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Japan's Middle East policy: 'still mercantile realism'

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Abstract

Japan's vital interests, both its energy security and US alliance, are at stake in the Middle East. Change in Japan's Middle East policy is charted over three periods, from a stance independent of the United States to one increasingly aligned with US policy. This is explained in terms of four variables: level of US hegemony, threats in East Asia, energy vulnerabilities in the Middle East, and normative change inside Japan. Japan's policy in Middle East/North Africa reflects its general move toward a more militarily enhanced version of mercantile realism.

The nature and direction of change in Japanese foreign policy has been widely contested in the name of rival theories whose main area of agreement is that Japan is not a traditional great power. Liberals characterized Japan as a trading state, while constructivists saw it as a non-military great power; realists portrayed it as an anomalous 'lopsided' power whose military capability was not commensurate with its global economic interests. Realists and their rivals have disagreed over how far Japan has started to appropriately upgrade its military capabilities and move

toward 'normal' great power status or whether normative constraints and economic interests still constrained this.[1]

Such debates, while sharpening our appreciation of the possible alternatives in Japan's security policy, can divert us from grasping its complex reality. As Japan's notion of comprehensive security recognizes, there are multiple aspects of security (such as territorial, economic, energy); hence, security strategy necessarily *mixes* instruments appropriate to each. Thus, Heginbotham and Samuels (1998), Soeya (1998, p. 207) and Kawasaki (2001) all emphasized the rationality of Japan's generally non-militarist policy of prioritizing its economic prowess and threats from economic rivals, while eschewing great power style militarization which would likely increase the security dilemma and damage the economy, but *also* of its maintenance of a sufficient military deterrent backed by a US alliance. This security policy is perfectly congruent with Japan's specific historical post-World War II construction by the US hegemon and its geopolitical situation in a zone of war and as an advanced industrial economy lacking indigenous hydrocarbon resources (Soeya, 1998, p. 199). While Japan has incrementally moved away from a pure trading state toward a closer US alliance and an upgraded military establishment, it continues, as Samuel argues (2007, pp. 185–209), to *hedge* or balance between realist and liberal options, a function of the pragmatism of policy-makers, fiscal constraints, bureaucratic politics, and public opposition to radical change. Japan's policy might still be considered 'mercantile realism', if the concept is stretched to accommodate a more militarily activist version of this strategy.

This article uses the case of Japan's Middle East policy to provide further evidence for this complex 'mercantile realism'. Japan's policy in the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) provides a useful test case for understanding its overall security policy for three reasons. First, two of Japan's most vital interests are at stake in this region, namely its energy

1 As a trading state, Japan was said to seek wealth, not military might, a seemingly 'non-military great power' or a 'new kind of superpower' (Darby and Hullock, 1994). Berger (1996, 1998) and Katzenstein and Okawara (1998) also emphasized Japan's non-militarized international relations. Many saw its foreign policy as inappropriate to a great power – 're-active', 'passive', 'low risk', and 'immobile' in responses to crises (Drifte, 1990; Inoguchi, 1991; Blaker, 1993; Curtis, 1993). However, toward the end of the Cold War, many neo-realists assumed that Japan would translate its economic power into an independent military capability; and since 9/11 many see Japan as more ready to use military force (Hughes, 1999; Green, 2001; Yachi, 2002; Hughes, 2004; Lind, 2004).

security and its alliance with the United States. No other developed state is as dependent on imported energy resources, mostly from MENA, as is Japan and the crisis of its nuclear industry only increases this vulnerability towards the states in the region[2]; moreover, Japan is uniquely dependent on its US alliance because it alone of developed states must cope with a potential 'zone of war' with limited military capabilities. Second, it is in the Middle East where Japan's traditional anti-militarist foreign policy appears recently to have moved furthest toward 'realist' behavior, including the use of its military (notably in Iraq), after a long tradition of acting there purely as an non-militarist trading state. Third, the MENA case sheds light on key dilemmas Japan faces, enabling us to test the factors that make for choices among often equally unpalatable alternatives. The first dilemma is that Japan's military security is dependent on its alliance with the United States, while its economic prosperity is dependent on energy supplies concentrated in the Middle East and Japan is often caught between the two dependencies. The second dilemma is that the United States has increasingly called on its Japanese ally for support of Washington's ever-deepening military intervention in MENA, which has clashed with the thorough absorption of anti-militarist norms by the Japanese public.

