

Ohira's foreign policy: 'followism' of Washington

The process by which a nation shapes its foreign policy is by any standard extremely complex. For the Japanese, that complexity is heightened by the fact that since their defeat in World War II, there has always been an underlying fear in Tokyo that no matter what Japan did, the Americans were always inescapably there "looking over Japan's shoulder." The potential awkwardness of this unique relationship between victor and vanquished has been described, in the words of a famous Japanese phrase, as like "two people in the same bed dreaming different dreams."

Until the coming to power of current Japanese prime minister Masayoshi Ohira, the underlying trend in Japanese foreign policy since the early 1970's has been to carefully distance Tokyo from Washington's dominance so that Japan could develop a truly independent sense of "Japanese national self-interest."

This shift in Japanese foreign policy reached a high point under the administration of the man Ohira replaced as prime minister—Takeo Fukuda. Precisely because Fukuda was himself more subject to the demands of what heavy-industry circles of Japan understood as Japan's self interest, under his premiership Japan established crucial links with Germany, France and Saudi Arabia to force the United States to defend the dollar. At the same time Fukuda was the key figure in driving Japan into a political and economic alliance with Germany which would have ended Japan's postwar feelings of dependence on the United States.

Today the policies being promoted by Ohira are in every crucial way diametrically opposed to those of both Fukuda and his Liberal Democratic Party predecessors, Kakuei Tanaka and Takeo Miki. To make this point emphatic, Japan's current Foreign Minister Sunao Sonoda recently told a public meeting in Tokyo that Japan should not "rely on an alliance with West Germany but instead Japan should support France and England." Shortly after giving that speech, Sonoda flew to London to be briefed by British Foreign Secretary Lord Carrington before visiting Africa on a trip which followed British advice to the letter. According to the *Yomiuri Daily News*, one of the main purposes of Sonoda's trip was to weaken French and German influence in Africa.

Ohira's moves today to reverse Japan's still devel-

oping sense of independent diplomacy is in large part based on manipulation of Japanese fears that if Tokyo gets seriously out of line with the United States, Japan will be crushed again, as it was in World War II.

Despite Ohira's actions, however, the underlying tensions in the relationship between Tokyo and Washington have not eased. The same pressures which led to Fukuda's push to weaken the ties with the United States are still at work today. The pressure that the United States exerted against Japan via the recent oil hoax, although it succeeded in intimidating many Japanese political circles, is fundamentally yet another signal of a deep chasm of mistrust between the two nations.

What has changed inside Japan is not so much reduced mistrust of the United States, but rather, a rise in the Japanese's sense of their helplessness to do anything about changing that relationship. Under Ohira's direction, the climate in Tokyo is one of resignation and despair that Japan will ever be free of U.S. domination. The momentum and self-confidence underlying Japanese policy during the Tanaka, Miki and Fukuda years has been badly shaken.

The seeds of rivalry...

The rivalry between the two countries can be traced to the late 1960s when it began to become obvious to Tokyo that the Japanese could no longer simply sit back and watch Washington play its role as the leader of the Western world at a time when the United States itself was floundering about in a wasteful and strategically pointless war in Vietnam.

Even more shocking to Japanese foreign-policy makers, however, was the combination of American overtures to China, without Japanese consultation, as well as the 1971 unilateral U.S. decision to end the Bretton Woods system and its related gold standard—a move which forced a dramatic revaluation of Japan's yen. What that crisis year of 1971 crystalized in the minds of many of Japan's elite was the realization that with the U.S. acting not only in a weak but at times implicitly hostile manner to Japan's own self interests, a Japanese foreign policy *solely* dependent on the dictates of Washington could spell disaster for Japan in the future.

