Japan’s Strategies for Advancing Diplomacy in the United Nations: Implications for U.S.-Japan Cooperation

By Miki Honda

Introduction

1956 was an historic year for Japan as it was approved as the 80th member of the United Nations (UN), one of the postwar multilateral institutions led by the United States. Becoming a UN member signified Japan’s genuine return to the international community. Two years after gaining membership, Japan became a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for the first time, and since then Japan has served as a non-permanent member on 11 occasions, the most of any member state. Japan has made efforts as a stakeholder to achieve the UN mission—maintaining international peace and security, protecting human rights, delivering humanitarian aid, promoting sustainable development, and upholding international law. In addition to Japan’s alliance with the United States, UN policy has been a major component of Japanese diplomacy in the postwar period. The UN enables Japan to contribute to the international community despite constitutional limitations in the area of security.

Nonetheless, Japan has successfully expanded its security role in the international community within the framework of the UN by supporting international norms, addressing non-traditional security (NTS) issues, and strengthening relations with like-minded countries. But there have always been tensions within the UN concerning agenda-setting and achieving consensus on promoting collective security and maintaining the postwar liberal order. Since joining the UN, Japan has made great efforts to support those aims as a pacifist nation and strengthen the U.S.-Japan alliance to enhance its own security and stability in East Asia.

The alliance with the United States has been the cornerstone of Japanese diplomacy. In the postwar international environment, the United States particularly needed Japan as a fortress to block communism and secure stability in Asia, and Japan needed U.S. extended deterrence to protect itself from security threats. U.S.-Japan cooperation has advanced remarkably but sometimes has not functioned as well in multilateral settings. On the surface, there is no contradiction between U.S.-Japan cooperation and Japan’s UN diplomacy as the postwar international system is a hybrid of institutions that uphold rules and norms and national power. Most of the postwar multilateral institutions provided a way for Japan to increase its influence in a U.S.-led order. However, U.S. and Japanese objectives in these institutions are not always perfectly aligned, and a failure to coordinate mutual interests can become a source of tension in the bilateral alliance.

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1 The author is a professor at the Department of Global Politics, Faculty of Law, Hosei University, Tokyo. Prior to joining academia, Dr. Honda worked as a journalist for The Japan Times. Her research interests include the United Nations coercive measures under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, and traditional/non-traditional security studies of the Asia Pacific region.
U.S.-Japan cooperation in the UN is a mixed picture with some shared interests but also a range of challenges such as the relatively weak U.S. interest in multilateral cooperation, China’s increasing commitment to enhance its influence in multilateral settings, strategic competition between the United States and China, and a trend towards unilateralism against global governance as espoused by the UN. Japan has maintained a consistent leadership role in the UN, but today multilateral institutions are more difficult to manage. Japan-U.S. cooperation is essential for maintaining the institutional architecture that has supported the global order.

In the changing international environment, Japan actively works on tackling NTS issues in cooperation with UN agencies based on universal values and international rules. These NTS fields, given the relative inattentiveness of the United States and other great powers, are strategically important areas for Japan to demonstrate its initiative in the UN and to increase support for UN reform among like-minded nations. Japan’s increasing commitment to NTS activities can help Japan in achieving its ultimate goal—gaining a permanent seat on the Security Council.

The objective of this paper is to analyze how Japan has shaped its approach to the UN and managed differences with the United States, as well as to clarify the challenges Japan faces with agenda-setting in the UN. This paper also makes a modest attempt to search for further ways in which Japan and the United States can cooperate in multilateral settings, against the backdrop of changing power dynamics.

First, this paper gives an historical overview of Japan’s UN diplomacy since it gained membership in 1956 and analyzes Japan’s evolution in its commitment to the UN. Secondly, this paper analyzes Japan’s efforts and challenges in agenda-setting in the major UN bodies—the General Assembly and Security Council—focusing on the tensions in those bodies and on the relationships between the United States and Japan, the United States and China, Japan and other Asian nations, and others. And lastly, this paper makes policy recommendations regarding Japan’s UN diplomacy.

**Historical Background**

Since Japan gained admission to the UN, it has placed great importance on UN diplomacy as a basic principle of its foreign policy to support international peace reflective of the pacifist principles in its constitution. Japan sees the UN as an ideal arena to pursue an omnidirectional foreign policy independent of its alliance with the United States. After the late 1950s, Japan actively participated in the social and economic activities of UN specialized agencies and other international institutions. Japan then began to play an increasing role in

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2 Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution says: 1. Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes; 2. In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.
supporting UN finances and is today a large financial contributor to the UN general budget, as well as the UN budget for peacekeeping operations. Around 1970, financial contributions became a major aspect of Japan’s UN diplomacy. In 1975 Japan became the host country for the headquarters of a UN agency, the United Nations University, to support research and capacity building efforts to resolve global problems. In this way, Japan has tried to contribute more to international stability by providing financial aid and supplying human resources in the fields of education and research. But Japan’s relationship with the United States sometimes complicates Japan’s security diplomacy at the UN.

