

SRI LANKA-JAPAN RELATIONS: CHALLENGES FOR A SMALL STATE AND A BIG POWER

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Introduction

Sri Lanka and Japan have completed fifty years of formal diplomatic relations by the year 2002. These relations are generally described as 'peaceful and cordial' and also beneficial to Sri Lanka as small developing country. It is important to note that during this long period of fifty years, there were no signs of any major controversy or even those so-called 'common diplomatic rows over procedural matters' did not occur, leaving aside any crisis or conflict. This may perhaps be the reason for students of international relations as well as the foreign policy analysts of both countries to pay much less attention to the relations between the two countries. On the part of Sri Lanka, the bulk of literature on foreign policy is mainly concerned with, describing its relations with the West, big and small neighbors in the geo-political region of South Asia, and to a lesser degree with the Eastern Europe especially before the demise of the Soviet Union and the disintegration of the socialist bloc. And lately, for easily noticeable economic reasons, the focus of attention shifted to the Middle East. Whatever may be the reasons for this unbalanced treatment in the analysis of Sri Lanka's international relations were, the undermining of, if not totally ignoring Sri Lanka's relations with Japan is, in many respects, unjustifiable.

As it has already been mentioned, Sri Lanka's relations with Japan, on one hand have been very friendly and cordial and hence apparently of routine nature without noteworthy vicissitudes in the pattern of interactions. This 'uneventfulness' may be one reason for the lack of enthusiasm within the academic community of Sri Lanka. On the other hand however, from a strictly comparative cost-benefit perspective in terms of economic aid and assistance, Sri Lanka's relations with Japan have been more beneficial than with that of any other single donor country or a donor-group, since as early as 1960s. The following table shows, to what extent Japan has been the overwhelmingly dominant donor of aid and assistance to Sri Lanka. This is as a single country in addition to its substantial contributions through a large number of international and regional organizations.¹⁾

1) The table produced here was specially prepared for the purpose of demonstrating Japan's position as a aid donor to Sri Lanka during the past five years and was not intended as a tool for analyzing Japanese ODA to Sri Lanka.

Table 1 AID/LOAN/GRANT DISBURSEMENTS-JAPAN'S POSITION AS A DONOR

- The Table shows the amount of bilateral aid/loan/grant disbursements by selected donor/creditor countries. Figures are in millions of US Dollars.
- The total disbursements include multilateral and other sources for which Japan too has contributed. Some country-donors were selected for a comparison.

AID

Donor	1996		1997		1998		1999		2000	
	Amount	%		%		%		%		%
France	1.8	0.3	1.6	0.3	1.7	0.2	4.5	1.0	2.3	0.4
Germany	16.6	2.8	21.7	4.0	31.0	4.5	23.9	5.2	27.2	5.3
Japan	191.2	31.0	153.1	28.2	225.1	32.5	179.1	39.2	206.2	40.3
Korea	0.5	0.1	0.0	0.0	17.5	2.5	12.2	2.7	9.6	1.9
Kuwait	0.7	0.1	1.5	0.3	1.9	0.3	1.5	0.3	1.3	0.3
United States	17.50	2.9	20.4	3.8	16.8	2.4	12.8	2.8	7.5	1.5
Total	287.9	48.0	262.7	48.4	336.1	46.5	271.2	59.4	269.2	52.6

LOANS

Donor	1996		1997		1998		1999		2000	
	Amount	%		%		%		%		%
France	1.8	0.4	1.6	0.4	1.7	0.2	4.5	1.3	2.3	0.5
Germany	5.0	1.1	13.8	3.4	18.7	3.2	9.9	2.8	20.1	4.6
Japan	139.1	30.5	113.4	27.6	176.6	30.5	146.4	42.1	173.3	39.3
Korea	0.3	0.1	0.0	0.0	16.5	2.9	10.2	2.9	9.6	2.2
Kuwait	0.7	0.2	1.5	0.4	1.9	0.3	1.5	0.4	1.3	0.3
United States	9.1	2.0	9.6	2.3	9.5	1.6	0.0	0.0	4.8	1.1
Total	159.5	35.0	155.8	37.9	240.5	41.6	178.5	51.3	212.4	48.1

GRANTS

Donor	1996		1997		1998		1999		2000	
	Amount	%		%		%		%		%
France	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Germany	11.6	8.0	7.9	6.0	12.3	10.7	13.9	12.8	7.1	10.0
Japan	52.9	36.7	39.7	30.3	48.5	42.4	32.7	30.0	33.0	46.6
Korea	0.2	0.1	0.0	0.0	1.0	0.9	2.0	1.8	0.0	0.0
Kuwait	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
United States	8.3	5.8	10.8	8.2	7.3	6.4	12.8	11.8	2.7	3.8
Total	128.2	88.8	106.9	81.5	95.6	83.5	92.6	80.9	56.9	80.4

Source: External Resources Department, *Foreign Aid Review 2000*, Colombo Sri Lanka.

Understandably, only a very few Japanese scholars have shown considerable interest in Sri Lanka in general and virtually none, in the relations with Japan or any foreign country in particular.²⁾ In the area of Japan's international relations, Sri Lanka has never been or is unlikely to be prominent from Japan's point of view, except as one of the major recipients of ODA (the Official Development Assistance). It should be noted that even the few writings currently available are mostly in the Japanese language and are confined to the fields of management studies and rural sociology. It may be explained or understood strictly from the angle of Japan's global position. Being the second largest economy in the world, next to the United States, the only super power in the contemporary world, Japan is unlikely to consider, geographically distant small countries such as Sri Lanka as powers to be reckoned with in a conventional diplomatic sense. In the foreign policy of Japan, closely and intrinsically connected with the United States, the relations with the other countries are mainly determined by the politics of geopolitical formations such as China-Korea-Japan triangle and the economic competition and cooperation with the ASEAN and the European Union.

