Japan's Middle East Security Policy: Rethinking Roles and Norms

*Yukiko MIYAGI**

Abstract
This article looks at the trends in Japan's Middle East policy on politico-security issues since the beginning of the 1970s. It observes that Japanese policy started with a stance sympathetic to the Palestinians and the Arab and Islamic states but shifted towards neutral and then towards more pro-US positions over time. It suggests this trend can be explained by international structural change and power shift, from a period of relatively cohesive Arab and Islamic states that had more weight vis-à-vis the US and the West towards one which saw a decline of Arab unity and the oil weapon, and a shift towards US hegemony. The paper also points out a gradual change in Japan's main policy tool towards the Middle East, from non-military to military approaches over time. The paper argues that Japan's clear pro-US military-activist policy seen in the Iraq war was a primary example of such changes, reflecting the afore-mentioned international changes, but also due to Japan's domestic political conditions – an erosion of anti-militarist norm in particular; however, it also suggests that Japanese policy in the Iraq war should be understood as an exception, a product of certain special conditions.

Keywords: Anti-militarism, National Norms, Peace Constitution, US Bandwagoning, Oil Interest, Balancing.

Japonya'nın Ortadoğu Politikası: Rolleri ve Normların Yeniden Düşünmek

Özet
Bu makale Japonya'nın, 1970'lerin başından itibaren, siyasal güvenlik konusunda Ortadoğu politikası hakkındaki eğilimleri üzerinde durmaktadır. Söz konusu makale Japon politikasının Filistinlilere, Arap ve İslam ülkelerine karşı başlagınçta olumlu bir tutum sergilediğini, fakat ardından tarafsız, sonra da zaman içinde daha ABD yanlısı bir tutum sergilemeye başladığını gözlemlemektedir. Makaleye göre bu eğilim, ABD ile Batı karşısında daha fazla ağırlığı olan ve nispeten birbirine daha bağlı durumdaki Arap ve İslam devletleri döneminden, Arap birliğinin ile petrol silahının etkisinin zayıfladığı ve ABD

* *Lecturer, School of Government and International Affairs, University of Durham, UK.*

Yukiko Miyagi, "Japan's Middle East Security Policy: Rethinking Roles and Norms", Ortadoğu Etütleri, Volume 3, No 1, July 2011, pp.9-32.

hegemonyasına doğru uluslararası yapısal bir değişim ve güç kayması yaşanmasıyla açıklanabilmektedir. Söz konusu çalışma aynı zamanda, Japonya'nın Ortadoğu'ya yönelik temel politika aracının zaman içerisinde silahsız durumundan silahlı bir yaklaşıma doğru kademeli bir değişim geçirdiğine de işaret etmektedir. Makale, Japonya'nın Irak savaşında görülen bariz ABD yanlısı askeri hareketlilik politikasının söz konusu uluslararası değişimleri yansıtan başlıca örnek olduğunu ancak bunun aynı zamanda başta anti-militarist bir norm aşınımı olmak üzere Japonya'nın iç politik koşullarından da kaynaklandığını savunmaktadır. Bununla birlikte, Irak savaşındaki Japon politikasının istisna bir durum ve belli birtakım özel koşulların ürünü olarak anlaşılması gerektiğini de ileri sürmektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Anti-militarizm, Ulusal Normlar, Barışı Sağlama, ABD'ye Eklemlenme (Bandwagoning), Petrol Çıkarı, Dengeleme.

السياسة اليابانية حول الشرق الأوسط : التفكير مجددا بالأدوار والمبادئ

بقلم : يوكيكو مياكي

خلاصة

يتناول هذا المقال توجهات اليابانيين منذ بدايات عام ١٩٧٠ نحو سياسة الشرق الآوسط الخاصة بالأمن السياسي. ويورد المقال ان السياسة اليابانية كانت تتوجه في البداية توجها ايجابيا تجاه الفلسطينيين والبلدان العربية والاسلامية، وتحول موقف اليابان بعد ذلك الى موقف محايد في هذا الصدد، وان اليابان بدأت وبمرور الزمن باتباع سياسة اكثر ميلا الى الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية في هذا المضمار. ووفق هذا المقال، فانه يمكن تفسير هذا الموقف عندما نشاهد التحول من عصر الدول العربية والاسلامية التي كان لها ثقل اكثر امام الولايات المتحدة الامريكية والغرب والتي كانت نسبيا اكثر تماسكا وتساندا فيما بينها، الى العهد الذي ضعف فيه تأثير التساند العربي وسلاح النفط والذي شاهد العالم فيه تحولا دوليا نحو سيادة الولايات المتحدة الامريكية وتغير موازين القوة في هذا الاتجاه. وتشير هذه الدراسة في نفس الوقت الى تحول آليات السياسة اليابانية الرئيسية بصورة تدريجية في موضوع الشرق الاوسط من وضع غير مسلح الى التعامل بالسلاح. ويعتبر المقال وقوف اليابان عسكريا وبوضوح بجانب الولايات المتحدة الامريكية في حرب العراق، ابرز مثال يعكس التغيرات الدولية في هذا المجال، مشيرا في نفس الوقت الى ان ذلك ينبع من الظروف السياسية لليابان وتحولا عن مبدأ عدم التسلح الذي كانت اليابان تتبعه في بداية الأمر. ويضيف المقال انه لا بد من اعتبار السياسة اليابانية خلال حرب العراق وضعا استثنائيا نابعا من اوضاع وشروط خاصة بها.

الكلمات الدالة : اللا عسكرية ، المبادئ الوطنية ، تحقيق السلام ، التواصل مع الولايات المتحدة الامريكية ، المصالح البترولية ، التوازن.

I. Introduction

Japan, as a close US ally and often acting as the second largest sponsor of various US initiatives in the Middle East after the US itself, has a significant impact on developments in the Middle East. As it has increasingly expanded its involvement as a mediator between the US and key states, both UN Security Council members and states in the Middle East, and more recently as a junior partner in US wars in the region, understanding of Japan's policy patterns carries increasing importance.

