

Japan: Dilemmas of A Pacifist Ally

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摘要

對日本而言，9月11日恐怖襲擊和其後的反恐怖戰爭造成了頗尷尬的局面。一如十年前海灣戰爭，日本正苦於尋找在支持其盟友的同時能免受戰火慘痛回憶下內心煎熬的方法。日本首相小泉純一郎小心翼翼地承諾以自衛隊為美國反恐戰爭提供情報和後勤支援。未來數月內自衛隊的表現將決定日本今後是否能在國際政治舞台上扮演一個更正常的角色。

How to stand up and be counted? The tragic events of 11 September, the US declaration of a war on terrorism, and the subsequent military attacks on Afghanistan have raised significant dilemmas for the United States' premier ally in Asia, Japan. Immediately after the 9-11 tragedies, prime minister Junichiro Koizumi expressed shock and sympathy, but then found himself confronted with the problem of what to do next, as the Bush administration began to construct an international coalition to eradicate terrorism. Koizumi, who had come to office four months earlier vowing to strengthen the Japan-US alliance, promised to do as much as possible to support the anti-terrorist campaign but then added the caveat of having to act within the constraints of the Japanese peace constitution. Aware that this could be interpreted abroad as a recipe for inactivity, Koizumi clearly wanted to do more, but he has had to face up to two debilitating legacies.

The first – which I call the ‘yen not men syndrome’ – provides a strong sense of déjà vu. In 1990, after Iraq had invaded Kuwait, the United States constructed another multi-national coalition, on that occasion to liberate Kuwait. Hamstrung by constitutional niceties, a well-intentioned but weak prime minister, and a still strongly pacifist population Japan hedged and ducked for cover. It did contribute a very substantial amount to the costs of that Gulf War campaign, but sent no troops. Minesweepers were sent to clear Persian Gulf seaways, but only after all the fighting had finished.

The second millstone is Japan's own history of military action in Asia and the sensitivities of neighbouring countries about any sign of what might be considered as a revival of ‘militarism’. Although some right-wing politicians did and still do hark back to the earlier days of ‘rich country, strong army’, the majority of Japanese have no wish to return to the aggressive attitudes of the past; if anything, the desire to disengage from anything involving force has become pre-eminent. Unfortunately, the Japanese tendency to try to settle the past by at best by-passing it and at worst by ignoring it has only helped to keep it alive. Unlike the seemingly more penitent postwar German approach to Europe and Israel,

the sincere but often convoluted Japanese governmental apologies have not had sufficient resonance for aggrieved Asians.

The ‘9-11 attacks’ have, paradoxically, at the same time both resuscitated the debate within Japan about contributing actively to the maintenance of international order (a debate briefly stimulated by the Gulf War but which subsequently lapsed into semi-dormancy because of the preoccupation with prolonged economic recession) and dampened the suspicions – or perhaps it is more accurate to say the expression of suspicions – of neighbours about such contributions.

In trying to respond to US demands that Japan make ‘visible’ contributions to the new anti-terrorist campaign, Koizumi at least has four advantages that did not exist for his hapless predecessor in 1990-91. Firstly, he has tremendously high personal support amongst the Japanese. Although his party still has to rely on two coalition allies to ensure legislation passes through parliament and the economy is sinking further into recession, he has managed to project a new style of governance which strikes a chord with a population desperate for a revival in Japan's fortunes. Secondly, the pacifist-based parties of the political left have withered over the past decade to be replaced by less-ideologically driven centrist ones. Thirdly, whereas Kuwait seemed to be an oil-rich country far away, the dramatic television pictures of the crumbling World Trade Centre towers and the deaths of some Japanese in them have made this crisis seem much more real to the Japanese. Public opinion polls show more than 70% of the population supporting new legislation to allow the Self-Defence Forces (SDF) to participate more actively in the US-led campaign.

Finally, all the neighbouring Asian nations, including most importantly China, have expressed sympathy and support for the US-led campaign against terrorism (although some have expressed reservations about the US military retaliation). Since they themselves are contributing in various ways – ranging from intelligence and financial monitoring through to logistical and medical support – they can hardly complain openly about Japan too moving forward with its support. At the same time the fact that even China, which had been previously going through a sticky patch in its relations with the new Bush administration, is becoming actively involved meant that Japan could not afford to be left behind.

In fact, the Koizumi government has been acting in a cautious but positive manner. Under the recently-passed new legislation, the scope of the SDF's activities have been widened, allowing it to dispatch ships to the Indian Ocean and to provide transport and logistical support for the US-led forces. This time around, Japan is contributing less yen but more men. Japan will doubtless play a leading part financially in the post-war reconstruction of Afghanistan, but the sending of the SDF at this stage of the campaign is an important step forward. Low-key but

positive actions by the SDF can, in turn, prove reassuring to Asian neighbours.

President Bush has described this as the first war of the twenty-first century. For Japan, certainly, it is the first major challenge it has faced since the Gulf War and the end of the Cold War. How it discharges its assumed responsibilities in the coming months will be an important marker as to whether Japan can really become accepted as a 'normal' state in the international system.