



Japan's New "Values-Oriented Diplomacy": A Double Edged Sword by David Fouse

Japan's recent decision to develop a foreign policy based on support for universal values is a step forward in the development of a more coherent, strategic vision to pursue its national interests. The new policy is likely to make coordination with the United States easier and allow Tokyo to focus its efforts to compete with China for influence in areas such as Southeast Asia. Japan should, however, learn from U.S. experience: asserting its values internationally will invite other countries to put Tokyo's behavior under the looking glass as well.

A major policy address by Japanese Foreign Minister Aso Taro in November 2006 along with subsequent statements by Prime Minister Abe Shinzo during his recent tour of European countries indicate that Japan has decided to follow the path of "value-oriented diplomacy" and help establish "the arc of freedom and prosperity" along the outer rim of Eurasia. In doing so, Japan hopes to shed the perception that it is a mercantilist power by placing greater emphasis on what it has identified as the universal values of democracy, freedom, human rights, rule of law, and market economies. In a speech certainly welcomed in Washington, Foreign Minister Aso stated that Japan will support countries such as Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam in Southeast Asia, along with the countries of Central Asia and those in the Caucasus region such as Georgia and Azerbaijan, to move down the road to "peace and happiness through economic prosperity and democracy."

The new emphasis on value-oriented diplomacy, which contrasts starkly with Japan's early postwar policy of *seikei bunri* (separating politics and economics), means that Japan aims to devote its economic and diplomatic resources toward what Aso describes as "countries that are capable of partnering with Japan." From the mid-1970s, Japan's foreign policy in Asia has been largely staked around the so-called Fukuda doctrine, in which Japan attempted to be a political bridge-builder between the communist and noncommunist regimes of Southeast Asia, with hopes of integrating that region economically under its own leadership. Under the Fukuda doctrine, Japan avoided taking an ideological or interventionist approach when engaging Southeast Asia, which at times brought it into conflict with U.S. policy in the region (Japan's engagement of the military junta in Burma being a recent example).

The Fukuda doctrine, which directed a great deal of Japan's economic aid to Southeast Asia over the past 30 years, was designed to win back the hearts and minds of the people of the region following large scale anti-Japanese protests in several countries during the early 1970s. The protests were caused by the legacy of damage inflicted on these countries during World War II and a perception that Japan was

exploiting the region economically in a manner similar to the war era. While many years have passed since the Fukuda doctrine was adopted, Japan must still contend with the distinctly noninterventionist leanings of ASEAN nations when implementing its new ideologically oriented diplomacy.

For Japan to be perceived as a legitimate proponent of democracy and human rights in Southeast Asia, it must clearly and irrevocably cut its ties to its imperialist past. The U.S. has its own historical baggage – the Vietnam War – and its promotion of democracy and human rights in the region are not always taken at face value. A conservative government in Tokyo that reneges on former apologies for war-era misdeeds (as when Prime Minister Abe recently denied that the Japanese government was involved in coercing "comfort women" during WWII) will have a hard time selling its commitment to universal human rights in Asia. Consider also that the man in charge of explaining Japan's new policy, Foreign Minister Aso, argued in June 2003 that Koreans voluntarily adopted Japanese names during Japan's colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula and refused to retract the statement, infuriating many Korean people.

Though Southeast Asia has demonstrated a willingness to accept, and even encourage, a greater political and perhaps security role for Japan in the region, there has been growing unease with Japan's insensitivity to the feelings of Asians, as demonstrated by the critical statements of the Singapore government regarding former Prime Minister Koizumi's visits to Yasukuni Shrine. Japan's support for universal values in its new foreign policy agenda will draw even greater scrutiny of its own behavior on these issues.

While many in the region may suspect that Japan's recent policy shift is motivated less by its newfound commitment to universal values and more by its recent loss of prestige to China, Foreign Minister Aso has been careful to note that Japan is "by no means pointing the finger at anyone else." The stated basis for the policy, Aso contended, is to strengthen, not only the U.S.-Japan alliance, but also Japan's relationships with neighboring countries such as China, the Republic of Korea, and Russia. It is therefore incumbent upon Japan's leadership to demonstrate to all of Asia that its commitment to the universal values of democracy, freedom, human rights, and the rule of law is sincere by thoroughly severing ties with the imperialist values of a previous era.

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