Japan's Diplomacy under the New Abe Cabinet

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Thank you very much, Richard, for your thoughtful introduction.

When I was a CNAPS fellow working on papers two years ago, I never expected that I would be returning to Brookings not only as a featured speaker but as a government employee. But I always enjoy coming back to Washington and especially seeing my many good friends here at Brookings.

I have been asked from time to time why I chose not only to become a government employee, but a spokesperson for the government. I was leaving my beloved job as a journalist and almost entirely giving up my right to "freedom of speech."

I admit I still sometimes long to be back in journalism. It was only after leaving it did I realize how much I truly loved my job as a journalist. I loved going out and talking to people. I loved even the pressure of deadlines, which always filled me with a mixture of fear and adrenaline.

Despite all of that, I honestly believe I have made the right decision in joining the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. At any rate, I am on a fixed term of two years, with a possible extension of as long as a year. I am supposed to leave the ministry next summer, or the year after next at the latest.

That timeframe has put me at the margins, as it were, straddling two cultures: the Japanese bureaucracy and the rest of the world which is a more familiar place for you and me.

Despite these "impediments" compared to my old profession, I enjoy my new career. It is fascinating for me to observe Japan's diplomacy from the inside out. And on an almost daily basis, I feel as though I am "present at the creation" of policies and actions which affect Japan's changing politics, economy, and certainly its diplomacy.

So today, I would like to share with you how these changes will affect where Japan is headed in the future.

To borrow Richard's metaphor, Japan may be a nation of "a long wind-up and a quick pitch".

It seems that after spending more than a decade of economic stagnation and political paralysis, the Japanese have regained a greater degree of confidence in their state of economy, and now want their government to deliver, to make a "quick pitch."

Today's topic, to put it differently is, what kind of pitches is Japan throwing?

First, let's take a look at the pitcher.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who turned 52 this last September, can be characterized by three "nots."

First and foremost he is *not* an Elvis enthusiast. Believe me he has no desire to visit Graceland.

Clearly, he is *not* as charismatic as his predecessor who would spend weekends alone in his official residence, meeting no one and being endlessly immersed in opera, symphony, rock and pop music.

Even his hairstyle is not as memorable as Koizumi's, to the disappointment of cartoonists the world over.

It does not mean, though, Shinzo Abe is less popular than Junichiro Koizumi. Indeed Abe's approval rating stands among the highest for the post-war Prime Ministers. Yomiuri Newspaper polled its readers and found the rating to be 70.3% and the left-of-center Asahi Newspaper, showed approval ratings as high as 63%.

In retrospect, it was not until Mr. Abe accompanied Mr. Koizumi's first trip to Pyongyang back in September 2002 that he became well-known among the ordinary citizens.

In their eyes Mr. Abe appeared to be someone who was more compassionate than most other politicians of the day toward the pains of the abductees and their family members. Indeed, having the parents of Megumi Yokota, (who was one of the girls abducted by the North Koreans) appearing to place their trust in Mr. Abe won him huge support from the public.

It was also during this time that it became known that in fact, Mr. Abe had committed himself to the abduction issue long before the nation's media began even talking of it.

He is the youngest Prime Minister in post war Japan, and according to a correspondent with the British newspaper, The Times, he looks a bit like Tom Conti, a Scottish actor and a one-time Academy Award best actor nominee.

He also possesses a degree of showmanship. When he made his first trip abroad as Prime Minister and went to Beijing and Seoul, he got out of the Prime Ministerial airplane hand in hand with his 44-year-old wife Akie.

My hunch is that it was an elaborately calculated action to appear modern and urbane with an aim to shake Confucian minds in the capital cities of China and Korea. Rumor has it that Taro Aso, the Japanese Foreign Minister, gave a hand-written memo to Abe urging him to do that, and Aso handed the memo to Abe during a Diet session

Incidentally Akie, or Akkie as her radio program's listeners would call the female DJ, is known to be a South Korean soap opera enthusiast who speaks conversational Korean, which was music, literally, to South Korean ears.

