

Reform in Japanese Foreign Affairs: Policy Review Long Overdue

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What is the meaning of "politics-led" foreign policy? Constructive reform of Japan's foreign ministry depends upon substantive reform of foreign policy in accordance with the times. The Japanese people themselves will pay the price if such reform is not carried out.

Since the end of World War II, some observers suggest, Japan has not had what could be properly called a foreign policy. Such an assessment is hardly surprising if one compares postwar Japanese foreign policy with that pursued in other times and places under such leaders as Viscount Palmerston, Otto von Bismarck, Winston Churchill, or even Japan's own Mutsu Munemitsu (foreign minister 1892–96).

So, one might ask, did other countries have a foreign policy for the post-World War II era? The U.S.S.R. certainly had one, to go with its formidable military strength rivaling that of the United States and its aggressive ideology. The consequences of that policy did nothing for the people of the Soviet Union, however. Present-day China also has a distinctive foreign policy arising from conditions imposed by its massive population (ten times larger than that of Japan and five times larger than that of the United States), its possession of nuclear arms, and its rapidly growing economy. It is too soon, however, to say whether or not that foreign policy will have positive results. In the 1950s, the diplomacy of nonalignment was promoted with much fanfare, but none of the countries that adopted it has achieved much prosperity thereby. Europe is proceeding toward its momentous goal of unification under the European Union, but this project, too, was made possible by the unique conditions in which the countries involved are relatively close culturally and in similar stages of economic development.

It seems unreasonable to criticize Japan, where none of the special conditions above apply, for not having a unique foreign policy.

The Right Decisions at the Right Time

We have to be careful to distinguish among the terms foreign relations, foreign policy, and diplomacy (particularly we Japanese, since we have one word, *gaiko*, that covers all three). "Foreign relations" holds the broadest meaning. In any country's foreign relations, certain factors are fundamental, such as economic strength, military capability, and the nature of the country's rela-

tions with its immediate neighbors. As Shidehara Kijuro (foreign minister 1924–27 and 1929–31; prime minister 1945–46) once remarked, diplomacy is not magic, like pulling a rabbit out of a hat. No country, Japan included, can attempt to transcend the fundamentals in its pursuit of good foreign relations. There has been much talk in recent months about the diplomatic skills (or lack thereof) of foreign ministers, but any such competence is valuable only in the context of such fundamentals. It should not be surprising that Japan, which does not stand out particularly as far as any of these fundamentals go, has little in the way of an independent foreign policy stance.

Japan's foreign policy during the postwar era may not have been distinguished, but neither did it suffer from any serious blunders. Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru is known for his efforts to restore Japan's independence as quickly as possible, which he achieved by providing military bases to the United States, signing the Japan-U.S. security treaty, and in effect rearming Japan even while pledging, on the grounds of Article 9 of the Constitution, not to rearm the country. Unavoidably this left the Japanese government in the awkward position of having to stretch interpretation of Article 9, among other issues, but, as Yoshida foresaw, if Japan had created the kind of army that the United States was hoping for at the time, it might have been dragged into the Korean War (1950–53).

The problem today is that Yoshida's successors have so uncritically clung to the policies he initiated. One often hears mention of the term "Yoshida doctrine," but I imagine Yoshida, had he heard the term, scoffing from his grave: "Who ever heard of a 'doctrine' in foreign policy?" Foreign policy is something that is constantly being revised in accordance with changing realities.

In considering Japan's foreign policy, in other words, what should concern us is not whether or not it has any outstanding features, but whether or not the right decisions were made, given the circumstances, at the right times. To assure that this will always happen requires the regular and fundamental re-examination of policy.

I doubt that Japan ever made it a practice to fundamentally review its foreign policy. If, after exhaustive debate and review, it was decided that established policies and practices should be continued, that would be acceptable. But as things stand now, I am afraid that we are simply drifting along with the status quo, making no real effort to take critical stock of the results of past policy.

In the United States, a fundamental review of foreign policy takes place at least once every four years when presidential elections bring in a new administration. Postwar Japan, however, has yet to experience a genuine change of government. A truly new administration came to power in August 1993 under the Hosokawa Morihiro cabinet, but it collapsed within a matter of months. The following year a cabinet was formed under the leadership of the head of the Social Democratic Party of Japan (SDPJ) Murayama Tomiichi, but the SDPJ then reversed its own long-held policies and fell in with the established conservative line, which again prevented a true changeover of political power and let go another opportunity to fundamentally reevaluate Japan's foreign policy platform.

