



JAPAN'S ROLE IN INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

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Japan's aspirations to have a permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council, where all five members (United States, Russia, United Kingdom, France and China) are nuclear powers, have been known for awhile by most countries of the world. Most observers also believe that it is unlikely that Japan would pursue a permanent seat in the nuclear club if it did not have the capability to develop nuclear weapons like all the rest of the permanent Security Council members. Most people also believe that several of the countries represented in the Security Council should not be there any more. Ziring, Riggs & Plano (2005) mentioned that "Although Russia replaced the Soviet Union on the Security Council and enjoyed the privileges that went with permanent power status, in other than strategic terms, it too had become something akin to a Third World Nation" (Ziring, Riggs & Plano, 2005, p. 516). People have also questioned the importance of France and the United Kingdom.

Japan's claim to a permanent seat is strengthened by the fact that only Japan and Brazil have been elected as members of the Security Council on nine different occasions (Dobson, 2006, p. 59). Japan also has become very active in playing a role in the peace-keeping operations of the international organization. While some nations resent this new interest in Japan's leadership, it could demonstrate a sincere desire on the part of Japan of normalizing its role in world affairs.

More recently, Japan has been extremely active in pursuing a "big" image in international politics, more in accord to the heavy weight of its economy. In fact, because the members' contributions to the United Nations are based on their national economies, Japan is the second largest contributor to the organization after the United States. In the year 2000, Japan contributed almost 20% of the organization's dues, while the United States, the only remaining superpower, contributed only 2.5% more to the world organization than Japan did (Hook, Gibson, Hughes & Dobson, 2001, p. 373).

Japan's aspirations have been presented to the United Nations in different formats. In 2005, the G-4 nations (made up by the emerging economies of Brazil, Germany, India, and Japan), submitted an unsuccessful resolution to get permanent seats at the Security Council (Dobson, 2006, p. 41). The resolution was opposed by China and the United States, although for different reasons, but it also lacked sufficient support from the rest of the UN members. The United States is a supporter of Japan's admission to the Security Council, but China has repeatedly opposed any resolution tending to reward Japan for its increasing economic and

political muscle. China also opposes Japan because both countries aspire to regional influence and domination.

Japan introduced its own new resolution, keeping the G-4 membership intact, but making some modifications to the resolution, such as providing for a 15-year freeze on veto power for a new permanent member (Dobson, 2006, p. 66). Japan has kept insisting in its permanent seat every time that it has an opportunity. In 2006, on the occasion of celebrating the 50th anniversary of its membership in the UN, Japan renewed its request to become a permanent member of the Security Council (Dobson, 2006, p. 71).

It seems paradoxical that Japan contributes more to the world organization than four of the veto-holding permanent members of the Security Council. However, in 2001, Hook, Gilson, Hughes and Dobson forecasted that “there seems little likelihood that this desire for a permanent seat will be realized in the near future” (Hook et al., 2001, p. 374).
The role of Japan in the global economic institutions

Japan’s position in the global economic institutions –the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank- at least since 1984, is much closer to its economic standing. Although still second to the United States, the financial muscle of Japan can be exercised more efficiently in the global economic institutions than in the United Nations, although Japan’s participation in all three international organizations (the United Nations, the IMF and the World Bank) is second only to the United States. Japan is also a member of the G7/8, whose initial main goal was the management of the global economy.

In the IMF, Japan’s contributions are a little bit over six percent of the total, after the US with about 17 percent (Dobson, 2006, p. 10). The Japanese yen is one of the four currencies determining the daily value of the special drawing rights (SDR) by the IMF (Dobson, 2006, p. 10). In the World Bank, Japan’s contributions are about 8 percent, compared with the US which contributes about 16% of the total (Dobson, 2006, p. 11). On some important economic issues, Japan seems to follow a much more “independent” policy, being in many ways at odds with the United States.

In relation to the deal on debt relief for the underdeveloped countries, for example, Japan’s position is more conservative than the US-British position. Japan has joined forces with France and Germany advocating a closer look, on a case by case basis, about debt relief on specific countries, although recently both groups have agreed on tightening the conditions for debt relief to the so-called HIPC (heavily indebted poor countries) group (Dobson, 2006, p. 65).

Still, it is apparent that the administratively-efficient Japanese rightly consider that granting debt relief to underdeveloped countries, which have not taken all the necessary steps to avoid falling into the same trap again, is like rewarding the irresponsible economic management of some of the poor nations. Japan advocates that these countries should be trained to handle the debt by themselves, rather than giving them a blank check to cover their debts. After all, Japan has the experience of going from one of the major recipients of loans from the World Bank immediately after the World War II years to a first-class economic power. If Japan could do it coming from the devastation of the war –they may think- the underdeveloped countries –with the proper guidance- should be able to do the same.

Japan has also actively involved in the Asian Development Bank, whose website claims that it “is dedicated to reducing poverty in Asia and the Pacific region through pro-poor sustainable economic growth.” Japan’s commitment to the Bank is \$ 8.6 billion, or 37% of the total, higher than the combined contributions to this organization of the United States and Canada (Asia Development Bank & Japan, 2007, p. 3)
ASEAN, China and Japan

China and Japan are competitors for regional supremacy in the region. Both have attempted to influence the ASEAN nations in their favor, and both have been successful to a certain degree. China and six members of this organization will establish a free trade area in 2010, with the remaining four members expected to join in 2015 (Dobson, 2006, p. 21). The ASEAN nations also have agreed to conclude a free trade agreement with Japan and South Korea (Tellis & Wills, 2006, p. 34). Although Japan’s image as the economic leader in East Asia declined after the recent financial crisis, and could be endangered further by Japan’s residual protection of its agriculture, the new Miyazawa Initiative and its bilateral approach has helped a lot to improve Japan’s image within the ASEAN organization. The Miyazawa Initiative was advanced by Japanese Finance Minister Kiichi Miyazawa in October 1998 and pledged or provided five Asian countries (Indonesia, South Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand) with US \$ 21 billion financial assistance following the 1997 Asian financial crisis (Bangkok Report, 2000, p. 1). Although the crisis also engulfed Japan and negatively affected its economy for almost a decade, Japan was also benefited by the spread of globalization and its “veritable flood of global economic activity” where “the real winners in and beneficiaries of the globalized economy have been the leading industrialized economies or the “triad” of the US-Japan-European Union” (Muldoon, Aviel, Reitano & Sullivan, 2005, p. 113).