Japan's security policy in the Middle East has been shifting away from its traditional anti-militarist profile underpinned by the Peace Constitution, and from its standing rule of thumb, as a resource scarce state, 'no offence to an oil state'. This first became apparent at the time of the Gulf war in 1990-1, when Japan, under US pressure, funded 16 percent of the cost of the US coalition in Iraq while resisting US demands for military support. The Iraq war of 2003 appeared to be another major watershed in Japan's policy toward the Middle East, in which Japan, this time, willingly provided military and diplomatic support for a US war of regime change in Iraq, even though it lacked UN endorsement. Do these shifts signify a transformation of Japan's Middle East policy or indeed its global role and norms?

The paper aims to identify and explain the evolution of Japan's Middle East security policy, with special attention to whether Japan's anti-militarist identity has changed and whether the prioritisation of Japan's various interests in relation to the Middle East has altered. Japan's policy over the long term can be differentiated along two dimensions, its orientation and its major policy instruments. The paper will both discuss the long-term trends in Japan's policy and some recent short-term shifts and their implications for Japan's long-term tangent in the Middle East. It will also trace the evolution in the mixture of policy instruments employed, a factor that has implications for Japan's identity as an anti-militarist state.

***Orientation*:** Historically, Japan's Middle East policy has had to balance two potentially conflicting imperatives: a) the need to keep good relations with the Arab and Islamic states, on which it is greatly depen-

dent for its energy security; and b) the need to sustain the alliance with the US, on which it is dependent for its military security; this requires it to accommodate US demands for cooperation with policies which often antagonize the Arab and Islamic states. As such Japan is arguably 'caught'[1] between its 'dual dependency' on the US and on Middle East oil.[2] However, the tilt Japan's policy orientation assumes at any given time has historically varied along a continuum between pro-Arab and Islamic and pro-US policies. In fact, three distinguishable phases in Japan's orientation can be identified, as indicated below.

Major Policy Instruments: *instruments* at policy-makers' disposal range from diplomatic to economic and military means. Beginning in the period following World War II, Japan traditionally stood for a non-military approach to security. This was rooted in domestic constraints under Article 9 of the constitution established in 1947, the clause renouncing 'the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes' and the Japanese public's strong support for it. Hence, despite the implications of oil access for Japan's energy security, the notion of using military intervention to coerce the oil producers or to establish client regimes has never been an option for Japan—in contrast to the US promotion of the use of force by itself and its allies. Therefore, diplomacy and especially economic means have substituted for military means. Diplomacy may take a bilateral form but Japan has especially valued multilateral diplomacy conducted through international organizations such as the UN or with European partners as a legitimacy source and a political buffer against pressure. Economic means have typically taken the form of financial aid to Middle East recipients to ensure amicable and inter-dependent relationships with Middle East oil states but also for politico-strategic purposes as a preferred substitute for military force in efforts to minimize the regional instability which could jeopardize oil access. The use of the military instrument, specifically the deployment of the Self Defense Forces (SDF) in the region is a radical innovation, which appeared in a tentative form after the 1990-91 Gulf war but more dramatically in the recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

1 M. Yoshitsu, *Caught in the Middle East*, (Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Books, 1984).

2 S. C. Carvely, *Dual Dependence: Japanese policy toward the Middle East, 1973 to 1984,* Ph.D. thesis, George Washington University, 1985.

II. The Long-term Evolution of Japan's Middle East Policy

Japan's policy towards the Middle East can be divided into three phases, although some features overlap across periods, and policies toward particular states may exhibit more complexity than this periodization suggests: 1) the period following the oil crisis in 1973, when Japan tilted toward the Arab and Islamic states at the expense of its relations with the US; 2) the period starting in the early 1980s of the second Cold War, accompanied by the oil-glut after 1986, when Japan tilted back toward the US, but retained some independence in its Middle East policies; and 3) the period following the Gulf war of 1990-1991, when Japan increasingly tilted toward the US at the risk of its relations with the Arab and Islamic states. As such, there has been a *long-term shift* from an essentially independent Japanese policy in the Middle East towards increasing bandwagoning with the US and, with it, a deployment of the Japanese government's economic assistance, Official Development Assistance (ODA), and then the SDF in support of US policy in the Middle East region. Three main forces account for Japan's policy shift from a pro-Arab and Islamic to a pro-US orientation.

a) *Shifts in the balance of power between the Arab and Islamic states and the US*: This factor indirectly but fundamentally determined the weight of US influence on Japanese policy towards the Middle East. In the first period, the relative power of these states vis-a-vis the US had increased owing to their policy cohesion and ability to use the oil weapon. At the same time, US hegemony seemed to be eroding after the costly Vietnam War and Nixon's end of the gold standard support for the dollar amidst the oil price boom. The next period, however, saw the decline of the 'oil power' of the Arab states, due to the oil-glut, their increasing dependency on US protection against Iran; and the further weakening of the leverage of the Arab and Islamic states vis-a-vis the US following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and the subsequent Gulf war of 1990-1, which sharply divided them. In this war, the US demonstrated its capacity to mobilize a global coalition to easily defeat Iraq and in the course of the war acquired an unprecedented military presence in the Gulf. With the end of the Cold War, the US, unconstrained by the USSR, assumed the position of the primary mediator in the Middle East peace process as well as protector against

Iraq for many neighboring states, significantly increasing US influence in the region. As a result of the rise of US influence in the region and the continuation of the oil glut in the nineties, Japan's energy vulnerability to the Middle East further declined.

