

# Contributing to What?

By Takeshi Sasaki

Looking back at the early-January magazines, it is striking how few Japanese authors were expecting the Gulf crisis to develop into the Gulf war. This pervasive optimism that things will somehow work out for the best is also at least part of the reason that there was so little debate about a Japanese role after the Peace Cooperation Bill was abandoned in the Diet late last year.

Once the fighting started, the March issues (which come out in February) were full of Gulf stories, the main thrust of most of the articles being that Japan should fulfill its international responsibilities. Examples here are "The Choices Left for Japan" (March *Bungei Shunju*) and "Assessments of the Gulf War" (March *Voice*). Of course, there was a significant school, such as "The Gulf War and the Self-Defense Forces" (March *Gunshuku*) which continued to champion pacifism in line with the Constitution, but even Japanese pacifism had to develop new outlooks and perspectives. Thus it is well worth looking at how this war has been perceived in Japan and what it has meant for the Japanese world view.

## Police action

The first noteworthy characteristic is that a new line of argument seems to have emerged that sees the Gulf war as a kind of "police action" to beat back aggression and to preserve international peace within the framework of the post-Cold War new world order. Typical here is "Myopic Government and Irresponsible Public Opinion" by Seizaburo Sato and Akihiko Tanaka in the March *Chuo Koron*. According to these people, this was not a war between the United States and Iraq. Rather "the fighting by the multinational forces was not, technically speaking, a war but was a means to enforce United Nations resolutions calling for a halt to Iraqi aggression."

Underlying this interpretation is the expectation that, unless the other coun-

tries cooperate with the United States, the United States will turn isolationist and this will have an unsettling influence on international relations and a deleterious impact on the Japanese economy. While opinion is divided within this school on the adequacy of the cooperation mounted by the Kaifu administration, the overall tone was that these measures were generally consistent with Japanese foreign policy to date in promoting closer ties with the United States and supporting the United Nations.

In a way, this interpretation is a reincarnation of the legalistic and moralistic approach traditional to U.S. foreign policy, and it is not surprising that it has drawn considerable skepticism. Working from the pragmatic approach that all international relations originate in national interest, the first set of questions says that the U.S. action, far from being the war for world justice that President Bush said it was in his official pronouncements, was actually a self-illusion and a dangerous gamble putting America's national interests at risk.

In effect, the skeptics argue that the United States would be better off accepting a multipolar world and seeking to play the role of balancer, since that would allow it to reduce its overseas burden and concentrate on domestic issues, and that it runs contrary to the tide of history to resort to the logic of power and seek to be the world's policeman. Among the articles arguing this position were "When a Superpower Plays Craps" by Terumasa Nakanishi in the March *Voice*, "Whither the World, Whither Japan" by Shintaro Ishihara, Jun Eto and Masataka Kosaka in the March *Bungei Shunju*, and "Military Resolution Marks a Backward Step for History" by Takehiko Kamo in the March 8 *Asahi Journal*. This line has broad support across the political spectrum, and it correlates closely with the widespread acceptance in Japan of the view that the United States is in decline.

Closely related to this, there have also

been those who have argued that the United States wants to use the Gulf war to establish itself as the sole surviving superpower in a unipolar world order. Ken'ichi Ohmae's view is typical. Interviewed for the February 1 and February 8 *Asahi Journals*, Ohmae argues that the most crucial issue facing the post-Cold War world is that of how the international community can leash a rogue America, and he further argues that the United Nations is useless in this endeavor. Even if this is a somewhat extreme statement of the position, it is nonetheless true that victory in the Gulf war is providing a tremendous boost to American confidence (as seen in Charles Krauthammer's "The Unipolar Moment" in *Foreign Affairs*).

## Japan's impotence

The talk in recent years of how the world was drifting to multipolarity was talk grounded in economic realities, and it is worth noting what kind of an impact the Gulf war, with its renewed emphasis on military might, will have on this discussion, especially in a country such as Japan that is not an important political or military presence on the international scene. One reaction already visible is the nationalists' distrust of Bush's new world order and their frustration at Japan's political impotence (see Jun Eto's article in the March 14 *Sapio*).