You can tell that in many respects Akie and Shinzo Abe belong to a new generation. I for one had never seen a Japanese prime minister walking down the landing steps side-by-side, hand-in-hand with his wife.

Secondly he is *not* a nationalist.

But I must add a footnote here in a hasty fashion. I do not know how each of you defines the word, nationalist. In my definition it means the following: A nationalist is someone whose mind is narrowly closed, who hates foreigners and longs for a romanticized idea of becoming "independent" in the Gaullist sense of the word.

By arguing that his country ought to be "A Beautiful Japan", to borrow the title of his book, sounding a bit romantic and I dare say, "little-England-ist", he is without a doubt, a proud patriot.

Still, not only is he not a nationalist, I should say, he is almost the polar opposite.

To start, far from being a jingoistic xenophobe, Shinzo Abe advocates that Japan should attract from abroad, a far greater amount of human capital, students, and direct investment.

A nationalist, in Japan's context, has always found it hard to reconcile what he or she deems uniquely Japanese, itself a pretty much romanticized notion, with the undeniable fact that the nation can hardly spend a day at ease had it not been for its strong bond with its one-time conqueror, the USA.

For instance, I am reminded here of the late literary critic Jun Eto. Some of you may remember Yukio Mishima, though neither one of whom was as simplistic-minded as might appear.

Nationalists in Japan, as is so often the case elsewhere, have long suffered from a peculiar ambivalence complex, the love and hate complex, toward the US. I can say absolutely, that Mr. Abe does not suffer from this trait.

In fact he has long been known among the American expatriate community in Tokyo to be one of the most relaxed lawmakers, a very much approachable figure, thereby winning bi-partisan support.

He was among the most instrumental in the aftermath of the

terrorists' attacks against the US, paving the way for the Japanese military, i.e., the Japanese Self-Defense Forces, to widen its operational scope to better collaborate with the US Military.

It is no secret, either, that Akie was dedicated to boosting the long-ailing Japanese immersion language program in Fairfax County, Virginia. The couple also has their own pet project of fostering a new generation of leaders on both sides of the Pacific, taking advantage of such successful programs as JET which places young Americans throughout Japan and pays for them to teach English.

In a nutshell, theirs is the mind which is open and far from cloistered in the 1930s' sense of the word.

That being the second "not", thirdly, he is *not* a Japanese neo-con, if I may define a neo-con for an argument's sake to be a dogmatist. Illustrative of this fact would be that he succeeded in meeting both heads of China and South Korea upon taking office as Prime Minister, thereby sweeping off for now the belligerent image that Beijing and Seoul have long projected about Tokyo.

In fact, Hu Jintao chose to come a long way by "positively appreciating," if I may cite the wording of the Japan-China Joint Press Statement that, "Japan more than 60 years after the War, has been consistently following the path of a peaceful country, and would continue to follow this path." It was the first time ever that a Japanese Prime Minister let his Chinese counterpart "positively appreciate" what Japan had become after the war.

I for one will be thrilled when China's history textbooks will finally start talking about some of the positive aspects of Japan's post-war development.

I think I have spoken a fair amount of who is taking the mound.

Let me now make a few words about whether or not Japan will go nuclear, as I think you are most curious about this recent debate.

I have used the term, debate, but to be precise, very few in Japan are debating whether it should obtain a nuclear arsenal. What is in fact going on is a debate about whether or not Japan should really debate the matter. It is a debate about a debate, no matter how complicating that may sound to you.

Foreign Minister Taro Aso maintains that there is nothing wrong with Japan having a debate on whether it would be a good thing or a bad thing to obtain nuclear capacity. He goes on to argue that it would be even sounder if Japan reconfirms its long-cherished non-nuclear principles after having rigorous debates.

His long-time pal, Minister of State for Defense, Fumio Kyuma holds a different view. According to him, the debate would not help Japan's image abroad. Kyuma is basing his position from a marketing perspective.