Japan’s Contribution to UN in the Early 1990s: Peacekeeping Activities

Financial contributions have been a safer and more comfortable way for Japan to show its presence in the international community. But Japanese diplomacy, which was heavily dependent on the strength of the economy, weakened in the post-Cold War era. Japan contributed a total of $130 billion dollars to U.S.-led multilateral forces during the Gulf War but was criticized for not sending troops, even though Japan’s constitutional limitations prevented the dispatch of its Self-Defense Forces (SDF). This situation traumatized Japan, which then searched for a way to make a more effective contribution to international security. It quickly enacted the Act on Cooperation for UN Peacekeeping Operations and Other Operations, the so-called PKO Law, in 1992, a law supporting nation-building overseas in the wake of conflicts. This marked Japan’s entrée into multilateral security cooperation under the UN umbrella.

The PKO law stirred great debate at home. Nevertheless, the perception that international peacekeeping operations are in line with the principles of the Constitution has taken root. A Cabinet Office public opinion poll in 1994 found that about 60 percent of respondents were in favor of the SDF taking part in UN peacekeeping operations (PKO) and the percentage rose to nearly 80 percent in 2016. The law paved the way for Japan’s SDF to be dispatched abroad and represented a turning point in the nation’s postwar security policy. On this legal basis, Japan has taken part in 14 peacekeeping and humanitarian support operations to date, dispatching over 12,000 SDF members to Cambodia, East Timor, Haiti and South Sudan. The SDF has played a major role in nation-building through its work on

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3 Concerning Japan's financial contributions to international organizations including the UN, refer to the section on reports concerning contributions and funding to international organizations on the MOFA website. http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/shiryo/sonota.html (Accessed March 31, 2020).
4 Some scholars say that creating the PKO Law was necessary for the government to pave a way to further advance military cooperation with the U.S. For example, Yuji Uesugi, Hiromi Fujishige (eds.), Kokusai heiwa kyoryoku nyumon (Introduction to International Peace Cooperation), Mineva Shobo, 2018.
infrastructure improvement, and Japan’s “soft power,” has been welcomed by and has benefitted many countries.⁶

The Japanese PKO law has five principles for taking part in peacekeeping operations.⁷ Building on the three UN principles of consent of the parties, impartiality, and non-use of force except in self-defense, it added the following principles: (1) parties to the armed conflict must have agreed on a cease-fire, and (2) a stipulation on withdrawing from operations should the necessary requirements cease to be satisfied. It is accepted that parties can depart from a stance of neutrality to carry out their duties and the PKO can use force to protect victims.

UN peacekeeping missions have changed over the past quarter of a century. Immediately after the Cold War, activities centered on helping to rebuild developing countries, such as Cambodia, which had been ravaged by civil war. But then there was an increase in peacekeeping operations countering grave humanitarian crises, including mass killings. As a result, peacekeeping forces became caught up in armed conflicts and were unable to sufficiently pursue their duties.

A turning point of UN PKO activities came at the 2005 UN Leaders’ Summit on peacekeeping operations, with the summit declaration stating that the protection of civilians was the “solemn responsibility” of participants. The leaders decided that the responsibility for protecting a country’s citizens from slaughter and war crimes unequivocally lies within that country, but if this process is not functioning then international society can rise above that country’s sovereignty to protect citizens. They allowed force to be used with the consent of the UN Security Council, and this change was incorporated into peacekeeping missions. As a result, the number of PKO missions with potential for danger have increased, although the UN lacks the requisite amount of military equipment and personnel armed with advanced technology to fully meet the objectives of those missions.

In 2015, the Abe administration in Japan reinterpreted the Constitution to permit the exercise of collective self-defense in certain circumstances. Some scholars point out that the PKO law was necessary for the government to pave the way for coordinating and developing future means of security cooperation with the United States. But it is not clear what the policy change means for Japan’s role in multilateral security operations under UN auspices.

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⁷ The five principles include: 1. agreement on a cease-fire shall have been reached among the parties to armed conflicts; 2. consent for the undertaking of UN peacekeeping operations as well as Japan’s participation in such operations shall have been obtained from the host countries as well as the parties to armed conflicts; 3. the operations shall strictly maintain impartiality, not favoring any of the parties to armed conflicts; 4. should any of the requirements in the above-mentioned guideline cease to be satisfied, the Government of Japan may withdraw Self-Defense Force (SDF) units; 5. the use of weapons shall be limited to the minimum necessary to protect the lives of personnel, etc.
Japan’s Contribution to UN in the Late 1990s - 2000s: Norm-setting

Beginning in 1999, Japan started to focus on norm-setting in the field of international cooperation. In the post-Cold War period the possibility of war between nations appeared to have decreased. However, internal conflicts among sub-national entities originating from religion, ideology, or ethnicity increased drastically and caused an outflow of displaced persons. In addition, transnational issues or NTS issues like environmental degradation, infectious diseases, and human rights abuses became common threats to the international community.

In 1994, the United Nations introduced a diplomatic principle known as “Human Security” as the key to dealing with a diverse range of global issues facing the international community. Human security means protecting the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance freedom and fulfillment and securing individuals’ safety from any kind of threat to life and dignity. It requires empowering both the people facing these threats and the local societies and communities to which they belong, that is, by strengthening their capacity to deal with these threats. This idea fits Japanese foreign policy perfectly because it is essentially a bottom-up civilian approach involving local communities to enhance people’s freedom.

