

A CIGS Special Seminar with Jim Schoff
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“Balancing the Japan-US-China Triangle”

Date: Monday, March 29, 2010

Location: The Canon Institute for Global Studies Room3

Time: 15:00~16:30

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

Q1: Although I understand that many people have different views on definition of ‘*smart power*’, my understanding based on Professor Nye’s remarks is that ‘*smart power*’ is the apt handling of hard and soft powers. As Japan has constraint on the hard power component, the US counterparts tend to feel, especially in current situation of decline in their political and economic powers, that Japan’s actions are very slow when it comes to institutional change. So, they are likely to be impatient. How do you think it possible to remedy such slow movement of Japan or to rectify the different perspectives between the US and Japan?

Mr. Schoff: Policy makers in general tend to favor functional and incremental action. It does not grab headlines, but, I do believe that it is the only way that we can move forward. Grand, sweeping programs often fail to materialize or are hard to sustain. Still, functional activities should be put within a broader purpose as a part of grand strategy that is consistent over time.

Although I feel a sense of urgency with various global challenges we face, and I believe that Japan should do more in some areas, I also appreciate that Japan actually has done and is doing a lot of things, such as peacebuilding, reconstruction, training of people, etc. in fragile or failing states like Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Sudan. There are many more opportunities for Japan, however, to involve a wider range of professionals, such as legal experts, police officers, educators, farmers, and accountants, etc. to assist with peacebuilding activities.

Because there is a gap in the nature of our two countries’ contributions (one harder and one softer), it may be necessary to create high-level strategic dialogue between the United States and Japan to define and share the views to identify the priority areas and maximize effective coordination with international organizations and with other countries.

Q2: China has become a gigantic and prosperous country. Although Japan created such powerful country by providing capital, technology and market, it seems to have turned out that what Japan created is not what it wanted. How do the United States see China? If we do not realize what they are, we cannot know how we deal with them in the future.

Mr. Schoff: China is a vast, complex, multidimensional and dynamic entity. In Washington, we are still battling about how we perceive China. On the one hand, people who emphasize economic engagement with China believe that the more we invest in economic ties and trade ties, the more China's future will be bound to our future, and that this interdependence will be ultimately good for our relationship with China as well as for the region. Many in the U.S. State Department hold this view. On the other hand, people in Defense Department, for example, tend to think that through all this activity we are strengthening a potential predator in global competition. I believe that we will soon realize that the time for that debate is over because China's rise has already happened.

I was optimistic some time ago and thought that the United States would eventually get its hands around the idea of China as a global player (not necessarily a "strategic partner" or "competitor" or "responsible stakeholder," but simply a global player with good points and bad points...opportunities for cooperation and aspects of competition) and that it would start working with China on this basis. Recently, however, the political dialog in the United States has continued to be increasingly divisive and difficult to manage. So, the situation I hoped for might be difficult to realize because the divisive politics will force people to clarify their political positions in a black-or-white manner, i.e., they are either pro-China or anti-China. I hope that the political atmosphere in the United States will improve after the healthcare debate and mid-term elections, but we'll see.

Q3: You have shown an equilateral triangular relationship between Japan, the United States and China. I would think that this kind of triangle can exist only where the powers they have are equal. But, in reality, Japan is losing its economic power, i.e. it is losing the second largest economic position taken over by China and will decline further to the fourth position in years to come. And, politically Japan has nothing. The triangular idea may mislead Japanese people that we have an influential power on international politics. Many things can be decided by the United States and China. In such situation, Japan may have to place itself as one of middle countries instead of a part of triangle. I would think that Japan can do a lot of things together with other middle countries. What is your view on this?

Mr. Schoff: I agree with you that the triangle can exist only if powers are relatively equal. But, I still think that Japan has a lot of influence and weight in this triangle.

Japan in this region is not only unique in terms of its sophistication on the economic side but also is influential because of its alliance with the United States, which gives Japan more power in the political sense. It is not siphoning off, or relying on US power, but it actually draws new power from this relationship (in economic, political, and military terms). I believe that Japan enhances its power through its alliance with the United States.

So, I would be concerned about any middle power strategy that would seek to distance itself from the United States. In that way, an alliance of middle power states may weaken each of them due to the distance from the United States. I still think that the triangle is very critical and it gives Japan greater weight both in the security dimension and in the political dimension that helps match its own indigenous economic power.

Q4: China has three major concerns: First, they are concerned about free flow of information or transparency, i.e. how the freedom of information can affect the Chinese society; second, they are not confident about the national integrity, i.e. they have problems with Taiwan and domestic minorities; and third, they cannot afford further economic burden to respond to the international responsibility. I would like to hear your view on how you can apply the '*smart power*' strategy to these three major issues of China.

