

Comment on Economic Security

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Agree or Disagree?

The concept of national economic security is typically Japanese. No matter what theory and expressions may be used, the idea is, in fact, based upon the conviction that Japan, as a major economic power, can contribute positively to the world with its economic might in lieu of military strength.

The report entitled "Seeking the Establishment of Economic Security of Japan" which was compiled by the Industrial Structure Council, an advisory body to the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), thus fails to outline the crucial relation between Japan's military contribution and its economic security.

Those who favor Japanese military cooperation with other nations tend to be extremely cautious about the idea of national economic security. Although they

avoid open criticism, they appear to regard the conclusions of the report as questionable.

Conversely, those who endorse Japan's current status as a modestly armed economic power tend to agree with the report. My own evaluation of the report is ambiguous.

It is ambiguous because I cannot side with one argument or the other. More specifically, I sympathize with the concept of economic security but not to the extent that I think we should totally dispense with military cooperation.

In my view, the Soviet Union is a highly expansionist and dictatorial nation which believes in the teachings of power and relies solely on military strength.

I think it is only natural for Japan, as one of the leading members of the free world, to play a role in deterring the Soviet Union from military-backed encroachments into the Third World.

Japan Should Remain a Local Power Militarily

But I differ decisively from those who believe Japan should become a major military power. I think Japan should extend military cooperation to other nations but only within the framework of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty. I believe Japan should remain a local power militarily.

We have no choice but to continue our efforts for deterrence until the post-Brezhnev Soviet leadership turns "inward" and makes an all-out effort to solve its domestic problems.

This said, my stand on economic security should be clear. I regard myself as a positive supporter of national economic security.

I support, in particular, the provision of the Council report saying that Japan should, as a global economic power, contribute more than others to the maintenance and strengthening of international political and economic systems for crisis prevention.

There is no need to underline anew the necessity of taking crisis management measures, including stockpiling, for economic security in its narrow sense. Reinforcement of this established policy will suffice for the present. The point is how to meet the cost of these crisis prevention measures.

In principle, taxpayers can meet the cost. But when there is not yet any national consensus on how to right the problem of deficit-ridden state finances, Japan will find itself plagued by a continuing shortage of funds despite any willingness to contribute. This inability is tantamount to a betrayal of other nations' trust, and the government must speedily restore the nation's fiscal health if only for this reason.

Liberalized Market Is the Best Stimulus

While I support the concept of economic security, I find it regrettable that there has been an effort to take advantage of the economic security concept to call for protection of special-interest groups.

Surprisingly, some consumer groups have joined in the call for agricultural protectionism. If these people truly represent consumer interests they should favor the liberalization of agricultural imports and seek ways to revitalize Japanese agriculture. Competition in a freely liberalized market is the best stimulus.

If these consumer leaders are truly on the consumer's side, they should reexamine the idea of national economic security in its broader sense.



Japanese farmers demonstrate against the trade liberalization of agricultural products.

Photo by Asahi Shimbun