



JAPANESE FOREIGN POLICY AT THE CROSSROADS

Challenges
and Options
for the
Twenty-First
Century

Yutaka Kawashima

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BROOKINGS INSTITUTION PRESS
Washington, D.C.

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THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

1775 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036

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The Library of Congress has cataloged the hardcover edition as follows:

Kawashima, Yutaka, 1942–

Japanese foreign policy at the crossroads / Yutaka Kawashima.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-8157-4870-1 (cloth : alk. paper)

1. Japan—Foreign relations—1989– I. Title.

DS891.2.K39 2003

327.52—dc22

2003016802

ISBN-13 978-0-8157-4869-4 (pbk. : alk. paper)

ISBN-10 0-8157-4869-8

Digital printing

The paper used in this publication meets minimum requirements of the American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials: ANSI Z39.48-1992.

Typeset in Sabon

Composition by Cynthia Stock
Silver Spring, Maryland

Preface

It has been an entirely new experience for me to write a book. Although I drafted numerous cables and policy papers during the thirty-seven years that I worked in the Japanese Foreign Ministry, much of what I wrote pertained to confidential diplomatic matters and few people had access to it. I never imagined that one day I might be tempted to produce a book for the general public. However, in 2002, while teaching a course, “Decisionmaking in Japanese Foreign Policy,” jointly with Ezra Vogel at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, I was shocked to find that the supply of material in English covering the evolution of Japan’s foreign policy since the end of the cold war was very meager. The paucity may be due to the fact that the era is still too fresh to pique the appetite of historians. Perhaps a more likely explanation is that as Japan’s economy lost much of its dynamism and no longer was perceived as a threat, curiosity on the part of Americans and other foreigners about the “inscrutable” Japanese started to wane. In any case, I began to think that it would be worthwhile to produce a book analyzing the evolution of Japan’s foreign policy in the postwar era, with emphasis on the period since 1990.

I was fascinated by reading *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World*, by Walter Russell Mead, in which he presents four basic ways of looking at American foreign policy: the Hamiltonian, Wilsonian, Jeffersonian, and Jacksonian approaches. Although we do not have their exact counterparts in Japan, I decided to emulate his book by clarifying various schools of thought that have constituted decisive parameters of Japanese foreign policy. For example, the interaction—or rather, the confrontation—between realists and pacifists has dominated decisionmaking on the issue of national security. The debate over maintaining a distinctly “Asian identity” or attempting to “catch up with the West” also has often had a defining impact on Japan’s foreign policy agenda. Over the years from 1974 to 1995, working alternately in the American Affairs Bureau and the Asian Affairs Bureau and also at the Japanese embassies in Washington and Seoul, I became keenly aware of this dichotomy, which has been one of the key parameters of Japan’s foreign policy.

As any diplomat should be, I have been keenly interested in security issues. I was fortunate in having been posted in three countries in which the defining wars of the second half of the twentieth century—the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the series of wars in the Middle East—were fought. I served in Saigon, South Vietnam, from 1969 to 1971, which was one year after the Tet offensive; in Seoul, Republic of Korea, from 1992 to 1993, during the time that tension over North Korea’s development of nuclear weapons accelerated; and in Tel Aviv, Israel, from 1997 to 1999, when the peace process under the Oslo Accord was still being pursued. For these three countries, survival had been at the absolute top of the agenda since their founding, and South Vietnam eventually failed in that regard. In particular, I was very much impressed with the unshakable legitimacy accorded to the armed forces in Israel, which were regarded as the ultimate guarantor of the survival of the state. That constituted a stark contrast with the attitude in Japan, where many people hesitated to accept the legitimacy of the Japanese Self-Defense Force because of the historical memory of the fanatical Imperial military forces, which led the country to devastating defeat in World War II. My impression is that it took almost half a century for the Japanese people to accept the legitimacy of the Self-Defense Force, which has proved to be devoted to the defense of Japan, operating under full democratic control and within constitutional constraints, and in that sense totally different from its predecessor. Since the end of World War II, Japan, unlike the three

countries mentioned, has been extremely fortunate in not having had to face a crisis that could threaten its very survival.

