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JAPAN ARCHITECT OF A POST-NUCLEAR WORLD ORDER?

A View From The South

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What strikes a visitor from the South who has his first chance to have a closer look at Japan most is the degree to which the uncertainties and fears with which many foreigners look at Japan and its possible future.*/ The fears and uncertainties of the outside world have to do with Japan's fabulous rise to economic power and the choice of a political and possibly military role commensurate with that economic power which Japan now faces in the context of the new constellation of forces in the Asia-Pacific region.

The ambivalence of power, its potentiality for both good and evil, is in Japan's case even more marked because one of the choices she faces is the exercise of her nuclear option while at the same time the memory of her militarist past evokes the specter of a repetition of that pattern. The lack of clarity felt to be inherent in the Japanese national character only helps to aggravate these uncertainties and fears.

The uncertainty in some American quarters about how high a price - in terms of abrogation of erosion of the Mutual Security Treaty with the U.S. - Japan might be willing to pay in her desire to normalize relations with the Chinese is part of this picture.

The tough though narrow-gauged collective purposefulness impelling the drive and efficiency of Japanese businessmen abroad, reflected also in the expectations in Japan that the high growth rate of the last decade can be perpetuated indefinitely simply by continuing their headlong export drive has led to another type of concern.

The question that has now arisen in the world outside Japan among the rich as well as among the poor countries is whether Japan for uniquely Japanese reasons is permanently locked in a neo-mercantilist posture, or whether it has the capacity to broaden her horizon and to assume the responsibility for the economic state of the world as well as of her national interest. These questions then center around the nature of Japan's political and economic vision of the world and the role she wants to play in shaping that world.

Againts this look-from-the-outside the internal sense of confusion, the uncertainties and fears which are part of the Japanese scene today stand out in sharp relief : both, external and domestic factors account for this. One important external reason has to do with the uncertainty as to what the shift from a rigid bi-polar world order to a multi-polar constellation of forces will do to Japan, how the shift will affect her interests, and what role Japan is expected to play as one of the five poles of the new pentagonal configuration.

This shift has put an end to the familiar and to Japan comfortable patron-client relationship with the United States. Part of Japan's uncertainty has to do with what she feels to be the unpredictability of the United States' attitude towards her, of the impact of domestic American pressures on United States strategic posture in general and her capability to meet her commitments. Is the U.S. in the process of developing a strategic posture which would make the use of her bases in Japan redundant, and where would that leave Japan and if that is the case : what would be left of the credibility of the nuclear umbrella ?

There is no doubt that a sense of abandonment underlies many questions the Japanese would pose in regard to her relationship with the U.S. Has the United States ceased to look at Japan as her "ward"? Is it entirely inconceivable that the United States might prefer China as ally to Japan? Should Japan expect the United States to play off China and Japan against each other to her own benefit? What role does the United States want Japan to play?

The growing hostile reaction among a number of industrial countries, and also among some of the less developed countries, against Japan's self-centered economic policies have added another dimension to the bewilderment she already feels.

Firstly, there is a beginning concern about the growth of a general discriminatory mood against Japan in various important parts of the world and what it might do to the Japanese psyche, which could only be prevented by an acceleration of Japan's trade and investment liberalization policies and Japan's assumption of a more clearly defined role in a post-Brettonwoods international monetary, trade and development system.

Secondly, there is the pressure from the developing countries demanding that Japan opens her markets more widely for manufactured products of the less developed countries, and their urgent appeal that Japan identifies herself more firmly with the needs of economic development consonant with the national aspirations of these countries.

And finally, there is the fear (partly a hangover from her long isolation) what the impact will be of opening up Japan in this manner - which is not entirely predictable - on her real power and her national essence.

The second set of factors that lie at the root of Japan's own uncertainties has to do with social changes that are taking place in her own society leading to shifting domestic pressures. The need for substantially increased social overhead investments sustained over a long period of time, not only in order to improve invidual living standards and the strengthening of Japan's internal

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markets, but also because of environmental considerations is bound to require a massive redirection of Japan's resources and considerable organizational and financial adjustments.

Could this be done without serious dislocations and without slowing down the growth rate, triggering in turn a degree of social unrest ?

The gap in life styles and future expectations between urban areas and the countryside are increasing, creating new pressures in the prevailing political structures. On top of this there is the generational shift in value orientation.

One can already discern another emerging problem. It is becoming increasingly clear to the Japanese themselves that Japan's entry into the post-industrial phase will require the indigenous development of a new technology appropriate for that period. She can not expect any longer to apply and improve upon borrowed technology as she has done so succesfully, thereby beating the earlier industrialized nations in their own game. To this end, massive concentration on Research and Development will be necessary.

This may require a different type of leadership not only in the political, intellectual and scientific fields but also in government and business. Instead of the traditional virtues of group loyalty and conformity, the new situation may require a new emphasis on individual development, innovative capability,

boldness, creativity : qualities that only have a chance to blossom in more loosely structured social and business organizations.

Given these external uncertainties about Japan and Japan's own uncertainties about herself as well as the unquestionable existence of major problems demanding some painful adjustments; the considerable pressures exerted on Japan from various quarters are indeed not so surprising.

Each major power seems to be pressuring or manoevring Japan into a programmed position or dissuading her from playing a particular role she might aspire. Both China and the Soviet Union have an interest in widening the distance between Japan and the United States, but neither has an interest in doing this to the extent that Japan will arrive at the conclusion that she has to go nuclear. Neither of them can afford to see Japan developing too close economic and political relations with the other competing party. Through political manipulations and psychological intimidation China is striving to prevent Japan from achieving a military strength commensurate with her economic power, disregarding the magnitude of her own defense expenditure in relation to her GNP.

