



University for Peace



Number 11 – July 2017

The Foreign Policy of Japan

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Summary

- As a general rule, Foreign Policy is based almost exclusively on national interest, which varies according to each nation's ideology, capabilities, limitations, and restrictions.
- In the case of Japan, the following factors influence its foreign policy: an increasingly sensitive security environment in East Asia; a growing concern over violent, extremist and international terrorism; global issues that urgently need a response; and the risks and opportunities for international economies, namely Japan.
- Japan's main priorities when drafting foreign policy include: (1) making proactive contributions to peace; (2) promoting Japan's national interests; and (3) working together with other on global issues.

Ideas for peace



The Foreign Policy of Japan

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I would like to start with a definition. Without a common definition, the discussion may not be fruitful. So, let's define what foreign policy is. The English dictionary defines foreign policy as *"a policy of a sovereign state in its interaction with other sovereign states."* The Oxford dictionary defines it as a *"government's strategy in dealing with other nations."* So, let's define foreign policy here as follows: *a policy formulated by a nation in its dealing with other nations, in order to preserve national interests and/or achieve national objectives.* This is a very general statement and this is not just applicable to Japan's foreign policy, but also the foreign policy of any other country, for the moment. There is another important word that needs defining: diplomacy. This word is often used when talking about foreign policy. According to the dictionary, diplomacy is *"the art and practice of conducting negotiation between nations."*

How Foreign Policy is Formulated

Taking these definitions into consideration, let's see how foreign policy is formulated in a general way. First of all, there is a **national interest**. This might be one of peace and stability, safety and security, sustainable prosperity, or territorial integrity, this last one either for its own sake or how they are related to natural resources like oil or marine resources like fisheries. You can add any national interest you can think of. There are also **ideologies**, like peace, democracy, rule of law, human rights, and the environment. Every country has its own **capabilities, limitations** and **restrictions**. One such example is power, which can be either military or financial in nature. If you don't have money to spend, you cannot effectively interact with other nations. If you don't have the money to set up an embassy in another country, you lose influence in that country. So everything is money; money is power. There are regional and global entities that nations are a part of, and it is here where they develop much of their relationship with other nations. And then there are foreign relations themselves, whereby each country has its own unique relationship with its neighboring countries.

We also have **public expectation**. Foreign policy cannot stand alone; foreign policy should take account of public opinion. Sometimes public reaction may influence foreign policy in any country, including Japan.

And then, there is the reality, even if it is a **perceived reality**. Foreign policy makes people perceive reality differently. Japan's perception of reality maybe

be different from the reality perceived by Costa Rica or North Korea of the same situation. **Reality** refers to the situation's prospects for the future: what will happen or what may happen, risks (such as infectious disease or terrorism) and opportunities (such as economic opportunities to import or export).

Global and regional issues also have an impact on foreign policy. In the case of Costa Rica, there is currently an issue with immigrants from Cuba, and now we have African immigrants trying to get into the U.S.A. and remaining stuck in transit in Costa Rica. Europe is another example, with millions of refugees from Middle East and Africa flooding the continent. These are global and regional issues. Formulating foreign policy will take all of these elements into account. The process of formulating foreign policy requires those in charge to be reasonable. Those who formulate foreign policy don't jump to conclusions out of the blue, they recognize the seriousness of the situation, and they evaluate the opportunities and possible options. This is a very serious process.

Japan's Perception of Reality

In the specific case of Japan, how does Japan perceive reality?

1) There is **an increasingly sensitive security environment** in East Asia. This might just be a Japanese perception, but Japan considers that security, in the case of East Asia, is becoming increasingly sensitive due to the rapidly increasing military capability build-up of the countries in the region. There are two regions in the world where military spending is rapidly increasing; one of them is the Middle East, the other is East Asia. In Iraq there are currently attempts to change the *status quo*. In East Asia, the direction of North Korea is currently unclear, making it very difficult for Japan to predict what North Korea will do next.