The Small State and the Big Power

Although Sri Lanka-Japan relations may well fit into the 'Small State-Big Power' model in world politics, it should also be noted that this conventional model requires some modifications, in the special circumstances. This is especially so, because of the characteristics that are unique to both countries in their behavior as 'small state' and 'big power' within the international system. For instance, Sri Lanka despite being a small state by definition in view of its geographical size, population and the level of economic development, it is known to have played a disproportionately 'active' role in the international political arena. During most of the time, it definitely has been more active than any ordinary small state in its international relations. Quite contrarily, the 'big power', Japan notwithstanding its economic strength has generally preferred to play a disproportionately low-key role in the international politics.³⁾ It is for this unique character of Japan, that it has been constantly but cautiously criticized by many Western and Japanese observers. This low-key role has even been viewed as a negligence of duties and obligations by an actor in the international system.⁴⁾

2) Professor Nakamura Hisashi is known as specialist on South Asia, and has authored many writings on Sri Lanka. However, these writings are in Japanese and are still not available to the reader in English or Sinhalese.

3) Sri Lanka has been a very active member of the United Nations since it was admitted as a member of this international organization in 1954 and is known to have played a leading role in major Third World movements and campaigns. In view of its active participation in the United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea, some observers place it among the most active 20 or even 10 members of the Conference since 1971. In fact, the Sri Lankan representative in the UN was the Chairman of the Conference throughout its long duration. In addition Sri Lanka won international recognition as the initiator of the proposal for the Indian Ocean Peace Zone.

4) Japan's diplomacy is often described as reactive rather than proactive in conventional diplomatic parlance, considering its failure in playing an active and innovative role within the international community. This is despite Japan's extremely large donations of aid and assistance to developing countries both unilaterally and multilaterally. For an excellent and constructive critique on this✓

Notwithstanding the fact that the 'small state and big power' model or somewhat metaphorical 'David and Goliath' model became popular among the analysts of international relations and hence predominant in the analysis of small states in world politics in the 1950s, the terms 'small state' and 'big power' have never been adequately defined. In this essay too, those two terms are used very loosely and figuratively in a limited sense to compare and contrast the two states, namely Sri Lanka and Japan in their relations. Also, the fact remains that even the intensity of conventional diplomatic transactions has been remarkably low. However, this arbitrarily adopted model, despite its weaknesses, may be at least heuristically helpful for a better understanding of the nature of the relations between two countries, problems they confronted and likely to face in the future and also the prospects for sustaining and improving the existing relations for the future.⁵⁾

Comparative Country Profiles

Sri Lanka falls into the category of small states in both quantitative and qualitative terms. Geographically, as an island, it is located in the Indian Ocean and occupies a land area of approximately 65,000 square kilometers with the adjacent 12-mile territorial waters and an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) extending up to 200 nautical miles. Despite the importance in view of its strategic location and value in commercial navigation of the Colombo harbor as well as Trincomalee, one of the world's deepest natural harbors, Sri Lanka is overwhelmed by the existence of the huge neighbor, India. The total population, multi-cultural in composition, does not exceed 20 millions. In the demographic respect too, Sri Lanka belongs to smaller state category slightly bigger than a micro-state in international standards.

Japan, 'the big power' on the other hand, is nearly six times bigger than Sri Lanka with a total of 377,835 square kilometers and is located far away in Eastern Asia as an island chain between the North Pacific Ocean and the Sea of Japan, east of the Korean Peninsula. It should be noted that even in the contemporary era where geographic location is not considered decisive in terms of transportation, trade and military strategy, it could nevertheless determine the regional affiliations and geo-political constellations. However, it is important to observe that Japan's overall non-military policy does not currently assign any decisive role in view of its geo-strategic location like in the case of most other 'big' and 'powerful' states.

The population of Japan, one of the very few virtually homogeneous societies in the world, is estimated at 126.7 millions by July 2001. This is at least six times larger than that of Sri Lanka. Apart from the demographic size, even a cursory glance at major economic indices suggests that the usual small state-big power equation is most fitting into the economies of both countries that distance them further away from each other. In quantitative terms, Sri Lanka is described as a small developing economy with a per capita GDP of \$3,250 (purchasing power parity) and is placed slightly above poverty line.⁶⁾ Being the

unique feature of Japan's foreign policy, see Taskashi Inoguchi *et. al.* **A Comprehensive Document submitted to the Foreign Ministry of Japan**, January 4, 1999.

5) See the Appendix 1

second largest economy in the world, there appears every reason for Japan to consider Sri Lanka as a small developing economy which needs external aid and assistance for its socio-economic development and in some respects even sustenance. In an interdependent world, it is needless to say that any imaginable interdependence between Sri Lanka and Japan can only be described as highly asymmetrical and uneven. In comparison to other South Asian nations and most of the Afro-Asian large and small states, Sri Lanka, however, figures prominent in most of the socio-economic indicators in the areas of literacy, education, health, general welfare and popular participation in community activities. This feature has brought about for Sri Lanka both negative and positive consequences, attracting international attention while making it disqualified or less qualified for assistance on humanitarian grounds.