How Japan tries to resolve these dilemmas has varied over time and remains complex, but, overall, there has been, since the 1970s, a long-term, incremental albeit incomplete shift apparent by the late 1990s in Japan's MENA policy: from an independent policy, toward greater bandwagoning with the United States, without ever becoming a mere US client and continuing all along to defend its own interests, albeit within the limits of US hegemony; and from exclusive reliance on economic and diplomatic instruments to an expanded role for military instruments, without abandoning its essentially non-military approach to energy security (Kuroda *et al.*, 1987; Naramoto, 1991; Takahashi, 1995b; Tateyama, 1995). This is charted through three distinct phases: (i) the

2 Japan's dependence on imports for its energy sources at 96% compares with the United States at 35% and Britain at 27% (IEA Energy Balances of OECD Countries, 2010 Edition). Oil has been the largest source of energy for Japan since the 1950, at 44% in 2007 (Agency for Natural Resources and Energy, 2007), and as a resource-scarce country, Japan relies almost entirely on imports for its consumption of crude oil. Japan's dependency on the Middle East for its crude oil imports has been on the rise since the mid-1980s (69%), almost reaching the pre-Oil Crisis level (91%), 89.5% in 2009 (Statistics by the Oil League of Japan; Agency for Natural Resources and Energy, Energy White Paper 2007).

1970s when the oil crisis prompted Japan's move toward a policy independent of the United States and reliant on an enhanced trading and investment drive in MENA, accompanied by political appeasement of Arab oil producers and attempts to develop a stake in Iran; (ii) the 1980s when Japan shifted toward the United States in MENA, albeit with the use of non-military policy of aid to support the United States-initiated peace process; (3) from the 1990s, a further tilt toward the United States in the region, reaching a climax in the 2003 deployment of the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) in support of the US occupation of Iraq, yet still with self-constraint.

1. The determinants of Japan's MENA security policy

This article proposes that several factors combine to determine Japan's policy in MENA: its US alliance, its territorial security, its energy security, and its security culture and norms. While each of these tends to be the domain of a particular rival theory, they can be incorporated into the framework developed by Buzan and Weaver (2003) which accommodates a complex world of four levels – global (US hegemony), regional (East Asian insecurity), inter-regional (Middle East oil dependency), and domestic (national norms relevant to the Middle East); each of whose effect is negotiated through a fifth factor, the policy process.

1.1 The global level: Japan under US hegemony

As Buzan and Weaver point out, global-level dynamics are shaped by the relation between the sole superpower, the United States, and the great powers, including Japan. Therefore, Japan takes it as a matter of course that the pursuit of its interests must be congruent with US hegemony. This is uniquely so for Japan owing to the deference built into the relation as a result of Japan's special experience – both defeated and reconstructed under US patronage. It is sustained by Japan's belief that US hegemony largely serves Japan's own interests; in its role as off-shore balancer, the United States provides Japan a security umbrella; as global hegemon, it defends the open trade and investment system and the security of the sea lanes from which Japan, as a trading state, derives great benefit. This is reinforced by the trans-national inter-elite interconnections through which US-promoted norms are transmitted to Japanese elite circles.