2) There is a **growing concern over violent, extremist and international terrorism**. Violent terrorist groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Boko Haram in Africa, and their international influence beyond their borders. One might consider these phenomena to be very distant from Japan and Latin America, but just last year, there was a second Japanese citizen murdered by extremist groups in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Japan is not immune to international terrorism, and the government has a responsibility to protect its nationals, which makes this a very serious matter from the Japanese perspective.

3) There are **global issues that urgently need a response**. Poverty is one of them, with millions of people currently living under the poverty line. Also, we are feeling the effects of climate change and there are urgent issues regarding environmental protection that need attention. Furthermore, we have the issue of universal health coverage, as well as other issues pertaining to health, including infectious diseases like the Zika and Ebola viruses. Another large issue is that of refugees, considering the mass wave of refugees from the Middle East currently flooding Europe. All of these are big issues, not only regionally but globally.

4) There are **risks, but at the same time opportunities, for international economies**. There is a phenomenon slowing down the Chinese economy. And I say this because the Japanese economy is so dependent on the Chinese economy. We export a lot to China. If the Chinese economy's performance drops, so does Japan's. At the same time, Asia is one of the fastest growing economic regions in the world, which represents a great opportunity for Japan. We can also see the emergence of protectionism, the idea that "my country is first". Japan is currently so dependent on free trade, that it depends on an open and fair trade system in order to prosper.

So, let's take a look of the details of these realities.

The Security Environment around Japan

Regarding the security environment around Japan, let us examine the military spending of our neighbors¹. First of all, Russia's defense spending is about \$91,081 million, with 80,000 defense personnel just on the east side, and 7,000 nuclear warheads. We also have North Korea, with defense personnel of more than US\$ 1 million, and 10 nuclear warheads. Then there is China, which exceeds US\$ 214,485 million in military spending, with 1.7 million defense personnel and 260 nuclear warheads. In the case of South Korea, the military spending is US\$ 38.640 million – modest when compared with the rest of the region – with 524,000 military personnel, and no nuclear warheads. Japan spends about US\$ 46,346 million, has 140,000 military personnel, and no warheads. This is the current security and defense situation in East Asia.

1 Sources from SIPRI, Defense White Paper of Japan, and Arms Control Association.

If we consider the total population of North Korea, which is 25 million, and its military personnel, which is over 1 million, and we compare it to Japan, which has a population of 127 million and just 140,000 military personnel, we can see that North Korea has more disproportionate military capabilities. There is no real data on North Korea's military spending.

There is also U.S. military presence in the region. There are approximately 17,00 U.S. military personnel in the Republic of South Korea and 18,000 in Japan. Japan is also a stronghold of the U.S. military fleet.

Japanese Economic Relations

Let us turn now to the economic situation of Japan. China is currently Japan's biggest trade partner, with the U.S. in second place. Japan also holds excellent economic relations, including trade and investment, with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), its third most important economic partner. The European Union currently holds fourth place, with the Middle East close behind, since Japan imports a large amount of oil and natural gas from this region. At the same time, Japan currently has an important trade surplus with the U.S., If we lose that trade surplus with the U.S., how will we buy that oil from the Middle East? How do we balance that surplus with the deficit we have with China? These are important issues for Japan.

If you look at the current economic relations in Japan and military situation previously mentioned, it is easy realize that Japan is in a very tricky position. We are afraid of the military build-up of one of our "big brothers", China, while depending on the trade with our other "big brother", the U.S. So how can Japan manage this relationship with its two "big brothers"? This is at the crux of Japanese foreign relations.

Japan's Foreign Policy

Japan's foreign policy Considering these realities as perceived by the Japanese is important for understanding how foreign policy is formulated from a Japanese point of view. One of the first priorities is making proactive contributions to peace. But I think in order to have peace for Japan, the world needs to be peaceful. So, Japan's foreign policy attempts to make contributions towards a more peaceful world. The second priority is protecting and promoting Japan's

national interests. Peace is a national interest, but so is sustainable economic prosperity, which it strives towards by working together with partners on global issues as a responsible member of the international community.

