

PERSPECTIVES

JAPAN'S "NEW INTERNATIONALISM"

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DECEMBER 2005

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**Response to Consul-General Kawada;
Japan's "New Internationalism"¹**

Malcolm Cook

"Open systems" foreign policy:

Two major accelerating trends in foreign policy-making that are affecting all countries are weighing particularly heavily on Japan and its global image. The first trend is the expansion of policy issues with a distinct and undeniable external dimension to them. Very few, if any, policy or even statutory issues are now strictly local. In the case of Japan, this has been clearest on the economic front over the tension between industrial policy (internally focussed) and trade policy (externally focussed) and exchange rate/monetary policy. More telling is the intense foreign criticism of particular editions of Japanese history textbooks. What is officially a routine policy matter for the Ministry of Education is now one of the most challenging issues for Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The textbook issue is one of the world's most extreme examples of this trend and the new difficulties it creates for foreign policy-making particularly as it is an issue over which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has no direct control.

The Australian government has responded to this trend by shifting comparatively quickly and comprehensively to a whole-of-government approach to policy-making that attempts to minimise inter-departmental barriers and turf wars. A whole-of-government approach also permits a more effective marriage of political, policy and administrative demands and constraints. Unfortunately, for Japan the very size of its government and the strong "silo mentality" of its bureaucratic agencies make any such shift much more difficult.

The second trend is intimately related to the first and adds another challenging and ever-shifting dimension to foreign policy. Driven by the surfeit of 24-hour news outlets, individual governments and societies are under the global spotlight like never before. The global coverage of America's response to Hurricane Katrina, with each news outlet tailoring it for

¹ This Perspectives comes from a presentation the author gave at the Australia-Japan Roundtable on 25 November 2005. The presentation was a response to a speech given by the Japanese Consul-General outlining Japan's new internationalism. The Roundtable was organised by Australia-Japan Economic Intelligence Inc and hosted by Macquarie Bank.

their own audiences, is a good example of this powerful trend and its impact on national image. Very little is now beyond the reach of the “real time” global media needing to fill programming minutes or column inches. Along with the international media, the number of civil society groups with global ambitions and reach is growing.

In the case of Japan, the thirty-year campaign for equal opportunity in the workplace is a classic example of growing foreign interest in Japan and its policy impacts. Japan’s workplace relations became a cause celebre for local and international feminist groups that worked together to place significant pressure on the Japanese government and Japanese firms. The textbook issue is another long-standing and damaging example of this trend in Japan. Japan’s significant global weight and its unresolved regional historical issues intensify this trend for Japan, and often mean that international coverage and interest in Japan take a critical slant. Policies and political comments that touch on these historical issues like Yasukuni shrine visits are particularly prone to capture international attention. Certainly, Prime Minister Koizumi’s visits have garnered more international coverage and opprobrium than Prime Minister Nakasone’s 1985 visit.

“Traditional internationalism”:

I fully agree with the Consul-General’s main contention that over the last 15 years, Japanese foreign policy has undergone a significant shift, triggered by the first Gulf War, to what he refers to as “new internationalism.” Before I give my comments on Japan’s new internationalism, it is worthwhile reflecting a bit on Japan’s traditional internationalism that determined Japanese foreign policy from the 1950s until the 1990s.

Japan’s traditional internationalism was a Nordic/Canadian style foreign policy with superpower grunt. Its founding principle was Japanese pacifism, and its main levers were official development aid and strong support for multilateralism. Its legal touchstone was Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution. Traditional internationalism was primarily concerned with improving the image of the Japanese state within Japan and globally. Strong support for multilateral institutions and comparatively large aid expenditures also acted as an “insurance policy” for Japan’s renewed global role and interests and its lack of “hard power.” Traditional internationalism both embodied the spirit of Article 9 and presented a policy response to Japan’s disastrous war-time image.

Traditional internationalism, apart from embodying Article 9, fit very well with Japan’s intensely pacifist domestic opinion and anger at where Japanese militarism had led the

country. One of the largest domestic political battles in post-war Japan was the establishment of the Self-Defence Forces. Traditional internationalism also addressed regional sensitivities about Japan's hegemonic potential. The riots in Southeast Asia that dogged Prime Minister's Tanaka's 1974 tour (the first by a post-war Japanese leader) sparked a crisis in Japan's regional relations. This led to a deepening of Japan's traditional internationalism and its refocussing on Southeast Asia and official development aid.

Traditional diplomacy's strong support for multilateral bodies and its focus on Southeast Asia was instrumental in the creation and underwriting of regional and global institutions. Japan's Ministry of Finance established the Asian Development Bank (headquartered in Ortigas, Manila) while Japan provided significant financial support for ASEAN's industrial projects. Japan provides roughly 56% of the total annual budget for the APEC Secretariat in Singapore and 20% of the United Nations' budget despite still being classified as an "enemy state" by the United Nations and not having a permanent seat on the Security Council. By comparison, Japan's share of APEC's regional GDP is 22% and its share of global GDP is roughly 12%.

