

# Ticking Time Bombs

By Susumu Takahashi

## Constitutional reform

The first focus of media attention in February was United Nations Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's reported suggestion that Japan should take part in U.N. peacemaking forces even if this involved amending the Japanese Constitution. Visiting Japan shortly after this was reported, Boutros-Ghali was welcomed with decidedly mixed emotions.

In examining this question, the first reference is a non-Japanese source: *The New York Times'* February 22 editorial "Let Japan Choose Peace" (also carried in the *International Herald Tribune*). In this editorial, *The New York Times* wrote that, "Although Japan has ... built up a new military, its constitutional language has kept militarist ideology in check and made possible the most democratic, as well as the most prosperous, era of Japan's long history ... Japan's voters are free to change their constitution. But they are entitled to know that few knowledgeable foreigners are clamoring for a change."

There has been sharp debate within Japan over the constitution in general and the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) in particular. Constitutional scholar Yoichi Higuchi wrote ("Hidden Agendas Behind the Constitutional Debate" in the March *Sekai*) that the real question is whether or not human rights—which means respect for the individual—will take root in Japan and amending Article IX, which has been the focus of the furor, would mean making a shambles of the constitution before respect for the individual really became ingrained. As such, he has opened up a

new window of debate on the spirit of the constitution and the morality of changing it. In response, British Japanologist Ronald Dore said in discussion with Higuchi ("Can the Use of Force Ever Be Justified?" *ibid.*) that the SDF are inherently in violation of Article IX, that riding roughshod over this central tenet of the constitution is the greater evil, and that paragraph 2 of Article IX should be amended to provide for a military force that would be explicitly restricted to defending Japanese territory, would provide rescue and relief in the wake of natural disasters wherever in the world they may occur, and would take part in true

U.N. military operations.

Also noteworthy in this connection is the suggestion made by a number of younger researchers ("Why Not a 'Basic Peace Law'?" April *Sekai*) arguing for leaving Article IX alone but enacting a Basic Peace Law that would have quasi-constitutional force. As envisioned, this would reorganize and restrict the purpose of the SDF to solely defend Japanese territory, would provide for an entirely separate force to take part in U.N. peacekeeping operations and the like, and would incorporate the three non-nuclear principles (no production, no possession and no introduction) and other basic tenets of postwar defense policy. This proposal has also created a stir among Rengo (Japanese Private-Sector Trade Union Confederation) labor unions and the Socialist Democratic Party of Japan (SDPJ) as they move to review and rethink their long-standing policy that the SDF is unconstitutional.

## The United Nations

Also in connection with constitutional issues, there was considerable discussion of the U.N. and its peacekeeping fatigue. Hidemasa Tanaka, a younger member of the Liberal Democratic Party's liberal wing, wrote ("Restructuring the U.N.," March *Sekai*) that the debate over what Japan should do by way of an international contribution has largely ignored the question of what kind of world Japan wants to see and that this question should be the point of departure in any formulation. Building upon that, he makes a number of recommendations for restructuring the U.N. and Japan's relationship with the U.N. For one, he says that Japan should not aspire to a permanent seat on the U.N. Security Council and should even decline if such a seat were offered, given that it does not have any clear ideas about what it would want to do as a permanent member. Second he says that we need a new U.N. to deal with the imperatives of achieving across-the-board disarmament, solving the global environmental crisis, securing respect for human rights worldwide, and rectifying the disparity between

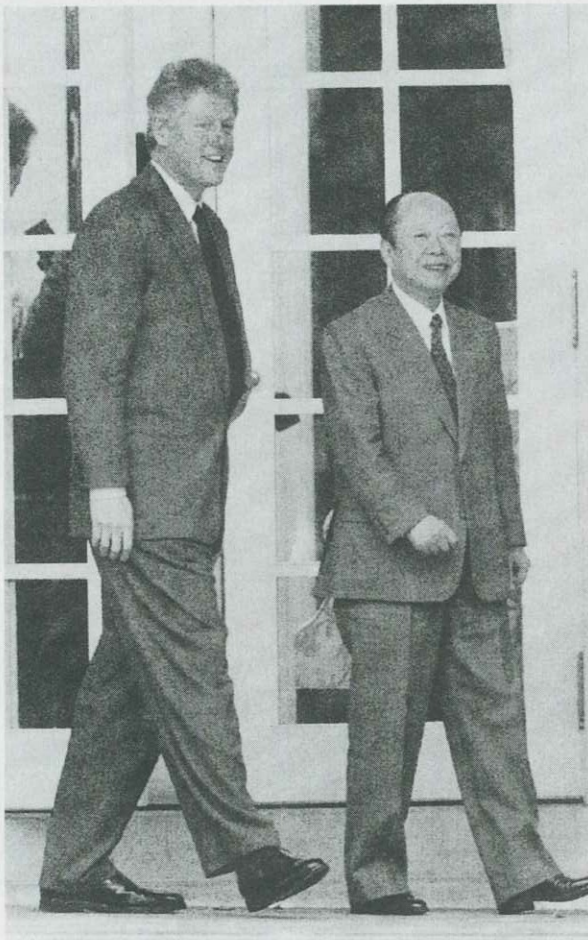


Photo: Kyodo News Service

Putting an end to the "economic cold war" was the focal point of the Clinton/Miyazawa meeting held in Washington in mid-April.