Kinhide Mushakoji brushes aside talk of a new world order or American unipolar hegemony to argue that the Gulf war is evidence of a new North-South Cold War come to replace the old East-West Cold War and says that the tripartite (America, Europe and Japan) effort to become the world's police force and to subjugate conflict in the South is representative of multilateral military security guarantees ("Time to Stop Echoing U.S. Foreign Policy" in the February 19 *Ekonomisuto*).

Although the Gulf war was fought under the banner of establishing a new



world order, the reality is that it represents an attempt to replace American suzerainty over the South with multinational suzerainty. Specifically, it is inevitably an attempt by the industrial countries to control the sources and supplies of oil. As Mushakoji sees it, even if the effort is made to resolve the North-South conflict by military means, there will be no end to the turmoil in the Southern countries where so many of the world's problems are concentrated, and this effort to impose a multinational suzerainty is no more than building castles in the sand.

Working from these premises, Mushakoji argues that the real imperative for Japan is not that of joining the suzerain triumvirate but is that of opting for policies putting the priority on pacifism (rather than cooperation with the United States) so as to create a world free of hegemony. In essence, he is stressing not the Yoshida Doctrine's outward-looking facet of cooperation with the United States but its inward-looking facet of Japan's peace Constitution and is arguing that, rather than getting bogged down in the quagmire of joint hegemony, Japan should devote its efforts to devising and deploying a proactive foreign policy for peace befitting Japan's status as a peace-loving nation.

In all of the discussions of the Gulf war, one theme has constantly been repeated again and again: simply calling for peace is not enough. Because Japanese pacifism did not offer proactive foreign policy initiatives and was not linked to international networks for peace, it was doomed to being nothing more than a movement against war. Mushakoji answers this criticism by proposing vigorous new foreign policy options for peace in the face of the new North-South Cold War.

It is interesting that Mushakoji, a former vice rector of the United Nations University in Tokyo, says nothing about the linkage between a strategy for peace and relations with the United Nations. Given that Japanese pacifism has a long history of expecting too much from the United Nations in opposing the old Cold War, it may be expected that it was a major shock to these people that war should be waged under the auspices of United



Prime Minister Kaifu conferring with President Bush. The Persian Gulf war illustrated the limits of Japanese political and military muscle.

Nations resolutions. Today, those who champion the United Nations are not the pacifists but the pro-Americans who had until now scorned the UN. It is clear that the United Nations will be a major subject in Japan's foreign policy debate in the years to come.

### Honest broker

It was Terumasa Nakanishi ("The UN's War" in the March *Seiron*) who took the hardest look at what long-term damage this strange war—the first war fought under the auspices of the United Nations as an international institution for peace—will do to the United Nations. Working from the pragmatic perspective of emphasizing national interest, Nakanishi says that even though the Cold War may be over, international relations still revolve around power and national interest and it is unrealistic to expect to be able to devise a politically neutral justice with military action in the international community's name. Instead, he says, now that the Cold War is over, an international order will emerge centering on the United Nations, and sticking doggedly to the legalistic and moralistic approach simply betrays the advocate's ignorance of the realities of international politics.

If this kind of approach is to have any plausibility, the power exercising military force must be perceived as very neutral and military sanctions must be applied even-handedly across the board. In fact, military might is today closely linked with

national interest and political considerations. Adhering blindly to this formula ignores the realities of international relations and may well lead to chaos in the international order. The kind of UN that Nakanishi wants to see is one that can act as an "honest broker" in international disputes and not one that raises the banner of justice and condones the use of military force in every international dispute.

The Gulf war was the first international war that Japan had been involved in since its own adventures nearly 50 years ago. And it was also a stark illustration of the limits to Japanese political and military muscle. The imbalance between Japan's economic might and its helplessness in other fields was plain for all to see. Over the last few years, the structural impediments in the Japanese economy have been much discussed, and the impression is that the Gulf war has laid bare the structural impediments in Japanese politics as well. Since the 1960s, Japan has been an economic giant and a political and foreign policy pygmy. However, the Gulf war, in tandem with the frequent economic friction, has demonstrated that there are limits to what can be accomplished with that approach. The Gulf war is over, but it has left a vast number of political problems in its wake for Japan. ■

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