Japan's traditional internationalism accepted very large financial outlays for quite limited "national interest" returns and in many ways tried to downplay Japan's great power potential. Traditional internationalism also spoke directly to shared domestic and international concerns about the use of Japanese state power.

Declining returns/supports:

While the crisis of the Tanaka riots deepened traditional internationalism, the foreign policy crisis triggered by Japan's participation in the first Gulf War was the watershed crisis for the ongoing shift to new internationalism. Japan's active, non-military response to the first Gulf War followed the tenets of traditional internationalism and these tenets led to the crisis. Japan, referring to Article 9, did not send any troops but supported the war to the tune of \$13 billion, a huge financial commitment. Japan's non-military response was also fully in tune with pacifist domestic opinion. Yet, Japan was widely criticised by other contributors and by the international media, while Kuwait pointedly excluded Japan from the list of countries it thanked in every international newspaper at the end of the war. Japan's traditional internationalism provided huge outlays for an international crisis and delivered a significant loss of national interest and national image in a concerted, public manner that shocked Tokyo.

North Korea

If the first Gulf War was a sudden decisive crisis for traditional internationalism, the North Korean issue and the rise of China are two long-term regional security issues that are undermining the utility of traditional internationalism and shaping what the Consul-General refers to as new internationalism. North Korea's nuclear brinkmanship and its vitriolic approach to Japan may have contributed more than any other external issue to the Japanese public's willingness to provide the state more leeway in addressing external threats. North Korea's 1998 missile test over the Sea of Japan shook Japan deeply. The missiles provocatively tested by North Korea over Japan's maritime boundaries theoretically can target some of Japan's major cities and largest nuclear power sites. More recently, the revival of Japanese public attention to North Korea's abduction of Japanese citizens has significantly soured Japanese opinion towards North Korea and deepened Japan's North Korea threat perceptions.

China

The rapid rise of China economically and diplomatically and the fact that this power shift is still in its early stages is the most fundamental and worrying change to Japan's strategic environment. Like North Korea, it directly threatens Japan's relative strategic insulation which acted as a main support for traditional internationalism. Politically frigid relations with China, China's public criticism of Japan and fears of looming economic replacement by China have created a sense of threat and even anger towards China. The continuing dispute over Senkaku/Diaoyutai islands and the incursion of Chinese military assets into Japan's territorial waters heighten these concerns and add a pressing military dimension to them, a military dimension very ill-suited to traditional internationalism. The Japan-China relationship is the most important, undetermined and tense in the Asia Pacific. Each side focuses intensely on the other and faces strong domestic political incentives to present the other as a threat/problem.

United Nations

If the first Gulf War was the first significant undermining of traditional internationalism then Japan's failure to gain a permanent Security Council seat may be the last. Befitting the state of the bilateral relationship, China led the opposition to Japan's gaining a permanent seat at this year's United Nations Summit. Japan's foreign policy since joining the United Nations in 1956 has placed the United Nations at the centre of Japan's foreign policy. Japan is the largest country in the world with the best opinion of the United Nations. Gaining a permanent Security Council seat has been a long-term primary goal of Japanese foreign policy and the

litmus test of traditional internationalism. The failure to achieve it in the first ever major attempt at United Nations reform has already changed Tokyo's approach to the United Nations, with calls for a significant cut in Japan's contributions.

Collapse of the left

The Social Democratic Party of Japan was the standard bearer of pacifism, idealistic internationalism and domestic criticism of the use of state power. While the Social Democratic Party never gained power in Japan, from the 1950s to the 1990s it was the leading opposition party and provided critical support for traditional internationalism and an electoral check on the Liberal Democratic Party's nationalist right wing. Today, the leading opposition party, the Democratic Party, is an amalgam of ex-Liberal Democrats like Ozawa Ichiro, elements of the faltering the Social Democratic Party and other opposition groups. It is not as single-mindedly focussed on traditional internationalism and appears to be shifting rightwards in face of continued electoral failures. Its new head, Maehara Seiji, is known as a "hawk" in the Democratic Party and is willing to discuss Constitutional reform with the Liberal Democratic Party.

Party centralisation

Prime Minister Koizumi's strong personal image and his effective campaign to reorganise the faction-based Liberal Democratic Party to favour his political and policy interests is a significant departure from Japan's traditional politics. However, it is unlikely to be a one-off exception. Without a doubt, Koizumi is a very canny politician skilled at using his personal popularity and maverick image to undercut intra-party resistance and to control the media agenda. Yet, Koizumi is also the first Prime Minister to take advantage of the 1993-1994 electoral reforms (passed during the Liberal Democratic Party's only absence from office in the last half-century) that aimed to strengthen central party organisations against factions and local offices. The Democratic Party's selection of the young "outsider" Maehara indicates that the opposition is also moving to take advantage of the new reforms and the consequent need for a popular, media-friendly leader. If this drive to centralise party power continues, then Japan's political and policy interests will be more closely and comprehensively aligned, making a return to traditional internationalism with its focus on long-term policy levers very unlikely.