I am of a mixed view here. I am inclined to agree more with Mr. Aso as I share his view that debating the future course could even lead the Japanese to a rational conclusion as to why it does not benefit Japan to go nuclear. Thus far, the so called nuclear allergy among the Japanese has been much dependent upon the understandable emotions that they have held since Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Yet emotions may or may not weather time.

However, I must confess that as a Foreign Ministry spokesperson, I have grown pretty much tired of having to answer exactly the same question posed by BBC, CNN, a radio network in Pakistan, Australian TV network and so on as to whether, or even when, Japan should consider a nuclear option. A VOA interviewer called me from Washington DC and asked, "By the way Mr. Taniguchi, when is Japan going to obtain nuclear weapons?"

Mr. Kyuma is right in pointing out that it is so easy for a misinformed image to be projected to the world. Japan, I must admit, has never been good at marketing itself. As a result, its brand loyalty still remains vulnerable.

The fact of the matter is, that even after the North Korean regime claimed that it had conducted a nuclear detonation, Prime Minister Abe, Foreign Minister Aso, and Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuhisa Shiozaki, all reconfirmed repeatedly on the parliamentary floor that there should be no change whatsoever in the nation's non-nuclear principles that it would manufacture, possess, or allow anyone to bring in nuclear weaponry.

Some critics say that so long as those principles are not enshrined in a written law but merely given a repeated endorsement by the past and present administrations, they can be changed overnight. The fact of the matter is, it is not so simple to change these principles. To start, Japan has a responsibility to follow the mandates set forth as a non-nuclear signatory to the NPT regime.

Furthermore if Japan could instantaneously become a nuclear nation, then it could have just as well become one 40 years ago.

At that time, then Secretary General of the Liberal Democratic Party, Takeo Fukuda created a storm of controversy when he said on

December 14, 1967, that "the majority of the Liberal Democrats see the need to outgrow the 'nuclear allergy'", echoing the prevailing sentiment voiced in the previous year by Takeo Shimoda, then Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs, who "told a press conference that 'Japan cannot agree to such a big power-centered approach, [i.e., the NPT regime] implying as it does that the nuclear powers would not be required to reduce their capabilities or stockpile, while the non-nuclear powers would be barred … from having nuclear weapons'" (Selig S. Harrison, "Japan and Nuclear Weapons" in Selig S. Harrison, ed., *Japan's Nuclear Future: The Plutonium Debate and East Asian Security*, 1996, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington D.C.)

One should learn two points here. First, the nuclear debate is as old as I am. And you are not looking at a young man here, are you? Japan, as is the case on many other issues, is a nation "that has been there, and done that." That experience should give the world an assurance that Japan is mature enough to be able to put aside extreme views and strike a good balance.

Second, in today's Japan, very few Japanese share the kind of resentment typified in Shimoda and Fukuda views, and expressed as a criticism of the unfairness of the NPT regime. Rather, Japan has chosen to follow the path and remain as faithful as it possibly can, as a participant of the regime.

In the meantime, the vast majority of Japanese have come to accept the effectively hegemonic presence of the US as a given, and being indispensable for Japan's own security and providing stability to the region.

With the passing or the near passing of the war-time generation, the American presence in and out of Japan of late has ruffled far fewer feathers, and for Shinzo Abe, it is part of Japan's precious assets, not

liabilities.

If you are an economist, you know that there is something called "sunk cost." A potentially nuclear capable Japan by going non-nuclear has sunk an enormous amount of cost in maintaining this position. This is similar to changing from a QWERTY keyboard. You have sunk so much time and effort familiarizing yourself with the QWERTY keyboard, that you cannot use a much more finger friendly alternative. Foreign Minister Taro Aso knows this by instinct, as he is an experienced business person.

Political pundits should also take note that unlike in North Korea or China, nothing dramatic could happen, to risk sounding boring, in a financially sophisticated country like Japan. I would argue that countries that have McDonald's restaurants may still go to war with one another, but it would be much more difficult for them if they are regularly visited and checked by the financial analysts from, say, Moody's Investors Service or Standard and Poor's.