Japan began to strategically promote diplomacy deeply connected with Human Security. This concept has allowed Japan to utilize its own experience of rapid economic recovery after war. In the field of international cooperation and development, Japan has promoted projects that respect self-help efforts by developing countries and cooperation with various stakeholders, including other developed countries, regional/international institutions, corporations, and civil society. The Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) is a good example. Japan has hosted TICAD since 1993. In 1999, Japan also established the “Trust Fund for Human Security” with an initial contribution of approximately $4.6 million to translate the concept into UN-initiated projects. Japan also incorporated Human Security into its ODA Charter in 2005 as a core principle that should underpin ODA as a whole. Further, former

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8 This approach was first proposed in the human development report announced by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in 1994.
9 The UN maintains international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace. (Article 1-1, Chapter I: Purposes and Principles, The United Nations Charter).
10 Japan has hosted TICAD, co-organized with the UN, UNDP, the World Bank and the African Union Commission. TICAD VII was held on 28-30 August 2019 in Yokohama with over 10,000 people, including 42 African leaders from 53 African countries, 52 development partner countries, 108 heads of international and regional organizations, and representatives of civil society and the private sector. For further information see https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/africa/ticad/ticad7/index.html (Accessed Dec. 1, 2019).
11 Considering comprehensively each country’s requests, its socio-economic conditions, and Japan’s bilateral relations with the recipient country, Japan’s ODA is provided in accordance with the principles of the UN Charter as well as the following points. (1) Environmental conservation and development should be pursued in tandem, (2) Any use of ODA for military purposes or for aggravation of international conflicts should be avoided, (3) Full attention should be paid to trends in recipient countries’ military expenditures and their development and production of mass destruction weapons, etc., (4) Full attention should be paid to efforts for promoting democratization and the introduction of a market-oriented economy, and the situation regarding the securing of basic human rights and freedoms in the recipient country.
UNHCR Sadako Ogata and Indian economist Amartya Sen co-chaired the UN Commission on Human Security which clarified the definition of Human Security and was adopted as an international norm in the General Assembly in 2012.12

This norm was also featured in the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the subsequent Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Assistance for Africa holds a special strategic significance for Japan as a means of gaining more African support for Japan’s proposals aimed at UN reform.

Japan’s Quest for UN Reform

The number of UN members has grown substantially from 51 at the time of its inception to 193 today. The outcome document of the 2005 UN World Summit reflected a consensus about UN reform. The document states, “We support early reform of the Security Council—an essential element of our overall effort to reform the United Nations—in order to make it more broadly representative, efficient and transparent and thus to further enhance its effectiveness and the legitimacy and implementation of its decisions.”13 But, in fact, only three amendments have been made to the UN Charter in almost 75 years and all deal only with the number of seats in two of the six principal bodies: one for the Security Council and two for the UN Economic and Social Council. The use of the term “reform” is applied often and far more broadly than constitutional changes to UN policy.

From Japan’s perspective, as the world’s number three contributor to the UN it would like to have a presence in the UN that is proportional to the burden it shoulders.14 Japan contributed approximately $240 million dollars to the UN regular budget for 2017, ranking second behind the United States. Its contribution to peacekeeping operations for 2017 was about $660 million dollars, coming third after the United States and China. As a major financial contributor, Japan has been encouraging the UN to make more efficient and effective use of its resources.

Japan has taken up the challenge of promoting UN reform in concert with Brazil, India and Germany, also known as the Group of 4 (G4). The G4 proposal includes the expansion of UNSC membership from 15 to 25 by adding six permanent members and four non-permanent members, with the objective of the G4 obtaining permanent membership. The G4 have also proposed to forego their rights to a veto for at least 15 years. But the G4 proposal is opposed

12 The norm gained consensus in the General Assembly resolution 66/290 (2012). It says that “Human security is an approach to assist Member States in identifying and addressing widespread and cross-cutting challenges to the survival, livelihood and dignity of their people” and it calls for “people-centered, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented responses that strengthen the protection and empowerment of all people.”
14 Concerning Japan’s financial contributions to international organizations including the UN, refer to the section on reports concerning contributions and funding to international organizations on the MOFA website. http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/shiryo/sonota.html (in Japanese only, accessed Dec. 1, 2019).
by another consortium, the Uniting for Consensus group, whose core members include South Korea, Italy, Canada, Spain, Mexico, Turkey, Argentina, Pakistan, and Malta. African nations also proposed a plan for UN reform around the same time, but all of these proposals have been left unaddressed.

Unfortunately, the “hostile or enemy state” clauses of the UN Charter still apply to Japan, although it has been decided that they will be removed upon the next revision of the charter. The clauses, incorporated into the charter by the victorious Allied powers in 1945, spell out discriminatory arrangements against the former enemy states of the war. Japan, together with other former Axis powers, demanded the removal of the clauses in the 1990s following the end of the Cold War and their efforts resulted in a General Assembly resolution adopted during the 50th anniversary session in 1995. The clauses remain unchanged today, however, because the revision of the UN Charter requires cumbersome procedures—not only must it be adopted with a two-thirds majority vote in the General Assembly, but it must also be ratified by two thirds of the UN members, including the five permanent members of the Security Council (P5)—China, France, Russia, the United States and the United Kingdom. China, Russia, and South Korea, who have tense relations with Japan over historical and territorial issues, are strongly against removing the clauses. Although the P5 are reluctant to relinquish their vested interests to allow for an expansion of the framework of permanent members, Japan will continue to work with other countries to achieve that goal. In addition, it has been very difficult for Japan to explain to its taxpayers why Japan has shouldered much of the financial burden for supporting the UN if its leadership role does not increase in tandem. UN reform will remain a big challenge for Japan, but also a strategic priority given the need to answer to the concerns of the Japanese public.