Similarities

Assuming that while differences between the two states/nations, on one hand can determine the nature of relations between them, similarities, on the other hand, may also contribute to shaping up mutual relations. In international relations, it is observed that the decision-makers often over emphasize historical or contemporary parallels, also known as 'national parallel actions' in harnessing mutually beneficial relations while undermining differences that could be unfavorable. In the case of Sri Lanka-Japan relations, this has often been the practice adopted by Sri Lanka's foreign policy decision-makers and diplomats. Such similarities frequently and some times lopsidedly emphasized on, perhaps with justifiable reasons, cover a wide range of past and present activity including history, religion, culture and also politics.

Apart from both entities being island states, the randomly cited geophysical factor which, by itself, has no significant bearing on inter-state relations, the ideological similarities on the basis of religion and also on grounds of political culture are very often highlighted and also some times stated rhetorically as important. For centuries, Japanese travelers have known Sri Lanka as a Buddhist country in the world. In this regard, notwithstanding the fact that Japan and Sri Lanka have been following two predominant Buddhist traditions, the *Mahayana* (Greater chariot) and *Heenayana* (Lesser Chariot) or *Theravada* respectively, there have been several visits by prominent Japanese to Sri Lanka (then Ceylon). There are even historical records of bringing down *Pali* Buddhist literature from Sri Lanka to Japan by visiting Japanese Buddhist monks. Although the natural tendency is for these old transactions to be forgotten over the time *vis a vis* new developments in socio-economic and political environment, the very abstract concept of having 'historically rooted relations' can make positive contributions to make relations at both governmental and non-governmental levels closer. This is particularly visible in the non-governmental sector. During the recent past, although no systematic records are available, engagement of Japanese non-governmental organizations and individuals in religious and cultural activities has been significantly on the increase. In a small community such as Sri Lanka these activities in turn have

6) This figure may be compared with Japan's GDP calculated as \$24,900.

a greater impact on inter-state relations. The areas of active engagement of this nature include primary and tertiary specially University education, welfare of the village poor and the disabled, rehabilitation of people in the war affected areas and funding of temple based Buddhist religious activities. Despite the modernist rationale for not giving prominence to those conventional historical factors in a strictly functional sense, rather theoretically according to James Rosenau, the foremost scientific analyst of foreign policy, such internal socio-cultural determinants, despite those so-called modernist developments are still valid and important.

Political and Economic Systems

Perhaps, the similarities that are more visible and acknowledged by many in respect of currently prevailing political, and socio-economic structures have been and will continue to be important determinants of Sri Lanka-Japan relations. Since gaining political independence in 1948 from the British imperial rule, Sri Lanka boasts about inheriting a democratic system of government characterized by a democratically adopted constitution, popularly elected government on a political party basis through regular elections and a system of universal franchise, and also the rule of law backed by an independent judiciary. Especially in the Asian context where non-democratic regimes as well as military dictatorships continue to be in existence, Sri Lanka is often compared with Japan more than any other nation in Asia since both claim to have similar political system and hence a political culture. This claim is, in fact, is compatible with Japan's formally expressed foreign policy guidelines that emphasize on democracy for better mutual relations.⁷⁾

In the economic sphere, Sri Lanka has come even closer to Japan, as a consequence of the introduction of market economy in the second half of the 1970s, years ahead of other South Asian states. It was in 1977, with a major political regime change, Sri Lanka adopted a new Constitution, a legal measure, as a prelude to liberalizing the economy. The removal of foreign exchange restrictions and liberalization of import-export trade undoubtedly contributed to the expanded trade between Sri Lanka and Japan, understandably to the advantage of Japan as a developed industrial economy.⁸⁾ It was after 1977, that Sri Lanka's market for electronics and automobiles has been overwhelmed by Japan.⁹⁾

Social mobility factor has loomed large over identified similarities between Sri Lanka and Japan. Both countries though in a different scale underwent social changes in parallel

7) See *Diplomatic Bluebook* of various years. This official document is made available to the public on print and electronic media. Japan is one of the very few countries that regularly publish the foreign policy objectives, and principles with detailed prefaces of world affairs analyses.

8) Sri Lanka's **major export partners** are the United States, United Kingdom, Middle East, Germany and Japan whereas **the main import partners** are Japan, India, Hong Kong, Singapore and South Korea.

According to statistics available for the year 1999 Sri Lanka's trade with Japan is as follows:

Exports: \$160 million-mainly shrimp, tea, computer and textile products.

Imports: \$430 million-mainly automobiles, electronic equipment, electrical machinery and equipment.

9) The Japan's dominance in the electronic and automobile products is widely evident over and above any statistical data, by the sheer fact of commercial brands such as Sony, Mitsubishi, and Toyota becoming household names in Sri Lanka.

with almost all modern global transformations. Among them are considerable degree of gender equality, uninterrupted access to education (including free education up to a University Degree in the case of Sri Lanka), and equal opportunities in the society at large irrespective of an individual's religion, ethnicity and social background.

In view of those similarities, Sri Lanka and Japan may be aptly described as highly compatible actors in inter-state relations despite the distance between the two on the basis of other factors as outlined above.

There is however, one characteristic feature that has contributed to make these two states, Sri Lanka and Japan somewhat 'incompatible'. On one hand, Sri Lanka despite being a small state has played, on the whole, a disproportionately larger and active role in international politics.¹⁰⁾ On the other hand Japan, the 'big power' has been noted for its low-key role in contradistinction to its economic power and capabilities.¹¹⁾

III

The Perspective

Having outlined the comparative structural and functional character of two states placing them within the framework of 'small state and big power', the present article attempts to examine and analyze current Sri Lanka-Japan relations in a rather broader perspective (1) to understand the actual nature of relations beneath the apparent pattern (2) to examine the potential and also the necessity for improving the existing relations, (3) to highlight the need for changing the pattern of relations with a view to improving or even sustaining those relations at current levels and, (4) to identify the prospects and problems for possible changes.

