

Tinkering Every 15 Years: A New Major Turn in Japan's Foreign Policy?

By Inoguchi Takashi

IT was Henry A. Kissinger who expounded a 15-year-theory of Japanese decision (Kissinger, 2001). In his view, the Japanese are slow at making decisions. Let's take a look at three events: Commodore Matthew Perry's visit to Japan in 1853; the complete defeat of Japan by the Allied Powers in 1945; and the collapse of the huge bubble in 1991. It took 15 years for the Japanese to put an end to the seemingly endless debates and strife before they started *de novo* in 1868 (Mitani, 2003). It took 15 years for the Japanese to make up their mind as to whether they would get along with the Americans or not before they announced the income-doubling plan in 1960, whereby they indicated that they would go with the United States focusing on wealth accumulation (Packard, 1967). It is about to take 15 years after the collapse of the bubble before the Japanese make their mind on how to lay off employees and deal with bad loans. As the Japanese economy has started to pick at long last toward the end of 2003, Kissinger may ring so true even if some remain skeptical of his theory as to what factor leads the Japanese to make such a decision so repeatedly (Mikuni/ Murphy, 2002).

The Battle between Pro-Alliance and Anti-Alliance: 1945-1960

With his theory kept in my mind, I started to examine Japan's foreign policy lines since 1945 and found that his theory holds true, more or less! To the great surprise of many observers of Japan who keep believing that Japan does not change, Japan has been changing its policy line every 15 years since 1945! The first period, 1945-1960, is the "with or without the United States" period. Though vastly different from Iraq after the Iraq War of 2003, Japan, from 1945 to 1960, was conducting the debate about whether it should continue to work with the United States. The die

was cast when Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke passed the revision of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty in the National Diet against vigorous resistance, and submitted his resignation to the Diet. That was in 1960. Yoshida Shigeru's policy line (Yoshida line) commenced on the day of Kishi's resignation. By the Yoshida line, I mean the thought that happiness is keeping the security treaty with the United States whereby the Japanese focus their brains and energy on wealth accumulation. This was the official beginning of the Yoshida line. The Yoshida line was most vigorously contested during the period of 1945-1960. Many Japanese were not able to come to terms with the humiliation of delegating their national security to a foreign country and the uneasiness with which they had to allow the cohabitation of the security treaty and the Constitution. Only with the income-doubling plan of 1960-1970 announced by Prime Minister Ikeda Hayato in 1960 did the Yoshida line look as if it had no enemy at home and abroad.

Yoshida Line or Free Rider: 1960-1975

Japan's income level went up so steadily that Japan became the target of envy first, and then of enmity. Internally as well, the rapid economic, social and demographic changes undermined the political basis of the governing party, the Liberal Democratic Party. President Charles de Gaulle's nasty comment that Japan is a mere salesman of transistors was a caricature of Japan with the Yoshida line stripped of the visionary politician's valor and pride. De Gaulle called Japan a free rider who had no sense of responsibility about how to run the world even when it represented the second largest economy. The free rider line prevailed more or less during the period of 1960-1975.

Systemic Supporter: 1975-1990

Toward its end, the oil crisis erupted and war broke out in the Middle East. Japan wavered between pro-American and pro-OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) positions while the accusation that Japan was a free rider echoed from both sides. This prompted Japan to shift its position slowly but steadily from a free rider to a systemic supporter (Inoguchi, 1986; Inoguchi/Okimoto, 1989). By a systemic supporter, I mean actions which help to maintain the U.S.-led international system. It is important to note that Japan's support was of a mostly economic nature, as exemplified by Japan's positions on free trade and energy security, but that toward the end it took on the political and military natures as well as exemplified by Japan's support on issues like SS-20. The period of 1975-1990 was aptly called the period of the systemic supporter's role. It is more like Niccolò Machiavelli's "armed support to friends; neutrality to enemies" without teeth. Despite all the difficulties associated with the constitutional ban on the use of force for the settlement of international disputes, rhetorical freedom was not in short supply. Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro went so far as to characterize Japan as an "unsinkable aircraft carrier" toward the end of this period of 1975-1990.

Global Civilian Power: 1990-2005

The steady decrease of war among the major powers (Mueller, 1989) and the end of the Cold War (Fukuyama, 1992/95) set the stage for what they called the global civilian powers to play a significant role (Maull, 1990; Funabashi, 1991). Even though they had been revisionist powers and heavily militarist and expansionist powers before 1945, and exemplarily pacifist countries afterwards, Japan and Germany were

more than delighted to be given this role after the Cold War. If Germany and Japan suffered from their obstinacy about power and expansion before 1945, they appeared as if they had forgotten about power and influence after 1945 (Schwarz, 1985). Both are big and wealthy; both are pacifist; both are good allies of the United States; and yet the legacy of the past and the ban on the use of force have been weighing on the shoulders of the Japanese and the Germans for half a century. Given these constraints, both countries had no reason to be exceedingly unhappy. Both countries paved the way for activities associated with peace keeping and economic construction largely on the basis of the notion of human security, a laudable concept of giving each and every human being opportunities to activate his/her potential. The United Nations (UN) was most pro-active in the former part of the 1990s in these activities under the leadership of Boutros Boutros-Ghali. However, soon dark clouds started to prevail in many parts of the Third World. Global market integration deepened the predicament of poverty-stricken and strife-riddled countries; the end of the U.S.-Soviet confrontation meant that the two powers had a reduced stake in the Third World on many occasions. The result of all these created the almost perennial problems of failed states and bankrupt economies. That is far above what self-claimed global civilian powers, the UN and non-governmental organizations were able to handle in a singular fashion. Under such conditions the events of Sept. 11 took place, as if calling for the United States to make its might felt and act decisively. That will put an end to the fourth period of global civilian power, 1990-2005 and paved the way for the role of global power with justice, a global power which makes judgments about which is more just and which is a lesser evil.

Global Ordinary Power: 2005-2020

The emerging role, a global power with justice, from 2005 to 2020, has been chosen by Japan. The chosen role is at least seemingly revolutionary as Japan has been an actor supposedly beset with *Machtvergessenheit* (obliviousness of power). It symbolizes the idea that Japan is becoming an ordinary power in a number of senses. First, the use of force is becoming more acceptable if solely for self-defense. Effective self-defense against terrorism requires a number of lines of action. Without reproaching public opinion, the Japan Coast Guard has used force against an unidentified vessel which fiercely resisted the Japanese coast guard's attempt to investigate what it carried. This incident took place in 2002. The Self-Defense Forces (SDF) have been allowed to use force, more specifically rifles, once they are attacked or once they detect that an enemy is about to attack in the context of UN peacekeeping operations. This was legislated in 1991. The SDF have been allowed to use force, more specifically person-to-tank weapons in the context of the peacekeeping operations in Iraq. This legislation took place in 2003. Second, non-provocative use of force needs to be practiced. In other words, strictly defensive defense must be practiced. If use of force is required to the extent to which this doctrine cannot be applied, it will be difficult to leave the constitution unrevised. Third, recognition that terrorism can only be reduced with efforts to eradicate extreme poverty, to terminate discrimination and to enhance the inclusive involvement of the wider population in running a society must be practiced abroad as well.

Although Japan's foreign policy has been constant in many ways since 1945, a close look enables one to discern its not-so-subtle changes every 15 years; the battle between the pro-alliance and the anti-alliance (1945-1960), the Yoshida line

(1960-1975), the systemic supporter (1975-1990), the global civilian power (1990-2005) and the global ordinary power (2005-2020). Needless to say, what an ordinary power means is still very vague. But it is important to stress that Japan has started a major transition.

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(To be continued)

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