Key Issues Facing the UN

The UN, like other multilateral institutions, is challenged by resurgent unilateralism and changing global power dynamics. China’s emergence economically and politically at the regional and global level is particularly impactful. China established the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB) to realize its One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative with some 70 members, and has challenged existing regional and global financial systems like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) that the United States and Japan have promoted together. In the UN, China engages more on global issues like the environment, attempting to fill a void caused by intermittent U.S. attention to global issues. The United States and Japan have urged China to behave as a responsible stakeholder that should pay more attention to international rules and universal values such as freedom.

15 UN Charter Article 53 of Chapter VIII, 77 1b of Chapter XII, and 107 of Chapter XVII.
human rights, democracy, and a free trade system. This dynamic is mirrored in the UN and is especially visible in the General Assembly.

Today the General Assembly is divided by voting into two big clusters: one cluster centering on China, and a European cluster that includes Japan. The United States is rather isolated from either of these but has a close relationship with Israel and some Pacific islands. This tendency is not new. After the end of the Cold War, the non-Western pole included the remaining communist states of Laos, North Korea, Vietnam, China, and Cuba. Around 2002, when human rights issues became an increasingly prominent feature on the UN’s agenda, China led the developing communist countries, separate from European countries that advanced the mainstreaming of human rights. From the late 2000s to the present, Russia has become closer to the cluster centering on China, and African countries have been absorbed by the Chinese cluster. China is influential and leads voices from Asian and African nations but shows little interest in sharing universal values such as freedom, human rights, and democracy. How can the United States and Japan take initiative in setting agendas in the General Assembly? How can Japan invite the United States to make multilateral efforts to tackle “global merits” together?

**Japan-U.S. Agenda-Setting in the General Assembly**

At the 74th General Assembly meeting in 2019, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe addressed the General Assembly and stressed Japan’s contributions to the UN, especially on global issues such as poverty reduction, education, children’s rights, infectious diseases, health, and organized crime. The United States, however, has shown little interest in working together with Japan on these NTS issues. Challenges for Japan include how to shape its approach to agenda-setting in the General Assembly in an age of unilateralism, and how to

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17 Erik Voeten “Data and Analyses of Voting in the UN General Assembly” Routledge Handbook of International Organization, edited by Bob Reinalda (published May 27, 2013). Available at SSRN: http://ssrn.com/abstract=2111149; Michael A. Baile, Anton Strezhev, and Erik Voeten, “Estimating Dynamic State Preferences from United Nations Voting Data,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61 (2), 430-456. Since late 1990, scholars have used General Assembly voting data to examine the impact of shared interests on the likelihood of interstate disputes (e.g. Gartz 1998), the distribution of foreign aid (e.g. Alesina and Dollar 2000), the lending behavior of the World Bank and IMF (Thacker 1999). These are dependent variables that can help answer research questions such as whether socialization through IGOs leads to convergence in member state interests (Bearce and Bondanella 2007), whether the EU has started to form a cohesive foreign policy (Drieskens 2010), whether the U.S. is starting to get increasingly isolated by foreign policy issues on which it has lobbied (Voeten 2004), and whether and how U.S. or Chinese foreign aid or trade successfully buys foreign policy adherence (Flores-Macias and Kreps 2012).

18 The U.S. has been rather isolated from the beginning of the UN establishment but in the past the U.S. had relations with many likeminded countries under the Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson administrations. But since the Ford administration, the U.S. began to isolate herself from the other members by voting. The Trump administration does not show an interest in NTS issues in which all stakeholders are required to work together. The U.S. seems to have given up on multilateral negotiations that need more time and efforts for reaching consensus (Bailey, Strezhev and Voeten 2015).

keep the United States active in multilateralism given that U.S. leadership is necessary for the survival of multilateral institutions.

**Opportunities and Challenges for Japan and the United States**

The General Assembly is the most democratic organ in the UN because: (1) all the members hold one vote respectively, and (2) it functions as a platform open to various actors—states, civil society, businesses, academics and others with different intentions, values, ideologies, and capacities—to tackle diverse transnational issues. This is even more so in today’s globalized world where advances in communication and the cross-cutting nature of various challenges mean that international organizations like the UN should accommodate the interests of the least economically developed and the most under privileged to strengthen human security.