Regarding the pursuit of prosperity, I joined the Foreign Ministry in the mid-1960s, when we were obsessed with our vulnerable foreign exchange reserves of only U.S.\$2 billion. Those were the days when Japan was about to graduate from the class of developing countries to the class of advanced economies, starting on a path of robust economic development marked by a double-digit growth rate every year. I belong, therefore, to the generation that witnessed the respect and eventually the fear that Japan evoked in the international community for the dynamism and increasing competitiveness of its economy. Today, the time around the 1980s when Japan was considered a serious economic threat to the United States and the West European countries seems like a remote, bygone era.

My basic premise in this book is that the sharing of interests and values among nations has become a basic and perhaps an irreversible trend in today's world. This creates a setting that is totally different from what my generation was trained to face during the cold war. It is my strong belief that in order for Japan to meet the challenges discussed in this book, it must work with as many like-minded countries as possible to enhance the effectiveness of the international order, deepening and widening the shared interests and values on which that order is based. Firm in that conviction, I revisit some past foreign policy decisions that brought success in the quest for peace and prosperity and examine the evolution of a new foreign policy posture in the aftermath of the cold war. I conclude by speculating on new challenges that Japan might encounter in the coming years.

In closing, I wish to say that this book represents my personal views alone; it does not in any way reflect the position of the Japanese government.

YUTAKA KAWASHIMA

Tokyo

June 2003

Acknowledgments

At the outset, I wish to say that I am deeply indebted to Mike Armacost, former president of the Brookings Institution, and to Jim Steinberg, vice president and director of Foreign Policy Studies at Brookings. As a senior officer in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I had worked with both of them on many important occasions in the past when they occupied various key posts in the U.S. government. Soon after my retirement from the ministry, they kindly invited me to Brookings as a distinguished visiting scholar in the fall of 2001. My time within the institution's intellectually stimulating environment presented a truly invaluable opportunity to reflect on the basic orientation of Japan's foreign policy. I should stress also that without the help of Ezra Vogel, this book would have been nonexistent. Ezra invited me to teach a course on decisionmaking in Japanese foreign policy at the Kennedy School of Government in 2002. It was primarily the wonderful experience of teaching that course that prompted me to write this book, and I am very much indebted to the brilliant students who made so many inspiring comments during our classes. I also owe much to Makoto Iokibe of Kobe University and Bunji Abe of the

Osaka University of Education, who gave me valuable advice while they were doing research at Harvard in 2002.

Naturally, I am profoundly indebted to the numerous wonderful colleagues with whom I worked in the Japanese Foreign Ministry—many more than I can name here. This book is, after all, the distilled version of what I learned from them over the thirty-seven years of my career in the ministry.

Finally I wish to express my gratitude to Eileen Hughes, who edited my manuscript with superb professionalism, and to the other members of the Brookings Institution Press who did such a wonderful job in producing this book: Tanjam Jacobson, copy editor; Janet Walker, managing editor; Larry Converse, production manager; Susan Woollen, art coordinator; and Becky Clark, marketing director. The whole publication process was entirely new to me, and I thoroughly enjoyed it.

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1

Historical Parameters of Japanese Foreign Policy

The basic objective of the foreign policy of Japan, like that of any other country, is to ensure the nation's security and prosperity. It can be concluded that Japan has succeeded in the pursuit of that objective for more than half a century. Since the end of World War II, Japan somehow has managed to ensure that the wars, revolutions, and other crises witnessed in East Asia throughout the period have not fatally damaged its own security. And Japan has benefited immensely from the international economic order imposed by the Bretton Woods system, without which its economic recovery and ensuing economic success would not have been possible.

Today, however, a sense of drift or uncertainty about the future course of foreign policy seems to prevail in Japan. In part, it reflects uncertainty about the international situation. More than a decade has passed since the end of the cold war, during which international affairs were much more predictable. And yet a clear-cut concept for a new international order in the twenty-first century has yet to emerge. Many Japanese, although they may fully support the U.S. antiterrorism campaign, have begun to wonder

how President George W. Bush's preemptive strike doctrine will affect the U.S.-Japanese alliance in the future. The stunning admission by North Korea of its abduction of numbers of innocent Japanese in the 1970s and 1980s and the announcement of its decision to restart its nuclear facilities have reminded the Japanese people of the urgent need to rethink how best to deal with the dangerous quagmire in the Korean Peninsula. Furthermore, as the Japanese watch the dynamic economic growth of China—in such contrast to the economic stagnation in Japan—many naturally wonder what East Asia will look like, say, twenty years from now.