Foreign Policy Review

Kishi Nobusuke was one statesman of postwar Japan who did carry out a thorough review of foreign policy. In the wake of the country's defeat in the war, Kishi was charged a class-A war criminal, having served the government of Manchukuo, Japan's puppet state (1932–45), as well as in the cabinet of wartime prime minister Tojo Hideki. Despite this blemish on his reputation in history, he is credited with a number of noteworthy achievements.

After serving as foreign minister for two months in the Ishibashi Tanzan cabinet (Dec. 1956–Feb. 1957), Kishi became prime minister in February 1957. The Girard case, in which an American serviceman guarding a U.S. military rifle range in Gunma prefecture shot and killed a Japanese farm woman who was scavenging for empty shell cases on the range, took place during Kishi's term as foreign minister. Sensing that the incident represented a crisis for the U.S.-Japan security treaty, Kishi held a series of top-secret meetings with newly appointed U.S. ambassador to Japan Douglas MacArthur II (nephew of General Douglas MacArthur who served as supreme commander for the Allied powers during the occupation of Japan from 1945 to 1951). Within two months Kishi drafted two important memorandums, one listing the problems of the U.S.-Japan security treaty and calling for its revision, and the other demanding the return of Okinawa to Japanese sovereignty. Viewed from today's vantage point, Kishi thus put forward two extraordinarily bold proposals in a short space of time and on his own initiative.

Kishi knew that, in order to achieve those two goals, it was necessary first of all to dispel the doubts the United States harbored about Japan's security policy. At that time, just twelve years after the Pacific War, concern was strong on the American side that Japan would shift from a pro-American line to a neutral stance. In response to those concerns, on 20 May the same year (1957) Kishi pushed through a cabinet resolution adopting the Fundamental Policy on National Defense, which remains the cornerstone of Japan's defense policy even today. He then set off on a tour of Asia, visiting countries including India, Pakistan and Ceylon (Sri Lanka) the ties with which did not involve war reparations and other thorny issues. Having thus affirmed friendly relations between Japan and these countries, Kishi proceeded to the United States



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in June, held talks with President Dwight D. Eisenhower, and secured an agreement to address the problems of the security treaty.

Later that year Kishi embarked on a second overseas tour, this time visiting countries with which Japan had problematic relations stemming from the war, including Australia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Against the backdrop of reaffirmed friendship with the United States, Kishi thus sought to improve Japan's relations with these countries as well.

Before the end of 1957, the Kishi Cabinet had formulated what came to be the three cornerstones of Japan's foreign policy: importance

attached to the United Nations, cooperative ties with other Asian countries, and alignment with the free world. Kishi forged this impressive record of achievements in the space of just one year, starting from the time he became foreign minister.

No fundamental foreign policy revision of this magnitude has taken place since that time. Subsequent diplomatic achievements, such as the return of Okinawa to Japanese administration during the term of the Sato Eisaku Cabinet and the Nakasone Yasuhiro Cabinet's moves to strengthen Japan-U.S. relations, were, though important, secondary to those of Kishi. The Japanese people would better understand the continuation of the Japan-U.S. alliance if it resulted from a thorough review of Japan's foreign policy.

It is often said that Japanese foreign policy toes the U.S. line, but there is a big difference between grudgingly doing what one is told and taking the same action because one considers it necessary. It is precisely because Japan's response in the wake of the 11 September terrorist attacks exceeded U.S. expectations that Japan has since been able to voice objections in its dealings with Washington. The important thing is not whether or not Japan follows the United States but how it does so. In this sense, too, Japan must from time to time review—and sometimes revise—its foreign policy as circumstances require.

Prime Minister Responsible for Foreign Policy

Who should carry out such review and revision? This is clearly a task for the prime minister, who is ultimately responsible for foreign policy.

British diplomat Sir Harold Nicolson is known for making a clear distinction between the legislative and the executive processes of foreign policy, in essence regarding the former as "foreign policy" (i.e., policy toward other countries) and the latter as "diplomacy" in the narrower sense of the term. It can be said that ultimate responsibility for foreign policy lies with the prime minister, while that for diplomacy lies with the foreign minister.