Unless Washington is prepared to occasionally compromise and to contribute to solutions in other countries and regions, developing countries are unlikely to support U.S. priorities. The U.S. record on multilateralism in the twenty-first century conveys a “mixed message.” On the one hand, the United States has been the prime mover in creating virtually all of the current generation of intergovernmental organizations. On the other hand, the United States has often kept its distance and even withdrawn from such institutions like the International Labor Organization and the United Nations Educational, Social, and Cultural Organization. The United States has also recently withdrawn from several initiatives including the Paris Accord, the International Criminal Court, and the ban on antipersonnel landmines. The apparently growing U.S. appetite for unilateral action has alarmed internationalists at home and allies abroad. The UN’s menu offers more choices than “multilateralism à la carte” as proposed by the former U.S. director of policy planning Richard Haass. This trend could present challenges for U.S.-Japan cooperation in a UN context, but there is also potential for the two countries to build on existing opportunities for joint leadership.

**Trade and the Digital Economy**

The digital economy is an area where Japan exerts leadership in agenda-setting in regional and global fora such as the G7, G20, APEC, and the UN. Against this backdrop, in

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2019 Japan hosted the first G20 meeting bringing together ministers of trade and of the digital economy.24

In this field, Japan-U.S. cooperation is outstanding. The two countries have reaffirmed their shared goal of bolstering a free and open Indo-Pacific and welcomed concrete progress in their joint effort to develop energy, infrastructure, and digital connectivity in the region. The two nations have also resolved to deepen and expand their partnership.25 In the UN, the United States and Japan have advanced partnerships with like-minded countries including India, Australia, and South Korea. Japan and the United States have also introduced visions for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) that broadly reflect synergies with India’s Act East Policy, Australia’s Indo-Pacific concept, South Korea’s New Southern Policy, and Taiwan’s New Southbound Policy.26 Moreover, Japan and the United States have worked together to improve energy and infrastructure under the Japan-U.S. Strategic Energy Partnership (JUSEP) and the Japan-U.S. Strategic Digital Economy Partnership (JUSDEP) from the Indo-Pacific to the east coast of Africa.

Climate Change

Climate change is at the top of the General Assembly’s agenda. But U.S. leadership is absent in this field. The United States announced its withdrawal from the 2016 Paris Climate Accord on the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), claiming that the agreement puts the United States at a great economic disadvantage.

China has shown little interest in NTS issues in the past. But China was emboldened by the U.S. exit from the Paris Accord and has used this as a chance to deepen ties with European partners and take a leadership role. For example, both China and France pledged at this year’s G20 summit to update their contributions to combat climate change beyond their current commitments. China is interested in leading the world in renewable energy and is currently the world’s largest producer of wind and solar energy and the largest investor in green energy projects.27 Five of the world’s six largest solar manufacturing companies can be found in China, as well as the world’s largest wind turbine manufacturer. Russia has also criticized

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27 China is the world’s largest market for renewables, installing more wind and solar than the U.S., Canada, India, Japan, Korea and Brazil combined (almost 65 gigawatts (GW)). China’s wind capacity at the beginning of 2018 led the world with around 187 GW, compared to second place US with 89 GW and third place Germany with 56 GW. China’s cumulative installed solar capacity is 185.5 GW while the U.S. has yet to break 70 GW.
the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Accord, saying it seriously undermined the agreement. Russia ratified the climate accord in 2019, marking a shift in rhetoric for one of the world’s largest polluters, even though its pledged targets are low and it can still increase emissions.

The irony of course is that no country has done more to mitigate the effects of climate change in the past decade than the United States. While the United States is a historic contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, it led the world in carbon dioxide emission reduction from 2005 to 2017. But President Trump tweeted that the concept of global warming was created by and for the Chinese to make U.S. manufacturing non-competitive. It seems quite difficult for Japan to get the United States back to the Accord. U.S. withdrawal from the agreement is not official until November 4, 2020. This happens to be one day after the 2020 presidential election, where climate change will be a central issue. A new U.S. president could rejoin the agreement but would have to put forth new climate commitments to the UN.

Nuclear Disarmament

Nuclear disarmament is an issue that has been a dilemma for Japan in its relations with the United States. To realize a nuclear-free world is a long-held wish of the international community and the movement for abolishing nuclear warheads has been actively initiated by non-nuclear countries including Japan—and they are the majority in the General Assembly. Japan has promoted a ban on nuclear weapons as the only victim of atomic bombings. But Japan is under the umbrella of U.S. extended nuclear deterrence, which complicates its global disarmament agenda.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons was adopted in July 2017 by 122 countries in a historic vote at the UN, and is strongly backed by civil society including the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (iCAN). As of September 2019, 70 states had signed and 26 states had ratified the treaty, which will enter into force with 50 ratifications. The treaty aims to ban the acquisition, development, production, manufacture, possession, transfer, receipt, testing, extraterritorial stationing, use, and threat of use of nuclear weapons. The nine nuclear powers—the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, China, India, Pakistan, Israel, and North Korea—have rejected the treaty. This poses a problem for U.S. allies including Australia, Canada, Japan, and Norway. These “umbrella states” have previously positioned themselves as ardent advocates of nuclear disarmament.