As Hegemonic Stability Theory (HST) argues, the hegemon provides 'public goods' to other trading states but in recompense, levies certain 'taxes' for its services (Ikenberry and Charles, 1990). Of Japan, it expects acceptance of its leadership and, in the Middle East, 'burden sharing' in its conflicts with MENA states which defy it; this has potentially conflicted with Japan's anti-militarist security culture and complicated its relations with its Middle East energy suppliers. United States–Japan relations have also been complicated by trade disputes in which the United States insisted that Japan curb its penetration of US markets and further open its own market to US firms. Also, HST tells us that hegemons rise and fall and when in decline are more constrained and less likely to deliver public goods (Gilpin, 1981). Accordingly, Japan's responsiveness to US demands in the Middle East has varied according to whether US hegemony appears to be declining (in the 1970s) or rising (as in the post-Cold War period) and whether its delivery of public goods is effective – both stability in East Asia and ensuring the flow of Middle East oil.

1.2 The East Asian regional security complex

East Asia is a 'conflict formation', according to Buzan and Weaver, with its own balance of power, long-standing territorial disputes, and historical enmities. The region remains a 'zone of war' but Japan's perception of threats from its neighborhood has varied: while during the Cold War, China was never seen as a threat and even a Soviet attack on Japan was seen as unlikely (Soeya, 1998, pp. 203, 211–216, 232); in the post-Cold War period, Japan perceives much increased threats, notably from North Korean nuclear capabilities but also from a rising China, a competitor for energy sources, both East Asian off-shore and MENA sources; although the Chinese threat is diluted by the deepening economic ties between the two states, the unsettled World War II heritage keeps security relations tense. In response to this environment, Japan has enhanced its military deterrent over time, as realists expect. However, given the normative constraints on Japan's ability to translate its advanced economic and technological capabilities into military 'self-help', particularly ruling out a nuclear deterrent of its own, the US security alliance remains the centerpiece of Japanese security policy. Moreover, in the post-Cold War era, as Japan's perception of its vulnerability (from US

abandonment) in the security relationship increased, it increasingly felt the need to accommodate US expectations that it make a proper military contribution to their common security strategy, including in MENA, in order to show its value to the US. When threats, as opposed to economic partnerships, in East Asia increase, so also does the importance of US protection and US leverage over Japan and therefore constraints on Japan's policy independence in MENA.

1.3 Japan–MENA inter-regional relations

Trans-state economic ties are well conceptualized by liberalism's complex interdependence and the notion that *asymmetric* interdependence creates vulnerability in the more dependent state (Keohane and Nye, 1989, pp. 3–22). Japan's exceptional dependence on imported MENA oil makes it vulnerable to the oil producers (who have many other customers), but this fluctuates according to the oil market (glut versus scarcity), MENA states' political cohesion or fragmentation, and MENA instability. Japan seeks to reduce its vulnerability by promoting trade and mutual investment, especially Japanese investment in the region's oil industry, against a background of (usually) scrupulous diplomatic neutrality in regional conflicts. Japan's access to MENA energy is not a purely commercial matter but one of energy security,[3] but Japan does not, in contrast to traditional realist states like the United States and Britain, take a military approach to it (Kimura, 1986; Calabrese, 1997). To a considerable extent, Japan has also relied on the US hegemon to ensure access to Middle East oil, especially as US hegemony in the region steadily increased after 1990 with the end of the Cold War and its victory in the Gulf War. However, because US Middle East policy has often antagonized regional states and peoples, the United States has also tended to generate instability jeopardizing energy security. In particular, the United States has a history of hostility to the two states, Iran and Iraq, which in recent years have possessed the largest potential energy resources not yet irretrievably claimed by Western companies and where Japan had tried to establish a foothold. Japan is, therefore, as Yoshitsu (1984) and Carvely (1985) have argued, 'caught' between two asymmetric interdependencies that make it simultaneously vulnerable to the Middle East

3 Japan Agency for Natural Resources and Energy, http://http:www.enecho.meti.go.jp/faq/oil/q01.htm (21 June 2010, date last accessed).

oil-producing states for energy security and to the United States for military security and, as Orr (1990) claimed, is therefore forced to 'balance' between the two. Which way Japan tilts in this balancing is inevitably powerfully affected by the relative *leverage*, rooted in material power, of the United States and MENA states over it at a given time.

