

***Japan's Middle East Security Policy:
patterns since the millennium and implications for the
coming period***

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Determinants of Policy

1) Japan's Middle East policy – shaped by two politico-strategic factors

Japan's lop-sided strategic profile: security dependency on US; concern for North Korea & China's expansionism

Oil dependency: **42.7%** of energy on oil, **24.2%** on gas; dependency on ME oil **83.6%** from the Middle East (**2013**).

Dual dependency - Caught between often clashing US and Middle East demands.

Other factors: international prestige (incl. UN SC seat) , Russia

2) In the process of policy-making, elite norms also clash with one another or public opinion.

e.g. US alliance vs political neutrality on the Arab-Israeli conflict; elites' military activism vs national anti-militarist norm

Patterns of Policy: *historical implications*

- Historically Japan sought to balance and avoid offending either US or ME.
- Room for manoeuvre declined with the end of the Cold War – fear of abandonment by US, given East Asian security threats

I. Long-term Tendency:

- Constant shift away from pro-Arab/Islam towards pro-US tangent

Explaining the long-term shift:

- Shifts in the world balance of power toward US
- Shifts in Japan's dependency/vulnerability (from energy insecurity to East Asia threats)
- Changes in Japanese elites' goals: from a “liberal” trading state to desire to be a “normal” “realist” great power

Case of the Iraq war (2003)

Japan's policy: Bandwagoning with US

- Clear political support for US war
- Sending GSDF to Iraq for post-war reconstruction
- Financial support for Iraqi reconstruction
- Policy coordinated with the US from an early stage

Q. Erosion of Japanese identity as an anti-militarist state?

- Government needed exceptionally strong political leadership in the Iraq war case.
- Government forced to scale down the SDF activities (war-time logistic support; post-war rear support; non-combat zone only).

Case of the Iranian nuclear issue:

- Was Japan's 3rd largest oil supplier: Japan's Azadegan oil concession to cover 6.3% of Japan's oil imports
- US\$ 2 billion contract despite US sanctions (under Iran-Libya Sanction Act). Japan was ready to take the case to the WTO.
- US demand for making Azadegan & Iran relations contingent on Iran's compliance on the nuclear issue (Additional Protocol Jan 2004).

Issues:

North Korea

Middle East stability (i.e. oil flow to Japan)

anti-nuclear norm – Japan did not want Iranian nuclear weapons acquisition, but sought to avoid oil sanctions on Iran.

← A new opportunity in Iran needed to be seized.

Case of the Iranian nuclear issue:

Japan's policy:

- 1) Softer tone, more patience than US.
 - 2) Zig-zag between pro-US and pro-Iran - Seeking international buffer (e.g. EU) to avoid damage to either relations. Once buffer disappears (e.g. EU3's policy hardening), Japan follows (except for Iran's right for peaceful use).
 - 3) Along with the US & EU3, gradual shift towards more pressure on Iran, but resisted oil sanctions. (until hardening of Iran → then EU3)
- Interest in Azadegan oil declined, although long-term and general oil relationship with Iran is still highly valued – Balanced by bilateral contacts & non-political ties.

Obama-Abe Period

Continuation: balancing & inheriting agendas

1.US:

- Continuing US dependency in East Asia: China, North Korea.
- But less episodes of strong US pressure on Japan for policy cooperation in MENA.

2. Responses to Changes in the Middle East:

- US-Iran détente: Japan no longer caught between US and Iranian oil interest.
- Arab Uprising: Following the previous government's position in support of democratisation & support for opposition in post-Qadafi Libya and against Asad regimes repression of people.

Obama-Abe Period

3. Russia factor:

The proposed US attack on Syria over poison gas (Sept 2013): Abe's refusal to cooperate, desire not to jeopardize interests in Russia.

4. Combating Islamic terrorism (IS):

Japan political bandwagoning with the West (non-military means & indirect approaches e.g. sanctions, training ME officials for border control etc).

5. Regional power struggle:

Japan seeks to avoid damage to its energy interests in both Arab Gulf and Iran. (Deepening ties with both. e.g. politico-strategic dialogues, various business sectors, military exchanges etc)

Obama-Abe Period

6. New business interest in some states in the Middle East:

e.g. Israel: R&D, high tech industry

e.g. Turkey: nuclear power plant building in Sinop – May affect Japan's approach in future if the relationship deepens.

Abe's Policy and Internal Politics

Implication for military cooperation in the Middle East in the coming period:

- **Abe's leadership** equivalently strong → **Top-down** policy-making possible.
- **Legislative change**: New security law enables a **wider range** of Japanese military participation under UN – UNSC resolution *still* required.
- However, **public normative constraints** still strong. Averse to accidental involvement in combat, handling ammunitions, causing casualties, becoming targets → Need for UN umbrella.
- **Scale down possible** – Will depend on the **security condition** on the ground & terms of **UNSC res.**
- * National norm might change w. change of **public perception of Islamists threat** to the Japanese public itself.

Conclusion:

Q. How is Japan's policy determined?

- Japan's basic policy orientation was determined by policy-makers' **perception of the international power balance** and Japan's **national interests**.
- Generally, Japan shifted according to **the perceived relative influence** of the US and that of ME states or oil interest involved (New factors e.g. *Russia*).
- Japan's policies in ME were filtered through **norms** such as priority of the US alliance, anti-militarism, neutrality in Arab-Israel conflict (Change in anti-militarism more *legislative than normative*).
- When opportunity for **gain at low risk** was perceived, Japan was actively engaged; when risks increased it dis-engaged (*UN framework & consensus* promoted).
- When interests or norms clashed, the outcome was determined by the strength of different factions or offices within policy-making institutions (*Strong leadership* overcame it).