b) ***Shifts in Japan's dependency on and vulnerability towards the US*****:** This second factor could either counter-balance or reinforce the first one and in fact it reinforced the decline in the influence of the Arab and Islamic states in Japan's policy-making. Over time, Japan became more vulnerable to US pressures because Japan needed not only the US alliance for its military security but also the US market for its burgeoning exports. The rise of Japan's economic power in the eighties caused trade conflicts with the US, which ironically made Japan more vulnerable to the US demands that it help fund US policy objectives in the Middle East. Then, after the Cold War, Japan feared US abandonment as a time when it became more concerned with security threats in East Asia from rising Chinese power and North Korean nuclear development while US interest in maintaining security involvement in East Asia to protect Japan was seen to have eroded along with the disappearance of superpower rivalry.

c) ***Changes in Japanese elites' goals and national norms*****:** While Japan's policy tangent was determined by the above two factors, this factor determined the main policy tool, as well as the level of Japan's engagement. Japan's policy goals changed over the last period towards more emphasis on the use of military instruments and more active engagement. The peace constitution after World War II had institutionalized anti-militarist and UN-centrist norms, backed by the post-war time Japanese mass political culture, which constrained how far Japan could accommodate the demands of its US ally in Middle East conflicts. In an earlier period, Japan's elite also embraced the country's distinctiveness as a 'trading state' and, until the Gulf war of 1990-91, this model was widely seen within and without Japan as spectacularly successful in allowing Japan to become an economic superpower and to be counted among the small groups of states which exercised international leadership (e.g the G-8). As Japan's economic might increased in the second period, it sought international prestige as an 'aid great power', a top donor of development assistance and a major

contributor of economic means, often at US behest, to resolve or head off conflicts in far-flung parts of the globe, including the Middle East.[3] However, the lesson of the Gulf war for Japan's new generation of elites was that international leadership required that Japan acquire military capabilities, abandon its non-military security strategy, and start to act like a conventional great power. Japan's lopsided power profile—that is, having great economic power but lacking military power—started to be seriously questioned among the ruling elites. They used a succession of Middle East crises and US pressures on Japan to wear down anti-militarist resistance from the Japanese public. Crises in the Middle East became the occasions for the government to alter the very identity of the country from an anti-militarist state with an independent foreign policy to one which seeks to be a 'normal' state which plays a military role in world politics as a junior associate of the US. The 2003 war on Iraq was a major watershed which enabled Japanese elites to pursue this agenda. Nevertheless, this process remains incomplete because Japan retains a strong interest in maintaining amicable relations with the Arab and Islamic states, while its people have not wholly abandoned anti-militarist norms, and both these realities have been incongruent with total alignment with US policies. Indeed, the Iraq case could prove to be an brief exception to the Japanese policy of balancing between the two ties.

1. Post-1973 oil shock period:

Japan had little active policy toward the Middle East until the oil crisis sparked by the 1973 use of the 'oil weapon' by Arab oil producing states. Although Japan had started to build closer ties with Arab oil states under the label 'resource diplomacy' from the very beginning of the 1970s, it was this crisis that shaped Japan's Middle East policy on politico-strategic issues, and that set Japan's policy towards the Middle East on a relatively pro-Arab tangent, distancing itself from the US. When the Arab states, acting together in the oil embargo, made security of oil supplies contingent on support for Palestinian and Arab claims in the Arab-Israeli conflict and when the US failed to guarantee

3 R. M. Orr, *The Emergence of Japan's Foreign Aid Power,* (New York: Colombia University Press, 1990); D. Darby and H.B. Hullock, *Japan: a new kind of superpower?,* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1994).

Japan's supplies, Japan tilted toward appeasing the Middle East. Because of the apparent political cohesion among the Arab states in this period, Japan's policy towards oil states and non-oil states was not differentiated. Indeed, Japanese policy during this period particularly centred around support for the Palestinians as the core actor in the Arab-Israeli conflict based on the view that this would secure amicable relations with the Arab oil states. One long-term consequence of this episode was the institutionalization of the norm of neutrality in the Arab-Israeli conflict in Japan's foreign policy establishment.

Japan's policy was marked by a number of watersheds and different aspects. The earliest one was in February 1977, when the Japanese government gave permission to the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), the group recognized by the Arab states as the representative of the Palestinian community (but not by Israel and the US government), to open a liaison office in Tokyo. Then the PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat was invited by the Diet members' League for Japan-Palestine Friendship, which was established in 1979, to visit Japan in October 1981 despite the objection of the US government and threats from the US Congress.[4] The beginning of active diplomacy in support of the Palestinians was accompanied by a substantial 1974 increase of Japan's financial contributions to the UN agency for humanitarian support for the Palestinian refugees, UN Refugee Working Agency (UNRWA).

Japan's policy of seeking to secure its energy supplies through diplomatic positions sympathetic to the Arab and Islamic states carried over into its maintenance of good relations with Iran despite efforts of the US to isolate the country after its revolution and especially following the US embassy hostage-taking in Tehran in 1979. [5]

Taking the view that oil security depended on Middle East stability and conflict management and moving away from a strict interpretation of the constitution deterring involvement in 'collective security', (multilateral security cooperation), Japan also started to help finance UN

4 M. Yoshitsu, 1984, pp. 18-9; E. Naramoto, 'Japan aligned with the PLO', *Japan Quarterly,* Vol. 37, No. 1, 1990, pp. 19-23.