1.4 National identity and security culture

States do not respond uniformly to the international system, but see its threats, opportunities, and appropriate strategies through the lens of their identities and security cultures. Japan, in Buzan and Weaver's (2003) terms, is a 'post-modern state' in a 'modern' (realist) region, hence with no obvious or simple security strategy; rather, as constructivism holds, its precise strategy is shaped by how its identity is constructed; but this construction is, in turn, affected by 'systemic' factors.

In Japan's distinctive national security culture, anti-militarist norms have constrained military approaches to security. These norms originated in the post-World War II de-militarization of Japan under US occupation, supported by the public revulsion at the high costs of militarism in the war and institutionalized in the Japanese 'Peace Constitution', which have sharply constrained the role of the Japanese SDF. This was further reinforced by Japan's spectacular success as a non-military trading state (Hook, 1996; Berger, 1998; Katzenstein and Okawara, 1998). Japan's concept of 'comprehensive security' treated threats as symptoms of deeper rooted causes that were best addressed by non-coercive measures, through the generation of shared interests via economic interdependence and through international institutions and law (Barnett, 1984; Ueki, 1993, pp. 348–349; Hughes, 1999, p. 24). This distinctive culture, as Berger (1996) argued, helps account for Japan's relative deviation from realism, its bias toward liberal international institutions, and its resort to economic policy instruments.

As such, in the Middle East, US and Japanese notions of security have not always been congruent. While the US supplies *one side* in the Arab–Israeli conflict with military superiority and deploys military power to *contain* threats to oil access in the Gulf, Japan holds firmly to *neutrality* in the Arab–Israeli conflict and advocates *resolutions* of the root causes of the regional conflicts that put energy security at risk through diplomacy and economic incentives. On the other hand,

Japan's anti-nuclear normative tradition is largely congruent with US counter-proliferation policy regarding certain states in MENA (Sasagawa, 1982, p. 42; Yoshitsu, 1984, pp. 24–25; Shimizu, 1988, p. 386; Noboru, 1997, pp. 58–59).

However, as constructivism holds, identities and security cultures are not static and are continually reconstructed by interactions with other states and domestically through interchanges between elites and publics. In Japan's case, the normative influence of the US hegemon, transmitted by trans-national elite ties first constructed during the occupation, has always been powerful, first imposing de-militarization, but subsequently pushing Japan to accept greater military burden-sharing. Along with Japanese perceptions of increased security threats in East Asia, US influence altered the security culture of a new generation of Japanese elites, who developed an ambition to overcome the perceived 'imbalance' between Japan's global economic interests and its limited international leadership role and military capabilities (Inoguchi and Iwai, 1987, pp. 209, 119–120). Led most effectively for a period by Koizumi Jun'ichirō during his premiership, they have sought to shift the internal normative balance toward realism (Sebata, 1992; Tanaka, 2000, p. 4; Furukawa, 2005, p. 5). The anti-militarist norms institutionalized at the domestic level are highly resistant to change but Japanese elites systematically exploited US pressures on Japan for military burden-sharing in MENA and purported threats from North Korea to advance their agendas. The long-term changes in Japan's MENA policy toward an enhanced role for its military were a function of Japanese elites' adoption of realist strategies and the declining resistance of anti-militarist norms to this in public opinion.

