Japan's Quest For Global Leadership

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In a report submitted in June to the Secretary General of the UN, Japan officially stated that it wanted a permanent seat on the Security Council (UNSC). As the world witnesses the disintegration of the old structure sustained by often brutal nonetheless stable hegemonic domination and as the importance of the UN is growing after the end of Cold War, this is a significant development that calls for close attention from not only its rivals in the Council but also from its neighboring countries. The world with no Soviet Union and declining American power would in itself cause a great deal of uncertainty; the rise of Japan could make the equation even more complex. What Japan does in the coming years will have critical impact on the shaping of the "new world order," whether it will be a stable and benign order or an unpredictable, vicious one.

This article examines the prospects for Japanese global leadership with a particular focus on its bid for permanent UNSC membership. What are the factors behind Japanese interest in a permanent seat on the Security Council? What are their intentions? What are the obstacles that Japan would face in achieving its goal? What is its strategy to gain permanent membership? What would that status means to the future of the Japanese role in the world? These are the issues to be explored.

Background

In the background of the debate concerning the possibility of a permanent Japanese seat on the UN Security Council, we could consider three factors: the rising responsibility of the UN in the post–Cold War era and demands for its reform; Japan's growing importance in the international community; Japanese intention to become a global leader.

First, demands for UN reform. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc, the US emerged as the only superpower in the world. This fact could not have been more clearly demonstrated than during the Gulf War. However, as the old international system is undergoing profound changes causing instability and uncertainty, it also became evident that the US alone could not play the role of global policeman. Another conspicuous development since the end of Cold War has been the revitalization of the UN after long years of paralysis from East-West confrontation. This has raised hopes that the organization will be able to function effectively to deal with international disputes. Between 1988 and 1992 the UN has sent peacekeeping forces (PKF) to twelve different locations around the world on an unprecedented scale, including fourteen thousand troops to Yugoslavia, twenty thousand to Cambodia and two thousand to Congo.

The UN's burden of responsibility, however, is becoming heavier than it can bear as it struggles to regain its vitality and effectiveness. Questions are raised whether, with its limited resources and poor management, it is up to the job. This is why UN reform is being advocated. Reform advocates say that the credibility of the United Nation is at risk and it is facing a real crisis. A most prominent figure who advocates UN reform is Butros Butros- Ghali, the UN Secretary General. Since taking office he has become a champion of UN reform. He argues that the UN is facing numerous challenges such as environmental deterioration, wide-spread famine and religious, ethnic conflicts all over

the world, and that expectations of UN service have been rising faster than it can cope.[1]

Apart from wasteful management and cronyism that has been plaguing the UN, another major issue is its decision-making process, particularly at the Security Council. The Council is said to be the only part of the UN where democracy does not apply, and this is considered by some as a blatant violation of democratic principles in today's international society. That is, the veto power of the five permanent members (P5) of the Security Council, given to the victors of World War II, cannot be justified in the 1990s. If the UN sincerely hopes to be a world government[2] in the true sense of the term, reformers argue, the Security Council has to be restructured to become more democratic and more representative.

The second factor is Japan's rising importance in the international community. The US-Japan military alliance was the core of American containment policy towards the former Soviet Union and has formed the backbone of Asian security. However, the relative decline of the US economy and the collapse of the common enemy the Soviet Union made it necessary for policymakers in both countries to reexamine the meaning of the alliance. The US-Japan relationship is currently undergoing a process of readjustment under the auspices of "Global Partnership" espoused in the "Tokyo Declaration" at the Bush-Miyazawa summit in 1992. The adjustment is being made in a way to expand Japan's regional and global responsibilities. At present Japan is perhaps the one country capable of assisting US efforts to reformulate the framework of international order in the post-Cold War era. The US is particularly interested in Japanese finan-

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1 See Butros Butros-Gali, "An Agenda for Peace" (Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to the statement adopted by the Summit Meeting of the Security Council on 31 January 1992), 17 June 1992.