At the outset, as the most international relations analysts generally agree, it is needless to say that, the foreign policies of modern nation states are governed by their national interest which as a rule is vaguely and subjectively defined. As such, from a broader perspective that includes national security is considered the core element of the national interest where as the other interests both primary, secondary and permanent interests are ultimately reduced to national survival. The national survival on the other hand, in practice, is linked to the three major components of national security such as the preservation of physical, political, economic and cultural identities.¹²⁾ In this sense, it is most important

10) For instance, some observers have placed Sri Lanka among the 20 or even 10 most active states in the United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea. More over, Sri Lanka figured prominent within the Third World movements including the Non-aligned and championed the Disarmament movement and Anti-nuclear campaign for some time.

11) The Japanese scholars have begun to express their serious concern over this characteristic feature of Japan's role in international politics. For instance Takashi Inoguchi, *Challenge 2001: Japan's Foreign Policy toward the 21st Century* Proposal submitted by a group of university professors to Foreign minister, January 4, 1999. These proposals are briefly discussed elsewhere in this article.

12) There is no dearth in the literature on this subject. For a comprehensive discussion on Hans J.

here to note that Sri Lanka-Japan relations are hardly examined from a national security perspective by Sri Lankan scholars, since national interest-national survival, and national security equation is still not well established among them in foreign policy analyses.

In the absence of sufficiently broader discussion of Sri Lanka's relations with Japan among Sri Lankan analysts, a rather conventional approach to relations between the two still persists and appears to be based on two assumptions:

1. Sri Lanka-Japan relations have traditionally been 'friendly and cordial' and are likely to continue rather than change.
2. It follows from this conservative assumption that Sri Lanka's major bargaining chip with Japan would be this historically rooted 'good understanding' rather than 'mutual gains and benefits'.

The following press release issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka on the occasion of Sri Lanka-Japan foreign ministerial level talks held in Tokyo in October, 2001 may be treated as typically representative expression of this approach:

"Sri Lanka-Japan Foreign Ministerial level official level talks during the visit of foreign minister Lakshman Kadiragamar to Japan (22-25 October), focused on strengthening bilateral relations and foreign policy cooperation through regular consultations between senior Foreign Ministry officials to face **the common challenges of the 21st century, building on the traditionally close economic and trade relationships between the two countries**".¹³⁾ (Author's emphasis)

Most significantly, the political leaders as well as the diplomats until now have been in the habit of referring to Sri Lanka's relations as traditionally friendly and cordial which to a large degree is derived from the history. The origin of this most acclaimed thought is the presumption that Japan has been appreciating Sri Lanka's friendly attitude towards it in the aftermath of the World War Two, as it was demonstrated at the San Francisco Peace Conference of 1951.¹⁴⁾ This Conference was undoubtedly a landmark in the modern history of Japan that determined the reentry of it as a 'new nation-state actor' to the international community initially and later as one of the 'economic powers' in the world. At the historic San Francisco Conference, Sri Lanka was one of the very few countries represented by three delegates and more over, one of the two from South Asia that did not claim war dam-

13) Morgenthau's view on this concept, see James E. Dougherty and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff Jr. *Contending Theories of International Relations: A Comprehensive Survey*, New York: Harper and Row, 1981, pp. 98-105. and also S. Krasner, *Defending the National Interest*, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1978

It is important to note that an increasing number of recent critics of Japan's foreign policy tends to build up their arguments with reference to the concept of 'National Interest'.

13) Press Release, Foreign ministry of Sri Lanka. <http://www.lanka.net/fm/press/30th_oct_2000_2.html>

14) For a useful criticism of the San Francisco Conference see: John Price, *A Just Peace? The 1951 San Francisco Peace treaty in Historical Perspective*, JPRI Working paper No. 78. June 2001. <http://www.jpri.org/public/wp78.html> pp. 1-16

During the informal discussions with Japanese scholars and students, the author found only a negligible number to have a knowledge of San Francisco Conference and the Treaty. refer to Website Information

ages. The leader of the Sri Lankan delegation participating in discussions is claimed to have made a historic speech quoting Buddhist scriptures to suggest that Japan should not be punished for its participation in the World War and should not be asked for extensive damages allegedly caused to some nations. The belief is that Japan would have been very pleased and appreciative of the highly tolerant soft-line policy speech made by the Sri Lanka delegate ignoring even the somewhat unsuccessful attack on Sri Lankan targets by Japanese air force. As a result Japan was continuing to be gratuitous to Sri Lanka. The fact remains however, that this has been repeatedly used by Sri Lankan policy-makers in an exaggerated form and also there has been an over-emphasis on this single factor in explaining relations between the two countries. In the circumstances, while acknowledging the significance of the San Francisco Conference as a landmark in Japan's modern history, it would be irrational to believe that the memory of this has continued with the same magnitude and effectiveness for more than five decades.¹⁵⁾ It is also unreasonable to expect the 'second-generation' politicians and diplomats in Japan to have a vivid memory or any influence of this.¹⁶⁾ In the circumstances, the Japanese decision-makers may very correctly depend on their new perceptions of the contemporary national and international politics and more over their understanding of and attitudes towards the compelling economic issues of the day. It is easy to believe that their decision-making processes are governed by actual needs rather than historical memories.

