



Abe's foreign and security policy agenda by Kazuhiko Togo

Kazuhiko Togo (kazutogo@tkk.att.ne.jp), director of the Institute for World Affairs at Kyoto Sangyo University, is former Ambassador of Japan to the Netherlands.

The underlying current of the December election victory by Abe and his Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) is a quiet power shift toward liberal-center forces from the nationalist-right. This is first seen, as was pointed out by Brad Glosserman ("An ugly win for Mr. Abe," *PacNet* #89), in the relative rise of Komeito, which gained four seats to total 35, and the LDP's loss of three seats, which leaves it with 290 within the ruling coalition.

This is more conspicuously seen, however, in the shattering defeat of the Party for Future Generations (*Jisedai*), which lost 17 seats, retaining only two representatives. This party assembled candidates from the most eloquent nationalist-right. Ishihara Shintaro, named as the last candidate in the party's electoral list, could not gain a seat and immediately declared that he would resign from politics. Tamogami Toshio, former chief of the Air Self-Defense Force and known to have a nationalist view of history and defense, openly called for a break in the power of Komeito to achieve a conservative defense agenda. His defeat was symbolic and represented the nationalists' failure, particularly in the area of defense.

The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) gained 11 seats and now has 73 in total. The Japan Restoration Party (*Ishin no Kai*) lost one seat, holding on to 41, but the clout of Hashimoto Toru, the powerful nationalist mayor of Osaka, is considerably weakened. He announced his resignation from national politics to concentrate on Osaka's regional politics. Eda Kenji, former secretary to Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryutaro and possessor of a more balanced view on state matters, now heads this party. The remaining political party is the Communist Party, which gained 13 seats to reach 21. Thus, one can argue that other than the single conservative party, the LDP (290), all other major parties are liberal-center, including the Democrats (73), Restoration (41), Komeito (35), and the Communists (21), with other parties reduced to just two seats each.

Those results can have consequences for Abe's policy, particularly on issues of security, politics, and history. Two hypotheses are possible. Optimists will argue that this political landscape together with Abe's readiness to listen to realist-moderate aides from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) such as Yachi Shotaro will enable the prime minister to take a more balanced approach that will align him with global public opinion, including that of the United States and Europe. Pessimists will counter that the combination of a powerful majority position in the House of Representatives combined with caution because of the shifting political tide to the liberal-

center will, paradoxically, make the nationalist-right more vocal and vigorous, and Abe will have no choice but to listen to and implement their views. Let us now look at specific agendas.

First, there is Abe's security and defense agenda. After the election, and even at its last stage, Abe made it clear that "revision of the Constitution" is going to be one of his major political objectives. Does this make sense?

As far as Article 9 is concerned, the major task now is to concentrate on the parliamentary debate to codify the July 1 Cabinet decision to authorize the exercise of the right of collective self-defense, and after that, there does not seem to be real need for constitutional revision to ensure Japan's proactive defense and security policy. MOFA may seek a more active role in Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) and actions to be taken under UN Security Council Resolutions, such as enactment of a "permanent law" to meet such situations as the 2001 Afghan Resolution or the 2003 Iraq Resolution, but these would not require constitutional amendment.

Realistically, as long as Komeito remains part of the ruling coalition, further revision of Article 9 of the Constitution does not seem feasible. If Constitutional revision is going to go forward, issues such as ecological rights, public policy, or land property rights may have greater relevance.

Second, there are "historical memory issues," such as visits to Yasukuni Shrine or the comfort women. During the election campaign, in contrast to mentions here and there of security and defense, the total silence on history by all parties, media, and academics was conspicuous. There are now two possibilities.

The optimistic view is that Abe becomes more of a realist and a good listener to aides such as Yachi. He would not go to Yasukuni and without saying so would find a way to let Presidents Obama and Xi know that. On the comfort women issue, he would allow his best diplomats to negotiate in confidentiality one more initiative to heal the wounds of these women and let ROK President Park Guen-hye join this exercise to remove this issue from the thorny political agenda between Japan and Korea. The year 2015 would be highlighted by Abe's statement on the 70th commemoration of the end of World War II, but the key message on history should be his commitment to the Murayama statement and his determination of "never forget" as a perpetrator country. If these things can be achieved in 2015, Abe could take more resolute actions along this line to make him "Abe of Asia" and "Abe of the world" rather than just "Abe of Japan."

The pessimistic view is that the 2015 Abe statement would be exclusively "future oriented" to declare to the world that Japan has done everything to reconcile with the past and

that it is focused on the future to become a democratic and peaceful country. The key message would be “let us forget the past and work together for the future.” No further action can be expected by his Cabinet on comfort women. On Yasukuni, Abe would be pressed by nationalists who argue that pressure from the Xi-Park alliance is humiliating Japan, and he would have to visit the shrine again to show his pride and resilience. If the later path is chosen, Abe, despite his strengthened domestic political position, would be heading toward global isolation.

One last issue needs to be addressed: Okinawa. Non-LDP candidates opposed to Futenma’s transfer to Henoko won all four of the single-member districts on the ballot, highlighting the general tendency to reject the Henoko option. Since Onaga Takeshi, who also rejects the Henoko option, won the December Okinawa governor’s election, it seems that the 2006 Two Plus Two agreement that selected the Henoko option faces serious problems. Formidable intellectuals have taken up the Okinawan cause. One of them is Sato Masaru, a former MOFA official working on Russia and a popular and prolific writer, who is deeply committed to the cause of Okinawa and seriously supports Okinawa identity. Unless the government pays significant attention to Okinawa identity – a long neglected issue – this may well become the most difficult security, defense, and foreign policy issue for Japan in the third Abe Cabinet.

Abe has another critical agenda: Abenomics, the third arrow of deregulation and economic development, revitalization of regions, etc. Success or failure in these areas may prove to be much more decisive for his longevity, but that is the subject of another essay.

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