Since today change is occurring everywhere at a truly exponential rate, some sense of uncertainty may be inevitable. Still, the main reasons for the sense of uncertainty evident in Japan today are indigenous. First, there is generational turnover. All the decisions that have defined the course of Japan's foreign policy were made long ago. With the passing of time, the heated debates and agonized decisionmaking of former political leaders are forgotten. Although today's younger generation is aware in an abstract sense of the importance of U.S.-Japanese relations, it seems to have difficulty grasping in any real sense the enormous stakes that Japan has in managing those relations. The domestic political tension that the leaders of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) had to deal with in opting to maintain security ties with the United States has become a dim memory of a bygone era. Today, the argument that the relationship between Japan and the United States is the cornerstone of Japan's foreign policy may sound like nothing but a cliché to many people. For that matter, in the 1970s and 1980s maintaining a friendly relationship with China was recognized as extremely important, and it evoked a certain sense of achievement among many Japanese who remembered the historical context and the difficulties that the two countries had to overcome to develop that relationship. But today, to a younger generation that does not share the memory, arguments of the importance of the friendship between Japan and China are hardly convincing. Moreover, today important policy statements, domestic and foreign, tend to be presented as “sound bites,” and the complexity of the issues involved can easily be overlooked.

Second, in spite of the new culture of transparency and accountability in politics, the public seldom has access to the candid, in-depth analysis conducted by national decisionmakers of other countries' intentions, motives, and domestic power structure. Although such analysis is a prerequisite for successful decisionmaking, if countries began to disclose their assessments of each other publicly, the resolution of issues and

problems would become much more complicated, and mutually embarrassing outcomes inevitable. Candid and even unkind assessments of adversaries may be made public if officials do not care about further negative impact on relations that already are in bad shape. However, with the end of the cold war, such cases of openly adversarial relations between countries have become rare.

Much of the art of diplomacy lies in nations' ability to assess and analyze one another continually and accurately. If the analysis or assessment shatters the conventional wisdom, it may be welcome. The process, however, cannot be made transparent. That constraint may be very frustrating for the general public. In the course of discussions among members of the so-called Committee to Change the Foreign Ministry, it was argued that the ministry should make public all analyses and conclusions regarding policy alternatives before making any foreign policy decisions. The growing demand for such transparency is bound to make it an increasingly daunting task for the government to obtain better understanding and broader support among the population for its foreign policy.

Finally, we are witnessing a crisis of legitimacy. The prolonged economic difficulties in Japan have gradually taken a toll on Japan's national psyche. The domestic mood has become more resentful. The public harbors animosity toward various things—the bureaucracy, the banking sector, the traditional political process, foreign countries. In the face of protracted difficulty, people tend to react in one of two ways: one is to reflect on what they themselves did wrong; the other is to find someone or something else to blame. The latter reaction may be seen in the actions of Islamic fundamentalist-terrorists, but it is common throughout the world. Another example is the anti-immigration fervor in various European countries, where some nationals blame foreign workers for all sorts of problems. In Japan, one gets the impression that the public has become much more supportive of a tough, hawkish, assertive, and occasionally confrontational posture in the conduct of foreign policy. Since the mid-1990s, domestic criticism of the Foreign Ministry for being subservient to the United States, subservient to China, and soft on South Korea, North Korea, and many other countries has tended to be far more frequent.

Furthermore, a series of scandals involving fraud that have erupted in the Foreign Ministry since 2001 have badly damaged its credibility and legitimacy—so much so that there is a genuine risk that much of Japan's basic foreign policy may also lose its credibility and come to be viewed with skepticism or disdain.

Japanese Foreign Policy since World War II

This chapter revisits past decisions that have constituted the basis of Japanese foreign policy since the end of World War II. Some key decisionmaking processes of the postwar era are reviewed first, and then some reflections about future options on key issues are presented. However, before embarking on a review, it is important to have a clearer idea about the key domestic parameters—constraints, identity issues, obsessions, and other factors—related to foreign policy decisionmaking. For easier understanding, these parameters are discussed to the extent possible in a dialectical manner.