Whereas in pre-1945 days the name of the relevant foreign minister was often used to designate specific styles of diplomacy, in the postwar era these

have always been named after the prime minister—"Yoshida diplomacy," "Kishi diplomacy," "Sato diplomacy," "Nakasone diplomacy"—never the foreign minister. This is only natural, because in any true democracy it is either with the prime minister or the president that ultimate authority for foreign policy rests, and the foreign minister should not be at liberty to pursue foreign policy independently of the prime minister or president.

In fact, even in the prewar period it was the prime minister who was ultimately in charge of foreign policy. Even Mutsu Munemitsu, the architect of what came to be called Mutsu diplomacy, was constantly at pains to ensure that he pursued policies in keeping with the wishes of his prime minister, Ito Hirobumi. Mutsu's memoir *Kenkenroku* (a diplomatic record of the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–95) describes how deeply relieved he was upon confirming that his policies did indeed accord with those of Ito. Similarly, Shidehara Kijuro, the force behind the so-called Shidehara diplomacy of the 1920s, approached his job with a constant readiness to resign should his views be at odds with those of his prime minister.

Such was the case even in the prewar era, when the emperor held supreme power over foreign policy and the foreign ministry had far more autonomy than it has had since 1945. Yet in 2001, it was reported that the foreign minister made a number of comments contradicting the government's official position, expressing, for example, disapproval with certain Japanese history textbooks, the view that former Republic of China president Lee Teng-hui would not be permitted to visit Japan again, and objection to the United States' missile defense plan. Whether or not those reports are true, such behavior by a member of the diplomatic team headed by the prime minister is inexcusable. While every individual is free to hold whatever views he or she believes right, the comments of the foreign minister must always accord with policy formulated in close consultation with the prime minister.

Foreign policy should be guided by *politics*, not by politicians. Today, trade policy, defense issues and diplomatic affairs are all interlinked. It is only to be expected, therefore, that all such matters converge in the offices of the prime minister and the chief cabinet secretary, the prime minister's top aide, and are central to foreign policy. It makes sense, furthermore, to organize around the prime minister a corps of capable advisors that includes people of knowledge and learning other than politicians and bureaucrats.

The most important member of this kind of prime-minister-led diplomatic team is the foreign minister. Although the seat of highest authority in the formulation of foreign policy is occupied by the prime minister, the foreign minister plays a central role, both as the chief source of information and judgment for such policy-making and as the highest authority in the execution of foreign policy once it is adopted.

Each foreign minister should therefore first of all appoint as his or her deputy minister (*fuku-daijin*) and state affairs officers (*seimukan*) people who have extensive knowledge of diplomatic issues and in whom he or she can place the utmost trust. This group should enter the foreign ministry as a team, steering the country's foreign policy in cooperation with the ministry's top officials. It is also advisable to set up a brain trust. And if the office of foreign

minister should change hands, then so should those of the deputy minister and state affairs officers, the new minister bringing in his or her own appointees to fill those roles.

Confusion over the boundaries between the political and administrative arms of government has recently become an issue of public concern in Japan, and it is now necessary for these boundaries to be redelineated. Foreign policy, to reiterate, should be "politics-led," that is, guided by the prime minister. The prime minister appoints cabinet members on the basis of trust, and those ministers in turn appoint deputy ministers and state affairs officers and so on as their aides. Politicians in the Diet must therefore express their views directly to these ministers, deputy ministers, and state affairs officers. Politicians' attempts to deal separately with bureaucrats on specific matters can prevent proper coordination of policy. In this regard, we must do away with the practice of politicians calling the relevant bureaucrats to their foreign affairs subcommittee and thwarting implementation of foreign policy if they do not agree.

The Role of the Foreign Ministry

What type of person should the prime minister choose for the post of foreign minister? In Britain, from among politicians toughened through the rigors of parliamentary debate, there emerges someone more or less universally regarded as most suitable for the portfolio. In Japan, too, if a foreign minister is to be chosen from among the Diet members, it must be someone with many years of experience with interpellation in the standing committee on foreign affairs of the lower or upper house of the Diet. If the minister is chosen from fields outside the government, including the private sector, he or she must be distinguished for publications or other achievements in a relevant field of special expertise. It is not enough simply to be able to talk loudly on television. A crucial aspect of members of the parliamentary and academic worlds is that they are regularly exposed to counterargument. Experience with critique, counterargument, and persuasion is extremely important when dealing with foreign leaders in the arena of international affairs.

