

How Strong a Japan?

By Takashi Sakuma

There have recently been loud calls for Japan to play a greater role in the international community. Both developing and Western industrialized countries alike say Japan should assume responsibilities commensurate with its position of strength. Behind this, of course, is the perception that Japan now has the ability, as represented by its new-found prosperity, to take on a variety of roles in the international community.

Among the many duties assigned the Economic Planning Agency's Planning Bureau is that of measuring and analyzing overall national strength, and it was thus that the EPA asked the Japan Research Institute to conduct a basic study of Japan's comparative strength and to assess Japan's ability to contribute more actively to the betterment of the international community. This analysis draws heavily on that report.

Historical changes

National strength may be seen as a central concept in the study of international politics, and many researchers have developed theses concerning national strength. Among them, Hans Morganthau's work on national strength stands out as consolidating the field. Morganthau defines national strength as the foundation of pursuing the state's external policies and cites the following nine elements as constituting national strength: 1) geographical conditions, 2) natural resources, 3) industrial capacity, 4) military might, 5) population, 6) national character, 7) national will, 8) the quality of diplomacy, and 9) the quality of government.

Yet there are limits to the applicability of this classical concept of national strength, and the concept of national strength cannot be unchanging. Any analysis of national strength that is intended to be meaningful in the real world must have concepts that develop and evolve with the changes in the international community. Two points are especially important in considering na-

tional strength today: 1) the sharp increase in economic interdependence among nations and 2) the fact that the advent of nuclear weapons deters military conflict between the superpowers.

Defining national strength

National strength is a multifaceted concept whose constituent elements vary depending on which facets are emphasized by a particular researcher. Before starting to consider overall national strength, it is therefore useful to look at a number of aspects of national strength. This report, along with looking at such traditional facets as survivability and international influence, also attempts to deal with the concept of the ability to contribute to the international community, a new side to the discussion that is introduced in light of the heightened international interdependence. Although these three aspects are discussed separately, however, they are by no means unrelated, impacting both on each other and on the whole. Indeed, economic strength is seen as a factor in all three facets, and military might is an important element of both of the traditional measures.

Ability to contribute to the international community

This ability to make a contribution to the international community includes the country's ability to exercise initiative in the formation and development of international systems and to contribute to the betterment of the international community through the operation of international systems. Unlike survivability and influence, this facet of national strength emphasizes international interdependence in a plus-sum system. Another difference is that whereas survivability and influence assume a state of turmoil or emergency, ability to contribute to the international community is a measure of national strength in times of peace.

Very broadly, the ability to contribute to the international community may be seen as constituted of the two elements of

basic potential (economic power in the broad sense) and the executive ability to bring that basic potential to bear on external relations.

Basic potential includes economic power, financial strength and scientific and technological ability; and executive ability includes fiscal strength, foreign policy consensus and the ability to act in the international community.

Survivability

Survivability is, obviously, the ability to survive an international crisis. Thus this is national strength in times of emergency, and its elements vary depending on what kind of a crisis is postulated. The reason that the traditional theory of national strength has emphasized geographical factors, natural resources and other like factors is that these factors were considered important to the nation's survival. At the same time, the concept of total national security (as opposed to the narrower concept of military security) that so preoccupies Japanese policymakers is basically a debate over how to enhance the survivability elements.

In this study, the following seven elements were taken as determining survivability: 1) geography, 2) population, 3) natural resources, 4) economic strength, 5) defense capability, 6) popular thinking, and 7) alliances.

Influence

Also known as international clout, influence is the ability to force the nation's will on other nations and to influence their behavior. Even making allowance for alliances, this facet of national strength is basically the zero-sum concept of emphasizing the nation's own national interests and controlling other nations to ensure that national interests are satisfied. Given that force is the ultimate tool of influence, military might is a major component of this concept.

In this study, the following four elements are taken as constituting influence: 1) military might, 2) strategic materials and technologies, 3) economic influence, and 4) diplomatic skills.

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Indexing methodology

There have been many attempts to compile international comparisons of national strength, foremost among them the work of L.S. Cline. Drawing on these studies as well as our own priorities, we have attempted to quantify national strength with special consideration to the points set out below.

In attempting to measure actual national strength, it is first necessary to draw up indices of the various elements constituting national strength. However, given the extreme difficulty of finding statistics that perfectly describe the concepts being advanced, it is often necessary to settle for approximate indicators or substitute variable indicators. In economic strength, for example, it was possible to obtain GNP, growth rate, trade and other figures; yet other criteria such as foreign policy consensus are less amenable to being measured.

At the same time, because national strength is such a multihued concept, it is often impossible to assess national strength except in the context of an international comparison. As a result, it is imperative that comparable data be found for all of the nations to be compared, and this requirement further limits the scope

of data that can be used. Given these statistical constraints, this study looked only at Japan, West Germany, France, the United Kingdom and the United States.