Need for Change

Can the existing type of relations between Sri Lanka and Japan survive in the same manner without reciprocal change in the future? In consideration with the requirements of the new domestic political environment as well as the international system on the whole, the need for major changes in approaches to, attitudes toward, and also actual policies and the methods of implementing has become in the recent years, the focus of foreign policy critics in Japan. Whatever may be the internal regime changes, all decision-makers too are likely to be under compulsion for change *vis a vis* the crucial deficiencies identified by those critics in Japan. A similar need is felt by Sri Lankan policy-makers as well, although a rigorous discourse has yet to be started. In this context, an important distinction may be observed in regard to prevailing situations in countries:

1. Sri Lanka, after a fairly lengthy phase of proactive diplomatic activity since independence has gradually entered into a passive and mostly pragmatic foreign policy track and a routine and low key diplomatic practice. Although it is not within the scope of this essay to examine the reasons for this, it would be sufficient here to mention that this state of affairs can be detrimental to the even the maintenance of

15) The acknowledgement of the contribution to Japan's reemergence as a power in the international community San Francisco Conference and the Peace Treaty is itself now debated. For a critical review of the Conference and the treaty,

see: John Price, *A Just Peace? The 1951 San Francisco Peace treaty in Historical Perspective*, JPRI Working paper No. 78. June 2001. <http://www.jpri.org/public/wp78.html> pp. 1-16

16) During the informal discussions with Japanese scholars and students, the author found only a negligible number to have a knowledge of San Francisco Conference and the Treaty.

Sri Lanka's relations with Japan or for that matter any other State, leaving aside improvement.

2. In contradistinction to that, Japan seems to paying serious attention to the necessity of shifting its foreign policy from sheer reactive and passive to pro-active and somewhat dynamic. In fact, this has been widely discussed and also various Japanese scholars have proposed a radical policy transformation in recent times.

A dichotomous situation of this nature, on one hand, suggests that it is vital for foreign policy decision-makers and as well as diplomatic personnel of both Sri Lanka and Japan to be aware of and to be seriously concerned with, reshaping policies and methods of implementing them in accordance with the changing internal and external environment. However, on the other hand, a marked difference is seen on both sides in terms of this necessary adjustments and structuring.

Japan: Positive Response

The need for a significant transformation of the role of Japan in international politics has been recognized for quite a time although the policy making or policy implementing authorities of Japan did not take necessary steps effectuate such an ambitious venture. However, with the rapid changes in the global political and economic environment as well as the growing interest among academics and the concerned public in the question of Japanese passivity, some important constructive criticisms and proposals for change began to emerge. Probably in response to them, it is observed that Japanese official documents on foreign policy too began to reflect positive signs of adopting a new vision.

In this essay, two critiques on foreign policy and two official documents that reflect new challenges are specially identified. A close scrutiny of them could invariably provide useful guidelines for Sri Lanka, 'the small state', to adjust its foreign policies in accordance with the policies of the 'big power'. The selected for review are:

1. In search of Proactive Diplomacy: Increasing Japan's International Role in the 1990s.¹⁷⁾
2. The Proposals made by a group of University Professors to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, January 1999.¹⁸⁾
3. The Diplomatic Bluebook 2001
4. ODA Charter, 1992.

Search for Proactive Diplomacy

The working Paper prepared for Center for North East Asian Foreign Policy Studies by Masaharu Kohno, entitled "In Search of Proactive Diplomacy: Increasing Japan's International Role in the 1990s" is a fairly lengthy but an interesting essay dealing with overall

17) Masaharu Kohno, *In search of Proactive Diplomacy: Increasing Japan's International Role in the 1990s*, CNAPS Working Paper, Fall 1999 (http://www.brook.edu/fp/cnaps/papers/1999_kohno.htm)

18) Professor. Takashi Inoguchi *et. al.*, *Challenge 2001-Japan's Foreign Policy toward the 21st Century* (The proposal submitted to the Foreign Minister Masahiko Koumura, January, 1999) (<http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/challenge21.html>)

Japanese foreign policy machinery in recent times. More over, it is of a very critical but constructive nature so that a new light is shed upon Japan's somewhat gloomy foreign policy after 1950s and reshaping it for the future. Although the author claims that it does not reflect the official views of the Foreign Ministry of Japan, it unmistakably is based on his personal experience as a senior official in the Ministry. Nevertheless, his views extend beyond an average bureaucrat usually trying to justify what was done while involved in decision-making for some time. Most importantly, the working paper addresses the larger issues of Japan's general foreign policy principles in the context of global politics, especially the question of reactive/proactive diplomacy in Japan's international relations. Khono's exceptionally positive and constructive approach to the subject too is largely contributory. The picture, the author paints, is not pessimistically gloomy but calls for firmness in policy, greater cooperation and understanding between the foreign ministry bureaucracy and the law-makers and a concern for the expression of public opinion over the related issues.

With regard to this, the author does not point to a situation where proactive diplomacy has to be completely newly discovered. Changing to a proactive stance, according to the author, had already occurred in the case of Japan where only until 1970s, the Japanese foreign policy has been remarkably passive and reactive and in general external pressure driven. Lacking in any leading personalities, Khono correctly observes that Japan's diplomacy has been "faceless". However, despite the special relationship with the United States, it gradually changed and turned into a proactive foreign policy. In the 1990s, Japan became assertive and was characterized by its increasing international contributions. The involvement in Cambodia, and the Middle East, and also the engagement in UN Peace Keeping Operations were good examples. The author concludes that:

"...the Japanese commitment to an extended diplomatic role is irreversible. Proactive diplomacy through peace making efforts and peace keeping operations are widely supported by the Japanese public in general in general terms and well understood by the international community as a whole. Nationalistic sentiment prevailing among the Japanese will prove to be a temporary phenomenon as was the case in the early 1990s."