Catching Up with the West versus Maintaining an Asian Identity

Ever since Japan embarked upon modernization, many Japanese leaders have been acutely aware of a dichotomy in the national identity. A famous essay by Chomin Nakae vividly describes a hypothetical discussion between two characters in which one fervently argues that Japan should “get out of Asia” and join the club of Western powers while the other insists that Japan should remain an Asian nation. After all, the modernization effort since the Meiji Restoration can be simply defined as a nationwide attempt to catch up with the West. There were two phases of this catch-up process. The first was from the Meiji Restoration in 1868 to World War II, in which the fruit of the first phase was utterly destroyed. The second phase was from 1945 to sometime in the 1970s, when Japan became a major industrial power. When Japan was invited to the first summit of major industrial democracies (the gathering of the “G-6,” as Canada was not invited to the first meeting), there was a genuine sense of achievement in Japan, where many naturally thought that membership in that kind of forum signified the successful conclusion of the catch-up process. Since then, Japan’s identity as a responsible member of the major industrial democracies has become highly important, and it should be borne in mind in grappling with various foreign policy issues.

During the period from 1868 to 1945, there was not much conflict between the two approaches in terms of policy implications. To catch up with the West and perhaps to preempt any risk of colonization by Western powers, Japan vigorously participated in the game of imperialism in Asia. To “get out of Asia” was never an actual course of action. Instead, Japan’s Asian identity was stressed in terms of resentment toward the hegemony of the Western powers, notably the United Kingdom until

the early 1930s and the United States afterward. Fumimaro Konoe, who became prime minister in the late 1930s, published an essay in 1918 decrying the supremacy of the United Kingdom and the United States in international politics that had considerable resonance at the time among the elite class in Japan.

“Japan’s Asian identity” is almost a tautology. However, since World War II various arguments in favor of specific courses of action have been advanced on the basis of that identity. And often those arguments have tended to reflect Japanese psychological reservations about—or in some cases even revulsion toward—what the West embodies. A typical case in point is the issue of values, notably human rights.

The Japanese people today are thoroughly committed to universal values such as freedom and democracy. However, whenever it appears that Westerners are eager to press their human rights agenda on Asian countries, the Japanese often claim that Asian values are different. Japan, as an Asian country, should point out those differences, the argument goes—for example, by refusing to join Western efforts to impose sanctions on certain Asian countries because of human rights violations. Moreover, the theory used to be expounded that enlightened dictatorial regimes in various East Asian countries were the key to their successful economic development. And it has been frequently argued throughout East Asia that Asians attach more importance to and emphasis on group-oriented values, such as the importance of the family, and that those values have been the key to social cohesion and success in nation building. For example, in the early 1990s Singapore’s leaders often expressed the view that there was little doubt that a society with communitarian values, where the interest of society takes precedence over that of the individual, suits them better than the individualism of America. The very success of some East Asian countries in achieving dynamic economic development gave a certain degree of legitimacy to these arguments in defense of Asian values. However, treating what can be argued to be a universal value as a parochial value of the West to be contrasted with Asian values is of debatable validity. Nevertheless, when issues are discussed in the context of the differences between Western culture, values, or standards and those of Asia, the argument that, because of its Asian identity, Japan should act differently from the West can have considerable impact on popular opinion.

Another interesting case in point was the East Asian Economic Caucus (EAEC) issue in the early 1990s. Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad

of Malaysia proposed forming the EAEC, whose membership was supposed to include all members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Japan, China, and the Republic of Korea (ROK). If this group had been a formal economic entity, something like a trade bloc, perhaps arguments about its pros and cons would have been clearer, because its economic advantages and disadvantages would have been easily identifiable. However, since Mahathir's proposal was to establish an informal forum with a very loosely defined agenda, the debate inside Japan centered solely on the identity question. The Asian identity school held that there was nothing wrong with the idea of East Asians getting together to talk about economic problems pertaining to East Asia and that Japan, as an Asian nation, should wholeheartedly support the scheme. The industrial democracy identity school held that the notion of excluding countries like the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand could be counterproductive at a time when APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum) was starting to do well; besides, the United States was adamantly opposed to such a group, claiming that it would undermine APEC. In any event, the EAEC became a nonissue in the late 1990s, when a new forum for dialogue between Asia and Europe was created at the joint initiative of Singapore and France. The participants from Asia were limited to ASEAN members, Japan, China, and the ROK, and European participants were limited to European Union (EU) members. Thus a precedent was established for forming a group, the membership of which was de facto EAEC, without much agonizing about the possible impact on Pacific unity.

