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**"Japan's Role in Providing International Public Goods
in the 21st Century: A Thai Perspective"**

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Japan's Role in Providing International Public Goods in the 21ˢᵗ Century: A Thai Perspective

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Introduction

The world in the 21ˢᵗ century is now very uncertain and unpredictable in nature not only for Japan, but also for other members of the whole international society as a whole. The existence of both old and new security paradigms compel, more often than not, various actors, including Japan, to re-assess, re-formulate their national public and security policies in order to deal effectively with various types of security challenges—both traditional and non-traditional security issues. The combination of both security agendas leads to a necessity of adopting the new security mindset and approach to better understand the causes and consequences of these security challenges, evidenced by the emergence of new various security concepts; for example, comprehensive security, human security, and cooperative security. All of these new security concepts are not mutually exclusive. They also share a common caveat—state is no longer the only referent object in dealing with security agendas nowadays.

In addition, such development is now apparently emerging under the other changing international environment. The preponderant power of the US, the rising influence both China and India, the declining role of the world body like the United Nations (UN) cause major concern among policy makers in the Asia-Pacific region. Leaders both in Tokyo and their counterparts in Southeast Asian countries deem as timely and necessary to re-evaluate how to "maintain", "re-assert", and even "increase" Japan's role in international affairs, especially in the provision of and contribution to the maximization of international public goods. By this term, it is meant to be, let me propose, components or elements, both tangible and non-tangible, which "are directly aimed to enhance international peace, security, stability, and mutual understanding through non-violent approaches and mechanisms". Therefore, under the new development of the new dawn of 21ˢᵗ century, Japan's external roles, both at regional and international levels, are now under close watch with great enthusiasm.

Change and Continuity vs Challenges and Opportunities

The main components of Japan's foreign policy formulation and implementation nowadays are a mixture of both change and continuity. Both Japan's declaratory and administrative foreign policies reflect this in an incremental fashion. Various inputs, approaches, instruments of foreign policy implementation still remain the cornerstone of Japan's external affairs, but with different emphasis on these components from the past. It is no exaggeration to argue also at this juncture that the priority list of Japan's national interest comprises both those old and new national interest issues, with differing focus on the individual item on the list.

The old and new national interest issues are closely linked to both the existence of some traditional security issues, and the proliferation of various non-traditional security issues in the present international system. The tension on the Korean Peninsula, the ongoing confrontation between the two nuclear rivals on the sub-continent, and the Cross-Strait relations still remain vital for Japan's national strategic outlook calculation,[1]

albeit the fact that these conflicts will have either direct and indirect impact on its national security equation. The North Korean crisis since October 2002, when the Pyongyang government admitted that it has a nuclear enrichment programme, and the subsequent stand-off between the neo-conservative government in Washington and the authoritarian regime in Pyongyang have led to the political impasse and tension in the North Pacific region. A series of six-party talk, aimed at peacefully defusing the crisis on the peninsula, still makes no major progress. Compared with the Chinese government's role, one can argue that the Japanese government's role seems to be relatively low. Arguably posing the same level of threat perception among policy-makers in Japan is the tension between the Beijing government and the pro-independence ruling party in Taipei. The Chinese government's deployment of missiles in large number along the east coast results in the decision of the elites in Taipei to procure more sophisticated weaponry from the US. The government in Beijing makes clear its firm position on "one China" policy, regarding the Cross-Strait tension as its own internal political issue. Any settlement on this must be in favour of Beijing's sole sovereignty, and total territorial integrity. To Japan, these two crises, one to the very near west and the other in the not-far-away south, pose very direct security threats.

Moreover, policy-makers in Japan these days cannot merely overlook the nexus between these traditional security issues and the numerous non-traditional security issues confronting the world community nowadays. A list of these non-traditional security issues seems to be open-ended; for example, human and drug trafficking, hunger and poverty, religious/ethnic/sectarian conflicts and violence, money laundering, small arms proliferation, environment degradation, resource depletion, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), maritime security, piracy, and most relevant to most security thinkers these days, terrorism (either bio-terrorism or cyber-terrorism). Not only leaders in Japan but also their counterparts in other Southeast Asian capitals expect to come up with long-term and effective solutions to these security issues. The horizontal and vertical networks of both illegal human and illicit drug trafficking in the Asia-Pacific region become so transnational in nature that effect members of societies at different levels. The most recent news report on cracking down the illegal women trafficking into Japan serves as a legitimate reminder.