Beginning significantly in 1971 the Japanese began

to develop a policy which became known as "shigenha" or "resource diplomacy" as Tokyo's implicit hedge to the rapidly depreciating value of total dependence on America. The "resource faction" groupings in Japan's heavy industry and bureaucratic establishment (best symbolized by the close relationship between Nippon Steel, on the one hand, and the Ministry of International Trade and Industry, on the other) began promoting a foreign policy which, while it would in no way place Japan in an adversary relationship with the United States, would greatly increase Japan's own independent foreign policy options—especially regarding access to important raw materials such as uranium and oil. In order to make sure the United States did not feel threatened by such moves, the Japanese stressed again and again in almost ritual fashion the "economics" and "politics" were two totally separate issues and that Japan would never allow itself to be led by "economics" into anti-American policy stands. Other nametags for this policy were "equidistant" and "omnidirectional" diplomacy.

The man chosen to represent Japan's "shigenha" policy in the political world was Kakuei Tanaka, who rose to power in 1972 over his arch-rival, Takeo Fukuda, precisely because Tanaka was seen as a man less closely tied to the New York and Washington elite than the long-time Finance Ministry official Fukuda. A rough and eager hustler from the internal world of Japan machine-politics, Tanaka's victory over Fukuda for the premiership signaled that a consensus had been reached and that the "shigenha" option was to be developed. That view of Japan's role in foreign policy, to a greater or lesser degree, was also the view of the two men who succeeded Tanaka, Takeo Miki and then Takeo Fukuda himself.

The victory of Tanaka and especially his determination to pursue an actual "shigenha" policy angered Washington. The American opposition to Japan's taking a more independent "Gaullist" policy course was best expressed by then Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who in a speech before the Japan Society of New York flatly declared that "equidistant diplomacy is a myth."

The American wrath at Tanaka was strongest over three points: (1) Japanese policy towards the Soviet Union; (2) Japan's Mideast policy; and (3) Japan's relations with Southeast Asia.

In all three areas, Tanaka tried to develop an independent relationship outside direct American control. Tanaka's late 1972 trip to Moscow to discuss joint Japanese-Soviet oil and energy development projects in Siberia was the first major Japanese overture to Russia since the aborted Japanese attempt to import oil from Moscow in the early 1960s. Before going to Moscow,

Tanaka stopped off in Paris and Bonn. Tanaka's 1974 tour of Southeast Asia, aimed at developing independent ties with especially resource-rich Indonesia, met with largely CIA orchestrated, "anti-Japanese" riots. The most dramatic point of Japanese-U.S. confrontation, however, occurred over the Middle East when, in the aftermath of the October 1973 Arab-Israeli war, Tanaka refused to accept Henry Kissinger's policy of backing Israel and instead tilted Japan toward a pro-Arab policy, especially with Iraq and Saudi Arabia. It was around this time that Henry Kissinger could be heard muttering to the Israelis that Tanaka was "anti-Semitic."

Shortly after Tanaka's dramatic Middle East stand, a series of events were set into motion that would wind up in the "Watergating" of Tanaka in 1974 on corruption charges, and later, a further weakening of his influence by the "Lockheed Scandal." For the Japanese both these events had a strong "Made in USA" stamp upon them.

Despite Tanaka's fall, the basic "shigenha" viewpoint of Japan's foreign policy role was continued under both premiers Miki and Fukuda. Before Fukuda's downfall in late 1978, an embryonic Tokyo-Bonn axis had been forged around the personal relationship developed between Fukuda and West German Chancellor Schmidt. The friendly reception Fukuda received at the Bonn Summit by Germany and France was the direct result of Fukuda's own support of the European Monetary System and the role the EMS was playing to stabilize the U.S. dollar. Fukuda's own vision was to use the Tokyo Summit to further strengthen the EMS-Japanese collaboration. At the same time, Fukuda launched a major initiative toward Washington to get the U.S. and Japan working on the joint funding and development of new energy technologies—especially nuclear fusion power—as the real long term solution to the "oil crisis."