Pacifists versus Realists on the Security Issue

The clash between pacifists and realists regarding the peace and security of Japan has persisted since the end of World War II. In view of the catastrophic casualties that Japan had suffered during the war, it is natural that the Japanese people came to have an extremely strong aversion to war and anything related to the military. And in the immediate aftermath of the war, the foremost concern of the United States was to eliminate any possibility of the reemergence of the military in Japan. Therefore, at the initiative of the United States, a new constitution was promulgated that included a provision, Article 9, that if read literally seemed to preclude any possibility of Japan's regaining its defense capability. As described in chapter 2 of this volume, many Japanese government officials in those days assumed that in the event of an attack on Japan, the United Nations

would take care of Japan's defense with its own forces, as envisioned in Chapter 7 of the UN Charter. However, the advent of the cold war at the end of the 1940s totally altered Japan's circumstances. Instead of ensuring the security of the United States against Japan, ensuring the security of Japan against the newly emerging threat from the communist bloc became the more urgent priority for the United States. In response to U.S. pressure to proceed with the rearmament of Japan, Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida eventually opted for forming what was described as a "lightly armed mercantile state." The gist of Japan's defense policy was the establishment of security ties with the United States and the eventual creation of the relatively small Japanese Self-Defense Force (JSDF).

In the past, the domestic debate between pacifists and realists over the peace and security of Japan quite often led to fierce political turmoil. Three notable features of the debate should be pointed out. First, it often takes the form not so much of a policy argument as of legalistic scrutiny focusing primarily on the constitutional constraint on military action. Second, the crux of the debate is whether the notion of deterrence is accepted or not. Third, at issue is whether and to what extent even the democratically elected government can be trusted never to return to the path toward militarism, which had led Japan into war, with tragic consequences.

LEGALISM. In the course of parliamentary debate, the opposition parties try to attack the government by taking up the legalistic aspects of the defense issue. From the pacifist viewpoint, "rearming" Japan by creating the JSDF—as well as maintaining security ties with the United States—is an unforgivable breach of the constitution. Also, the opposition has always been a minority in the Diet, so if the debate is about the policy options related to security, the opposition is bound to be numerically overwhelmed. However, as long as the debate is about the legality of the government's action, the opposition can proclaim what the government is doing to be unconstitutional and illegal.

Moreover, the assumption is that government agencies carry out their functions exactly as they are stipulated in the authorizing laws and regulations. Therefore, for example, the law related to the role and functions of the JSDF had to be amended so that JSDF aircraft could be used to evacuate Japanese nationals in foreign countries. In any other country, it would be inconceivable that aircraft of the national defense force could not be used for such purpose unless a specific clause was included in the law.

As to the constitutional constraint on military action, the debate often is related to the definition of “use of force.” The constitution permits the use of force—that is, military action by the JSDF—only for individual self-defense (to fight foreign forces that are engaged in armed attack on Japan) and not for collective self-defense (defense of allies, for example). However, things are not that simple. The legal question is always raised of whether the apparently noncombat logistical support activities of the JSDF, such as supplying materiel to U.S. forces (USF), facilitating refueling of U.S. combat aircraft and ships, and providing medical support to the USF can be considered to constitute the use of force. The government’s interpretation of the constitution is that they can, as long as they are part of combat operations. An often-quoted example is that to engage the JSDF in transporting materiel to the front line, where actual combat is going on, constitutes an integral part of the use of force and therefore is unconstitutional.

This is a serious question that requires a clear-cut response. Following the enactment in 1999 of a law paving the way for logistical support activities by the JSDF for the USF in the vicinity of Japan—and in 2001 of a law defining measures to deal with terrorism in the aftermath of 9/11—the government was authorized to engage the JSDF in various non-combat support activities for the USF. However, as Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi suggested, the opposition’s legal arguments against those laws sometimes were as relevant as medieval theological debates. Thus far the issue has not been clearly sorted out. It has often been pointed out that if the standing interpretation of the constitution were revised to accept the constitutionality of the exercise of collective self-defense, then the need for elaborating on the definition of “use of force” in the context of logistical support by the JSDF for the USF would practically disappear.

Another unique aspect of the legal battle is that the government is expected to maintain the legal consistency of all the answers it has given in past parliamentary debates. If there are frequent changes of the governing parties, the new governing party can claim that it is not bound by the legal positions of the previous government. However, in Japan, because the LDP has stayed in power continuously for decades, the LDP government is required to maintain the continuity of its legal arguments. For example, in parliamentary debate about the interpretation of the security treaty between Japan and the United States, responses of government officials some forty years ago have to be quoted and adhered to.