To say that ultimate responsibility for foreign policy rests with the prime minister may suggest that the foreign ministry's function is not very important, but that is not the case. When, for example, the prime minister or other political leaders are poised to adopt plans that might be impossible to carry out, experienced officials can point out impracticalities or warn of possible negative outcomes of such a course of action. This is the essential function of the ministry.

In November 1989, during the term of the Corazon Aquino administration in the Philippines, members of the Philippine air force staged an uprising, entrenching themselves at an air base. With the rebel force seemingly poised to attempt an overthrow of the government, President Aquino turned to U.S. President George Bush for help, requesting a U.S. air strike on the rebel air force base. President Bush was inclined to comply with the request, but Colin Powell, then head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, thinking that the

political impact of an air strike would be too great, put forward an alternative proposal. First, he suggested, if the U.S. Air Force conducted intimidation flights over the air base, the rebel force would be unlikely to attempt decisive action. If after such flights the rebels still seemed ready to go ahead with their coup attempt, the U.S. forces would fire warning shots. Finally, in the unlikely event that the insurgents went into action despite these warnings, the United States would shoot the rebel planes down. Powell's proposal was adopted, and in the end the United States was able to assist in suppressing the coup attempt without resorting to the politically damaging option of air strikes. (See Bob Woodward, *The Commanders*, 2002.)

This is the kind of role that bureaucrats should play. But what should subordinate officials do when their superiors reject their advice and adopt policies directly opposing it. Followers of Max Weber would probably say that, whatever the higher authority directs, it is the bureaucrat's duty to carry out orders without question or protest. That may be an appropriate attitude in low- and middle-ranking bureaucrats, but a top-echelon official in that situation should tender his or her resignation. In some cases, it may even be appropriate for that official to risk punishment and break the rules. In the late 1880s, Komura Jutaro leaked information in protest against proposed revision of treaties with Western powers. Just prior to the outbreak of the Pacific War Yoshida Shigeru informed Americans of the proceedings of an imperial conference. Although Yoshida had by that time retired from the foreign ministry, his act nonetheless amounted to a serious crime. While these may be somewhat extreme examples, the point is that it is precisely the high-ranking bureaucrats with heavy responsibilities who, when faced with what they consider to be a mistaken course of action on the part of their superiors, should be prepared either to oppose that action by putting their own jobs on the line or at least resign in silence.

Toward Reform of the Foreign Ministry

The foreign-ministry-related problems that have received wide coverage in the media these days concern the executive arm of foreign affairs, or in other words its diplomacy side. While it goes without saying that many aspects of Japan's diplomacy need to be reexamined, these are inseparably linked to the shaky foundations of foreign policy.

The first of these problems to emerge was the misuse of secret funds. Although this was a very serious ethical issue, the amount of money involved was not that large. Assuming that most of the secret funds totaling just over 5 billion yen was used properly, the amount used questionably would have been in the range of a few hundred million. This is not an especially large sum when compared to the money squandered on public works projects or, speaking of the foreign ministry, ploughed into official development assistance. Given the disclosure of the problem last year and the reform measures taken since then, and with further measures to rectify the shortcomings of the budget system, there is relatively little cause for concern that this sort of problem will recur.

The real problems lie, rather, in the nature of the foreign ministry, in its

closed nature, authoritarianism, and rigid hierarchy, for example. While many proposals have been made regarding these problems, I would like here to offer a few suggestions regarding aspects that have yet to receive much attention.

First, the development of foreign policy is effected by the foreign affairs organization as a whole. The leaders of the organization must have their subordinates well in hand and raise their morale. To that end, leaders should lead by example, making the kind of personal effort that impresses upon others how diligently they apply themselves to their work. While it may seem an obvious point, it is essential that officials at the ministerial and vice-ministerial level be people of superior character and discernment.

The same may be said for ambassadors. The personal qualities that Nicolson described as prerequisite for diplomatic service can be summarized as those of a well-educated, cultivated man or woman. I agree that this is, in the broadest measure, the foremost requirement of a good diplomat. If someone is going to represent Japan to the world as our ambassador, I would hope first of all that he or she is a person of excellent character. Good knowledge of the country to which he or she is to be posted would be only a secondary condition.

In other words, extensive experience as a diplomat is not by itself a sufficient condition. Skilled ambassadors are usually those who are well-developed human beings, which is precisely why they earn trust and attract people and information.