The reversal of Shigenha diplomacy

The moves of the Ohira government within the last months have dramatically reversed the years of shigenha policy. Virtually every effort by Tanaka, Miki and Fukuda to lay the cornerstones of an independent Japanese policy has come under attack from Ohira. On the crucial issues of Japanese policy toward the Soviet Union, Southeast Asia and the Middle East, Ohira's policy has been targetted at ending Japan's attempt to create an independent diplomatic presence.

Japanese-Soviet relations have reached an all time low since the issuance a few weeks ago of a Japanese Defense Agency (JDA) report which publicly denounced the Soviet Union for its "military buildup" in Asia. In the past the JDA has pointedly avoided criti-

cizing Russia by name as part of Japan's overall policy of maintaining a balanced relationship between Russia and China.

Earlier this spring the head of Japan's Defense Agency, Ganri Yamashita, had leaked reports to the press that the Japanese suspected the Soviet Union of building a secret base in Vietnam which, if completed, "could threaten Japan's oil lanes from the Middle East." Yamashita's hope, which has been strongly encouraged by both the Chinese and the U.S., is to use such scare-stories to reverse Japan's long-standing policy of only defending its own islands, in order to extend joint U.S. and Japanese naval patrols into the South China Sea.

The attempt of the Ohira government to greatly expand Japanese military coordination with Washington was also underlined by the historic first visit of a JDA head, Yamashita, to South Korea, which the Russians have denounced as a Pentagon-directed attempt to create a Japan-South Korea-United States military pact.

The attempt by Washington to use Japan to fill the American military vacuum left after the Vietnam war had been strenuously resisted by Japan before out of fear of jeopardizing independent relations with both China and Russia. The current government's attitude toward the Soviet Union was best captured in Sonoda's recent address in Tokyo. The Japanese press reports that the comic highpoint of the talk was Sonoda's imitation of Gromyko negotiating with him.

In Southeast Asia today, Japanese foreign policy is virtually indistinguishable from that of both Washington and London. Japan's Foreign Ministry leaked a report to the Aug. 1 *Yomiuri Daily News* that Tokyo fully supports the right of the murderous Pol Pot group to represent Cambodia at the U.N. According to the Pol Pot group's China-based "Voice of Democratic Kampuchea" radio broadcasts, Foreign Minister Sonoda met with a representative of Pol Pot's "government" in Nigeria. In early June, Sonoda, in response to a question from a pro-Chinese member of Japan's Diet, raised the possibility of giving "foreign aid" through groups like the Red Cross to the remnants of Pol Pot's

brutal forces still in Cambodia. The Japanese government is also on record as supporting the Anglo-American attempt to reinstate Chinese puppet Prince Sihanouk in Cambodia. The Foreign Ministry announced in early August that Japan will unfreeze its foreign aid grants to Vietnam, in an attempt to increase Japanese leverage over Hanoi to push Vietnam into agreement with such a policy.

Nor has the Ohira government been particularly hesitant to state its actual policy in the region. In a press conference that Sonoda gave in Tokyo before visiting London he told the assembled reporters that Japan will urge England "to pay more attention to Asia" since the British presence is still "well respected" there!

Finally in a little more than a month Japanese policy towards Middle dramatic shift. For months the United States had been pressuring Japan to support the Egypt-Israel "Camp David" treaty via financial aid to Egyptian President Sadat; a policy the Japanese have consistently avoided doing due to a fear of an Arab, and in particular a Saudi, backlash.

Now that policy, too, is changing. In mid-July Japan's Foreign Minister Sonoda gave a speech in Tokyo where he not only endorsed the idea of a U.S. military base in the Middle East, but went on to say that Japan was even recommending a site for the base to be built! According to the Japanese press, the Foreign Ministry building was flooded with calls from angry Arab embassy officials after Sonoda's views hit the press. Next month, Sadat will visit Japan where it is anticipated that major Japanese assistance to Egypt will be agreed on.

Japan's rapidly shifting policy towards the Middle East was earlier signaled in a *New York Times* interview with former Japanese Foreign Minister Kiichi Miyazawa, a doyen of Japan's foreign policy establishment. Miyazawa endorsed the idea of a "consumers against OPEC. This, the *Times* delightedly noted, was the first time an important Japanese leader had squarely come out with an anti-OPEC line.