5 R. Tateyama, 'Japan, Iran and the United States: a delicate triangular relationship in the 1990s', *JIME Review,* No. 22, 1993, pp. 27-38.

peace-keeping operations in the region, including its contribution in February 1974 to the Second United Nations Emergency Force (UN-EF-II) operating in the Sinai from 25 October 1973 until 24 July 1979. However, Japan's involvement in such peace-keeping operations was limited to financial support due to the prevailing interpretation of Article 9 of the constitution excluding Japan's participation in military activities other than for its own self-defence, including 'collective security'. Thus, as early as July 1958, the Japanese government had declined a request from the UN Secretary General Dag Hammaerskjold to send ten Japanese officers to the UN Observer Group in Lebanon, even though its troops would have been in a non-combatant role.[6]

2. The Second Cold War and Oil Glut Period:

During the 1980s, Japan's position shifted primarily owing to a heightened sensitivity in Japan to the expectations and demands of its US ally. Japan moved toward a more neutral position in the Arab-Israeli conflict in response to the US government's demands under President Ronald Reagan that it build ties with Israel. This was accompanied by an emerging interest among Japanese policy-makers in playing an international role in the Arab-Israeli peace process, an ambition which emerged as a result of achieving the international status as a top donor to developing countries and international institutions. Based on the belief that assuming such a new role required a neutral position, the Japanese government made a gesture of neutrality between the two sides by starting official visits and invitations between Japan and Israel in the late 1980s, which was followed by Japan's call for the termination of the Arab boycott of Israeli business in December 1992. Japanese diplomacy was also active in trying to find a resolution to the conflict, as seen in the first state visit made in 1988 by Japan's Foreign Minister Sōsuke Uno to Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Israel to discuss the issue of Middle East peace. Japan's official policy of neutrality and its ambition to play an international role on the issue has remained unchanged up to the present time, with the Japanese government acting unobtrusively to buttress the Arab side on issues such as Palestinian

6 S. Ogata, 'The United Nations and Japanese diplomacy', *Japan Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 1990, pp. 141-65.

rights, while yet maintaining diplomatic contacts and economic and other ties with Israel.[7]

Incrementally, Japan began to assume greater roles in international affairs, including in the Middle East. In line with the belief that playing a role in the containment and resolution of the Middle East conflict would enhance Japan's prestige and in parallel with its emergence as an economic superpower, Japan increased its economic aid to the region through the UN's agencies and peacekeeping operations, particularly its contribution in support of the Palestinians, becoming the second largest donor to the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) by 1994. In order to prove itself as a US ally and project its image as a leading member of the international community, Japan provided US$3 million to the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in March 1988. Importantly, as a precursor to the decision to begin participation by the SDF in UN peace-keeping, civilian personnel began to be included in UN peacekeeping missions in Afghanistan/Pakistan, in the Iran-Iraq Military Observer Group (UNIMOG) and in the United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observer Mission (UNKOM) in 1991. However, this had to be undertaken 'inconspicuously', until the passage of the International Peace Co-operation Law (the PKO Law) (*Kokuren Heiwa Kyōryoku hō*) in 1992 after the Gulf war.[8]

Indicative of an overall tilt in Japan's policy toward the US and Japan's rising economic strength was its systematic use of economic aid in support of US policy in the Cold War. In response to the US requests Japanese aid was provided to Afghanistan, Turkey and Pakistan, the frontline states countering Soviet influence and revolutionary Iran. It was also provided aid to Lebanon after the Israeli invasion of 1982, and Egypt became a major recipient following its conclusion of a US-sponsored peace with Israel in 1979. Iraq, a US ally against Islamic Iran

7 R. Tateyama, 'Japan and the Middle East peace talks', *JIME Review* No. 19, 1992/3, pp. 19-22; K. Katakura, 'Japan and the Middle East: towards a more positive role' in P. Tempest, (ed.) *The Politics of Middle East Oil*, (The Royaumont Group, London: Graham & Trotman, 1993), pp. 10-17.

8 M. Nishihara, 'Japan-US cooperation in UN peace efforts' in S. S. Harrison and M. Nishihara, (eds.) *UN Peacekeeping: Japanese and American perspectives,* (Washington D.C.: A Carnegie Endowment Book, 1995), pp. 163-75.

until the Gulf war of 1990, was also a major recipient of Japan's ODA.[9] However, while tilting toward the US on some issues, Japan's policy remained consistently independent as regards Iran, where it had large oil investments.[10] This was seen in Japan's continuing refusal to break diplomatic and economic links with Iran despite US pressures, and its non-partisan diplomacy towards Iran and Iraq during their war of 1980-8, at the time when the US was supporting Iraq and seeking to isolate Iran. Japanese Foreign Minister Shintarō Abe tried to mediate between the two states from August 1983 until a ceasefire was agreed in August 1988, and also sought to end Iran's isolation and what was viewed as an imbalance toward the parties in the conflict by proposing at the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in September 1983 that Iran's grievances be considered. Japan also took a lead at the UN Security Council in the drafting of a resolution calling for a ceasefire, which materialized with its passage as the UN Security Council resolution 598 in July 1987. Japan's self-restraint in military participation was still apparent: it turned down a US request to send Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force's (MSDF) mine-sweeping vessels to the Persian Gulf to protect oil tanker traffic there during the Iran-Iraq war, constrained by the anti-militarist norm widely shared among the Japanese public[11].

The Gulf war of 1990-1 was the next watershed in Japan's policy that marked a transition to a new era in its international commitments and a pro-US tilt in its Middle East policy. In that war Japan faced unprecedented US demands for direct, military cooperation in the Middle East. The conduct and outcome of the war, in which the US led a victorious international coalition, seemed to mark Washington's emergence as an undisputed global and Middle East hegemon, narrowing room for an independent Japanese policy in the region. Japan still refused to participate militarily during the war: despite a US request, the Japanese

9 T. Uchida, 'Japan and the Arab World: an economic perspective', *American-Arab Affairs,* No. 32, 1990, pp. 27-32.

10 R. Tateyama, 1993, 30.

11 Then Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone had been pushing for the dispatch but faced the veto of his prominent Cabinet colleague Masaharu Gotōda, who was more sensitive than the prime minister to the anti-militarist public sentiment of those days. Y. Okamoto, *Sabaku no Sensō: Iraku wo Kakenuketa Tomo, Oku Katsuhiko e,* (The War of Desert: to Oku, my friend, who was devoted to Iraq) *(*Tokyo: Bungei Shunjū, 2004), p. 197.