From that perspective, appointing ambassadors from the private sector has its merits. It is not easy, however, to recruit truly talented persons from the private sector into diplomatic service. People at the forefront of business are rarely able to leave their positions even for a short time. Scholars may also serve as diplomats, but just how many among them would be truly suitable for such work?

Compared to the United States, Japan appoints few politicians to diplomatic posts. Former prime ministers Nakasone Yasuhiro and Miyazawa Kiichi would have been ideal appointees for ambassadorships if only they had been a bit younger.

Foreign minister Kawaguchi Yoriko has announced that she will appoint ten persons from the private sector to bureau chief- and ambassador-level posts in the ministry. I suspect it will be difficult to find so many suitable appointees. If so, rather than stick to any hard-and-fast rule, it might be better to bring in such “outsiders” as general staff, ministerial advisors, or members of an advisory board.

At the same time, it is extremely important to give foreign ministry bureaucrats experience in other fields. Already we have seen cases of former prefectural police commissioners, vice-governors and so on receiving posts in the foreign ministry, with apparently favorable results. Approaches of this kind should be expanded.

It is also important to do away with the practice of promotion and allocation of authority based on age and years of service. In the present foreign ministry, the posts of deputy vice-minister and head of the Economic Affairs Bureau went to people three to four years younger than previous appointees.

By the standards of Kasumigaseki, the home of central government offices, that represents a rejuvenating step, but for most people the shift of just a few years is barely noticeable.

One thing I would like the ministry to try is appointing relatively young people—around forty years old, perhaps even from the ranks below section-chief level—to ambassadorships. Such ambassadors would be preferable in countries with demanding conditions, such as some countries in Africa. After their terms as ambassadors, these young diplomats could return to take up posts as section chiefs. Their salaries should be increased during their terms as ambassadors, but they should drop back to their former levels once the ambassadorships are over. In any case, the notion that promotions and wage increases come automatically with age or years of service must be eliminated.

Much is also made of the principle of incentives and punishments, but punishment should accord with actual responsibility in the case at hand and should not be excessively harsh. Making top-level officials take responsibility for the transgressions of subordinates they had no way of closely supervising serves only to obscure the true source of the blame. Furthermore, if punishment is too severe, those at fault will be the more inclined to cover up their misdeeds, while the fear of failure will make others too timid to do anything but follow well-established precedent. Ministry employees must not be encouraged to think that they will advance in the organization as long as they coast along without making any mistakes.

Conversely, the system of incentives and rewards should be strengthened. Special commendations for distinguished service provide considerable incentive and encouragement. A system in which promotion is the reward should be avoided.

Attracting Talented People

The problems afflicting the foreign ministry are formidable. Its capacity for information gathering, for example, leaves much to be desired. Sectionalism, furthermore, often prevents the information it does manage to acquire from being shared, not only with other government agencies but also among key posts within the ministry itself. Information is also often leaked. These are issues that must be discussed more fully on another occasion.

While the ministry's flaws may be grave, public criticism, it seems to me, is excessively harsh. The transgressions of people in positions of great importance cannot, of course, be tolerated, but whenever the misdeeds of a prominent public official are exposed, the fuss raised by the media, particularly television and weekly news magazines, verges on the bizarre. I suspect this

Japanese foreign policy has not been fundamentally reviewed since the Kishi Nobusuke cabinet (1957–58).

stems from people's excessive faith in and dependence on "the authorities." The assumption that talented, excellent people in the service of the country could not possibly err or do wrong leads to criticism all the more scathing of any mistakes and crimes a small minority of them are found to commit. The standards of competence and ethics among public servants have to be high, and I believe they are high, but public servants are not superhuman; they are human beings with human limitations. We must proceed from the viewpoint of creating a system which makes maximum use of public servants but which is premised on this recognition of their human fallibility.

Particularly important among the problems facing the foreign ministry is that of human resources. I referred above to the fundamentals that a nation-state requires in its foreign relations, and in my view talented personnel are today the most important of these fundamental factors. Unless we create an environment that inspires hardworking, talented young people to become diplomats, Japan's future will be bleak.

The foreign ministry has been the target of criticism for good reason, but Japan's foreign policy will not improve simply from repeated bashing. The diplomats of other countries are among the cream of their human resource crops as well. Along with this recognition of their elite status comes a strong sense of responsibility. Unless Japan entices its own talented youth into the path of diplomatic service, and makes the constructive changes required to make full use of that talent, the capacities of its foreign ministry will decline even further, and ultimately it will be the Japanese people who pay the price.

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