North and South. This should include (a) reorganizing the way the U.N. and the Security Council are run, (b) formulating a firm international consensus on the procedural prerequisites for the use of force so we do not see wanton first-resort to force by the U.N. in any and every contingency, and (c) creating a standing world police force under the U.N.

International political scientist Terumasa Nakanishi takes a more cautious stance ("Questions About a U.N.-enforced Peace," *March Voice*). In particular, he says that there are many difficult problems to be resolved before reality can catch up with the principle of global responsibility for the U.N. If we operate according to universal principles, then the U.N. should be obligated to intervene in all conflicts everywhere. But if we allow the U.N. to choose its battles on the basis of where it can be most effective, then this will be selectivity and will undermine the principle of universality. Because of this logical dilemma, Nakanishi contends, it is only right that there should be constraints on what the U.N. can or cannot do for conflict resolution.

## Clintonomics

Perhaps it is because of Japan's enormous trade surplus, but the other industrial countries' economic policies toward Japan have begun to take on worrisome overtones. When former Foreign Minister Michio Watanabe visited the United States, President Clinton reminded him on February 11 how important the trade balance with Japan is, made a strong call for reducing the U.S. deficit and providing strengthened market access, and said that the Super 301 provisions should not be invoked very often but might come into play depending upon how responsive Japan was.

Then on February 19, U.S. Treasury Secretary Lloyd Bentsen made a comment seeming to support the yen's appreciation and the yen started on an upward course that took it to nearly ¥110 to the dollar by late March. The European countries are also fidgeting about their deficits with Japan, and there are even some people who have begun referring to the trade surplus as a time bomb ticking away for the Japanese economy.

Yet the main focus in Japan was on the economic policy President Clinton



announced in mid-February. Naoka Ishii, one of Japan's younger economists, commented on U.S. industrial policy ("Clintonomics: Market Inefficiencies vs. Government Inefficiencies," *March Keizai Seminar*) saying that Clinton's industrial policy is not intended to nurture specific industries the way Japanese industrial policy is but is instead intended to offset the market's shortcomings. Having done considerable study of technology, the economist Kotaro Suzumura zeroed in on Clinton's technology policy ("Trade and Industrial Policy Under President Clinton," March 6 *Toyo Keizai*) and questioned whether or not it would actually help boost American competitiveness. One of the reasons for questioning the policy's effectiveness is that he doubts it is actually possible to read and analyze the mountains of information that is available on markets and technology, to identify strategically important fields accurately, and to provide the right incentives and fine-tuned support for companies that operate in the very complex world of cross-border competition and cooperation. This is, Suzumura points out, very much like the problem that the old socialist governments faced in trying to grow their centrally planned economies, and it is forbiddingly complex. The same issue of *Toyo Keizai* had a cover story on U.S. trade policy entitled "Is Clinton a Threat to Japan?" that noted the emergence of what might be called the "crowbar school" of trade hard-liners who believe that the United States has to "get tough" to open other markets and said these people dominate the Clinton policy

team. This "crowbar school" is bound to provide work for numerous commentators in the months ahead.

## Japanese politics

Japanese domestic politics was rocked in early March with the arrest of former LDP kingmaker Shin Kanemaru, and the March 23 *Ekonomisuto* sponsored a panel discussion entitled "Kanemaru's Arrest and Japanese Politics' Cardiac." In this meeting political analyst Michitoshi Takahata said that the basic problem with Japanese politics is that there is a very strong connection between money and favors. He went on to say that it was the various special-interest caucuses that institutionalized this relationship and the media will doubtlessly have more to say about caucus members when the workings of the caucuses becomes better known. The main and most urgent imperative in Japanese politics today is that of regaining popular trust, and everyone is watching closely to see what kinds of radical political reforms, including reforming the electoral system, legislators can come up with. Depending upon how this debate goes, there is even the possibility that both the LDP and the SDPJ will split, the Japan New Party and other new parties might come to center-stage, and we might see a whole realignment of Japanese politics. The economy is not the only area with a time bomb ticking away. ■

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