

JAPAN CHAIR PLATFORM

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With a Left Like This, Who Needs the Right?

Jeffrey Hornung

Are Japan's left-of-center parties bad for its national security and the U.S.-Japan alliance? Given their advocacy of various levels of pacifism, anticapitalism, and anti-Americanism, it is easy to believe these would translate into a fundamental shift in Japan's security policies if given the chance to govern. The problem is that, while a dramatic shift occurs, it is away from the principles that defined the party while in opposition. Far from being bad for Japan's security, the Left has actually bolstered Japan's security and, in some instances, done more than the Right ever could.

Democratic Party of Japan and its Security Shift

Japan's current left-of-center party is the governing Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ). Formed by defectors from the Japan Socialist Party (JSP) and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), the party remains a coalition of political persuasions across the ideological spectrum. Prior to coming to power in August 2009, there were critics in Tokyo and Washington who feared its foreign policies would be disastrous to Japan's security and alliance relations. This was because the DPJ had long called for a foreign policy more independent of Washington and a recalibration of Japan's relations with its neighbors. Yet, a review of the DPJ's 17 months in office shows initiatives by the DPJ that strengthen, not weaken, Japan's security initiatives and its bilateral alliance.

Nuclear Nonproliferation

Like the LDP, the DPJ has advocated nuclear disarmament and refused to engage in nuclear cooperation with states that are not signatories to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). When the United States and India signed a civilian nuclear agreement in 2005, the DPJ criticized it as sending the wrong message to Iran and North Korea. The DPJ's stance meant they opposed an LDP agreement to strengthen bilateral security cooperation with India in October 2008. Yet, since coming to power, the DPJ has relaxed its position and dropped NPT membership as a precondition for cooperation. Instead, the DPJ government proposed a "strict guarantee" that India would not deviate from its nonproliferation commitment. Guided by this, in June 2010, Japan began negotiations with India regarding a civilian nuclear cooperation agreement. In the months since, representatives from both countries have met to discuss deeper military ties and the establishment of a security dialogue via a new 2+2 framework at the subcabinet senior level.

Self-Defense Forces

Despite the DPJ's recognition of the legality of the Japan Self-Defense Forces (SDF), throughout its years in opposition, almost every time the LDP wanted to dispatch the SDF abroad the DPJ objected. This was because it opposed the SDF's gradually expansive role in what it viewed as "America's wars." Instead, the DPJ advocated dispatch under UN-mandated missions. Anything else trampled on the constitution and the ban on the exercise of the right to collective self-defense. Adherence to this belief was a reason why the DPJ opposed the SDF's involvement in Iraq and refused to renew the Maritime SDF's (MSDF) refueling mission in the Indian Ocean for NATO forces conducting operations in Afghanistan. The current framework of allowing SDF dispatch only under special legislation (i.e. 1993 PKO Cooperation Law, Special Measures Laws) led LDP governments to call for a permanent law to allow for more prompt dispatches to a variety of situations. Despite previous objections, last month the DPJ established a working group to consider legislation for a permanent dispatch law, as well as whether or not to authorize the exercise of the right to collective self-defense (something the LDP made a campaign issue in the 2009 election).

Missile Defense

Since Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi agreed to jointly develop a ballistic missile defense system with the United States in 2003, the DPJ has questioned the LDP's cooperation. It questioned both the legality of operating such a system and how effective it would be in practice. This led to the expectation that the DPJ would cut missile defense spending. Not only has

the DPJ continued joint development, it approved the transfer by the United States to third parties of SM-3 Block IIA missiles. The decision is notable because it accepts Koizumi's 2005 decision to make an exception to Japan's 1967 self-imposed ban on arms exports to include joint development of missile defense-related weapons and technology with the United States.

Antipiracy Efforts

Although the DPJ did not necessarily oppose Prime Minister Taro Aso's March 2009 decision to participate in the multilateral effort off the coast of Somalia, it did disagree on which agency (Coast Guard or MSDF) should lead. Aso not only succeeded in having the MSDF lead by utilizing Article 82 of the SDF Law (using maritime security as an emergency measure), he passed a permanent antipiracy bill in June 2009 that widened the MSDF's rules of engagement (i.e., allows firing at hulls of pirate vessels after repeated warning shots) and provided a wider scope for the MSDF to use force to protect *any* commercial ships threatened (i.e., not just those carrying Japanese nationals/cargo or sailing under the Japanese flag). The DPJ opposed, voicing concerns over Japan's expanding military reach and Diet control. Yet, since coming to power, the DPJ has done nothing to act on its concerns. On the contrary, the DPJ's insistence on the Coast Guard has disappeared. Not only did it extend the MSDF mission in July 2010 for another year, last summer it began studying the possibility of sending MSDF refueling ships to support the mission. What is most surprising is its decision to construct Japan's first overseas permanent SDF base in Djibouti to support the MSDF's antipiracy efforts. Construction of an overseas military base would have been unimaginable under the LDP.