New internationalism's contours:

As Consul-General Kawada has done a better job than I could at discussing new internationalism in detail, I will simply provide some preliminary comments on the shift as an outside observer. New internationalism is not a repudiation of its predecessor, rather it is an attempt to address its shortcomings and Japan's changing foreign policy environment, particularly the rise of China. New internationalism differs from its predecessor in three main ways. First, it seeks to change the anti-military Article 9 to provide Japan more military options rather than embodying it. The shock of the first Gulf War is the key factor behind this change. For the Japanese government, changing Article 9 is necessary to become a full member of the United Nations and to abide by its collective security requirements. In this instance, new internationalism aims to change Japan's law to allow it to fulfil traditional internationalism's embrace of the United Nations system.

Second, new internationalism takes a more nuanced and jaundiced view of multilateralism. On the economic front, this has been clearly shown by Japan's late embrace of bilateral preferential trade agreements. Historically, Japan has premised its international trade policy on the GATT/WTO and was the last major economy to shift to bilateralism. Japan's entrenched agriculture lobby and the WTO's focus on agriculture have facilitated this retreat from multilateralism. Japan's recent defeat at the United Nations and the dim prospects for gaining a permanent Security Council seat in the future will likely have a similar effect on Japan's international diplomacy.

Third, new internationalism features a stronger tone towards China and a willingness to reorient the United States-Japan alliance away from territorial defence to addressing Asia-Pacific security threats such as Taiwan. At the height of traditional internationalism, Japan took a more accommodative approach to China than either the United States or many other regional countries such as Indonesia or South Korea. This "pro-Beijing" line was supported by the Social Democratic Party and many pro-China people in Japan's lead external agencies and even within the Liberal Democratic Party. Japan was the first non-Communist power to seek renewed contact with Beijing after Tiananmen Square. China was routinely the largest or second largest recipient of Japanese bilateral aid.

With the decline of Japan's left and China's new assertive diplomacy which is often very critical of Japan, Japan's tone towards China has changed. Today, Japan's policy towards China is more cautious and critical than its regional neighbours while the latest United States-Japan joint statement on the alliance mentioned Taiwan for the first time. Japan's new internationalism is turning Asia's most important alliance from a latent inward-looking one

for Japan towards a more active, outward-looking one. Japan's and the United States' views of the alliance are converging. At the same time, Japan is slashing aid to China.

Japan's new internationalism is aligning Japan's foreign policy more with a classical definition of Japan's national interest and its regional and global position as a powerful country in the world's most power-dense region. Japan's new internationalism is also well in line with the changing power dynamics of East Asia. Until recently, Japan and the United States were the only two dominant powers in the region, joined by history into a very tight unequal relationship in which Japan willingly outsourced much of its security policy. The United States-Japan relationship is no longer the only great power relationship in the region. The two new ones, Japan-China and the United States-China, are still fragile and undetermined, requiring all three powers to have the leeway to robustly pursue national interests.

Challenges ahead:

New internationalism faces a host of international challenges going forward. Traditional internationalism was very easy for foreign capitals to digest and even take advantage of. New internationalism may not be. Japan's aid budget is tightening while its support for multilateralism is less automatic. Japan's new internationalism and its more complicated approach to foreign policy, however, have not been backed up by an effective "whole-of-government" approach. For example, Japan's powerful agricultural lobby and its chief promoter, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, have already delayed and compromised preferential trade negotiations with Mexico (recently completed) and Southeast Asian countries. China's competing regional trade diplomacy has moved forward more quickly and gained more diplomatic rewards.

Japan's commitment to internationalism, new and traditional, has never been as comprehensive as the international media's and neighbouring countries' focus on Japan. Japan's internationalism has not yet extended to publicly addressing its actions in World War II in a way that assuages its victims in East Asia and beyond. Japan's new internationalism, with its stronger national interest overtones, is frequently in conflict with the international media and neighbouring countries' insistent calls on Japan to reckon with its history. Japan's bureaucratic silo mentality and the different interpretation of these criticisms in Japan mean that Japan's new internationalism will likely face this clash with external expectations for the foreseeable future.

Yasukuni shrine visits and revisionist textbooks will not fade from the scene but continue to act as examples of new internationalism's shallowness for Japan's critics overseas. The most worrying and important manifestation of this clash is the repeated accusation that Japan's new internationalism is actually a manifestation of Japanese aggressive nationalism. Increased international attention on China and its foreign policy pronouncements and the fact that many of China's criticisms of Japan are supported by South Korea lend this repeated criticism more salience and credibility. While Japan sees new internationalism as a way of overcoming the painfully exposed limits of traditional internationalism, its critics, including China, present it with some self-interest as a repudiation of traditional internationalism.

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