Suppose for instance, a Japanese Prime Minister declares that his government will develop a nuclear arsenal, [even putting the Constitutional constraint aside,] he would still have to pass the defense budget through the Diet, and even if he succeeds in doing so, "thank you very much" will the credit rating companies come and say and Japan's government bond ratings will plummet and long-term interest rates will soar accordingly.

What Japan has chosen to do instead, and I must add that Shinzo Abe has been one of the most ardent architects of this, is to try and become a reliable partner for the US not just economically but also in the field of security.

As a result of this architecture, Japan has pursued a missile defense

strategy and as the sole partner nation to the US that provides sea-based, mid-course missile shields. Japan has also developed a solid tripartite security institution with the US and Australia, Japan also continues to shoulder security responsibilities in the Arabian Sea and in Iraq, and Japan has reached out to India and far afield to NATO, effectively binding itself as much as possible with its democratic peers.

While saying so, I am being reminded of what Robert Cooper talked about Japan.

Robert Cooper is known to be Tony Blair's foreign policy guru and a partner to a Japanese pianist Mitsuko Uchida.

The thinker-cum-bureaucrat made a fascinating argument of "what-if-Japan-was-in-Europe" in his thought-provoking book, *The Breaking of Nations*.

He said, and I quote, "Of non-European countries, Japan is by inclination a postmodern state. It has self-imposed limits on defense spending and capabilities. It is no longer interested in acquiring territory nor in using force. It would probably be willing to accept intrusive verification. It is an enthusiastic multilateralist. Were it not on the other side of the world, it would be a natural member of organizations such as the OSCE or the European Union. Unfortunately for Japan it is a postmodern country surrounded by states firmly locked into an earlier age: postmodernism in one country is possible only up to a point and only because its security treaty with the US enables it to live as though its neighborhood were less threatening", unquote.

The German postmodernism was again evinced by a piece in the Financial Times that ran earlier this week. According to the article, Germany has adopted the most radical restructuring of its military since

1945, turning the Bundeswehr, the army, into an international intervention force.

This is a postmodernism that Japan cannot afford but can only dream of. Many in Japan are supportive of their Self-Defense Forces personnel rushing to the rescue in the disaster-hit areas. They are also proud that the SDF troops helped build schools, assisted local doctors in Samawah, Iraq, and including the Iraqi operation, they have shot not even a single bullet throughout the post-war history. And yet again, what is affordable for Germany is mere luxury for Japan.

That being so, and being pretty much aware of the surroundings Robert Cooper illustrated, Japan, especially since 9/11, has chosen to be much more articulate in advocating universal values, and as I noted already, getting itself bound as geographically widely and substantially deeply as it possibly can by forming strategic ties with Australia and India, and for the first time ever, by reaching out to NATO.

That Japan's diplomacy having been much more value-driven than previously struck me when I joined the Foreign Ministry, as for me it had seemed for so long extremely shy and reserved in waving any sort of banner.

In this context I must urge you to go to the Ministry's English website, key in "NATO speech" in the search box, and have a look at the speech Minister Aso delivered at the North Atlantic Council (NAC) meeting on May 4, this year.

For a country where discussing collective defense had long been quasi-taboo, the Foreign Minister's trip to NATO, an epitome of collective defense, was an even more taboo act.

Foreign Minister Aso addressed the NAC and said, "We are peers, like-minded, let us move on together". He went on to propose the following, and I quote, "Let us enhance our mutual awareness, as we will most likely find ourselves working aside together much more frequently than in the past. Let us start talking to one another more often and much more on a regular basis, with a view of possibility for operational cooperation in the future. Let us establish a workable interface in order to coordinate our policies", unquote.

I for one tend to agree with Ivo Daalder and James Goldgeier who said in their article appearing in the latest issue of *Foreign Affairs* that "[A]s of now, a number of countries with a questionable commitment to democracy and human rights […] are covered by Article 10, while stalwart democracies, such as Australia and Japan, are not. Yet a shared commitment to shared values should be a more relevant determinant of membership than geography."

That much is what Japan's diplomacy is like at the moment.