The effect of Japan's reversal of the Shigenha policy

is already being felt in the Middle East. One of the premises of "resource diplomacy" was the transfer of Japanese technology for oil. Yet when Masumi Esaki, the head of MITI, visited Saudi Arabia last month, he was met with heated Saudi complaints over Japan's stalling of development projects. The Saudis refused to increase oil sales to Japan unless these sales were directly tied to Japanese willingness to carry out its promised development project. In Iraq, Esaki was warned that if Japan fully endorses Camp David, the Iraqis would cancel their agreement to increase oil shipments to Tokyo. The Iraqis underlined Japanese economic support to Egypt as a test of their real policy. The loss of a powerful sense of a need to use Japanese technology for development of other nations by Tokyo itself has also hurt Japanese relations with Mexico.

The decision of Japan to drop its almost decade-long vision of Japan's role in world affairs is not simply reducible to the current prime minister's Anglo-American pedigree which is considerable. It is well known in Tokyo, for example, that in 1974 it was then Foreign Minister Ohira who tried to promote Henry Kissinger's "pro-Israel" tilt to then Prime Minister Tanaka, only to be rejected. Yet, as late as this May, Ohira himself was not in full control of Japanese foreign policy. Ohira's weakness was dramatically illustrated in a column by Council on Foreign Relations member Joseph Kraft, who interviewed Ohira in Tokyo on the eve of his trip to Washington. Kraft's argument at the time was that Ohira was so weak that the U.S. should use his trip to prop up his status in Tokyo. Kraft then told a story: after he elicited a favorable response from Ohira over the U.S. "Camp David" policy, a Foreign Ministry official in the room interrupted to "correct" Ohira and stress that Japan's policy was independent of Camp David!

Oil Blackmail

The shift in Japanese foreign policy, which has resulted in the tremendous strengthening of Ohira's own political future, is the direct result of the Japanese panic over the recent "Seven Sisters" oil hoax. During that hoax the U.S. majors, led by Exxon, dramatically

reduced their oil shipments to Japan. At the same time, Tokyo was picking up signals both from Washington and London that another Middle-East war and subsequent oil price hike was a very live option, and that if Japan wanted to be sure to get a staple supply of oil, then Ohira, Washington's mouthpiece, had to be followed.

The pressure on the Japanese reached a high point at the time of the Tokyo Summit. Washington's approach hinged on a classic "carrot and stick" approach to ensure that Tokyo would not line up with the French. Using oil as the threat, the United States successfully used the "carrot" of conspicuously toning down the threats against Japan's exports to America. This change in Washington's approach to Japan was especially notable when Ohira came to meet Carter in May. In line with this policy, the U.S. oil majors have recently told Tokyo that they would not have to reduce their oil shipments to Japan as much as they had initially anticipated.

These short-term moves by the United States, have for the time being stabilized Ohira's control over the political process in Japan. Yet the tensions in Tokyo over what path to follow still remain. These tensions were underlined by an incident that occurred in Saudi Arabia during MITI head Esaki's tour of the Middle East; the incident was virtually blacked out of the Japanese press, but reported by the *Le Monde*, Aug. 9. Esaki desperately wanted to meet with the Saudi oil minister, Sheik Yamani, but when he arrived in Riyadh, Yamani was conspicuously absent. Esaki then flew to London to try and meet with Yamani, but when he arrived Esaki was told Yamani was on a yacht and could not be bothered. According to *Le Monde*, the anger of Yamani with Japan was due to the Arab's perception of Japan's policy of "suivism" (literally "followism") of the United States.

How long Ohira can keep Japan on the path of "followism" in the face of what will undoubtedly be increasing pressures from Arab and other quarters to reverse this policy, will ultimately determine the stability of his government in the months ahead.

—Kevin Coogan