Mr. Schoff: There is a hard power component in applying the '*smart power*' vis-à-vis China. The hard power component is certainly the deterrent power of the United States, which includes arms sales to Taiwan, and the like. So, the hard power component is being played out in that realm. It is difficult for Japan to be a proactive part of the hard power component operationally and politically. I hope that the Hatoyama government will not try to drive off the US Marines from Japan before there are some other plans in place to compensate for the loss of those Marines. I would say that this is probably the way that Japan is playing a role in the hard power component. In other words, most of it consists of the support and consultation between Japan and the United States.

At the same time, the QDR (Quadrennial Defense Review) in the United States emphasizes the importance of openness in the region and the world with respect to global commons (including the high seas, space, cyberspace, and global financial markets). We protect this openness through various tools and initiatives including international organizations and coordinated multilateral action. The United States and Japan can cooperate with other like-minded countries in this area of soft power.

There are also hard power tools in this regard, and at the moment, China is trying to improve its ability to deny the United States and its allies the kind of access that they have come to enjoy as they try to protect a certain level of openness. Some of this is mentioned in the QDR as well...talking about how to deal with China's so-called anti-access strategy. Here we are in danger of sliding into a security dilemma if we do not maintain good political relations and multilateral cooperation. The United States will take steps to secure its access, which could force China to try to further deny the access, and a vicious cycle could emerge. This would be a waste of resources. There is a need for an intervention of soft power to deal with information flow as a usual business.

The same applies to the financial information. It is clear that financial regulation is needed to guarantee transparency of financial conditions. This is something that China should be able to support.

In terms of national integrity, Japan can play a critical reinforcing role in a way that it did in the ASEAN region. It offered financial aid in Myanmar, for example, dependent on a free election there, so it is supporting positive norms. There might be opportunities to continue this kind of precedent in China.

Mr. Kurihara: It may be one of the ways to foster the free flow of information in China that information can be spread through overseas Chinese (e.g. those who are studying in Harvard or Cambridge, Chinese people in Singapore and Taiwan, etc.). The Chinese government may have problems dealing with the people within China who become aware of an information gap with overseas Chinese.

National integrity may be the same. Nurturing democracy in Taiwan is a good example for the application of soft power so that Taiwan can develop harmonious relationship with Singapore, Japan and the United States. To support the forces in China trying to modernize and reform its domestic systems is also one of the ways of applying soft power to China. The reform of healthcare, pensions, etc, is the responsibility of Chinese government, but reform of domestic systems may lead China to foster a sense of social responsibility on a global scale.

Q5: The words "interdependent relation" or "equal alliance" with the United States, which sounds comfortable for the Japanese people, are frequently mentioned in many occasions recently in Japan. I do not believe that such relationship is possible where Japan is entirely dependent on the US military force. By using the anchor theory you have just shown, how do you explain "interdependent relation" or "equal alliance" between Japan and the United States?

Mr. Schoff: The first goal of the alliance between Japan and the United States is defense of Japan, and therefore we have cooperation and interaction between our two states for that purpose. Beyond that, there are many different forms of Japan's cooperation in the context of the alliance on a wider regional and global scale, such as the anti-piracy mission on Somalia and the relief "shuttle service" to Haiti provided by Japan's Air Self-Defense Force based out of Florida. I can see these kinds of activities increasing as Japan expands its role in various international peace cooperation missions. In the long run, cooperation may be possible in ways not considered today, such as Aegis ships of the United States, Japan and South Korea cooperating to interlink their missile defense capabilities in the Persian Gulf region to provide a real time umbrella over oil shipments in order to stabilize the flow of oils out of the region (if they are threatened by Iranian missiles, for example).

It is also possible to cooperate in the intelligence gathering missions. In my mind, the cooperation in this respect involves multiple partners, not only the United States and Japan but also Australia, South Korea and eventually China. We will be in the same club sharing burdens, and if China, for example, wants to use its market power to take a selfish approach to solve a particular problem, then it will lose the benefits of the participation in that club, and will also lose its respect. This kind of cooperation cannot be fully achieved now, but I would think that it could eventually come over time. So, in my opinion, there are many opportunities in a non-combat role to expand our cooperation network.

Q6: I would like to talk about the recent Toyota problem. Do you think that the Japanese government could have done anything to solve the Toyota problem under the US-Japan alliance? I do not think that there is not much to do by the Japanese government, but if the same kind of problem happens in the United States, what do you think the US government can do?