While the Soviet Union is obviously an important international player, the vast differences in its economic and social system mean that there are many indicators that cannot be measured on the same scale as for the Western industrial democracies. Accordingly, figures for the Soviet Union should be seen as reference values calculated from best estimates in some areas.

In deriving indicators, 1985 figures were used in principle. When international comparisons were based on monetary value, the exchange rate prevailing as of the end of 1986 was used for the sake of convenience, given that international currency exchange rates have fluctuated considerably since late 1985. Finally, the figures were indicized by taking the highest value as 100 and then calculating international comparative indices for the other nations.

Assessment

The results of the analysis on the three facets of national strength are given below.

Ability to contribute to the international community

Japan's ability to contribute to the international community, while only about 60% of that of the United States, is still larger than that of the European countries [Table 1-(1)].

This 60% represents a considerable improvement over the past 20 years. In 1965, Japan's basic strength was only about one-sixth that of the United States, and Japan ranked lower than the West European countries. Yet Japan's basic potential has been rapidly enhanced over the past two decades, until it is now over half of America's and far more than the West European countries. By contrast, executive ability has not grown nearly as fast as basic potential has, and Japan was still lagging far behind the West European countries even in 1985.

Survivability

The highest figure for survivability was the figure for the Soviet Union, which was calculated simply for reference, and the next-largest that for the United States. Japan stood at about half the American figure, slightly higher than the West European countries [Table 1-(2)].

These results are somewhat surprising

Table 1 The Three Facets of National Strength (as of 1985)

(1) Ability to contribute to the international community

	Japan	U.S.	U.K.	West Germany	France	Soviet Union
1. Economic power	50	100	17	34	17	30
2. Financial strength	57	100	11	37	11	0
3. Scientific and technological ability	47	100	13	21	13	79
Basic potential	51	100	14	31	14	35
4. Fiscal strength	72	81	100	79	89	93
5. Foreign policy consensus	54	52	66	96	100	24
6. Ability to act internationally	63	100	67	67	67	62
Executive ability	77	98	95	94	100	77
Total ability to contribute	61	100	43	54	45	50

(2) Survivability

	Japan	U.S.	U.K.	West Germany	France	Soviet Union
1. Geography	24	100	23	7	16	206
2. Population	51	100	23	26	23	117
3. Natural resources	8	100	64	34	36	103
4. Economic strength	62	100	32	58	29	36
5. Defense capability	7	100	10	10	10	100
6. Popular thinking	100	98	88	89	83	96
7. Alliances	100	88	95	85	95	178
Total survivability	56	100	52	49	47	119

(3) Influence

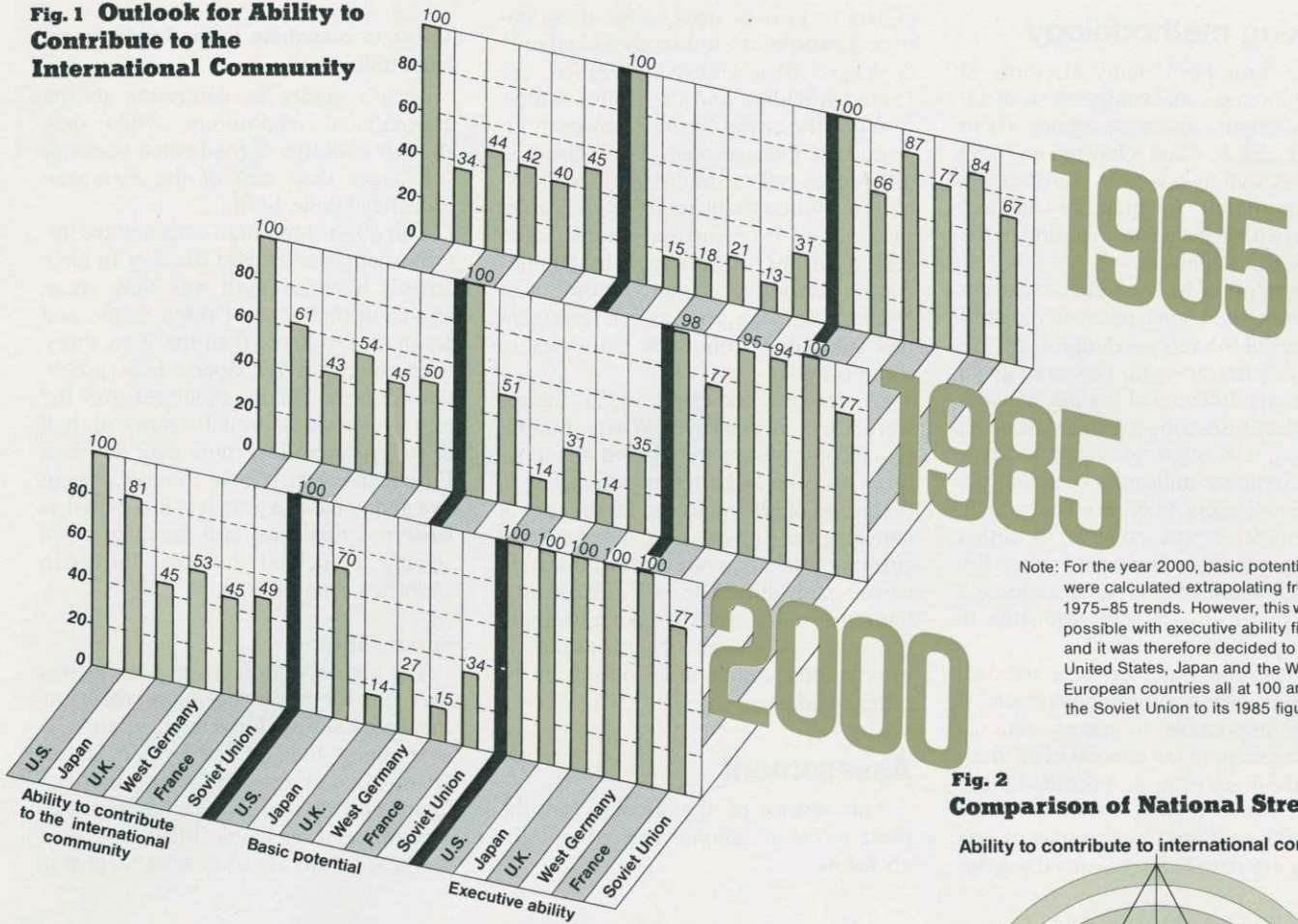
	Japan	U.S.	U.K.	West Germany	France	Soviet Union
1. Military might	0	100	33	10	57	86
2. Strategic materials and technologies	50	100	11	17	16	59
3. Economic influence	43	100	39	36	32	23
4. Diplomatic skills	27	100	58	50	51	97
Total influence	24	100	35	24	42	70