1. Making proactive contributions to peace

With regards to making proactive contributions to peace, Japan doesn't have a strong military power, and the psychology of the Japanese general public is such that they have no desire to get involved in a war situation. And so Japan attempts to contribute to peace in a larger context, a more comprehensive approach to peace. Japan is looking at peacebuilding to achieve sustainable peace in post-conflict regions by comprehensive efforts including peacekeeping, emergency humanitarian assistance, promotion of peace and reconciliation processes, reconstruction and development. All of this in the belief that without the proper construction of development, peace cannot be sustainable.

Japan also participates in peacekeeping operations, though it doesn't do so unilaterally, but by seeking partners for these operations. Japan is also involved in measures against piracy off the Coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden.

Japan also is also committed to disarmament and non-proliferation, and adheres to all legal instruments related to these issues, such as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) and the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). Japan is also a member of the Non-proliferation and Disarmament Initiative (NPDI) and the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and so on, and regularly cooperates with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), whose current Director-General, Mr. Yukiya Amano, is Japanese. Japan has been very active in promoting an additional protocol for greater safeguards in nuclear facilities alongside the IAEA. Furthermore, since 2015, Japan has been attempting to enlarge the scope of possible peace cooperation activities through new legislation for peace and security.

2. Promoting Japan's National Interest

The second pillar of Japanese Foreign Policy is protecting and promoting Japan's national interests. One of the keys to this is the strengthening of the U.S.-Japan Alliance. "The unshakable U.S.-Japan Alliance is the cornerstone

of peace, prosperity, and freedom in the Asia-Pacific region” (joint statement by President Trump and Prime Minister Abe during their recent meeting in Washington, D.C.)

The Japan-US Alliance has been the linchpin of Japan’s diplomacy, and Japan and the United States will continue to further strengthen this Alliance in all areas including technological cooperation of defense innovation and security cooperation in cyberspace. The two countries agreed and revised the Defense Cooperation Guidelines for more effective operations of this alliance.

In the history of the alliance, we can see various instances of reformulation of these guidelines on behalf of both countries, in order to enhance the effectiveness of the alliance. When the Cold War ended, new guidelines were agreed-upon that were relevant to a post-Cold War world. This was done again after 9/11 in order to effectively cope with terrorism and other threats.

History of Japan-US Alliance

- 1945: End of World War II
- 1952: San Francisco Peace Treaty
- 1952: Security Treaty between Japan and the United States.
- 1956: Accession to the United Nations
- 1960: Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between Japan and the United States of America
- 1978: Guidelines for Japan-US Defense Cooperation
- 1991: End of the Cold War
- 1997: Revision of Guidelines for Japan-US Defense Cooperation
- 2015: New Guidelines for Japan-US Defense Cooperation

Another important key aspect of this pillar involves enhancing relation with its neighbors. The relationships with neighboring countries such as the Republic of Korea, China, Australia, ASEAN 10 and Russia are important for a more stable environment surrounding Japan.

Finally, it is fundamental to promote Economic Diplomacy as a means of driving the growth of the Japanese Economy. For Japan, a maritime nation with scarce resources, it is critically important to maintain and strengthen an open and stable international economic system which guarantees stable import of raw materials and access to the overseas market. More specifically:

- The Republic of Korea remains Japan's most important neighbor, one that shares strategic interests.
- The relationship with China constitutes one of the most important bilateral relationships for Japan.
- Taiwan is a crucial partner and an important friend, with which Japan shares basic values in the forms of freedom, democracy, basic human rights and the rule of law.
- ASEAN10 plays an important role as a centre of regional cooperation in East Asia. It is important that ASEAN is integrated in accordance with values such as the rule of law and democracy.
- Japan and Australia enjoy a "Special Relationship", sharing fundamental values and strategic interests.
- The development of relations with Russia as a partner in the Asia-Pacific region contributes not only Japan's national interest, but also to peace and prosperity of the region.

