



CICP Commentaries

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Visit to Japan's Ministry of Defence

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Mr. Chheang Vannarith with Cambodian students at the National Defense Academy of Japan

Being invited to attend the Opinion Leader Meeting Program arranged by the Ministry of Defence of Japan from September 7th to 9th, 2009 is my great honour and privilege. I have been informed and learn about Japan's defence policy and other regional security issues in East Asia. I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to the Japan's Ministry of Defence and the

Embassy of Japan in Phnom Penh for giving me such an opportunity.

Interests in Japan's domestic politics and foreign policy have been increased over the last few months in the context of general election and the upcoming of the new administration under the leadership of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) represented by Mr. Yukio Hatoyama. Curiosity arises against the background of this new administration. Positive change is highly expected but be reminded that it takes time to fix things. Domestic politics and external relations are always intertwined in Japanese politics. Domestic issues such as the rising unemployment, widening gap of income, aging population and pension fund, and sophisticated and time consuming bureaucracy are the predominant social, political, and economic phenomenon in Japan. How to deal with these domestic issues is a huge task for the new administration. DPJ needs to work together with the talented and capable people/leaders from Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) although there is political conflict. Only through such culture of working together for the common national interests could Japan move forward and make positive changes.

Regarding Japan's external relations, some people think that Japan would not be active as present in cooperating with US in solving regional issues such as the war against international terrorism. On the other hand, Japan will be more active in engaging more actively with regional superpower such as China and dealing more aggressively with global warming and climate change. Whatever way it takes, I do think Japan is still an increasingly active player in the region and the world at large.

Here, I just would like to share some of what I have learned from my visit and talk to some of Japanese leaders in the Ministry of Defence.

The framework of Japan's defence policy is based on the Japan-US Security Treaty (June 1960), the Constitution of Japan (May 1947), and the United Nations Charter (June 1945). The basic policies of Japan's national defence are to: a. Support U.N. activities and promote international cooperation to achieve world peace; b. Stabilize the livelihood of the people, encourage patriotism, and establish the necessary foundations to ensure national security; c. Establish efficient defence capabilities to the limit necessary for self-defence; d. Respond to external aggression based on Japan-US Security Arrangements until U.N. becomes effective enough to prevent such aggression.

There are two main objectives of national security of Japan namely: Defence of Japan and Prevent the emergence of threats by improving international security environment. In order to achieve these two goals, Japan has implemented three approaches namely: Japan's own efforts, cooperation with alliance partners, and cooperation with international community.

Regarding Japan's own efforts, Japan prevents any threat from reaching the country directly by utilizing all available means, takes an integrated response by swiftly making appropriate decisions through the Security Council, brings together all relevant organizations such as Self Defence Forces, Police and Coast Guard, and introduces the concept of "multi-functional, flexible, and effective defense force". The multi-functional, flexible and effective defence force is a response capability oriented method in which it consists of high level of readiness, mobility, adaptability and multi-purpose capability, advanced technologies and intelligence capability, and greater achievement with limited resources by rationalizing and streamlining personnel, equipment and operations.

For the cooperation with the international community, Japan proactively engages in various diplomatic efforts, including strategic use of Official Development Assistance, proactively participates in international peace cooperation and activities, actively undertakes the reform of the United Nations, and play an active role in promoting multilateral regional frameworks for security in the Asia Pacific Region such as ASEAN Regional Forum and ASEAN Defence Ministers

Meeting.

As far as regional security is concerned, Japan is doing her utmost effort to promote cooperation in Asia Pacific region. Concerning the cooperation with alliance partners, Japan focuses on Japan-US Security Arrangement which is indispensable in securing Japan's security and critically important for the security in the Asia Pacific region. As Japan is in transition of administration shift from the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), there are questions regarding whether there is any drastic change in terms of defence policy. According to the Japanese experts, there will be no much change as far as the national defence policy is concerned. The uncertainties remain, though, concerning the issue of sending of Japanese Self Defence forces for overseas peace keeping mission. However, the public opinion seems increasingly understand and support Japan's overseas mission due to the fact that Japan has done a great job in peace keeping and peace building in various countries (Cambodia is one the successful examples).

According to Japanese experts, the modernization and expansion of the Chinese military with the lack of transparency and clear intention really threaten Japan's national security to a large extent. Japan is always following the development of China and finds way to engage actively with China as a responsible stakeholder in providing security to the region. Japan still considers Japan-US security alliance as the fundamental security umbrella for Japanese security at least to counter the threat from China. In such case the balance of power foreign and defence policy is widely practiced in the region.

In addition the bilateral security alliances with the US and Australia, Japan supports multilateralism in dealing with regional security issues. The realistic way to have stability in the region is to encourage multilateral security dialogues covering both non-traditional and traditional security issues. The presence and engagement of US is required to preserve peace and stability in the Asia Pacific region.

In overall, Japan's defence policy, even under the new administration, still focuses on the US-Japan security alliance and relies on multilateralism. More positive engagement with Asia especially China is highly possible. Japan still play significant regional and global role.