2 Takahiro Shinyo UN Division Chief at MOFA recently wrote a newspaper column in which he quoted Butros-Gali's argument. *Segye Times*, 12 March 1993.

cial contribution to its programs in maintaining order, and preventing and resolving international disputes either on its own or under UN auspices. Japan's permanent seat on the UNSC is considered in this context.

Japan on its part recognizes that maintaining political stability and continued economic growth in the East Asian region as a whole is crucial to its own interest, and it is making various efforts to achieve that goal. That is why Japan decided to dispatch Self-Defense Forces troops to the PKO in Cambodia. It considers the unstable situation in Indochina a significant threat to the security of East Asia and to its own interests. Japan has clearly shown through the so-called "Miyazawa Doctrine" its intention to play a political and economic leadership role in the region by taking an active part in resolving the Cambodian issue.[3]

Japan has been active in the UN since joining, having been elected to the Security Council seven times. Member states are giving overwhelming support for a Japanese role in the UN as evidenced in the 1991 Council election in which Japan received 158 of 161 votes cast.[4] Japan's financial contribution to the UN in fiscal year 1993–94 was 12.25% of the total, second only to the US and far above Security Council permanent member China's 0.77% (see the table). Japan is financially more than qualified to sit permanently on the Council.

It is argued that as number one military spender in Asia, the largest ODA donor in the world, and the largest financier of the IMF, Japan is a great power and should be recognized as such.[5]

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3 Speech given by Prime Minister Miyazawa during his visit to ASEAN in January 1993.

4 Toru Nakagawa, Keukdong Moonje (November 1992), pp.69–70. Among 175 UN member states, about two thirds are developing countries and most of them are Japanese ODA recipients.

5 *Sekai ga Gawaru, Nihon ga Gawaru* [The World is Changing, Japan is Changing], (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1992), pp. 190–92.

Contribution to the UN by Country

Rank	Country	Ratio (%)
1	the US	25.00
2	Japan	12.25
3	Russia	9.41
4	Germany	8.93
5	France	6.00
6	UK	5.02
7	Italy	4.29
18	China	0.77

How odd that Japan is not permanent member of the Security Council while recipients of Japanese aid, China and Russia, are. No doubt pressures to rectify this will continue to build.

The third factor is Japan's strong desire to become a permanent member. Discussions about its permanent seat on the Council has been activated partly because the Japanese government is now showing serious intention to pursue it. Japanese officials seem to feel it is time that Japan was recognized as a key UN player, and political leaders such as Prime Minister Miyazawa or ex-Foreign Minister Watanabe have publicly articulated the need for reform of the Security Council. Yoshio Hatano, Japan's Ambassador to the UN mentioned in 1991 that Japan wanted a seat within five years.[6]

We could consider two major factors behind this intention to apply for permanent membership. First, Japan wishes to clear itself of the stigma of a criminal state of WWII. Japanese leaders view the deletion of the "enemy state" clause from the UN Charter as one of the last remaining tasks for "postwar" Japanese diplomacy. Second, Japan now wants to be recognized as an equal with other western industrialized countries not only in an economic but also a political sense. Until now Japan has been

6 *Asahi Shimbun*, 17 October 1991.

faithfully following the US lead in world affairs. However, it now feels a need for change in the US-Japan relationship: it wants to see an equal partnership develop in place of the traditional patron-client relationship. Japan wishes to join the league of great powers who will shape the twenty-first century. To assert its international leadership there seems to be no better way than obtaining that seat, but Japan will face many obstacles and go through an extremely difficult process.

Issues

For Japan to obtain permanent membership, the UN Charter has to be revised, and that requires a two-thirds majority approval at the General Assembly and two thirds of the votes at the Security Council including those of the five permanent members. The Charter has been revised three times in the past: to increase the number of non-permanent members of the Security Council from six to ten, to enlarge the Economic and Social Council membership from 16 to 27 in 1965, and then to 54 in 1971.[7] However, changing the number of permanent members is another matter. Overcoming the resistance from the P5 countries and other permanent membership aspirants, and devising a formula that could produce consensus among all interested parties would be a daunting task.