Mr. Schoff: I think that the main problem was the slowness in terms of responding by Toyota. The late response always gives suspicion that there is something to hide. US companies have had many similar problems and recalls, some of which were more serious than the current Toyota issue, so this is not just a Toyota problem. It seems to me that Toyota is getting a better handle on the issue by using American Toyota owners to express their loyalty and through the company's marketing campaign.

I do not think it prudent for the Japanese government to become too much involved in this kind of issue, as it may reinforce the idea that the government is closely involved

in corporate matters (sort of a recollection of the “Japan Inc.” accusations of the 1980s and 1990s). I do not think that this issue will affect bilateral relations except in the case where such a problem goes unresolved for a long period of time. I believe that the average American’s opinion of Japan has not declined significantly as a result of this car quality issue. Some of the alliance managers are more concerned about debt levels of the Japanese government.

Japan should not portray a sense of weakness. Japan should portray an image (and a reality) of proactive engagement on global and regional issues by doing what it can do, e.g. putting forward ideas, building coalitions in the G-7 and G-20 to address common challenges, actively participating in the solution of the global financial crisis, etc. This kind of approach and image will keep Japan well respected in the world.

Q7: There is a political mess in Japan regarding the Futenma airbase issue. I would think that this issue will have a big impact when we think about the Japan’s soft power role and its involvement in the future. How do you find this issue?

Mr. Schoff: It is the single biggest problem in the short term between the United States and Japan that can really undermine the grand approach for ‘*smart power*’ cooperation that I discussed in my presentation. It is very frustrating. I do not know where it is going, what the end game is, and if we are trying to get to the same place. I believe in Japan overall, but this is like a bone caught in our throats at this time, and I do not know how we are going to get rid of it.

Someday the US Marines will move out of Japan. The question is, under what conditions and what kind of regional security environment? This is what we should be discussing. I think that the Marines are still needed in Japan at the moment to provide for Japan’s defense and for regional stability. If Japan wants the Marines to leave, then it will probably have to fill in the loss of Marines’ capability with more domestic defense spending, greater legal opportunity for Japanese forces to participate in collective security operations, or some other compensating actions by the Japanese government. The United States can accept this if it understands that this is a long-term sustainable solution that benefits the alliance. But the current Japanese government is not ready to discuss such a long-term solution, nor is it prepared at all for an opportunity to create a new paradigm for Japanese international and regional security.

I am concerned about a sort of vacuum to be created if Japan pushes out the US force without any compensating capability. If you look at the reality, including the facts of an increase of Chinese submarine patrols in the last 10 years, its investments in

aircraft capabilities and missile capabilities, etc., it is clear who will fill the vacuum (if it is created) over time.

Another aspect is the political one. If you look at the US forces deployed in this region including those in Alaska, Guam and Hawaii, the US deterrence is still quite strong. So, Japan may ask the Marines to leave and think that it can rely on other “over the horizon” capabilities. But, what does it mean politically for the alliance? The United States feels that we are here to defend Japan and the provision of bases is a part of bargain. But, if Japan is going to take that component away, why should we work so hard for the defense of Japan? If this is not handled well, it may be possible that the United States will become less proactive in its defense of Japan. This is not a prediction, but it is my worry.

I understand that the Futenma discussion in Japan is not really a debate about the pros and cons of the bilateral alliance, nor is it intended to push away US forces. It is, instead, largely a domestic political problem. However, I am afraid that the DPJ's lack of governing experience and a variety of other aspects involved in the Futenma issue could have a negative impact on the US-Japan alliance, and eventually undermine it. So, we need to find a way somehow to fix the problem and to deal with it in a way that prevents a wider negative impact on the US-Japan relationship.

QS: To what extent do we want to change China? As you pointed out, we are concerned about China in terms of its stability, openness and access. So, we can agree that China should change. Question is to what extent we want China to change with the concept of the anchor ship or ‘*smart power*’ you have explained.

Mr. Schoff: North Korea is an extreme example that is the far end of a spectrum of expectation or requirement of change in its internal systems. In other words, we can hardly deal with North Korea (the country) unless there is a major change in its leadership. At the other end of the spectrum, there may be a democratic country that elects a government that we tend to disagree with for some reason, and though this might cause some friction, overall we can still work well with that country, and administrations come and go. I would put China in the middle of this spectrum. China relies a lot more on openness now than it ever did, and it is more aware of the importance of openness (internal and external) than it was 10 or 20 years ago. In many ways, the behavior of China's government is changing, even if the government itself does not change. So, we see that with this element of openness, it is susceptible to change even within the current communist government system. We need some change

in China, but we don't need to try to force change from the outside, and we don't need to take an adversarial position vis-à-vis the Chinese government.