I can finish my talk here, but for your curiosity's sake, let me touch briefly on Japan's relations with China and Korea before taking questions.

With Beijing, Tokyo has had many issues, some of which have been pending. How and where to draw a demarcation line in the East China Sea, and to extract oil and gas there is one such issue. I frankly do not expect that the East China Sea issue will be solved any time soon to the full satisfaction of either side, but more important is that the leaders of these two countries affirmed they should work more closely together to explore a solution that is acceptable for both parties, including the possibility of co-developing the area.

There are many items I would like to introduce, such as the

initiative to conduct a joint study on history, a long-time Japanese proposal, but let me focus only on the high-school student exchange program that Tokyo initiated and Beijing accepted.

That is what I call a Chinese medicine approach to enhance the bilateral tie from a long-term perspective. It is to plant seeds of love and friendship in the still formative minds and hearts of Chinese high school students, if I may sound more flowery.

The Japanese government, in cooperation with Japan Foundation and others, is inviting 1,000 high school students for this year alone, from various parts of China to Japan, and letting them spend two weeks strolling around the now anime town of Akihabara and visiting at least two regional high schools, whilst spending two nights at host families' homes. In addition, approximately 40 students are on a much longer scholarship, spending 11 months, staying either at host families' homes or at school dormitories, and attending local Japanese high schools.

I like this initiative very much because it is simply much fun to see those young boys and girls obtaining their own views on Japan, looking at a good Japan and a not-so-good side of it, while overcoming cultural barriers on a daily basis.

The Foreign Ministry is committed to continuing the program, and we have set aside a considerable amount of money for an endowment.

You may ask where the Yasukuni issue has gone. Neither Beijing nor Tokyo touched on the issue during the bilateral talks. Yet it is still there, not necessarily in Beijing but certainly in Tokyo, to be discussed among the shrine's congregation, legislators, and the public.

Minister Aso, albeit in his individual capacity and in Japanese

language threw out a proposal last summer that has been the most comprehensive about what ought to be done regarding this issue.

In his characteristic commercial tone, he pointed out that Yasukuni is a customer-losing entity and hence with or without foreign interventions it is an institution that needs a draconian turn-around.

That now is the time for the shrine to turn itself around seems to have resonated widely among the congregation and within a group of politicians that want the shrine to remain a source of Japanese collective memories, glorious and shameful, good and bad. I continue to be intrigued by the debate, and by what exactly is going to happen.

Lastly, let me say a few words on the Japan Korea relationship. I must begin by pointing out that the North Korean claim of a nuclear test could not have come in a more timely fashion. Upon his arrival at Seoul airport from Beijing, Shinzo Abe knew that Kim Jong-Il had given him a huge amount of beef for Seoul and Tokyo to bite.

This set a tone for a sense of commonality between the two nations, and South Korean President Roh Moo Hyun, who said in the aftermath of multiple missile launches by Kim Jong-Il that Tokyo was making too much fuss out of it, instead appeared very much solemn, and became a wholehearted supporter of the US-Japan initiative for the passing of UN Resolution 1718.

There will likely be many ups and downs in the future course of Korea Japan relations. Yet South Korea is one of the most vibrant democracies in the region, whose proudest son is soon to head the UN, and the economy, to cite my own metaphor, whose budgetary conduct is frequently scrutinized by the analysts from Moody's and S&P's.

All that gives me very little to really worry about.

And on Akie Abe learning Korean language, she has one more motivation, other than her passion in Korean cultures, to acquire the linguistic skill. Her husband's home town and constituency is in Yamaguchi prefecture, the western-most part of the Honshu main island. It was the birthplace of Meiji-era leaders including the first Prime Minister Hirobumi Ito, whom South Koreans still hate a lot as it was Ito who annexed the peninsula.

Yet Yamaguchi is so close to Pusang, South Korea, its most profit making industry, namely tourism of hot-spring resorts, can hardly live a day without the flood of incoming Korean tourists, those who speak the language Mrs. Abe is so fond of learning.

Thank you very much.