government refrained from the use of the Air Self-Defense Force (ASDF) to transport US troops and equipment from the US to the Middle East, and instead, chartered US commercial aircraft for this purpose.[12] As a substitute for a military contribution, Japan provided large-scale economic support for US military operations against Iraq, shouldering overall 16 per cent of the war's expense. Moreover, Japan also aided US regional allies: this included the provision of a US$10 million-worth high precision navigation guidance system to the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) states to help detect and avoid mine-filled areas of the sea on approaches to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia; US$2 billion (as a part of the total amount of US$13 billion Japanese assistance for the war) was extended to Turkey, Jordan and Egypt, the pro-Western states which were considered as 'most seriously affected' by the war. Syria, which sided with the US in the war although it had a record of foreign policy radicalism, received US$500 million in aid to cover the costs to it of the war. [13]

3. Post-Gulf War period:

The most significant change in Japan's orientation in the period following the Gulf War was the emergence of an increasingly pro-US policy in the region. The Gulf War was also a turning point in that Japan began gradually to start, in its aftermath, a restrained use of military means in its security strategy.

Japan's diplomacy in the Middle East increasingly came under US influence. Japan's involvement in the issue of the Arab-Israeli conflict deepened once, after the Gulf War, it officially joined the US-led multilateral Madrid Middle East peace initiative as a regular member of the multilateral working groups in 1992. In the following period, Japan's diplomatic contacts, such as bilateral meetings with regional leaders to facilitate the peace process increased. The peace process gave Japan an opportunity to raise its profile through the provision of ODA to states which supported US initiatives such as Egypt, which had signed

12 Y. Okamoto, 2004, pp. 194-197.

13 D. Unger, 'Japan and the Gulf War: making the world state for Japan-US relations' in A. Bennet, Lepgold, J., and S. Unger, (eds.), *Friends in Need: Burden sharing in the Gulf War*, (New York: St. Martins Press, 1997), pp. 137-63.

a peace treaty with Israel and gave pivotal assistance to the US in the Gulf War.[14] During the 1990s, Jordan became the second largest recipient in the region after Egypt once it reached peace with Israel under US-sponsorship. Japan's economic assistance to Syria jumped in 1993 as a reward for allying with the US in the Gulf war and was thereafter continued as a way of supporting the country's involvement in the peace negotiations in the post-Gulf war period. On the other hand, when Syrian-Israeli peace talks stalled from the late nineties and the US lost interest in the Syrian track by the new millennium, Japanese diplomatic interest and ODA both started to decline. Once, after its opposition to the 2003 Iraq war sparked US efforts to isolate Syria, Japan began to disengage from the country, although it generally maintained a low profile in regard to anti-Syrian efforts by the US, such as Security Council votes over the assassination of former Lebanese prime minister, Rafiq al-Hariri in February 2005. Japan also started to participate in US-led international initiatives hostile to Iraq, a major Middle East oil producer. For example, it co-sponsored UN Security Council resolutions together with the US and Britain in 1998 calling for Iraq to cooperate with UN inspections of its purported WMDs, and publicly supported the subsequent US bombings of Iraq.

The most significant departure from Japan's traditional policy after the Gulf War, however, was its activation of the heretofore eschewed military instrument. This began with the sending of Maritime Self Defense Force mine-sweepers to the Persian Gulf in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf war, a mission Japan had previously declined during the Iran-Iraq war. During the decade following the Gulf war, Japan expanded the use of the SDF as a means of giving a high profile to its role in UN peace-keeping operations, gradually loosening restrictions so that the SDF could undertake more 'tangible' support activities abroad. After the passage of the International Peace Co-operation Law (the PKO Law) (*Kokuren Heiwa Kyōryoku hō*) in 1992, SDF participation in UN peace-keeping operations, international rescue activities for humanitarian purposes, and international supervision of elections was made legally possible. Subsequently, Japanese personnel were sent to Pal-

14 J. Rynhold, "Japan's cautious new activism in the Middle East: a qualitative change or more of the same?", *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific,* Vol. 2, No. 2, 2002, pp. 245-263.

estine, Iraq and Afghanistan. In January 1996, Japan sent seventy-seven observers to the Palestinian Council election, and an official to the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNSMA) for October 1996 – June 1998. In 1998, a Japanese diplomat was dispatched to join the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) and a researcher to join a nuclear inspection team of the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Iraq.

Restrictions remained on the tasks the SDF could undertake, however, as was clear in the case of its participation in the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), a cease-fire observation and maintenance mission in the Golan Heights, Israeli-occupied Syrian territory. Forty-three troops were deployed in logistical tasks and two SDF officers in planning and co-ordinating tasks beginning in February 1996. But due to the inherently insecure nature of the mission, the SDF was restricted to indirect rear support tasks such as the transportation of food, the construction of roads, maintenance of heavy equipment, and humanitarian support operations such as observing the repatriation of prisoners, the return of bodies, the exchange of mail and the supervision of family reunions of Druze families cut off by the zones of separation. [15] However, the amendment of the 1992 PKO Law in November 2001 expanded allowable SDF duties in PKO missions to include patrolling of demilitarized zones as well as its allowable use of weapons.