1.5 The foreign policy process

The norms that intervene between the system level and actual decisions cannot fully explain outcomes in any given situation since policy-makers must interpret the changing external balance of power and Japan's vulnerabilities and because multiple, perhaps contrary, norms must also be interpreted. Although Japanese decision-makers govern by consensus, there is competition between politicians over policy, notably pragmatists defending the Yoshida Doctrine and those seeking its revision, in which they deploy different norms to advance their views of Japan's interests in the Middle East. The different branches of the bureaucracy also have different

views of Japan's Middle East policy, varying notably between the Foreign Ministry, which prioritizes the US alliance, and the Ministry of Economy and International Trade, which values energy independence (Shinoda, 1999; Amaki, 2003, pp. 14, 15, 21, 68, 186; Yomiuri Shinbun Seijibu, 2005, 2006). In such struggles, the distribution of power inside the Japanese establishment can be expected to affect the outcome; thus, important in explaining Japan's increasingly proactive and 'realist' policy in MENA was the recent centralization of power in the hands of the prime minister and cabinet office undertaken after the 1990 Gulf War to permit a quicker response to international crises (and US demands on Japan).[4]

1.6 The factors governing change in Japan's MENA policy

What, then, has driven Japan's long-term tilt toward the United States and toward a limited involvement of Japanese military forces in MENA? The above framework suggests these changes are a function of: (i) the increase in US hegemony, the public goods it delivers to Japan, and/or the returns it demands; (ii) the increase in Japan's perception of threat in East Asia, hence security dependence on the United States; (iii) decreased leverage by MENA states (from fragmentation and an oil glut) or increased instability in MENA, hence a realization by Japanese policy-makers that their energy security cannot rely solely on economic ties and diplomacy with MENA states and also depends on US hegemony in MENA; (iv) a shift in the security culture of Japanese elites, under US influence or threat perception, toward realism and a decline in public resistance to this; (v) a shift in the power balance within the establishment in favor of military activists notably under Koizumi. The following summarizes and explains, in light of this framework, the main watersheds in the evolution in Japan's MENA policy.

2. The evolution of Japan's Middle East policy

2.1 Tilting toward MENA: the post-1973 oil shock period

Japan had little active policy toward the Middle East until the use of the 'oil weapon' by the Arab oil-producing states during the 1973 Arab–

4 This essay cannot, for reasons of space, systematically pursue FPA explanations of Japan's MENA policy in any detail; however, for analyses of recent MENA decision-making, see Furukawa (2005) and Miyagi (2009).

Israeli war sparked an international oil crisis. The Arab states, having taken control of their oil fields from the Western oil majors, made security of oil supplies contingent on support for Palestinian and Arab claims in the Arab–Israeli conflict and imposed an oil embargo on the United States for its support of Israel. When the United States failed to guarantee Japan's supplies, Japan understood it would have to look out for its own energy security and tilted its policy toward appeasing Middle East opinion. While Japan had hitherto relied on the Western oil majors for its energy security, the Japanese government now sought to arrange oil supply deals and joint ventures directly with the oil-producing states (Caldwell, 1981; Licklider, 1985, p. 26; Kuroda, 1986; Yoshitsu, 1986; Drifte, 1990, p. 13).

Parallel to this, US hegemony seemed to be eroding after Washington's retreat in the costly Vietnam War and after Nixon's end of the gold standard support for the dollar amidst the oil price boom threw the Bretton Woods monetary system into crisis; in this situation, Japan coordinated with key European states, which also feared for their energy security, in order to acquire greater autonomy of US policy in MENA. East Asian threats were also less salient in this era of emerging detente. As US hegemony declined and the leverage of MENA states over oil consumers increased, Japan's energy security seemed dependent on fostering the economic interdependencies with MENA, which an anti-militarist trading state was well designed to pursue.