Notes: 1. Rankings for the five leading Western industrial democracies and factors were calculated and then indexed against the highest value, which was assigned a value of 100. (Note that the figure for the Soviet Union is purely for reference purposes, such that it is possible for it to exceed 100.)

2. Figures are 1985 figures whenever possible, but nearest-year figures had to be used when 1985 figures were not available.

3. For indices that were calculated in monetary terms, the currency exchange rates prevailing in December 1986 were used.

Fig. 1 Outlook for Ability to Contribute to the International Community



Note: For the year 2000, basic potential figures were calculated extrapolating from 1975-85 trends. However, this was not possible with executive ability figures, and it was therefore decided to set the United States, Japan and the West European countries all at 100 and to hold the Soviet Union to its 1985 figure of 77.

Fig. 2 Comparison of National Strength

Ability to contribute to international community

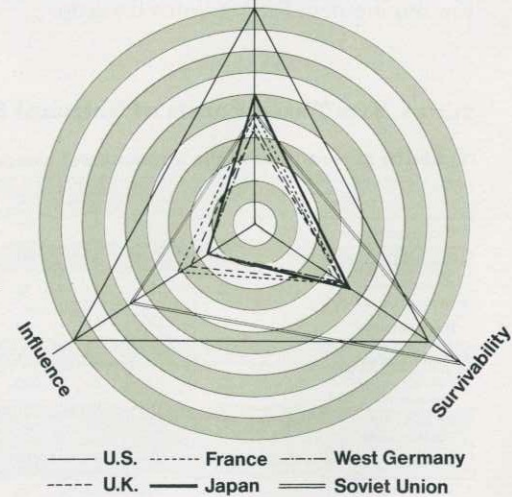


Table 2 Assessment of Total National Strength (for 1985)

	Japan	U.S.	U.K.	West Germany	France	Soviet Union
Ability to contribute	61	100	43	54	45	50
Survivability	56	100	52	49	47	119
International influence	24	100	35	24	42	70
Average	47	100	43	42	45	80

given the general belief that Japan is extremely vulnerable to crises. The reason most people tend to assign Japan a low survivability quotient is that so much is made of the lack of natural resources and the relatively low level of defense preparedness. Even in this study, Japan scored conspicuously low on natural resources. In defense, too, Japan was the lowest of the six countries studied. However, this defense figure is fairly close to the figures for the West European countries because calculations have been done using recent currency exchange values. At the same time, because this study also considers

such factors as economic might, national thinking and international relations, Japan comes out with a higher ranking than most people might have expected.

Influence

Japan has little influence internationally—only about one-quarter that of the United States and considerably less than France or the United Kingdom [Table 1-(3)]. The main reason for this is that Japan does not have the military might to enforce its wishes. Yet the lack of military presence is itself the result of a clear national policy decision, and it thus distin-

guishes Japan as marching to a different drummer in the international community, and it is also possible that this nonmilitarist stance may give it influence that it could not win militarily.