The United States wants Japan to get off the free ride she has been enjoying so far and asume some responsibility for the defense expenditure, preferably to undergird a defense role in the North Eastern Pacific area.

In any case, whether Japan will choose to play a role as a nuclear and military power in tandem with the United States, or as a nuclear independent power, or whether it sees itself as non-nuclear, significant independent power or as a non-nuclear, relatively unarmed neutral one, is going to be of the greatest importance to each of the major powers and will affect the power balance at both the global as well as the theater level.

It should also be realized that in the stately dance of ever shifting positions that will characterize the triangular relations between China, the USSR and the USA on the golbal nuclear level as well as on the sub-nuclear level - most likely just as often caused by problems over which they have no control as by those of their own making - every posture Japan even temporarily assumes or seems to assume vis-a-vis the points of the triangle, will be interpreted in the light of conflictual combinations, or in terms of clues as to Japan's choice among her strategic options. And moves will be undertaken to prevent or to encourage such a development.

How should she evaluate the seriousness of the conflicting voices she hears in the United States about American policy towards Japan? They range from "equanimity" if Japan finally overcoming her "nuclear allergy" decides after a decade or so to go nuclear, to welcoming such a development, and to voices speaking in Washington's corridors of power about the need to force or shock Japan into such a stance. And how much weight should be given to the U.S.

Statements ...

statements to the contrary?

How then should Japan respond to these conflicting pressures? Some of them are obviously mutually irreconcible; others might - at a lower level of international tension - be accomodated without harm to the Japanese interest. It would seem, however, that the element of time is of considerable importance here. While it is true that several of these pressures are a result of external uncertainties about Japan and her basic course, it is at the same time quite obvious that the thrust of some of these pressures are the result of domestic political developments in a number of countries, like the United States and China, and that the underlying processes will have to run their course before it becomes possible or desirable for Japan to gauge the implications of their final positions for herself.

Japan needs time to enable her sorting things out, to clarify to her own satisfaction what kind of nation she really wants to be, to establish in her own mind what kind of world she wants to live in that is also attractive to other nations, and finally she needs time to set her national priorities and goals in the light of her new sense of national identity and her vision of her place in the world, and to work towards forging a national consensus supporting this vision.

However, untill present Japanese soul-searching has led to a clearer sense of national identity and purpose, the internal and

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domestic uncertainties inevitably increase Japan's vulnerability to such outside pressures. These may well further complicate and even distort this process, and might even make it impossible for Japan to work out a new national consensus leaving her for all her economic power divided and paralyzed.

If she wants to reduce the danger of being pushed into an international role which she doesn't want or for which she is not prepared, Japan is then compelled to obtain two things.

Firstly, she has to gain time so that a number of historical processes in various countries will have taken their course in order that Japan doesn't committ herself prematurely to a particular role in the new constellation of forces. She also has to gain time to enable herself to set her new priorities. Secondly, she will have to try to narrow down the range of the various directions into which she is now being pushed and pulled, as well as to try to reduce the intensity of these pressures in order to keep them managable while she works out her own national consensus.

Three policies pursued in confunction might bring her closer to these ends. Firstly, if Japan foregoes her N-option more convincingly than she has done so far. Secondly, if Japan accelerates the liberalisation of her trade, investment and aid policies, - a course she has already begun to take - and if she throws her weight

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more decisevely in support of a new trade and monetary system capable of speeding up the development of the Third World as well as capable to combat present restrictive and protectionist trends. Thirdly, if Japan sets out to improve the quality of her political relations with the countries of the Third World, and especially the countries in South East Asia.

The rationality of Japan foreclosing her nuclear options rests mainly on two arguments. In the first place, as her own defense analysts have already convincingly pointed out, going nuclear would not add to Japan's security. On the contrary, a number of important problems in the Asia-Pacific theater which otherwise are more amenable to solution when a lowering of international tensions takes place would then become practically insoluble. If Japan goes nuclear, the responses of countries alarmed by that decision will have a serious limiting impact on the freedom of movement she now enjoys which as a matter of fact needs to be expanded even more. In short, the political cost to Japan would most likely cancel out any gain in security which nuclearisation might bring because of the increased fear, rigidity and hostility from other nations.

The second consideration has to do with the credibility of the U.S. nuclear umbrella. It has of course become more and more obvious that the automatic retaliatory response on the part of the U.S. to the use or the threat to use nuclear weapons against a

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country under that umbrella, has become increasingly questionable. One should realize however that a threat to use nuclear weapons, and especially the actual use of nuclear military power against any country would automatically constitute a threat to the two other major nuclear powers.

This would very seriously destablize the implicit - and later possibly explicit - balances and mutual accomodations between the USSR, the USA and China, and would inevitably evoke serious responses of great consequences to the member of the triangle upsetting the applecart. In this sense, the intra dynamics of the nuclear triangle itself constitutes a general kind of umbrella independent of the vagaries inherent in the domestic conditions of any single guarantor.

In addition, the example of China has shown how intensely vulnerable a country becomes from the moment it decides to go nuclear until she has developed a credible second strike capability. A Japanese decision to exercise her nuclear option therefore would only increase the internal divisions in the country as well as her vulnerability to the intensified pressures which would inevitable be exerted on her from the outside.