Japan's Middle East engagement also took a new political dimension. Because of the relative cohesion among the Arab states in this period around the Palestine issue, Japan began demonstrating support for the Palestinians in the expectation that this would enhance amicable relations with the Arab oil states. Thus, Japan allowed the PLO to open an office in Tokyo and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat was invited by the Diet members' League for Japan–Palestine Friendship to visit Japan in October 1981 despite the objection of the US government and threats from the US Congress (Yoshitsu, 1984; Naramoto, 1990). In 1974, Japan substantially increased its financial contributions to UNRWA, the UN agency supporting the Palestinian refugees. In consequence, the Arab oil producers designated Japan as a friendly nation whose oil supply should not be jeopardized by their oil embargo (Licklider, 1985, p. 26; Kuroda, 1990, p. 41; Soeya, 1998, p. 217). One long-term consequence of this episode was the institutionalization of the norm of neutrality in the

Arab–Israeli conflict in Japan's foreign policy establishment. Japan also insisted on maintaining good relations with Iran despite the efforts of the United States to isolate the country after its Islamic revolution, especially following the US embassy hostage-taking in Tehran in 1979. A joint venture between the Iranian National Oil Company and the Japanese trading company, Mitsui, signed in 1973 continued after the Islamic revolution and even after the outbreak of war with Iraq, with Iran especially keen to maintain the venture (Tateyama, 1993).

During this period (1970s), anti-militarist norms remained fully intact in Japan. Nevertheless, the Japanese government, taking the view that oil security depended on Middle East stability, took a first step away from a strict interpretation of the constitution: although military involvement was still ruled out, Japan helped finance UN peacekeeping operations in the Egyptian Sinai (Ogata, 1990). Japan also increased its economic aid to MENA in support of regional stabilization.

2.2 Re-balancing: the second Cold War and oil glut period

In this period, when Japan's spectacular economic success seemed to be translating into great power status and the country started to claim a global leadership role, Japan, ironically, became more vulnerable to US pressures to bring its MENA policy into congruence with US objectives. The United States–Japan alliance was strained as the rise of Japan's economic challenge to US primacy caused trade conflicts between the two. But Japan still needed the US alliance for its military security, especially as the Reagan-initiated 'New Cold War' increased tensions in East Asia. Equally important, it needed the US market more than ever for its burgeoning exports. Making concessions to the United States in the Middle East was a seemingly inexpensive way of appeasing Washington. Cooperation with the United States in MENA became less costly because Japan's vulnerability to the MENA oil producers was declining owing to the 'oil glut' of the eighties, their increasing dependency on US protection against Iran after its Islamic revolution, and owing to the general loss of cohesion among the Arab-Islamic states due to Egypt's separate peace with Israel in 1979, the Iran–Iraq war of 1980–88, and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait at the end of the decade.

A combination of US pressures and Japan's new ambition for global leadership status commensurate with its economic power subtly shifted

Japan's MENA policy. Japanese policy-makers believed that playing a role in the Arab–Israeli peace process would raise Japan's international prestige and that its great economic resources and benign image in MENA could be instrumental in allowing it a role in the process (Sakai, 2001). In response to demands by the United States under President Reagan that it build ties with Israel and also owing to Japanese policy-makers' belief that a mediating role in the Arab–Israeli conflict required a neutral position, the Japanese government initiated official visits between Japan and Israel in the late 1980s, which was followed by Japan's call for the termination of the Arab boycott of Israeli business in December 1992. In 1988, Japanese Foreign Minister Uno Sōsuke visited the Arab states and Israel to discuss Middle East peace prospects. Japan also became, by 1994, the second largest donor to UNRWA (Kuroda, 1990; Tatayama, 1992/93; Katakura, 1993).

In order to project its image as a leading member of the international community and enhance MENA stability, Japan also increased its economic contributions to UN peacekeeping operations in the region. It provided US$3 million to the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in March 1988. Importantly, as a precursor to participation by the SDF in UN peacekeeping, Japanese civilian personnel were assigned to UN peacekeeping missions in Afghanistan/Pakistan, to the Iran–Iraq Military Observer Group (UNIMOG), and to the United Nations Iraq–Kuwait Observer Mission (UNKOM) in 1991. However, this had to be undertaken 'inconspicuously' until the passage of the International Peace Co-operation Law (PKO Law) (*Kokuren Heiwa Kyōryoku hō*) in 1992 after the Gulf War (Nishihara, 1995). As regards military participation in MENA, however, Japan's self-restraint was still apparent: it turned down a US request to send mine-sweeping vessels to the Persian Gulf to protect oil tanker traffic during the Iran–Iraq war, constrained by the anti-militarist norm widely shared among the Japanese public (Okamoto, 2004, p. 197).