France and England made their opposition clear to any change in the composition of the Security Council that could diminish their own influence. The US does not want to see the Council again immobilized as a result of structural alteration. In addition, if Japan were given a permanent seat, it would be difficult to leave out Germany. If Germany becomes a permanent member, there will be complaints about three European seats out of seven permanent on the Security Council. Then the "fair regional representation" question comes in. India, Nigeria and Brazil will

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7 Toru Nakagawa, p. 72.

object to European domination of the Council and would demand representation. If they are considered as candidates, then Mexico, Argentina, and Egypt may also insist. Starting the process would be much easier than concluding it.

Besides these legal and procedural difficulties, serious questions are raised about Japan's qualification for permanent membership. Critics of Japan's foreign policy contend that it has neither the necessary leadership nor philosophy to be a permanent member, nor concrete ideas in resolving various problems facing the UN. In addition, critics argue that the Japanese people do not understand what the responsibility of maintaining global security entails, and there has never been any serious discussion among the population about the meaning of the use of force to keep international peace and order. They say Japan is not yet ready for the job.[8]

Still others point to questionable Japanese morality, as it has been so reluctant to admit the atrocities it committed during the war period. Despite Japan's claim to be a peace-loving nation, suspicion runs deep among the neighboring countries about Japanese intentions. They contend that it is inappropriate for Japan to take permanent membership because it has been trying to conceal its dark history and has not genuinely apologized for its past wrong-doings. Such negative perception of Japan's qualification is a major obstacle for Japan to earn the permanent status of the Security Council. Not insurmountable, though: memories die hard but they eventually do. A more critical issue is whether Japan with its domestic legal constraints and public misgivings can actually perform its functions as a permanent Security Council member.

One of the responsibilities of Security Council permanent members is active planning of and participation in peacekeeping

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8 See Yasuhiko Yoshida, "Anpojoninrijikoku no Hiyo tai Koka" [Permanent Membership of the Security Council: Cost vs. Benefit], *Bungei Shunju* (February 1993).

operations, including contributions of military personnel. However, the fact that the Japanese Constitution prohibits use of its military except for self-defense is a major hindrance. Japan already experienced serious political trouble in dispatching its Self-Defense Forces troops to Cambodia, even settling for only non-combat-related duties of the UNTAC. It seems useful to examine the issue of the Japanese PKO participation in considering the prospects of permanent Security Council membership.

The Japanese government passed the PKO Law in June 1992 and managed to dispatch Self-Defense Forces personnel to Cambodia, despite an internal split in the LDP, confrontations with opposition parties in the Diet, and popular discontent. It was the first time since WWII that Japanese troops put their feet on another country's soil.

The immediate cause of this historic decision was the Gulf War experience. Japan was harshly censured by the world public opinion for avoiding any human contribution to the multinational effort to assist Kuwait. Although Japan eventually did provide over thirteen billion dollars to finance the fighting against Iraq, criticism of "checkbook diplomacy" continued, and Japan was completely ignored and excluded from the post-war settlements and the reconstruction of war-torn Kuwait.

Experiencing frustration and diplomatic humiliation during the Gulf crisis, Japanese leaders seem to have realized that economic power alone does not translate into the status of global leader, and that Japan really must make a contribution to the international community commensurate with its economic capacity. The Japanese people also began to understand the need for an international role.[9]

The Japanese government came to view PKO as the most suitable means to expand its international role in the area of politics and security. Participation in PKO is considered the best

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9 In a recent opinion poll, fifty to sixty percent of the Japanese are reported to support Japan's PKO participation as it is. *Asahi Shimbun*, 24 March 1993.