"In sum, the proactive Japanese diplomacy begun in the 1990s will continue to characterize Japan's foreign policy in the century to come", however, "domestic constraints mainly caused by economic recession may force tactical slowdowns or setbacks."¹⁹⁾

Proposals for Change

The relatively brief review of Japan's foreign policy submitted to the Foreign Minister of Japan by Professor Takashi Inogushi, a renowned Japanese scholar and a prolific writer on the subject of Japanese Foreign Policy, along with a group of concerned University Professors, is important in three counts.

First of all, like Khono's Working Paper, it is a very comprehensive academic presentation of Japan's foreign policy outlining its objectives, new trends, and the challenges it

19) Masaharu Kohno, CNAPS Working Paper, *op. cit.* pp. 35, 36

has for the future and desirable changes of the overall policy. The abstract comprehensive nature of the proposals almost like an executive summary, undoubtedly permits the busy policy-makers, bureaucrats and diplomats using it as a functional guideline for their activities. With that objective in mind, the authors do not seem to be going into greater detailed descriptions.

Secondly, deviating from ordinary academic treatises, it brings forward a set of proposals in an articulated manner so that they may be easily translated into action.

Thirdly, but no less importantly, Professor Inoguchi and the others most appropriately move on to equate foreign policy of Japan with the National Interest of it. According to this piece of writing, the overall foreign policy objectives should be four fold:

1. The preservation of the National Interests of which the core element is the national security and the prosperity of Japan and the Japanese people.
2. Engagement as a global player to ensure the stability and prosperity of the international community. Correctly combining both the National Interest and the global role, the authors point out, that
 "Security and prosperity of Japan cannot be achieved without stability and prosperity of the international community. ...globalization will form an ever more irreversible and massive current in the 21st century., and interdependence across national borders will grow deeper in all areas. The way for Japan to secure its national interest amid this trend is to develop and present ideas and act as a global player in pursuit of stability and prosperity of the international community."
3. Presenting the vision of Japan-As Hashimoto presented to the UNGA in 1996 "creation of a better world for future generations" by making the world "a more stable, prosperous and comfortable place to live."²⁰⁾
4. Proving the credibility of Japan as nation.

While outlining the objectives, it also identifies the new trends, both national and international that would govern the future directions of foreign policy. The trends, according to Professor Inoguchi *et al.* are economic, political as well as security. The political transformation is the result of the greater diversification of national power, the actors in international politics and the new issues between and among them which, on the whole, involve the entire international community. The economic change is understandably linked to the larger process of globalization and its repercussions to 'losers in the competition' and the chain reaction of crises. In fact, the emphasis on the losers in global competition is an idea which could be attractive to poor and developing nations which are marginalized in view of the scarcity of capital, new technology and technical know how despite the presence of resources. Hence, an area where Sri Lanka too as a 'small state' can positively accommodate its own interests with the changing role of the 'big power'.

It is interesting to note that the reference to the changes in the security scenario marked by diversification of threats, actors, means of threats and the nature of threats was made well before the recent concern with global security specially after September 11. All

20) Professor Inoguchi *et al.*, the concluding remarks of the Proposals.

in all, the characteristic features of this phenomenon, the authors observe are, inter-state and intra-state conflicts, nuclearization, proliferation of the weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and small arms.

It is important that challenges most relevant to Japanese foreign policy decision-makers are identified and presented in an articulate manner. The Proposals suggest three major challenges to be concerned with:

1. Enhancing total strength of foreign policy that necessitates increasing public interest, partnership between government and NGOs, and also the participation of academic institutions in policy making.
2. Enhancement of national power in addition to economic strength. With regard to this, the emphasis, the Proposals suggest should be on technology, inventiveness, renewed recognition of national responsibilities especially in the context of the debate between militarism and protection of nationals. And,
3. Reinforcement of diplomatic frameworks in order to build a secure world through arms reduction, strengthening of international legal bodies, and expanding international cooperation.

Finally, the Proposals point to very firm and straightforward language the changes desirable for the achievement of changed foreign policy objectives responding to challenges of the twenty first century. In other words, the group of University Professors suggest that "Japan must strengthen its means to conduct foreign policy and make beneficial arrangements" and to achieve this, several concrete moves have to be made.

1. Japan must secure its voice in international fora. This entails greater participation in international decision-making including securing a permanent seat in the UN Security Council.
2. Despite tight fiscal conditions, using ODA as a means of achieving foreign policy objectives should continue.
3. Human resource development in political, bureaucratic, and business communities with a view to upgrading the effectiveness of diplomacy.
4. Development of a strategic public relations policy, and
5. Increasing organizational strength. This indeed is related to human resource development aiming at improving the quality of Japanese diplomats.

In concluding remarks, this group of University Professors gravely concerned with elevating Japan's role in international politics, especially notes that,

"Total strength of a nation will demonstrate itself only when our foreign policy is conducted on a solid domestic foundation, it is necessary for the government to take leadership in presenting ideas and gaining national supports and to develop mechanism of absorbing and summing up public opinion"

"No more than ever has Japan's leadership in diplomacy been so seriously called for. Japan, as a global player, has to take the leadership in achieving "a world where people can count on a better future." It is important, therefore, to further deliberate on the challenges in line with this proposal and to lead to concrete policies in the future."²¹⁾

Diplomatic Bluebook, 2001

The Diplomatic Bluebook as an official document published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan is unique in many respects. As a document comprehensively covering the many aspects of Japanese foreign policy on an annual basis is one among the very few of this kind in the world. Even among similar governmental/state publications, no single document is as detailed as Diplomatic Bluebook. In respect of contents, the Bluebook presents a holistic picture of the international relations from the perspective of Japan. As it is readily and freely available on print and electronic media, it provides access to a larger national and international audience willing to understand Japan's policy postures on global as well as regional levels.