29 Domestic emissions have declined by 758 million metric tons in that time frame, almost beating the entire European Union’s 770 million metric tons.
30 The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (iCAN) was a 2017 Nobel laureate.
Recent U.S. actions have also shown a decreased appetite for nuclear disarmament. In February 2019, President Trump suspended U.S. participation in the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. This was the first disarmament agreement of the nuclear age, and it contributed to the end of the Cold War and underpinned European strategic stability for three decades. The United States launched a new initiative in 2018 titled “Creating the Conditions for Nuclear Disarmament.” However, a year later its position shifted in favor of “Creating an Environment for Nuclear Disarmament,” signaling a weaker commitment to the cause.

As far as is publicly known, no treaty or existing arrangements constitute insurmountable obstacles to Japan signing the nuclear weapons ban treaty. Doing so would send a powerful message about the priority Japan assigns to nuclear disarmament. But Japan also relies on U.S. extended nuclear deterrence for its national security and cannot ignore this reality. While the prospects for Japan signing the treaty remain relatively low, Japan and the United States can continue to support the nonproliferation regime with like-minded countries in Asia and in institutions such as the UN.

**Japan-U.S. Agenda-Setting in the Security Council**

The UN is by nature the political arena of the major powers. Conventional wisdom has it that the P5 make key decisions, and the 10 non-permanent members elected by the General Assembly abide by their decisions. However, the non-permanent members follow their own policies in the Council and work to influence decisions of the P5, even when these efforts contradict the preferences of the permanent members. Japan has served as a non-permanent member on 11 occasions, the most of any member state, and has tried to cooperate with the United States in proposing resolutions on major security issues.

**Opportunities and Challenges for Japan and the United States**

Despite a limited role in the Security Council, Japan has cooperated with the United States in formulating resolutions on nuclear and missile tests by North Korea. During Japan’s presidency from July 2016 to December 2017, Japan also led discussions on conflicts and peacebuilding activities in African countries—including Sudan and South Sudan, Somalia and Eritrea, Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, West Africa, the Sahel, Libya, Western Sahara, and Burundi.

**North Korea**

North Korea’s nuclear weapons program was one of the greatest challenges addressed during Japan’s two-year term on the Security Council from 2016-17. This is a field in which the United States and Japan have worked together for a long time and have succeeded in formulating resolutions, sometimes through hard negotiations with China and Russia, and mostly in cooperation with the United Kingdom, France, and the non-permanent members. For
example, during Japan’s presidency of the council, Japan organized urgent meetings 18 times and drafted six resolutions against North Korea.\textsuperscript{32}

During Japan’s presidency, North Korea carried out its sixth nuclear test on September 3, 2017, as well as a series of ballistic missile launches, some of which flew over Japan. These actions were a direct challenge to the international community and posed an unprecedented, grave and imminent threat to the security of the region. The nuclear tests and the ballistic missile launches constituted a flagrant and repeated violation of the relevant Security Council resolutions and posed a grave challenge to the international disarmament and non-proliferation regime of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

Koro Bessho, then ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary of the Permanent Representative of Japan to the UN, cooperated with the United States and continued to exert pressure on North Korea.\textsuperscript{33} Bessho sent a letter to Secretary General Antonio Guterres to inform him of the basic stance of Japan toward the threats and challenges posed by the North to international peace and security.\textsuperscript{34} Japan worked to achieve the expeditious adoption of even stronger Security Council resolutions, based on cooperation with countries such as the United States and South Korea. Japan has steadily undertaken measures to implement Security Council resolutions 1718 (2006), 1874 (2009), 2087 (2013), 2094 (2013), 2270 (2016), 2356 (2017), 2371 (2017), and 2375 (2017). Japan has also strongly urged North Korea to take concrete actions towards the resolution of other outstanding issues of concern such as the abduction of Japanese citizens.

The Security Council has worked on improving the fairness and transparency of sanction regimes as well as searching for more effective sanctions employed under UN Charter Article VII. Since the mid-1990s, the UN has shifted away from comprehensive sanctions to more targeted ones that scholars call “smart sanctions.”\textsuperscript{35} Targeted sanctions should be more effective as they target specific individuals and entities that have primary responsibility for breaching international peace and security, and they should be more humane because they try to avoid or reduce damage to innocent populations in target countries. Smart sanctions on North Korea have now been imposed according to the new guidance.\textsuperscript{36} Japan and the United States continue to search for effective sanctions against the North.

South Korea is a good partner for Japan to pressure the North. Japan-South Korea relations in some ways could be more powerful than U.S.-Japan coordination. For more than

\textsuperscript{32} S/AC.49/2017/131 (6 December 2017)
\textsuperscript{33} Bessho was appointed in 1995 as head of the Northeast Asia Division of the Foreign Ministry and then served as Executive Secretary to Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi from April 2001, and as Ambassador to the Republic of Korea from 2012 to 2016.
\textsuperscript{34} S/2017/1038 (11 December 2017)
\textsuperscript{35} Further information on UN economic sanctions and “smart sanctions”, Miki Honda, UN Economic Sanctions and Humanitarian Issues – Searching for “Smart Sanctions” (in Japanese; Kokusai-shoin, 2013).
\textsuperscript{36} Since 2006 the sanction committee created a focal point within the Secretariat and the system and roles of an Ombudsperson. Further information on the reform of sanction regimes, Miki Honda, “‘Smart Sanctions’ by United Nations and Financial Sanction,” Sachiko Yoshimura (ed), Financial Sanctions, forthcoming, Routledge.
20 years, Japan and South Korea have discussed building a “future-oriented” relationship, but fundamental differences and historical perceptions remain insurmountable obstacles. Domestic politics also contribute to this paradoxical cycle of rapprochement and tensions. The two countries’ economic interdependence provides a safety net for leaders on both sides to parlay nationalist sentiments tied to historical differences into political leverage without fully severing their necessary economic relationship. Since the 1990s, the United States has tried to unite its two democratic allies by focusing on shared interests including the North Korea challenge. However, while North Korean denuclearization remains a necessary focus of cooperation, the present contradictions in U.S., Japanese, and South Korean views on dealing with Pyongyang underscore the difficulty of forging a unified approach. Nonetheless, U.S.-Japan-South Korea relations will remain critical to deterring North Korean aggression and maintaining solidarity on North Korea policy in multilateral institutions.

