SESSION 1:
NORTHEAST ASIAN SECURITY CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Challenges Facing Japan and Need for Innovative Institution Building

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Introduction

Whilst Japan has traditionally maintained relatively pacifist and so-called "exclusively-defense oriented" posture, past decade has been a period of continuous change. I will outline the main changes that have taken place and the adjustment Japan has made in its security strategy, and highlights need for further changes in face of recently added challenges.

Japan's Traditional Security Posture

If you ask any foreign students who has taken several hours of lessons on Japanese security, first thing they will come up with will be Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution. Whilst no prospect of changing this article is in sight, Japanese security policy has been going through remarkable changes in the past decade.. Article 9 has been the framework in which Japanese security policy had evolved. Despite the limitation it imposes, many Japanese citizens are still emotionally attached to this article. In fact, if you follow the Japanese government's interpretation, it does not state something peculiar. It only embodies the basic principle of modern international law which are also enshrined in the UN Charter. Article 2 paragraph 4 of the UN Charter states that "All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations."
Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution states that "the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes." The interpretation from the beginning had been that this does not preclude self-defense. Every nation has the right for survival and self-defense. When the United Nations cannot provide security that it was originally intended to, then nations must resort to individual or collective self-defense. On this interpretation, Japanese Self Defense Force (JSDF) was set up.

However, Japan had been very self-restrictive in interpreting how it exercises its inherent right of self-defense. Japan after the WWII was occupied by the American Forces and was under strong American influence and protection. Under this condition, Japan during the Cold War period maintained what became to be known as "Yoshida Doctrine," named after the first post-war Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida. Essentially, this meant keeping the defense spending to a minimum and relying on the Americans for security. Until very recently, Japanese Defense budged remained mostly under 1 % of GDP.
As Japanese economy grew, Japan increased its "host nation support" for the American forces in Japan, as well as buying more equipments from the US. But it did stick to the "exclusively defense oriented" posture, meaning that it will not acquire offensive capabilities. Although Japan did have a lot of high-tech defensive weapons like anti- submarine capabilities and missile defense, it refrained from having power projection and long-range strike capabilities. It also adopted the "Three Non-nuclear principles" in the late 1960s, and Japan has remained nuclear free.

Changing Security Environment

After the end of the Cold War, Japan slowly started to act more pro-actively in the international security. The negative experience during the first Gulf War galvanized Japan into the legislation to send JSDF overseas for peacekeeping missions after 1992. But until today, these missions remain strictly non-combative. Bigger challenges came later. North Korean development of nuclear capabilities pushed Japan into starting extensive missile-defense program. The so-called "Tepodong shock" of 31 August 1998 was one of the thresholds of Japanese security policy.
North Korea remained the focus of the Japanese security for a decade, to be followed by the rise of self-assertive China. Chinese economy overtook that of Japan in the year 2010 in nominal GDP. It did not take long before China became a militarily formidable power. Its change of approach towards international issues also contributed to heightening the sense of instability amongst the Japanese people.

Redefinition of Japanese Grand Strategy since Abe Period

The first Prime Minister to attempt to readjust Japanese Grand Strategy according to the time was late Shinzo Abe. The pillar was his work was to change the

interpretation of the Constitution article 9, so that Japan can exercise collective as well as individual self-defense. Although this may seem self-evident for most countries, for Japan it was a huge step. This made possible for Japan to fight alongside its allies and partners in time of extreme crisis. Until then, JSDF was not able to take any action until it was directly under attack and could theoretically only respond by resorting to the right of individual self-defense. This was manageable in quieter times, but in an era where multiple regional crises were possible, Japan needed to be able to act pro-actively and also with its allies and partners. 2015 security related legislations laid the ground for such circumstances. The first National Security Strategy ever of Japan was published in 2013.

Japan National Security Strategy of 2022 under Kishida government was in a way a natural extension of changes started during the Abe period, but it was also product of an era of real wars. The beginning of the Ukraine War in February 2022 left a strong impression on the Japanese public. Watching the city of Kyiv under bombing brought back the memories of the extensive and destructive city bombing of WWII in Japan.
The then Prime Minister Kishida repeatedly expressed that "Ukraine today could be East Asia tomorrow." This feeling that war was also possible here tomorrow, was shared by many citizens.
This was the reason for many changes that were possible in the National Security Strategy 2022, including the introduction of "counterstrike capabilities," which was traditionally considered beyond "exclusively defense-oriented" posture, and also the preparedness to spend 2 % of GDP for national defense.

Changing Patterns of Great Power Politics and the Need for Innovative Diplomacy

The changes in Japanese national security policy since the 2010s have indeed been remarkable. But the times will not wait for us. The changes are accelerating these several months, owing to the policies of the new US administration. Even now, US-Japan Security Treaty is the fundamental pillar of our security policy. But recent behavior of the Trump administration has heightened the sense of instability in the region. Europe is more strongly affected since the Trump administration has announced that it expects the Europeans to be mostly responsible for its defense. The erratic way the trade war with the rest of the world has been conducted have risen new doubts about the American leadership in the world.

As mentioned, Japan only started seriously building up its military capabilities several years ago. JSDF has been neglected over the years and building up of our capabilities needs to continue. We also need to acquire a whole range of new capabilities by learning from the lessons of the ongoing Ukraine War. But as the once almighty American Hard and Soft Power wanes, we also need to think about innovative ways to reactivate diplomacy in Northeast Asia, where tension is unquestionably high.
War cannot be to the benefit for anyone in 21st century. The destructiveness of modern warfare is simply too much to be rationally tolerable for an advanced and affluent society. And we have indeed realized an advanced and affluent society in Northeast Asia, and we now need to think about how to avoid war which will only bring destruction on all sides.

This situation is somewhat similar to the 1970s in Cold War Europe. Both the US and USSR were facing domestic difficulties and therefore wanted a relaxation of tension. They also needed mechanisms and institutions to manage crises, since the buildup of nuclear weapons had made war simply suicidal for both sides. A series of dialogue between the East and West, including Strategic Armes Limitation Talks and the Helsinki Process leading to the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe were realized in Europe during the 1970s. It also saw the start of the Conference for Disarmament in Europe.
We need a similar process in Asia. We need management of nuclear weapons between the nuclear powers which are actually much more numerous today: Russia, US, China and North Korea. Although the total number of warheads are still lower today than during the Cold War, that does not make these weapons less destructive. We also need something like the INF treaty which would limit the number of intermediate range missiles. For countries like Japan and Korea, intermediate range missiles actually pose more immediate threat than the strategic missiles. We need to start setting forums for arms limitation and disarmament in Asia before the armament race gets out of hand.

At the height of the Cold War, the US and USSR together held some 70,000 nuclear warheads. We don't need that here. That such a world does not reappear has been one of the central driving force of my academic career. We also need a forum where smaller and middle powers will be given a voice like the CSCE.

Mongolia is a place ideal for such an endeavor. This is a place well-suited for countries from all sides to meet. We need to build on the ten years of experience of Ulaanbaatar Dialogue, but we also need to be more creative in order to meet the challenges of the time. I hope that instead of seeing an ever increasing tension, I can see the start of a period of the will to coexist in peace and dialogue here in Ulaanbaatar.