The most recent watershed was the post-9/11 US engagement in two wars – the military attacks on Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001 and on Iraq in 2003. Japan came under pressure to take part in the US-led operations launched under the banner of a 'coalition of the willing', one within the UN framework in the former case, but without it in the latter case. This precipitated a further activation of Japan's military instrument. The Japanese government legalized SDF participation outside the framework of UN peace-keeping operations by *ad hoc* legislation. In order to allow SDF co-operation with US forces in Afghanistan, the government passed the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law (or the Anti-Terrorism Law) (*Tero Tokuso Hō*) in October 2001, with the UN

15 H. J. Dobson, Japan and United Nations Peacekeeping: Formulations in the post-Cold War world, Ph. D thesis, Sheffield University, 1998, p. 217.

resolution enabling the military attack on Afghanistan providing the legal justification. A new SDF activity which this law enabled was logistical support for the US-coalition forces in combat operations. Under the law, the conditions for the SDF's operations specified in the PKO Law were removed, namely involvement only after the cease-fire and with the consent of the parties to the war for Japan's involvement. Additionally, the SDF's right to use force for the defense of its own and US troops, and other lives 'under their protection' was permitted under certain conditions. In December 2001, a fuelling vessel and two vessels to protect it were sent to the Indian Ocean for the provision of water and fuel for the US and allied naval vessels supporting operations in Afghanistan.[16]

The Iraq war of 2003 marks the most extreme case of Japan's tilt toward the US in the Middle East. Japan immediately announced its clear support for US military action in the Iraq crisis at a time when most other states were critical of a rush to war. When international support for the US attack on Iraq was not forthcoming, Japanese diplomacy was active both at the UN as well as in bilateral approaches to UN Security Council member states in an effort to pass a UN resolution sanctioning an attack. Remarkably, Japanese diplomacy was actually seeking to facilitate a war, an unprecedented episode. Indeed, for Japanese policy-makers, Japan needed a UN resolution for war. As the US government was willing to launch a war without a resolution, Japan had to avoid the most difficult situation of coming under US pressure for Japanese military support for the war without having a legitimate base for domestically passing a new law in the Diet to enable it. As the UN resolution did not materialize, the Japanese government was only able to give the US strong political support for the war and waited until the 'official' end of the war before extending military support. In order to enable SDF's co-operation with US forces in Iraq after the war, the Law Concerning Special Measures on Humanitarian and Reconstruction Assistance in Iraq (or Iraq Reconstruction Law) (*Iraku Tokuso Hō*) was passed in July 2003. The passage of this law legalized for the first time the deployment of the Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF) on

16 P. J. Katzenstein, 'Same war, different views: Germany, Japan and the war on terrorism', *Current History*, Vol. 101, No. 659, pp. 427-35; Y. Iwamoto and S. Edirippulige, 'Japan's response to the war against terrorism', *New Zealand International Review* Vol. 27, No. 2, 2002, pp. 9-12.

foreign soil, along with the Air and Maritime SDFs, for the purpose of rear and logistic support for post-war humanitarian, reconstruction activities and US-led peace-keeping operations. The passage of this law was only possible once a UN resolution authorizing such reconstruction was internationally agreed.

As a result of this incremental expansion in the SDFs' mission, some re-definition and regularizing of the new role of the military in international security issues started to take shape, as seen in the National Defense Program Guideline established in December 2004. Reflecting the Anti-Terrorism Law and the Iraqi Reconstruction Law, which specified that the SDF would undertake intelligence and other activities in collaboration with US forces, the Guideline redefined Japan's security as not merely defense against an immediate attack on Japan but also improving the international security environment to reduce the chances of threats reaching Japan.[17]

Despite the new emphasis on military participation, the Japanese government needed to highlight non-military financial and humanitarian contributions as Japan's primary form of participation in order to legitimize the use of military forces overseas. ODA resources were concentrated, at US behest, on post-war reconstruction of Afghanistan and Iraq. The Japanese government's policy was to supply 10 per cent of the total international assistance for both Afghanistan and Iraq. For Afghanistan, the Japanese government pledged US$500 million at the conference for the post-war reconstruction of the country in January 2002, to be provided in the next two and a half years, among US$4.5 billion in total assistance internationally pledged. To Iraq, the Japanese government pledged US$5 billion at the conference for Iraqi reconstruction held in October 2003, nearly 10 per cent of the total sum internationally called for by the US, US$55 billion. Whereas the average share of total Japanese ODA allocated to the Middle East had been 10 per cent of total Japanese ODA since the 1970s, it was raised to 17.31 per cent after the Iraq war, marking a peak in Japan's expenditure in support of US policy in the Middle East.

17 JDA Defense White Paper 2006 The Basics of Japan's Defense Policy [http://www.jda.go.jp/e/index_.htm] Accessed on 11 September 2006.

In summary, the long-term trend in Japan's policy was a shift from a pro-Arab policy orientation towards neutrality, and then more recently toward a pro-US orientation. The mid-1980s saw the emergence of strategic ODA – use of economic means as a way to support the US, and the new millennium saw the emergence of SDF deployment in support of the US. Both strategic ODA and military deployment began similarly as *ad hoc* responses to US demands in particular situations in the Middle East but both responses were also gradually incorporated into a re-formulation of Japan's whole conceptualization of international security, with implications for its constitution and identity.

III. The Persisting Complexity of Japan's Middle East Policy

Iraq as Exception?

In spite of the long-term shift of Japan's policy orientation toward the US, this has nevertheless not been uniform but has varied by issue and country. Indeed, the wars in Afghanistan and especially against Iraq were in some respects exceptional cases, resulting from a combination of special factors such as a major international crisis and exceptional US determination to lead a 'coalition of the willing', with which Japan has sought to bandwagon. In the Iraq case, the special factors also included Japan's (mis-)perception of uncontested US hegemony in the post-Cold War world based on its experience of the Gulf war of 1990-1, which, however, has since been tempered by the difficulties the US faced in Iraq. The oil factor which had been the main force behind an independent Japanese policy in the Middle East was neutralized in the Iraq case because Japan had abandoned its oil interests in Iraq during the nineties under strong US pressure; moreover, because Iraq under Saddam Hussein had been internationally isolated for a decade, Japanese policy-makers believed US-engineered regime change would go unopposed in the Middle East, and would re-open oil opportunities, provided that Japan bandwagoned with the US in the war. Participation in Iraq under US leadership was also seen as an opportunity to expand and deepen the role of the SDF and to acquire international prestige as part of an international coalition. Japanese policy-makers, having learned the lesson of non-involvement in the first international war against Iraq in 1990, sought to make up for the lost opportunity.