Competition with China is likely to increase as this gigantic country continues to develop its economy. However, competition is always going to exist between any two powerful economies: what may run deeper in the China-Japan rivalry is the difference in their political systems and their implications for the security of Japan.

While military allies, Japan and the US also have had problems in the economic area. Japan has filed five complaints against the US at the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the US has reciprocated the same number of times (Dobson, 2006, p. 30). Japan had to voluntarily reduce its exports to the US in an attempt to reduce the imposition of drastic quotas on cars and other products. Japan banned US beef after a single case of mad cow disease, lifted the ban, and re-imposed it when they felt that US beef inspections were not adequate (Dobson, 2006, p. 39). However, both countries still are important commercial partners, and the same may happen with China.

China became Japan’s largest partner in 2004, surpassing the US (Statistical Handbook of Japan, 2005, p. 56). This trade relation means that their economies are complementary to each other, although, of course, there has to be some competition. In addition, the direct investments of Japanese companies in China have continued to expand (US\$ 46.1 billion as of October 2004), and Japanese investments in China occupy the third position from where China obtains its foreign capitals (Statistical Handbook of Japan, 2005, p. 61).

China may erode into some of Japan's traditional markets and this will create some problems, but Japan will develop into newer areas, in the same manner that the US did when Japan practically took over many of the traditional industries in which the US relied in the past.

China and Japan need each other, and although both of them are fierce competitors trying to obtain the necessary energy to fuel their development, Japan has the technology and China has an enormous market, relatively cheap labor, and so far a stable economic climate regardless of the ominous presence of the Chinese Communist Party in the background.

The "Japan-China rivalry" in political and security relations

There are many reasons why Japan and China can be seen as rivals. They share a history of mutual antagonism and opposition. They have different social and political regimes, although China's experimentation with capitalism is already having a drastic transformation of the country in several aspects. The two countries perceive each other as competitors both as economic superpowers and in their struggle for political supremacy in the region. They also are competitors for energy to maintain their rapidly growing economies.

The points of friction are many: Both countries have claims on the Senkaku islands (known in China as the Diaoyu islands) (Hook et al., 2002, p. 331). In 1992, China passed a law claiming sovereignty on these islands, and more recently, a nuclear submarine entered into Japanese waters, further raising the military tension, although the Chinese government made an apology (Tellis & Wills, 2006, p. 334).

China and Japan both claim 200 sea miles of water according to international law (Dobson, 2006, p. 71). However, while Japan is willing to accept the median line, China does not, with the inevitable consequence of mutual claims on the same territory (Dobson, 2006, p. 71). This situation has become more difficult with the discovery of natural gas on the Chinese side, which is connected to the territory of Japan under the seabed. China has established twelve mining fields in the East China Sea which extend into areas claimed by Japan as its exclusive economic zone (Chinworth, 2002, p. 56).

China is also very concerned about what it considers Japan's military rearmament. In 1999, Japan issued the Guidelines legislation allowing military cooperation with the US in "areas surrounding Japan", and although the wording was nebulous, most people believed that these areas include China and North Korea (Chinworth, 2002, p. 113). In 2004, Japan passed its New Outline for National Defense in which China and North Korea were specifically mentioned as major threats to the security of Japan. China also is concerned about Japan's ties to Taiwan and fears that, under the tutelage of the US and Japan, Taiwan could one day make a claim for independence (Mochizuki, 2003, p. 69). Taiwan has just purchased from the US two destroyers equipped with the Aegis system and is rapidly moving into a strategic military alliance with both the US and Japan (Dobson, 2006, p. 87). Japan also has conducted sea-based missile research with the US and was expected to deploy, by mid-2006, a two-stage missile defense system which included the SM-3 launched from warships and the PAC-3 launched from land (Dobson, 2006, p. 113). China has opposed all of these military actions, and has continued to increase its military budget by about 10% per year since 1989 (Dobson, 2006, p. 187). At the present time, China's military budget of about \$ 80 billion is almost double that of Japan (Dobson, 2006, p. 179).

On the other hand, there are some similarities and potential positive influences on both sides. Both countries are now and could eventually benefit even more from economic cooperation with each other. The economic integration of both economies could have a stabilizing effect on the political and security areas and reduce the present tension that exists between China and Japan not only within the United Nations, but also in other international organizations such as ASEAN.

Concluding Comments

Japan is becoming more active not only in the United Nations, where it is aggressively pursuing a permanent seat in the Security Council, and using its economic muscle in the regional and global financial organizations, as well as ASEAN. It is also becoming more independent from the United States, a country to which it continues to depend for its military defense. Japan is awakening with a new sense of leadership, trying to play the role of a “normal” nation, without the military limitations that were imposed in its Constitution at the end of World War II and which were adopted by generations of Japanese until the present moment.

Japan may not become a permanent member of the Security Council any time soon, but there is no question that Japan’s active role in the UN and other international organizations will deepen and increase in the near future.

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