Calculations of overall national strength

All three factors are important to overall national strength. Simply taking the average of the three values would yield approximate overall national strength indices of 100 for the United States, 80 for the Soviet Union and 40-50 for Japan and

Table 3 National Strength Rankings as Revealed by Questionnaire Responses**(1) Present**

(unit: %)

	Japan	U.S.	U.K.	West Germany	France	Soviet Union	China
Ranks first	1.1	97.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.6	0.0
Ranks second	11.1	1.6	1.6	3.2	0.5	80.9	0.5
Ranks third	32.3	0.0	18.6	17.4	6.0	10.8	15.0
Ranks fourth	27.2	1.7	23.1	21.4	8.7	3.5	14.5
Ranks fifth	17.7	0.0	19.5	20.1	19.5	2.4	20.7
Score	41	100	23	23	10	73	17

(2) Future (2000)

(unit: %)

	Japan	U.S.	U.K.	West Germany	France	Soviet Union	China
Will rank first	9.0	83.0	0.0	1.1	0.0	5.9	1.1
Will rank second	17.6	12.2	0.5	2.1	0.0	61.7	5.9
Will rank third	36.8	4.1	3.5	7.0	0.6	16.4	31.6
Will rank fourth	27.9	1.8	9.7	18.8	11.5	8.5	21.8
Will rank fifth	10.7	0.7	26.8	30.2	8.1	4.7	18.8
Will score	57	100	10	19	6	71	35

Notes: 1. Average weightings for the various facets were: (unit: %; three responses per person)

Economic power	77.9	Diplomatic skill	15.9
Scientific and technological ability	67.7	Culture	10.3
Political stability	44.1	Population	8.7
Educational level	43.1	Land area	0.5
Military power	22.1		

2. Based on a questionnaire sent to 800 people selected at random from among the total population of non-Japanese living in Japan. Of these 800, a total of 195 responses were received for a response rate of 24.4%.

3. Rankings were assigned 5 points for first place, 4 for second, 3 for third, 2 for fourth, and 1 for fifth. The totals were then compiled and indexed with the highest figure (that for the United States) set at 100.

the West European countries (Table 2 and Fig. 2).

Yet the three are clearly not equally important, and some weighting of the various constituent elements is needed if we are to derive meaningful assessments of overall national strength. In the absence of any convincing theoretical underpinnings for such weighting, this study used weightings based on the views of the eight-man research team at the Japan Research Institute and the responses received to a questionnaire asking how much emphasis Japan should give to each of the three facets. As a result, the weight-

ing was 5:3:2 for ability to contribute, survivability and influence, respectively. When these weightings are applied to derive total national strength figures and the strongest (the United States) is set at 100, the figures are slightly over 70 for the Soviet Union, somewhat over 50 for Japan and a little over 45 for the nations of Western Europe.

On this same questionnaire, respondents were asked to rank the six countries in order of national strength. When the replies to this question are tabulated and indicized, the United States comes out at 100, the Soviet Union at slightly over 70,

Japan at 40 and the West European countries at between 10 and 20 [Table 3-(1)].

While this questionnaire also asked about the various elements constituting national strength, the results showed that the respondents felt the most emphasis should be given to economic power and scientific and technological ability, followed by political stability and educational levels. By contrast, such things as national land expanse, population, culture, foreign policy skills and military power did not rank that highly on the list of priority elements (Table 3, Note 1). There is clearly a correlation between what the person thought was important and how he ranked the six countries' overall performances.

It should be emphasized that the above figures are simply one set of possibilities and one way of approaching this issue, and it was in no way the intent of the study to try to rank nations in any sort of order. There could be many different views of national strength that are not included here but would be just as valid, and this study simply represents the efforts of one group to try to assess national strength.

Outlook for ability to contribute

Of the three facets, the ability to contribute to the international community seems central to Japan's present situation. It is both the area where Japan is strongest and the area that people suggest Japan should emphasize. Given this, an effort was made to calculate future trends for the leading countries. Looking first at the three elements of basic potential (economic power, financial strength and scientific and technological ability), figures for 2000 were extrapolated from trends to date. If these extrapolations hold, Japan will rise to 70% of the U.S. figure and will surge far ahead of the West European countries (Fig. 1).

This has two major implications. The first is that the predictions of a "Pax Nipponica" rivaling or even replacing the present Pax Americana are premature, at least until sometime well after the turn of the century. And the second is that, while it will not supplant the United States, Japan clearly has the potential to become the second-largest industrial democracy in the world. If Japan is to realize this potential and to translate it into a meaningful contribution to the international community, it will be necessary for Japan to enhance its executive ability commensurate with the enhancement of basic potential. ●