Just as non-involvement in that latter war had damaged the US alliance, involvement in the 2003 campaign would demonstrate Japan's value to the US alliance and reduce the chance of US abandonment in the face of East Asian threats. Thus, this particular episode was an exceptional case in that Japanese policy-makers did not see a conflict among Japan's three major interests at stake, namely, maintaining the US alliance, securing oil relationships with Middle East states, and promoting Japan's international prestige due to their expectation of a successful removal of the existing regime in Iraq. It nevertheless took the unprecedented strong leadership of Prime Minister Koizumi to force through this policy, containing anti-militarist public opposition and in spite of the hesitation within parts of the policy-making circle; without his role, Japan's policy would have more minimalist in its military participation and less blatant in its pro-US stance. It may be that none of these conditions will be soon repeated.

Persistent Balancing

As a result, there is still no across-the-board militarization and Americanization of Japanese policy in the Middle East. Indeed, especially in more routine cases, Japan's Middle East policy continues to display aspects of its earlier political neutrality or balancing between the US and the Arab and Islamic states and also its stress on the use of economic instruments of influence. One salient example is Japan's stress on assistance to the Palestinian community, the core Arab party to the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Japanese government has seized every opportunity to advertise its support for the Palestinian Authority (PA) since its formation in 1993, initially in response to Washington's expectation of a large Japanese contribution, but increasingly out of its own commitment. Bilateral economic support began in 1993 in the same year as the Oslo Accord was signed by the PLO and Israel: Japan pledged US$2 billion dollars for the next two years, the third largest amount after the EU and US pledges. This aimed to help the Palestinian community's 'self-sufficiency' by supporting its economic and social infrastructure-building, employment generation, and the governance and institution-building of the Palestinian Authority, in the view that this would 'encourage and accelerate the peace process.' When in June 2003, US President George W. Bush announced the 'Road

Map for the Peace Process', the Japanese government announced a package of economic assistance called the 'Road Map for Japanese Assistance to Palestinians.' By the Fiscal Year 2004, Japanese ODA to the Palestinian Authority since 1993 had amounted to US$760 million. On the electoral victory of Mahmood Abbas, a Palestinian leader who enjoyed American favour as president of PA in January 2004, Japan increased its financial aid to PA for the coming fiscal year by US$60 million, marking its highest record of financial support for it. In January 2005, Japan pledged a further US$100 million upon the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in September 2005. Remarkably, further pledges for Palestine continued during the period following the victory of HAMAS (Islamic Resistance Movement) in the first Parliament election in Palestine held in January 2006, in counter to the US push to cut international aid for the HAMAS-ruled Palestinian regime. Japan continued to provide considerable assistance to the PA even in periods when it was regarded with hostility by the GW Bush administration, because neutrality in the Arab-Israeli conflict remained a normative cornerstone of Japan's Middle East policy, and because the Palestine issue remained an important way of placating Arab opinion that would otherwise be disenchanted with Japan's US tilt over Iraq.

A second manifestation of independence in Japan's Middle East policy has been its promotion of a WMD-free zone for the Middle East, a stance that pleases the Arab states but is unwelcome to the US and Israel. Japan has been an active promoter of this zone, one of the unfulfilled agenda items of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference held in 1995. Japan advanced its proposals at Non-nuclear Proliferation Treaty meetings and in its working groups, as well as in bilateral talks with Middle East states such as Iran, Syria, Egypt and Israel. Japan has even been vocal in pointing out a lack of effort and commitment on the part of the US (and Israel). In part this activism reflects Japan's self-image as an anti-nuclear state, a residue of its earlier normative commitment to non-military solutions to global conflicts.

On the Iranian nuclear issue, Japan has shown ambivalence. As the issue rose to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Board of Governors' top agenda in the summer of 2003, Japan actively cooper-

ated with the US by co-sponsoring a resolution against Iran with the US and European states at the IAEA. Japan supported this US-engineered international pressure on Iran in the belief that it would raise the profile of Japan's anti-nuclear activism, but also that Iran would capitulate and hence, the obstacles the nuclear issue placed in the way of Japan' business and energy relations with the country would be removed. This (mis-)perception derived in part from the belief, at the time, that US hegemony had been enhanced by the overthrow of Saddam Hussein and that Iran would succumb to its demands. However, when Iran resisted the pressure and warned Japan it was risking its oil stake in the country, Japan backed off and reverted to its traditional balancing between the two sides, generally taking, for a time, a more neutral position when the Iranian nuclear issue was raised at IAEA and in the UN Security Council.

What explains this continuing measure of independence in Japan's policy? Firstly, its starting point is how to pursue interests identified by the policy-makers to be at stake, namely Middle East oil, US security protection and the assertion of Japan's international profile as one of the leading states having influence in the international arena and enjoying a more 'balanced' military capability and roles. Which interests were to be emphasized and how to pursue them were determined by what groups or branches of the bureaucracy to and influence on the policy-making on a particular case.