The exception continues to be DNP. North Korea's continued nuclear and missile development poses a serious threat to the region as well as the entire international community. Based on the basic recognition that the normalization of diplomatic relations with North Korea is impossible without the solution of the abduction issue, Japan has positioned its resolution as one of its most important foreign policy issues.²

2 Diplomatic Bluebook 2016

In addition to this threat of missile and nuclear weapons from North Korea, Japan is dealing with abduction issues, in which Japanese nationals have been abducted by North Korea on Japanese territory, forced to live in North Korea and trained to become spies in Japan. North Korea create a Japanese village in its own country, where these abducted Japanese citizens live and are trained as spies.

For Japan, a maritime nation with scarce resources, it is critically important to maintain and strengthen an open and stable international economic system, which guarantees stable import of raw materials and access to the overseas market. This is achieved by:

- a. Promoting Economic Partnerships: To increase the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) ratio from 40% up to 70% by 2018. With the recent change in government in the U.S., Japan is no longer sure they can reach this goal, seeing as this projection takes into account the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which is no longer a guarantee. Without the TPP, Japan's ration would be 23.2%, making 70% seem difficult to reach. Japan also has free trade agreements with Chile and Peru.
- b. Promoting Overseas Business Expansion: Japan current has Investment Treaties to protect foreign investments (24 treaties + 11 Economic Partnership Agreements); Tax Conventions to avoid any double taxation (65 treaties); Social Security Agreements that allows Japanese nationals to retain their social security status even if they work abroad (19 agreements); Intellectual Property Protection agreements to protect Japanese brands (Toyota, Honda, etc.); and the Provision of Relevant Information to Private Enterprises and potential investors.
- c. Securing a Stable Supply of Resources from Abroad: Japan suffers from a low self-sufficiency rate (Energy: 5%; Food: 39%), which makes it very dependent on resources from abroad. For this reason, it strives to strengthening ties with resource-rich countries and works towards protecting open, free and peaceful sea for smooth maritime transport.
- d. Participating in International Rule Making: Japan actively participates in the following global fora: G7, G20, World Trade Organization (WTO),

World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), among others, especially in light of the current status of the TPP.\

3. Working together on global issues

Japan has been proactively addressing a wide variety of global issues, including poverty, climate change and other environmental issues, disaster risk reduction, water and sanitation, health, education, agriculture, inequity and refugees through its policy tools, such as development cooperation (15.71 billion US dollars in 2014). Most notably, Japan has been focused on:

- a. 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: For 2030, Japan will steadily implement this Agenda and contribute to the realization of a sustainable world without poverty. Japan focuses on such areas as health, gender, education, disaster risk reduction, quality growth and the environment.
- b. Human Security: Human security is a concept aiming at creating a community in which individuals are protected, and empowering them to solve their own issues by themselves. The concept of human security serves as one of Japan's diplomatic policy pillars. In the case of Costa Rica, Japan has a UN Human Security project in the south region, which targets the indigenous people migrating from Panamá to Costa Rica and then going back to Panamá again every year.

As a closure, I would like to mention the Japan's foreign policy making structure:

1. Cabinet: To decide or approve important policies of Japan. For example, the National Security Strategy which serves as a guiding principle of Japan's defense policy and foreign policy was decided in 2013
2. National Security Council: Created in 2013 to undertake strategic discussions on various national security issues on a regular basis and as necessary. Its members are the Prime Minister, the Chief Cabinet Secretary, Foreign Minister, Defense Minister and other relevant Ministers.

3. Ministry of Foreign Affairs: To formulate and implement foreign policy of Japan under the strong leadership of the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister as well as in coordination with the Cabinet Secretariat and other relevant Ministries such as the Ministry of Defense.

Foreign policy looks fairly simple only when you look at a single country. But, there is difficulty in foreign policy-making and its implementation. These difficulties stem from:

1. No assurance of having a complete set of accurate information necessary for policy-making;
2. Influences of and interactions with foreign policies and their implementation by other countries;
3. Domestic and international public reactions, etc.

Therefore, foreign policy needs to be continuously reviewed and refined as necessary, so that it remains relevant and effective.