More over, from the point of view of the states willing to sustain and improve relations with Japan, it perhaps can be the most useful guide irrespective of the person to person diplomatic contacts usually practiced by countries. If Harold Nicolson's most quoted definition that diplomats are the eyes and ears of the countries they represent, a document such as Diplomatic Bluebook may be easily described in a similar metaphor as the tongue of the host country, Japan that speaks loudly on the principles, objectives and the determinants of its policies to the rest of the world.

The most recent Diplomatic Bluebook 2001, like previous ones, at the very outset correctly recognizes as the basis of its propositions that global society is undergoing a series of transformation mainly in three areas (1) values such as freedom, democracy, respect for human rights, market economy and multilateral free trade (2) problems characterized by proliferation of sophisticated weapons and weapons of mass destruction, clash between traditional and new values, transnational movement of people, goods, services, capital and information and (3) the need for global harmonization and unified action for bearing the burden in implementing democracy, human rights and free trade.

In order to respond to these changes appropriately, the Bluebook suggests that Japan must be prepared to actively participate in those global responsibilities in implementing solutions and must continue to engage more actively in the process of UN reforms. It also stresses that Japan should be active in five especially important areas:

1. Elimination of WMDs (weapons of mass destruction)
2. Conflict Prevention
3. Information Technology revolution and globalization
4. Prevention of the marginalization of some countries in the global community in view of poverty, development issues, crimes and infectious diseases, and.
5. International Community collaboration

The ODA Charter

Popularly known as the ODA Charter adopted in 1991 as cabinet decision, like the Diplomatic Bluebook, is also unique, as very few documents have comprehensively stated the

21) Prof. Takashi Inogushi et. al., *Challenges 2001*, op. cit. p. 9

aid assistance policy of a donor country, the philosophy behind it, the objectives to be achieved, the requisites expected from the recipient countries and also the intricate details of aid which consists of loans and grants embodying different donor and recovery mechanisms. In certain respects, it is more than a mere set of guidelines for official development assistance (ODA) for it indirectly reflects some of the foreign policy objectives of Japan as well. As such the ODA Charter is more meaningful when it is taken in combination with the Diplomatic Bluebook.

For the purpose of the present essay, the most important aspects of the Charter that have a bearing on Japan's relations with developing countries including Sri Lanka are the philosophy of development assistance and the principles governing the provision of such aid.

The basic philosophy of Japanese aid and assistance to the developing countries as articulated in the Charter are:

1. Humanitarian consideration for human suffering due to poverty and famines etc.,
2. Recognition of the interdependent nature of relations among nations,
3. Necessity for environmental conservation, and
4. Importance of supporting self-help efforts of developing countries.

On the basis of the four fold philosophy, the aid is provided in accordance with, *inter alia*, four principles: (1) reconciliation of the needs for development with the protection of environment, (2) avoidance of using aid for military purposes or promoting conflicts, (3) paying attention to military expenditure of the recipient country that can be detrimental to global peace and security and (4) urging developing country in democratizing, establishing market economy, and protecting basic human rights and freedoms.

Despite having a set of well-articulated philosophy and guiding principles in theory, it is observed as a critique however, the stipulated conditions have never been rigorously implemented in the actual practice. Despite the concerned Japanese observers have now begun to point a critical finger towards this flexibility and leniency in observing principles, especially relating to environment conservation, protection of human rights, practice of democracy and resolution of conflicts through non-military means, it is unlikely that Japan would immediately resort to implementing those principles rigorously rather regardless of prevailing subjective conditions in recipient countries.

IV

Implications

Needless to say that the major constructive criticisms of Japan's role in the international politics as well as the prescribed changes of foreign policy of Japan for the future are unlikely to be meaningful unless they are reviewed along with the earlier cited official blueprints of Japan's international relations. In fact, any reviewer is fortunate to have those official blueprints, namely the Diplomatic Bluebook and ODA Charter. In fact, as it was already mentioned, a very few countries in the world can boast about having such bluep-

rints. Over and above, the intrinsic value of them in the context of so-called content analysis of the foreign policy of Japan, the implications of them for most of the countries including Sri Lanka-Japan relations in the future are many faceted and are also vital.

At the same time, it should also be noted that the implications of the envisaged changes, especially for Sri Lanka as a small state, are both negative and positive. The negative implication is that the foreign policy of Japan would be changed in the direction of insisting on rigorous and strict adherence to objectives and principles. If and when such changes occur, Sri Lanka too may have to adjust its overall foreign policy and particularly the relations with Japan very prudently. Failure to do so would undoubtedly lead to a widening gap between Sri Lanka and Japan, and ultimately to even the possible replacement of Sri Lanka by another small state. Within South Asia itself, Nepal could be viewed as a potential replacement.²²⁾

Unless the opportunities were grabbed by another deserving state in view of cautious diplomatic bargaining on the basis of economic and social needs however, it is justified in saying that Sri Lanka undoubtedly has better prospects than it was earlier on the following grounds:

Firstly, in terms of contemporary developments in international politics, Japan will be compelled to and would definitely play a leading role in international relations extending well beyond the traditional confines of Asia-Pacific Region. This is an extension in the 'range' of the foreign relations and also a breaking of the hard shell of old, traditional and reactive diplomacy of Japan.