Secondly, the norms concerned, both those nationally-held and those shared among the policy-making circle, continued to filter the way Japan pursued its interests. To be sure, the normative factor did sometimes legitimize a pro-US policy when WMDs were at issue, as in Iraq in the 1990s and during episodes of the Iran nuclear crisis in the early 2000s. However, more often norms worked to constrain Japan's pro-US policy. Within the policy establishment itself, the anti-nuclear norm encouraged a Japanese initiative for Middle East de-nuclearization at odds with US policy. The norm of neutrality in the Arab-Israeli conflict, firmly established in the foreign ministry in the seventies, limits how far Japan can embrace Washington's pro-Israel policy. The constitution, reinforced by public anti-militarism, has limited how far Japan can militarily support the US agenda in the region. In the case of war

in Afghanistan in 2001, the initial intention of actually sending ground troops and a controversial Aegis intelligence-gathering vessel to the Indian Ocean during the time of the war had both to be abandoned owing to political resistance even from within the ruling party. The SDF could not participate in the war on Iraq *per se* in the Iraq war of 2003, because the war lacked UN approval and, despite the ruling coalition's majority in the Diet, the government would not have been able to pass enabling legislation. Although UN approval was received for participation in Iraq's reconstruction, the hostility of the public and constitutional limits on SDF activity meant the government was forced to confine the SDF to non-combat-related roles and to turn down the US request that it provide rear support for US forces in post-war Iraq. The constitutional limits could not be circumvented in this case, because the fact that the war was not endorsed by a UN Security Council resolution hardened Japanese public opinion against it, showing how important UN endorsement remains if military involvement is to have legitimacy. While the government has been able to erode national norms such as anti-militarism and UN-centrism, they nevertheless persist and policy-makers are far from being free to implement their preferred policy when it violates them.

Thirdly, Japan's policy depended on its perception of the balance of power which, since the Iraq war, has not uniformly favoured bandwagoning with the US. For example, in the case of the Iran nuclear issue, Japan's balancing between its need to protect Japan's oil interests in the country and its US security dependence (including its need for the US to contain the threat of North Korean nuclear development) depended on policy-makers' perceptions of which side had the upper hand, which has resulted in some zigzagging in Japan's policy between support for and distancing itself from the US campaign against Iran.

IV. Conclusion: What of the Future?

What would Japan do in the case of a US attack on Iran over its nuclear program? While it would likely participate in pre-war non-military multilateral initiatives to sanction Iran, combined with dialogue aimed at encouraging Iranian compliance with these initiatives, it is difficult to envision conditions under which it would participate in a war. This is

because the outcome of the Iraq war has reversed US hegemony in the region and the willingness of other states, including Europe and many Arab and Islamic states to defer to US leadership, which also have to consider the mood of their publics and the possible lack of US effectiveness. The US proved itself to be neither a stabilizer nor capable of securing Middle East oil flows for Japan, hence the need for Japan to have amicable relations with regional oil states and to avoid being perceived as uncritically aligned with Washington. Moreover, at a time when world demand and competition for oil, especially from industrializing Asian giants such as China and India has being growing, Iran enjoys greater international protection against a US attack than did Saddam Hussein. Finally, Japan is unlikely in the near future to have strong leadership comparable to Koizumi's that would be needed to counter public opposition to participation in another US-led war without an international consensus. It will be too soon after the despatch of the GSDF to Iraq, by which Koizumi stretched public tolerance to its absolute limit. Hence, Japan's balancing between the US and Arab and Islamic states over Iran is most likely to continue unless the latter shows clear support for US actions, providing Japan a legitimacy base for alignment with the US, and unless it seems likely there would be a smooth regime change in Iran.

Bibliography

Carvely, S. C., *Dual Dependence: Japanese policy toward the Middle East, 1973 to 1984*, Ph.D. thesis, George Washington University, 1985.

Darby, D. and Hullock, H. B., *Japan: a new kind of superpower?,* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1994).

Dobson, H. J., *Japan and United Nations Peacekeeping: Formulations in the post-Cold War world,* Ph. D thesis, Sheffield University, 1998.

Iwamoto, Y. and Edirippulige, S., 'Japan's response to the war against terrorism', *New Zealand International Review* Vol. 27, No. 2, 2002, pp. 9-12.

Japan Defense Agency (JDA), Defense White Paper 2006 The Basics of Japan's Defense Policy [http://www.jda.go.jp/e/index_.htm] Accessed on 11 September 2006.

Katakura, K., 'Japan and the Middle East: towards a more positive role' in P. Tempest, (ed.) *The Politics of Middle East Oil*, (The Royaumont Group, London: Graham & Trotman, 1993), pp. 10-17.

Katzenstein, P. J., 'Same war, different views: Germany, Japan and the war on terrorism', *Current History*, Vol. 101, No. 659, pp. 427-35.

Naramoto, E., 'Japan aligned with the PLO', *Japan Quarterly,* Vol. 37, No. 1, 1990, pp. 19-23.

Nishihara, M., 'Japan-US cooperation in UN peace efforts' in S. S. Harrison and M. Nishihara, (eds.) *UN Peacekeeping: Japanese and American perspectives,* (Washington D.C.: A Carnegie Endowment Book, 1995), pp. 163-75.

Ogata, S., 'The United Nations and Japanese diplomacy', *Japan Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 1990, pp. 141-65.

Okamoto, Y., *Sabaku no Sensō: Iraku wo Kakenuketa Tomo, Oku Katsuhiko e* (The War of Desert: to Oku, my friend, who was devoted to Iraq), (Tokyo: Bungei Shunjū, 2004).

Orr, R. M., *The Emergence of Japan's Foreign Aid Power*, (New York: Colombia University Press, 1990).

Rynhold, J. (2002) 'Japan's cautious new activism in the Middle East: a qualitative change or more of the same?', *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific,* Vol. 2, No. 2, 2002, pp. 245-63.

Tateyama, R., 'Japan and the Middle East peace talks', *JIME Review* No. 19, 1992/3, pp. 19-22.

Tateyama, R., 'Japan, Iran and the United States: a delicate triangular relationship in the 1990s', *JIME Review,* No. 22, 1993, pp. 27-38.

Yoshitsu, M., *Caught in the Middle East,* (Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Books, 1984).

Uchida, T., 'Japan and the Arab World: an economic perspective', *American-Arab Affairs,* No. 32, 1990, pp. 27-32.

Unger, D., 'Japan and the Gulf War: making the world safe for Japan-US relations' in Bennet, A., Lepgold, J., and Unger, S. (eds.), *Friends in Need: Burden sharing in the Gulf War*, (New York: St. Martins Press, 1997), pp. 137-63.