way to minimize fears among Japan's neighbors about the "revival of Japanese militarism" and to enhance the chance that it will gain permanent membership. Due to internal legal and political constraints, however, expanding international contribution through PKO participation is not necessarily a smooth process. The Japanese are taking many pains to stress that the UNPKO do not constitute such a use of military force that the Peace Constitution prohibits. The PKO Law also stipulates five principles of PKO participation by the SDF,[10] and the troops must be pulled out if they ever come into a situation where maintaining these principles becomes impossible. In addition, the PKO Law put on indefinite hold any SDF participation in combat-related duties, thereby confining its duty to non-combat activities such as monitoring election processes, supporting civilian police, advising administrative matters, medical support, construction, transportation, telecommunication and the like.

PKO participation on the part of the SDF, debates over the revision of the Constitution, and gaining a permanent seat on the Security Council are all closely related. For Japan to become a permanent member, it will have to develop clear policies regarding PKO and this would require it to clarify the ambiguities in the current PKO Law and its relationship with the Peace Constitution.

There are two opposing interpretations of Article Nine of the Constitution as it pertains to the PKO Law. Some argue that the Law, which allows dispatch of SDF troops overseas, is unconstitutional. Others argue that the Law does not violate Article Nine because peacekeeping is not a use of military force as a means of foreign policy. In future debates of the constitutionality of PKO

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10 Japan is allowed to participate in PKO under the following conditions: (1) if there is a truce agreement; (2) when there is an agreement on PKO among the parties in dispute and the country where PKO is carried out; (3) PKO should be strictly neutral; (4) if the truce agreement is broken or if PKO becomes unable to maintain neutrality, Japan should stop its activities and withdraw the troops; (5) Japanese troops may use small personal weapons for self defense.

participation, there will be basically three different arguments: (1) Japan's PKO is unconstitutional, (2) it is a matter of interpretation of Article Nine, (3) Japan's PKO should be expanded and, if necessary, the Constitution be revised.

Until now the existence of the SDF or its PKO participation was justified by reinterpreting Article Nine. However, demands will increase for the SDF's peacekeeping operations to include combat-related duties. Japan will raise the level of its PKO participation gradually by loosening the "five principles" and lifting the embargo on combat-related operations. This will inevitably result in clashes with the Constitution.

Some conservative politicians view that rewriting the Peace Constitution, which was written under the US Occupation Government, is the final task for Japan to "settle all the accounts" of the post-war era before moving forward to the twenty-first century. Unlike in the past when mere mention of any revision to the Constitution was taboo, active debate is now officially waged over the issue. The LDP's Constitutional Research Committee has started deliberation on the relationship between the Constitution and Japanese military contribution to the UN. Many LDP leaders such as Ozawa Ichiro, Mitsuzuka Hiroshi, Kajiyama Seiroku, and Watanabe Michio seem to favor constitutional revision in some fashion that could allow a more active international Japanese role. Positive opinions about a new constitution appropriate for Japan in the next century are slowly but steadily spreading among the general public. However, a recent opinion poll showed that about 70% of respondents were against revising the Constitution for the purpose of expanding PKO participation, and the majority of Japanese politicians still oppose it. Revising the Constitution requires two thirds majority approval at the Diet and a national referendum, which would be rather difficult.

Japan's current constitution is certainly a handicap for application to Security Council permanent status. However, the official position seems to be that permanent membership and the

Peace Constitution are not necessarily contradictory. The government is hoping Japan can join the permanently before the end of this century, and is expected to pursue the following strategy to achieve that goal.

First, rather than trying to justify Japanese candidacy as a long issue, Japan will emphasize the need to reform the UN as a whole, which happens to include the Security Council. The government will stress that the structure and operation of the Security Council were determined immediately after WWII and do not reflect present realities.[11] Foreign Ministry officials will argue that the UN is not up to the job demanded by the world community today and that the Security Council should be reformed to change that situation.[12] They will make full use of arguments made by international figures such as Butros-Ghali, who strongly advocates UN reform.