Secondly, in more or less the same context, Japan's foreign policy would be most positively and assertively be expanded and diversified to cover new areas in politics, diplomacy, economics, international law and legal order, global regimes and international systemic maintenance. On one hand, Japan itself has realized the necessity for widening the scope of Japan's international relations, as it is implied in the Diplomatic Bluebook 2001 being the official document that outlines the foreign policy perspective of Japan. On other hand, the Japan's closest ally at global level, the United States has been urging Japan to play a wider active role in international politics. One good example was the apparently reluctant involvement in the Gulf War some years ago and the strong backing of the U. S. in the so called 'war against terrorism' in a global scale.

Thirdly and finally, Japan is also likely to impose its policy principles and norms rather rigorously by insisting on 'required conditions' or 'eligibility criteria' for establishing and sustaining relations with states and communities in the world. The leniency of implementing 'eligibility criteria' in extending aid and assistance has been under criticism for sometime, and in the special context of current problems such as rights of refugees, immigrants, ethnic and religious minorities, political asylum seekers and all discriminated

22) Signs of Nepal rising to a favored position in the Japan's foreign relations are already visible. Although systematically analyzed data are not available to speculate on this, the author's empirical observation is that Nepal figured more prominent than Sri Lanka in the Japanese print and electronic media during the year 2001/02. Regretfully, the author had access only to the information available in English

groups would undoubtedly compel some strict adherence to those criteria.

In foreign policy analysis, it is believed that the developments of the above nature in most cases have been favorable rather than detrimental to long-term relations with states and hence in the context of Sri Lanka-Japan Relations too.

Sri Lanka as a small state that had been very actively engaged in issues of global political nature such as movement against colonialism, racial discrimination, women's rights, international regime for the oceans and also the arms control and disarmament, can easily adjust to an environment of that nature. Sri Lanka surpasses most other states in these regards in view of the experienced diplomats and active participation in international forums.

Problems and Prospects

In harnessing existing relations and securing beneficial relations in the future, needless to say that Sri Lanka as a small state is compelled to make major changes in foreign policy and diplomatic behavior to accommodate changes in Japan's foreign policy in the future. The compulsion for change and hence the possible problems Sri Lanka may have to face in the process of such transformation, emanates from another quarter, i. e. from the Afro-Asian small and developing states competing for foreign aid and assistance. In addition, Sri Lanka is likely to confront many close competitors from the South Asian region itself. They include in addition to large though poor states like India and Pakistan, the small developing states such as Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives. Nepal already seems to be attempting to increase its bargaining power with Japan through various means, in the areas of developmental aid and assistance as well as trade and investment.²³⁾ In an optimistic tone, it may however, be said that, the changes already identified as desirable by the policy-makers of Sri Lanka are definitely compatible, if not identical with the changes that have been already prescribed for Japan.

In this regard, three major essential changes are considered to be on the order:

1. Diversification of relations. It is certain that Sri Lanka cannot continue merely as a recipient of ODA in the future. This is essential in the circumstances where Japan is changing its overall foreign policy in the long run. Signs are that the changes may adversely affect the quantum of aid and assistance offered to the developing countries. (The Finance Ministry has already proposed cuts in ODA.)²⁴⁾
2. Relations may be diverted to directly economic areas such as trade, investment and tourism along with the improved educational, cultural and non-governmental cooperation.
3. Finally, a strenuous problem would be the restructuring of policy-making and the adjustment of implementation mechanisms to match them. This includes encouraging public debate on foreign policy matters as well as training of diplomats especially in the negotiating and bargaining techniques.

23) The foot note 22 above.

24) Press release, The Japanese Ministry of Finance Website.

Conclusion

Sri Lanka's traditional claim that its relations with Japan has been cordial because of Japan's perception of Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) as a 'friend' since its outspokenly favorable stand at San Francisco Conference, is unlikely to provide a formidable foundation for fruitful future relations. In the changing global environment Japan is compelled to and is already convinced in changing its role from sheer reactive to a more proactive one as a leading actor in international politics. In the circumstances, it is vitally necessary that Sri Lanka now begins to play a role 'larger than its smallness' to secure good relations with Japan in the future. This in fact is only a resumption of a role Sri Lanka has played for some time in the past.

APPENDIX 1

The following VIP visits from Sri Lanka to Japan and vice versa shows the low intensity of state level transactions between the two countries. The other exchanges were/are of routine diplomatic and bureaucratic nature.

From Sri Lanka to Japan

Year	Month	The VIP
1994	Feb.	The foreign Minister A. C. S. Hameed
1996	May	Her Excellency, Chandrika Kumaratunga, the President
1998	March	Minister of Tourism and civil aviation, Dharmasiri Senanayake
1998	March	Leader of the Opposition, Ranil Wickramasinghe
1998	Sept.	Minister of Samurdi, Youth Affairs and Sports. S. B. Dissanayke
1998	Sept.	Minister of fisheries and Aquatic Resource Development, Mahinda Rajapakse
1999	Feb.	Minister of Samurdi, Youth Affairs and Sports. S. B. Dissanayke
1999	April	Minister of Tourism and civil aviation, Dharmasiri Senanayake

From Japan to Sri Lanka

Year	Month	The VIP
1993	May	Former Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu to attend state funeral of President R. Premadasa
1993	November	President of Japan-Sri Lanka Parliamentarians, Kiezo Obuchi
1996	November	Member of the House of Representatives, Yasuo Fukuda to attend state funeral of President J.R. Jayawardene
1997	July	Members, House of Councillors, Wataru Kubo, Teiko Sasano, Hirofumi Hirano
1999	January	Members, House of Councillors, Masakuni Murakami, Tetsuro Yano, Sanzo Hosaka and Takao Koyama
1999	August	Chairman of the Committee on foreign affairs and Defense, Tetsuro Yano
2000	August	Spécial Envoy of the Prime Minister, Housei Norota
2000	October	Special Envoy, Yasuo Fukuda