The Middle East

Over 80 percent of Security Council consultations on regional problems pertain to the Middle East and Africa. But reaching consensus in the Security Council on these issues is very difficult as Japan discovered during its 2016-2017 presidency, especially concerning consensus between the United States and Russia.

The United States and Palestine have a long diplomatic history including when the Palestinian Authority appealed for the creation of a Palestinian state at the UN on September 19, 2011, and the United States vetoed the appeal. During Japan’s presidency, this foreign policy history was again in the spotlight when the Security Council voted on a draft resolution on Jerusalem submitted by Egypt in 2017. The draft resolution was vetoed by the United States, reflecting the U.S. decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. The other 14 members voted in favor of the motion.

Japan has also faced a difficult situation regarding Syrian issues. The confrontation between the United States and Russia over the continuation of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) is a good example. In November 2017, Russia vetoed a UN resolution that would have extended an investigation into the use of chemical weapons in Syria. It was the third time that month that Russia blocked the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM)—a joint body of the UN and the Organization for the OPCW that was investigating responsibility for the chemical attacks in Syria. The JIM was unanimously created by the 15 council members in 2015 and renewed in 2016 for another year. The resolution was brought forward by Japan and would have extended the JIM’s mandate for 30 days. It was supported by 12 of the 15 council members, with Bolivia joining Russia and China abstaining.

37 S/2017/1060 (18 December 2017); The U.S. vetoed the draft resolution of S/2018/518 again (1 June 2018).
The veto also provides an indicator of the continuing decline of U.S.-Russia relations as this was the first Russian veto of a U.S. sponsored bill.

Russia claimed that the JIM was biased and argued that major changes needed to be made for it to continue, while other countries remained adamant that the JIM’s independence was paramount. The Security Council failed to adopt either of the two Russia-drafted resolutions or the one drafted by the United States, which called for an investigation into reported chemical attacks, as diplomats from both sides used their veto power. Even after Japan’s presidency, Russia repeatedly used vetoes to prevent the renewal of the mandate for the JIM.\(^{39}\)

The repeated vetoes from Russia and China on Syria and vetoes from the United States regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict complicate Japan’s efforts to pass resolutions on the Middle East. The vetoes have renewed debate over reform of the Security Council and attempts to curtail the controversial power of the veto. Japan, not a permanent member, has a limited ability to deter the use of vetoes and cannot directly put itself into diplomatic issues between the United States and Russia. There are few initiatives Japan can take, though Japan can work on reforming conditions for the use of vetoes in cooperation with the great powers in a bid to advance debates in the Security Council.

Reform of the Security Council

The movement for reform within the UN has been building for years. The High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, appointed by Kofi Annan, noted in 2004: “The way entities or individuals are added to the terrorist list maintained by the Council and the absence of review or appeal for those listed raises serious accountability issues and possibly violates fundamental human rights norms and conventions.”\(^{40}\) At the 2005 World Summit, state heads declared their support for early reform of the Security Council.\(^{41}\)

While the number of UN members has increased, the composition of the Security Council remains almost unchanged.\(^{42}\) It is essential to reform the Council to reflect the realities of the international community. The number of permanent and non-permanent members is up for discussion, and it has been suggested that countries suited to handle the responsibilities should become members. Multiple proposals have been put forward since 1993, when the


\(^{40}\) Annan directed the Office of Legal Affairs (OLA) to begin an interdepartmental process within the UN to develop proposals and guidelines to address such concerns. The OLA 2006 report argued that the Security Council must strive to balance its principal duty of maintaining international peace and security with respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of targeted individuals to the greatest extent possible. Based on the OLA analysis, Annan submitted an informal paper to the Security Council titled “Targeted Individual Sanctions: Fair and Clear Procedures for Listing and Delisting,” in which he enumerated basic elements to ensure fair and clear procedures.

\(^{41}\) The 2005 World Summit Outcome, A/RES/60/1, 24 October 2005.

\(^{42}\) The number of non-permanent members increased from six to 10 in 1965.
General Assembly authorized an open-ended working group to study expansion of the Security Council. The most notable proposal is the aforementioned G4 proposal, which has come from Japan, Germany, India, and Brazil. This change will improve the council’s representativeness, legitimacy, and effectiveness. As mentioned previously, the G4 proposal and others aim to improve the security council’s representativeness, legitimacy, and effectiveness, but consistent opposition from other constituencies within the UN renders the prospects for realizing such reform uncertain.

