

Squabbling over Peacekeepers

By Susumu Takahashi

The Japanese media in April and May were dominated by the same issues that dominated Diet debate: the bill to allow Japanese Self-Defense Forces (SDF) personnel to take part in United Nations peacekeeping operations (commonly referred to as the PKO bill) and the pressing perennial issue of political reform.

Although the PKO bill was finally passed on June 15, the deliberations leading to its passage were most irregular to say the least. This issue had been debated since the fall of 1990 with special attention to the Constitutional ramifications, the status and role of the SDF, how Japan can best contribute to the international community's development and stability, and even talk of political realignment. In fact, these peripheral issues got far more attention than the supposedly central issue of peacekeeping operations.

No more taboos

Looking first at the Constitutional issues and how they impact on peacekeeping operations and relations with the United Nations in general, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) had set up a Special Research Commission on Japan's Role in the World Community headed by former Secretary General Ichiro Ozawa to study this, and Ozawa had an article ("Japan's Role in the World Community") in the April *Bungei Shunju* giving his views.

This was quickly followed by a debate between Ozawa and United Social Democratic Party President Satsuki Eda in the May *Chuo Koron* entitled "There Are No Taboos Any More." Both of these articles served to lay the issues out for public discussion. Ozawa says that 99% of the areas where Japan can contribute are non-military but that it is possible for the government to interpret the laws to allow military participation in U.N. forces if appropriate to strengthen the U.N. security guarantees.

Opposing this effort to reinterpret or rewrite the Constitution, Eda says that, while not ruling out Constitutional revision out of hand, he does want to adhere to Constitutional procedures and feels that the government should first pass a Basic Defense Law or Basic Security Law that could set forth the basic principles governing the SDF and hence any role that it might play in U.N. peacekeeping operations. He also suggests that it might be better to constitute an entirely separate, non-SDF organization that could take part in peacekeeping operations and other non-military operations.

Even as this debate was taking place in the public eye, the debate in the Diet was still bogged down in tired formulae, and there was thus considerable criticism of the way the Diet operated. Masao Kanasashi and Terumasa Nakanishi, for example, had a discussion in the May *Gaiko Forum* entitled "Breaking Down the Inner Walls" in which they focused on the way the PKO bill was being deliberated. With a background in international political science, Nakanishi said that the pattern of the debate—one side unalterably opposed and the other side determined to ram the bill through according to an arbitrary schedule—tells him that the Cold War still lives in Japan and that the first need is to tear down this Berlin Wall dividing Japanese from Japanese.

Nihon Keizai Shimbun Deputy Chief Editorial Writer Kanasashi agreed that there is something wrong when the Cold War has ended everywhere else but still persists in the Japanese mindset. He was particularly critical of the way that the PKO bill was being advocated not in line with any long-term vision for a better world but simply because "it is expected of us."

If the PKO bill is going to shape post-Cold War Japanese diplomacy for years to come, as this debate would seem to indicate, it is all the more important that the debate be conducted on broad matters of principle and with a long-term perspec-

tive. It would be disastrous if Japan were to simply yield to the impulse of the moment and approve this bill with no regard to Japan's international position, domestic political implications, or the fact that no consensus has jelled yet—if Japan were to go in one fell swoop from its old isolationist "peace in one country" stance to a new interventionist "one-country peace in the world."

Eloquent critic

This concern was eloquently expressed by Yoichi Higuchi, one of Japan's foremost Constitutional scholars, in his "The Commentator's Responsibility: Why the Debate Is Limited to 'This and That' vs 'This or That'" in the May *UP* (published by the University of Tokyo Press). In this essay, Higuchi argues that the Constitutional debate has its origins in the fact that, "Even though the Constitution is said to be the fundamental law of the land, its legitimacy has yet to be recognized by the political authorities charged with its observance and enforcement." He is, understandably, quite critical of the current debate over the Constitution.

As Higuchi sees it, the current debate is one of people contending that "the Constitution is out of touch with the times" and then citing the need for a change of government and the need to play a greater international role as though they somehow proved the Constitution's obsolescence. The biggest problem with such an approach, Higuchi argues, is that all of this is going on with no explicit statement of what these people intend to do should they take the reins of power or what kind of an international role they have in mind. Instead, they are hell-bent on achieving a change of government and on making some kind of an international contribution, and they are disdainful of fuddy-duddies who dare to suggest that there might be any more important considerations. It is, Higuchi reminds us, a situation fraught with danger.

