capacity building assistance.

Japan has thus already been making proactive contributions to peace, and it intends to do more in the years to come. Japan has not suddenly shifted from a reactive to a proactive approach with the Dec. 17, 2013, announcement of the NSS. The strategy also emphasizes contributions through international cooperation, as security

CHART

ODA disbursement by major donors (\$ million)



Source: OECD/DAC and Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs

challenges are becoming more transnational. It calls for collaboration with other countries in the region and in the international community in domains ranging from cyberspace and terrorism to maritime security.

Japan's Role in Promoting Peace & Stability

Japan's "proactive contribution to peace based on international cooperation" is therefore not a mere political label or a cover for militarization. The NSS will enable Japan to be more strategic in implementing its contributions. The revised National Defense Program Guidelines, announced on the same day, reflects this thrust.

The NSS notes that Japanese security strategy is to be based on both defense and diplomacy and that Japan needs a whole-government approach under the leadership of the newly created National Security Council (NSC). Given the diversification of security threats today, Japan must develop additional strategies and concrete plans to clearly map out what it intends to do regarding issues such as cyber attacks, maritime security, poverty, pandemics and health, and natural disasters. In facing these security threats, one has to take both hard and soft security approaches in a comprehensive manner in order to build a resilient society.

Combined with the upcoming revision of the ODA charter and changes in the interpretation of Japan's right of collective self-defense and collective security, Japan has a chance to truly become a proactive contributor to peace based on international cooperation. The real questions are what Japan actually implements and how other countries respond through closer collaboration for peace, stability, and resilience.

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