Second, Japan will try to remove the "enemy state clause" (Articles 53 and 107) from the UN Charter. In 1991 Taro Nakayama, then foreign minister, raised the issue at the General Assembly and openly demanded its elimination. Japanese officials argue that it is unreasonable that the Charter still considered Japan an enemy state while its financial contribution to the UN is second largest next to the US.[13] In demanding the removal of the enemy state clause, Japan wants to open up the debate to reorganize the UNSC.

Third, to gain the support of the P5 Council members, Japan may seek permanent member status without veto power. Japanese officials will let it be known that what they want is not so much wielding power equal to that of the P5 as having greater

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11 Hideyuki Tanaka, "'Atarashii Kokuren' no Shodokoku e," *Sekai* (March 1993), pp. 47–49.

12 Fusakazu Izumura, "Should Japan Get a Permanent Seat on the U.N. Security Council?" *Tokyo Business Today* (March 1993), p. 55.

13 See Akira Yoshikawa, "Kokurenkensho 'Kyutekkoku Joko' no Mondaiten" [Problems of the 'Enemy State Clause' of the UN Charter] *Seikyoken Kiyo* (January 1993), pp. 85–113.

participation in the UN's crucial decision-making process. Japan will also spur lively debate on the formula for UNSC reform. In one formula, for example, a Japanese analyst proposes to add Germany, Japan, Brazil, India and Nigeria to the permanent membership and to abolish veto power by introducing two-thirds majority decision-making.[14] Another formula suggests that Japan and Germany be added to the permanent membership, but the three European countries share two seats in rotation.[15]

Fourth, Japan will boost its financial support of the UN, expand participation in PKO and increase various contributions to other international organizations. It will further expand its ODA to developing countries, most of which seem to support the Japanese bid for permanent membership. It will become more involved in dealing with global problems of environment, refugees, famine, drugs and so on, and try to strengthen its comparative advantage in contributing to international security by non-military means such as science and technology. In the field of military, Japan will try to develop an area of specialty where it can be active without using force. For example, it can play a leading role in creating a regime for arms control or disarmament. Of course, Japan considers PKO as the central element of its diplomatic efforts to gain a permanent Security Council seat and will put in a great deal of resources into it.

Prospects

The international community seems to be showing a mixed response to Japan's bid for a permanent seat. Most of the Southeast Asian Countries have registered their support. The Thai Prime Minister said that Japan should play a role in the UN

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14 Sato Seizaburo's comment during an interview, 26 May 1993.

15 Nakagawa, p.73; Yasuhiko Yoshida, Terumasa Nakanishi, "Kokuren Garikoso to Nihon no Moso" [Gali's UN Design and Japan's Delusion], *Shokun*, April 1993, pp. 130–32.

commensurate to its economic capacity. The Malaysian Prime Minister held that it is unthinkable that Japan will ever become a military threat in the region and made clear that he supports its permanent membership.[16] Filippino President Ramos also declared in a recent news conference that Japan's important role in the international community should be recognized and that UNSC permanent seat is an appropriate way to do so.[17]

Among the P5 countries, the US seems to be most supportive. The US seems to have realized that it needs a Japanese supporting role to establish a New World Order under its continuing leadership.[18] Mr. Clinton was reported to advocate that the Security Council should be reformed and that Japan and Germany should be included.[19] Assistant Secretary of State Winston Lord stated in a Senate confirmation hearing that the US government supports Japan's permanent seat.[20] American scholars and journalists also seem to be generally of the opinion that Japan's credentials are more than enough for the seat and that the US should support its most important ally to obtain it.[21]

Chinese and Russian attitudes are rather ambiguous. China's new ambassador to Tokyo recently stated that "Japan's permanent membership in the UNSC is a matter of time." He did not say whether China will actively support the application but suggested that at least it would not oppose.[22] Officially, the

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16 *Asahi Shimbun*, 17 January 1993.