Cultural and religious aspects play more critical role than before in both conflict and cooperation in international affairs. Sectarian armed confrontations leading to massive scale of bloodshed in various troubled spots in Southeast Asia confirm that the home-grown elements of instability and insecurity warrant serious and well-balanced attention and solutions. Also shared by both governments in Tokyo and other leaders in the region is the rising significance of terrorists' malicious and violent activities. Japan's own experience of dealing with the bio-terrorism in 1995 has helped in setting the unprecedented guidelines for pre-empting the bio-terrorism. The already "uncertain" world becomes more very "unpredictable" due to the spate of terrorists' violent attacks in various parts of the world, including most parts of the Asia-Pacific region as well. There is no denying that the necessity of making better understanding among different cultures, values, civilizations becomes more acute than some decades ago. A proper understanding of the differences among "fundamentalism", "radicalism", "fanaticism", on the one hand, and "modernism", "liberalism", on the other, appears highly inevitable under the current circumstances. Now coming to the security issues at sea which also can

effect Japan's economic growth, and prosperity, maritime security, for the Japanese government, is one of the key security concerns for every single Japanese government. The secure sea lanes of communication (SLOCs), both regionally and internationally, have formed a major lifeline for Japan's accumulated economic success and financial wealth. Any unforeseen disruption to the SLOCs will cause, more often than not, adverse consequences not only to Japan's economic outlook, but also its closely-linked economic interactions with other Asian countries, especially those in Southeast Asia.

Regarding the issue of environmental protection, the Kyoto Treaty, a historic milestone in preserving one of the most significant public goods of mankind—environment, is well-received by most members of international society. This can be construed as one of the most successful political and diplomatic achievements at the multilateral level by the Japanese government although some signatories to the Treaty still delay ratifying it and putting into full implementation.

Rising Expectations vs Japan's Contributing Role in Decline?

Together with the scenario described above, the unchallenged power of the US, the rising influence and assertive role of both China and India in Southeast Asia could lead to a question as to whether Japan's ongoing role in providing public goods is in decline or being challenged, and surpassed. It is no exaggeration to claim that one might probably expect Japan to play more leading role in providing public goods in various fields, both at the regional and international levels. Functional contribution by the Japanese government through its various "modes of action" could ensure mutual goodwill, mutual confidence, and long-term prosperity. The foreign direct investment (FDI) scheme, the overseas development assistance (ODA), of course, will become more effective by being complementary with other functional modes of action. Cultural exchange, and humanitarian assistance programmes are also a case in point. What should be emphasized at this juncture is that the actors involved with providing international public goods are not necessarily represented by government officials or agencies. Private sectors, especially the non-governmental organization (NGOs), or the philanthropist bodies, can assert more leading role as well.

In sum, the less pro-active foreign policy of Japan could be less well-received by its counterparts in Southeast Asia. For example, expectations of the Japanese assistance in bringing an end to the sectarian conflicts in Aceh, and in the South of the Philippines still prevail.[2]

At issue nowadays is the question as to whether and when the United Nations (UN) reform will become feasible. It is now attracting serious discussion and attention of not only the Japanese government, but also other members of the whole international system. The UN Secretary-General (UNSG) has commissioned a 16-member panel to make an in-depth study into how to make the major reform of this world body. Speculations are ripe to the extent that Japan and Germany should also be part of the main decision-making body of this world organization. With its major national attributes and contribution, one could claim that the Japanese government should be able to solicit strong political and diplomatic support of their counterparts in the Asia-Pacific region, including those in Southeast Asia.

Conclusion

Currently, it is possible to conclude at this stage that Japan is the inevitable key actor in international affairs in the Asia-Pacific region. An "window of opportunity" for the Tokyo government to play more "constructive" and "significant" role at the global level should receive not only a well-balanced support, but also consistent encouragement. In addition, it is also essential to point out that not only the Japanese government, but also the Japanese private sectors in various fields can come into interplay with their respective counterparts in other societies.

Endnotes

[1] Kenneth J. Haller, ed., Japanese International Responsibility and Contribution to Peace and Prosperity in the Asia-Pacific Region (Bangkok: Japanese Studies Center, Institute of East Asian Studies, Thammasat Univeristy, 1995).

[2] Mohammed Jawhar bin Hassan, "ASEAN's Political and Security Relations with Japan, in ASEAN-Japan Cooperation: A Foundation for East Asian Community (Tokyo: Japan Center for International Exchange), p. 153.