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**After Ukraine – Enacting a realistic Japanese diplomatic security policy**

BY Hideshi Futori

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With Russia’s illegal invasion of Ukraine, the world now stands at a crossroads. Will we revert to a pre-World War II order where the weak suffer what they must, and the strong do what they will? Or will we maintain the existing global order under international law? At this crucial moment, Japan must unite with the G7 and continue to impose tough sanctions on Russia to prevent further military challenges and uphold a free and open international order.

Those who suffer most in wars are always civilians. Japan should make every effort to engage with concerned countries to begin ceasefire talks and avoid further casualties. As of April 2, over 4.1 million Ukrainian citizens—nearly a 10th of Ukraine’s population—have been forced to flee to other countries. Although Japan has historically been reluctant to accept refugees, it has announced its intent to accept Ukrainians. Yet, the conditions under which they are accepted should be further relaxed. Meanwhile, the momentum for providing humanitarian assistance to Ukraine is growing among Japanese citizens. Rational assessment of the turbulent international situation is essential to achieving balanced diplomacy.

**Declining US influence**

Because Washington failed to prevent Russia’s invasion, US influence in the world will weaken and we are heading towards a more multipolar world. Certainly, the United States has no obligation to defend a non-North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member. However, following the collapse of the Soviet Union and on certain conditions, Ukraine was promised territorial integrity and security by the United States, the United Kingdom, and Russia via the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances. Not standing by this commitment may lead to certain countries in East Asia to take actions similar to Russia’s, while setting a precedent that countries with nuclear weapons cannot be controlled. In particular, the danger of crises emerging in the Taiwan Strait and on the Korean Peninsula are increasing. Given US cautiousness in dealing with nuclear-armed states, Japan will have to engage in diplomacy and dialogue to reassure concerned countries.

Japan should reconsider its reliance on the United States, which has not fulfilled its role as the global policeman. At the same time, without the United States, East Asia will also likely become unstable. So, deepening the Japan-US alliance to keep the United States in Asia is critical. In that sense, Japan has a major role to play. Japan must take drastic measures to strengthen its diplomatic and defense capabilities and build a new international cooperative system centered on peace and stability in Asia. As situations in foreign countries are becoming increasingly tense, Japan is under pressure to rebuild its security strategy from scratch. The time is ripe to promote Japan’s readiness and actions to protect itself.

**The role of political parties**

A think tank focused on diplomacy and security policy should be established by my party, the Constitutional Democratic Party (CDP) of Japan, to renew and deepen policies, reduce over-reliance on the bureaucratic nerve center of Kasumigaseki, and amplify Japan’s global reach. There is an urgent need to stabilize relations with the United States and to establish an independent intelligence gathering and dissemination system. The CDP should therefore establish offices in Washington, DC.

While the opposition party should always offer alternatives to the ruling party, there is no need to highlight differences when it comes to diplomacy and security policy. We should leave party interests behind when it comes to issues directly linked to the survival of the nation, and instead unite to protect peace in Japan.

**Promoting realistic policies**

In the face of the current crisis, Japan must seek comprehensive foreign and security policies based on a realistic view of the international order. According to various polls, over 80% of people worry about Japan’s security in the wake of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Protecting the lives of the people and the sovereignty of the nation should be the highest priority for Japan. National defense approaches should be further discussed and deepened and no topic should be taboo.

Gaining trust and reassuring the public are difficult tasks. Politicians should avoid making unrealistic and reckless assertions while also avoiding being overly sanguine about countries that are expanding their military. What Japan’s national defense policy requires today is to thoroughly reconsider Japan’s conventional capabilities while also ensuring the smooth operation of extended deterrence. The will and leadership of our politicians, and our realistic understanding of the geopolitical situation, will be further tested if we are to protect Japan and lead the liberal international order in Asia.

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