Relations with the United States vs. China

While in opposition, the DPJ was critical of the LDP for its overreliance on the United States. Instead, it stressed a more equal relationship with the United States and closer relations with China as part of a strategy of moving closer to Asia. Included in this was support of the East Asian Community (EAC), which did not necessarily include the United States. On becoming premier, Yukio Hatoyama promised to reopen LDP-era agreements. First among these was a 2006 agreement with the United States to relocate the Futenma airbase *within* Okinawa and instead move it *off* the island. Additionally, he pledged to rethink the agreement to pay over \$6 billion for the transfer of 8,000 U.S. Marines to Guam, reduce Japan's monetary contributions to U.S. Forces Japan (USFJ), and renegotiate the Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). Hatoyama ultimately resigned due to the Futenma impasse; yet under his successor Naoto Kan, the DPJ has shifted away from previous principles. Not only has Kan promised to conclude the 2006 agreement, he also dropped references to the EAC and renegotiating the SOFA, began advocating a U.S.-included East Asian Summit, and agreed to a new five-year treaty stipulating that Tokyo would *maintain* the annual costs of hosting U.S. bases at \$2.26 billion. This is surprising given that Kan's background as a civil activist seems to contradict his support for the relocation of Futenma against strong opposition from local activist groups and his decision to cut 430 Japanese jobs on U.S. bases in order to maintain current USFJ spending levels.

What Explains the Shift?

When viewed against its previous principles, the DPJ has made a number of dramatic shifts. This should not be surprising. After all, there is precedent for the Left giving up its principles when attaining power. Prior to becoming Japan's first Socialist premier since 1947, Tomiichi Murayama announced that his party would relinquish unarmed neutrality, its opposition to the U.S.-Japan security treaty, and its belief that the SDF were unconstitutional. Why does Japan's Left give up its principles so easily?

The dynamics are complex but involve the struggle these parties face between their pacifist roots (particularly the Socialists) and the real-world challenges of governing. As it happens in any democracy, governing is different from opposition. The lofty ideas a party can offer without the responsibilities of governance are soon met with the realities of governing. The result is a heavy dose of pragmatism. The JSP's abandonment of its calls for dismantling the SDF and scrapping the U.S.-Japan alliance is a perfect case in point.

Another factor specific to the DPJ is the ongoing search for political identity. The DPJ is a big-tent party, but there is still no resolution as to what grouping along the ideological spectrum will define it. In other words, the party lacks consensus on what it stands for. While in opposition, it largely agreed on what it opposed. As a governing party, this no longer works. As such, principles are easily swapped for political expediency.

The dominant factor is external events' impact on policy awareness. Japan's neighborhood is increasingly uncertain. The North Korean nuclear program in 1994 brought home the danger of an unprotected Japan to the Socialists, leading the party to revise the 1976 National Defense Program Outline and begin the process of strengthening the alliance. Similarly, recent Chinese and North Korean provocations have worked to convince former socialists in the DPJ to view Japan's environs in ways more similar to the conservatives. As such, the DPJ's policies are increasingly defined by the conservative wing. The outcome is a DPJ less driven by principles of closer relations with China and distance from the United States and more by

concerns of protecting Japan. This is most visible in the DPJ's recently published National Defense Program Guidelines, which call for a restructuring of Japan's defense posture to the south. This has also worked to push the DPJ's strategic thinking back toward Washington. After all, with two uncertain neighbors, Tokyo cannot afford to alienate its ally. While the Futenma issue remains unresolved, the DPJ is making concerted efforts to "deepen" Japan's alliance with the United States and its security partners for the sake of protecting Japan and hedging against a possible threatening China and unstable North Korea.

Why Does it Matter?

While the Left is acting more like the Right, this is not to suggest that U.S.-Japan relations will be smooth. The DPJ chose to take a stand on some issues and won, notably the refueling mission in the Indian Ocean. Surely the allies will have their difficulties, but these can be minimized if continuity and change in Japan's policies are properly assessed.

Because the Futenma issue has dominated bilateral relations, it is easy to believe that the DPJ is willing to act in ways that are counterproductive to the alliance or is more resistant to requests for security contributions. Both are wrong. Despite previous calls for fundamentally rebalancing the alliance, the DPJ never challenged its primacy for Japan's security. Similarly, while the DPJ terminated the MSDF refueling mission in the Indian Ocean, it has continued to make important security contributions in other areas, such as antipiracy efforts off Somalia.

Along with continued support for the alliance, the DPJ will continue to make contributions. However, these will differ in form, not substance, from the LDP. The DPJ will continue along its trajectory of closer relations with the United States and further strengthen ties with U.S. partners. At the same time, the DPJ will continue to be involved in international efforts *substantially* the same as the LDP. However, the *form* of this involvement will be limited to nonmilitary operations such as UN-mandated PKOs or humanitarian assistance/disaster relief (HA/DR) operations, as well as operations that directly affect Japan's security. In the former category, expect to see continued contributions similar to the \$5 billion to Afghanistan for reconstruction and the dispatch of SDF units to places like Haiti and Pakistan for HA/DR. These operations are either UN mandated or purely humanitarian in nature, allowing the DPJ to contribute SDF without questions about Japan's legal restraints. In the latter category, expect the DPJ to continue to prioritize defense of both its homeland and sea-lanes of communication on which the economy so heavily depends. This means continued involvement in antipiracy efforts, including possible increased cooperation with India, Indonesia, and others regarding the Malacca Strait, as well as possible permanent legislation to enable the MSDF to defend sea-lanes in the Indian Ocean. It also means continued involvement in the missile defense system with the United States.

The DPJ is not the LDP, but it too is a big-tent party split among groups across the political spectrum. The LDP never overcame this problem, but the conservatives tended to dominate, casting a conservative shade to the party. Trends indicate the DPJ is heading in a similar direction, although the shade tends to be lighter due to stronger pacifist roots in the DPJ. Nevertheless, with the DPJ heading in the same conservative direction, one has to wonder how the parties will differentiate their policies in the next election.

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