The debate over the PKO bill has brought to the fore a new party lineup of the LDP, Komeito and the Democratic Socialist Party versus the Social Democratic Party of Japan (SDPJ), and raised the specter of repeated clashes between this government coalition and the fiercely oppositionist SDPJ. This in turn is very likely to put an end to any meaningful discussions over political reform and realignment, even though there may well be some surface activity.

Yet as was made all too clear in the deliberations over the PKO bill, political reform is all the more important. There are also increasing calls from the general public for political reform and realignment. The May 14 *Asahi Shimbun*, for example, carried the results of a poll that found 56% of the respondents wanting to see the creation of a new political force that can transcend party gridlock and provide responsive government.

There are three areas of special note. The first is what the Japanese Trade Union Confederation (JTUC, commonly known as Rengo) will do. This is, it will be recalled, the same Rengo that picked up 13 seats in the 1989 upper house election—its first time out. A national organization of labor unions, Rengo reached an agreement of sorts in mid-May on what to do about the SDF, the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty and the PKO bill.

Breaking out

After analyzing the nature and role of postwar unions, economist Haruo Shimada asked whether Japanese workers are properly rewarded, answered his own question by saying that they are not—be it in terms of working hours, income or housing—and then proposed remedies for the system's various shortcomings. Of course, Shimada's two-part essay "The Limits to Japanese Unionism" (in the April 11 and 18 *Toyo Keizai*) was speaking of the need to reform the entire Japanese economic system, but his analytical focus was on the unions, and he says it is incumbent on Rengo to face these issues head-on and to try to reform Japan's political and administrative system.

The second area of special note is

former Kumamoto Governor Morihiro Hosokawa and his Liberal Social Union (later formally incorporated as the New Japan Party). In his "Inaugural Declaration for the Liberal Social Union" (in the June *Bungei Shunju*), Hosokawa explains why he decided to form a new party and what he wants the party to do. He was especially emphatic on the need to break out of the "Japanese system of centralized power." He intends to "embark on dramatic diplomatic initiatives to put Japan's tremendous vitality at the whole world's service," and the main imperative is that of "taking the political, economic, educational, and cultural paradigm that had become rigidly centralized and rigidly uniform ever since the Meiji Restoration of 1868, and especially during the rapid-growth 1960s, and shaking it up so it is decentralized, diversified, and more in flux."

The third area is the Committee for the Promotion of Political Reforms formed in late April. A private council for political reform, this committee is a group of business leaders, labor leaders and opinion leaders who have found the slow pace of political reform frustrating and have joined together to make recommendations of their own. If all goes well, the committee expects to have its report ready by this fall. At the same time, there is a group of about 100 Diet members who are working to promote political reform in tandem with the committee's efforts, and this supra-partisan group is another new development worth noting.

It is not only in the political arena that Japan is experiencing system fatigue and needs to be reformed. The same thing has been said of the economic system as well.

Economists Takamitsu Sawa and Haruo Shimada diagnose Japan's current economic doldrums and offer lots of suggestions in "Hard Choices in Recessionary Times: Domestic Infrastructure or a Global Contribution" in the May *Sekai*. Sawa says that the current recession is much more serious structurally than either the recession that accompanied the oil crises or the one in 1965. Agreeing that lower interest rates alone will not be enough to pull Japan out of its current

woes, Shimada says we need to face up to the fact that we are confusing our failure to get the economy moving again and our failure to restructure the economy. Because the problems are so structural by nature, they argue, it is imperative that we not restrict ourselves to economic fixes but go on to consider the need for political, social, cultural, and educational reform as well.

Need for reform

Ryuichiro Tate, one of Japan's foremost financial experts, is also on record on the need for reforming the economic system (in the special issue of *Ekonomisto* on the Japanese economy this April). The pattern of government-led economic development that has prevailed since the Meiji Restoration has run its course, and is now inadequate to deal with the diversification of Japanese values and lifestyles, and the need to liberalize its market. Tate says Japan needs to switch to an Anglo-American-style rational market system with minimal government intervention.

At the same time, he rejects the idea that there is any inherent pattern to the Japanese economic system and argues instead that "it is simply the sum of the various means created to respond most rationally to evolving economic and social requirements." As such, he says, there is every reason to believe the economic system can and should change in accordance with its changing circumstances.

Even in the midst of these cries for political and economic reform, the reality of Japanese politics is that it remains myopically wedded to special party interests. How we bridge this gap is the most important issue facing Japan today. ■

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