17 *Asahi Shimbun*, 2 March 1993. See also *Sekai Shuho* (3 March 1993), pp. 51–53.

18 Fusakazu Izumura, pp. 54–55.

19 Bill Clinton's address at George Town University on 12 December 1992.

20 *Asahi Shimbun*, 1 April 1993.

21 Kenneth Dam, John Deutch, Joseph Nye and David Rowe, "Harnessing Japan: A U.S. Strategy for Managing Japan's Rise as a Global Power," *Washington Quarterly* (Spring 1993), pp.39–40; Maiku Yangu, "Beikoku wa Nihon no Joninriji koku Iri o Shijisubekida" [The US should support Japan's permanent membership of UNSC], *Sekai Shuho* (12–19 January 1993).

22 *Nihonkeizai Shimbun*, 13 April 1993.

Russian government does not oppose Japan's application, either. France and England appear skeptical about the idea of sharing their privilege with Japan and Germany. English Prime Minister John Major once stated that he did not mind discussing the reorganization of UNSC, but that the focus of the discussion should be on how to make the Council function more effectively. The French and English positions are to oppose any change in the Security Council that may hamstring its effectiveness.

Although the US, China and Russia appear to endorse Japan's bid for a permanent UNSC membership, it is not at all clear whether they would do so when the time for decision actually comes. It is doubtful whether China would be willing to allow its regional rival to obtain permanent status. Neither is it certain how hard the US will try actually to help Japan beyond mere rhetoric, but it will be a determining factor. If US policymakers decide they really need an increased Japanese role in the UN, they will use their influence and persuade others.

Meanwhile, Japan seems not yet ready to launch a well-coordinated campaign to gain permanent membership. It has to resolve the issue of its Constitution, the SDF Law and the PKO Law. The public still does not quite understand what such status would mean and what responsibilities it would entail. Japanese society including the government and the political circles still do not have clear commitment to the idea of Japan as a permanent member of the Security Council. With the defeat of the LDP in the July election and the ensuing political instability, Japan will be unable for some time to come up with any consensus and take clear and confident policy steps toward permanent membership.

Nevertheless, there is no denying that Japan is playing a major role in world affairs today. And, given Japan's status as an economic superpower, there will be ever-increasing demands for Japanese responsibility and leadership. Japan's contribution to the UN both financial and personnel, including PKO, will rise steadily. We will see more SDF troops around the globe under the UN flag. Japan will eventually rewrite the PKO Law, too. It is

often argued that Japan cannot become a permanent UNSC member unless it revises its constitution. However, that may not be a necessary condition for permanent status itself. Informed observers generally predict that Japan could by the end of this century become a permanent member without veto.

The pace and scope of Japan's pursuit of global leadership will largely be determined by developments in the Japanese domestic political scene: the result of political reform, the philosophy and policy ideas of those who form the government, popular verdict on the revision of the Peace Constitution, among many.

The political map is now being redrawn as the traditional "conservative versus radical" structure has collapsed, the once-dominant LDP is in disarray, and an anti-LDP alliance led by newborn conservative parties is attempting to bring about some fundamental changes to Japan's political economic system and its foreign policy. The possibility of the advent of a two-party system is now greater than ever as the Social Democratic Party has shrunk to half and seems near its demise.

Revising the Peace Constitution is an extremely risky proposition for Japanese politicians, but it could become an election issue under a two-conservative-party system, and the popular mood against constitutional revision may decline in time. Ozawa Ichiro, the man behind the Renewal Party, believes that Japan cannot continue forever to depend on the US for its security, and that political reform towards a two-party system is necessary to invigorate the policy process and to formulate a more pro–active foreign policy. It is quite possible that more assertive and internationally minded conservative politicians such as Ozawa and his associates could form a major political force in a new Japanese system. With a revised Constitution backed by popular support, and with its name on the list of permanent membership of the UN Security Council, Japan would carry out a much more activist foreign policy and become ready to establish global leadership along with the US, whether we ask for it or not.