Nicholas Burns, the former U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs once stated that the United States wants to preserve the veto in the security council and does not want to extend a veto to new permanent members. 43 For the United States, an ideal enlargement scenario might simply be adding the G4 nations as permanent or long-term members without veto power. The resulting 19 members (adding four to P5, and 10 non-permanent members) would ensure the United States of at least two reliable allies (Germany and Japan), and possibly other support (Brazil and India) depending on the issue. 44 Such a modest enlargement would also be consistent with the original purpose of the council as a privileged body of great powers capable of sustaining global peace. At present, however, this scheme is unlikely to win support from two-thirds of the General Assembly without concessions to Africa.

The United States does not fully support the G4 plan, and Japan’s failure to coordinate with its U.S. counterparts when the G4 proposal first surfaced generated friction in the bilateral relationship. But reform of the Security Council cannot be achieved without support from the United States, and Japan should continue to identify avenues for bilateral cooperation on this issue.

**Policy Recommendations**

One important question for Japan is how to keep the United States active in multilateral initiatives under the UN umbrella. Japan can act independently to encourage UN reform and other initiatives, but U.S. leadership is necessary to manage because of changing power dynamics playing out in the UN and other multilateral institutions. There are several issues areas where Japan can assume a leadership role and promote cooperation with the United States.

*Continue to Push for UNSC Reform and Initiate UN reform*

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Japan’s proportional financial burden in the UN is about 9 percent, as Japan is the world’s number three contributor to the UN. Through the G4, Japan has taken up various challenges and the time has come to consider where it should go from now. UN power was originally focused through the allied forces, the five victors of WWII, which are the permanent members of the Security Council and countries that possess nuclear weapons and have veto rights. However, the international community has changed substantially.

Debates over the expansion of the council will take more time to reach consensus but Japan needs to continue efforts for reform by gaining support from the United States. For the United States, the task of accommodating powers in the council is a most difficult challenge. Japan should continue to make its case by providing a larger share of resources and taking on more responsibilities under the UN umbrella.

**Utilize Strengthens in NTS issues/Mak Outreach Efforts for Tackling NTS Issues**

Japan appears to have more of a consistent leadership role in the field of NTS issues. Japan needs to invite the United States to tackle NTS issues together with other like-minded nations in Europe and Asia, and Australia. In the fields of trade, the digital economy, and infrastructure, the partnerships among the United States, Japan, Australia, and India are indispensable. Utilizing their partnership under FOIP, Japan and the United States have worked together to improve the strategic digital economy from the Indo-Pacific to the east coast of Africa. The United States, Japan, and Australia now need to coordinate strategies for engaging India in a UN context.

Japan should also concentrate on its contribution to the fields of development assistance and human rights protection. It can also assist in policymaking and elections, and support police activities to stabilize African countries that are indispensable partners in the UN for Japan to achieve its strategic objectives. For example, disaster-related activities are the strongest field for the SDF, which has a depth of experience and knowledge in emergency relief.

**Increase Japanese staff in the UN**

It is important to increase Japanese personnel to the UN Secretariat’s desired level. The number of Japanese staffers in the Secretariat has been about 90 but an appropriate number is 186-252. The Japanese government strongly feels it is important to increase Japanese personnel and is making efforts to further increase the number of young Japanese professional staffers. It is enhancing cooperation with universities to achieve the 2025 goal of 1,000 people as early as possible. Utilizing the current Japan Professional Officers system, enhancing public relations activities, and giving training for MA holders, Japan needs to invest more resources in strategically developing expertise in the UN Secretariat. If more experienced people go to the UN, this will send a strong message from the Japanese government, which will be more
influential in the UN. This will therefore provide Japan with more opportunities for agenda-setting and will allow the delegation to be better able to reflect Japanese opinions on resolutions in every UN institution.

**Conclusion**

Japan does rather well in multilateral settings. On the occasion of the 74th General Assembly meeting in 2019, Japan stressed its contributions to the UN, especially on NTS issues such as poverty reduction, education, infectious diseases, health, and organized crime.

Japan can advance UN diplomacy without undermining U.S. interests and can keep a good relationship with the United States. Japan successfully supported the G7, hosted the G20, and initiated agenda-setting with like-minded members based on laws and norms in the UN. Especially in the field of trade and the digital economy, Japan-U.S. cooperation is outstanding, together with other like-minded countries including India, Australia, and South Korea under the flag of FOIP. This is a good chance for Japan to develop future strategies for the UN as it celebrates its 75th anniversary of establishment in 2020.

Some say the efficacy of multilateral institutions is receding. However, multilateral institutions function as a platform open to diversified actors—states, civil society, businesses, academics and others with different intentions, values, ideologies, and capacities—that can tackle a variety of transnational issues. And multilateral institutions, especially the UN, are an authoritative place to formulate international laws and norms. Japan can exert leadership and be an intellectual thought leader in the UN.

UN policy will remain one of the major components of Japanese diplomacy because the UN has given Japan many chances to contribute to the international community. And despite occasional differences in approach compared to the United States, there is ample room for bilateral cooperation to shape the trajectory for the UN as a key institution for upholding a rules-based international order.