At the same time as Japan's economic might increased in this period, it sought international prestige as an 'aid great power', becoming a top donor to developing countries and international institutions, often at US behest, to manage conflicts in far-flung parts of the globe, including the Middle East (Orr, 1990; Darby and Hullock, 1994). Indicative, however, of an overall tilt in Japan's policy toward the United States was its systematic use of economic aid in support of US policy in the Cold War. In

response to US requests, Japanese aid was provided to Afghanistan, Turkey, and Pakistan, frontline states countering both Soviet influence and revolutionary Iran. It also provided aid to Lebanon after the Israeli invasion of 1982 and Egypt became a major recipient following its conclusion of a US-sponsored peace with Israel in 1979. Iraq, a US ally against Islamic Iran until the Gulf War of 1990, was also a major recipient of Japanese aid (Yasutomo, 1989–90 pp. 9, 494; Inada, 1990, pp. 102, 117; Uchida, 1990; Koyama, 1993; Mizutani, 1993).

However, while tilting toward the United States on some issues, Japan's policy remained consistently independent as regards Iran, where it had large oil investments. This was seen in Japan's continuing refusal to break diplomatic and economic links with Iran despite US pressures, and its non-partisan diplomacy toward Iran and Iraq during their war of 1980–88, at a time when the United States was seeking to isolate Iran. Japanese Foreign Minister Abe Shintarō tried to mediate between the two states and Japan also sought to end Iran's isolation and redress what was viewed as an imbalance in international attitudes toward the parties in the conflict by proposing at the UN General Assembly in September 1983 that Iran's grievances be considered. Japan also took a lead at the UN Security Council in drafting a ceasefire resolution, which materialized with the passage of UNSC Resolution 598 in July 1987. Japan's resistance to US pressures over Iran even carried over to the post-Gulf War period of US hegemony: as host of the 1993 G8 summit meeting, Japan blocked a US attempt to engineer a condemnation of Iran (Tateyama, 1993, pp. 27–30).

The Gulf War of 1990–91, however, marked a transition to a new era in Japan's international commitments and a pro-US tilt in its Middle East policy. Japan faced unprecedented US demands for military participation in the anti-Iraq coalition. However, still operating under its traditional anti-militarist norms, Japan declined. For example, despite a US request, the government refrained from the use of the Air Self-Defense Force (ASDF) to transport US troops and equipment from the United States to the Middle East and instead, chartered US commercial aircraft for this purpose. However, as a substitute for a military contribution, Japan provided large-scale economic support of US$13 billion for US military operations against Iraq, shouldering 16% of the war's expense. Moreover, Japan also aided US regional allies: this included the provision of advanced equipment to help avoid mines on approaches to

Kuwait and Saudi Arabia and US$2 billion in aid to Turkey, Jordan, and Egypt, the pro-Western states which were considered 'most seriously affected' by the war (Inoguchi, 1993; Nishihara, 1995, p. 168; Unger, 1997; Okamoto, 2004, pp. 194–197, 205–206).

2.3 Post-Gulf War period: partial bandwagoning with US hegemony

In the period following the Gulf War, Japan adopted an increasingly pro-US policy in the region and experimented with a restrained use of military means in its security strategy. The conduct and outcome of the Gulf War, in which the United States led a victorious international coalition, combined with the end of the Cold War and the removal of the Soviet counter-vailing power, seemed to mark Washington's emergence as an undisputed global and Middle East hegemon. The war led to an unprecedented US military presence in the Gulf by which the hegemon could readily secure the unrestricted flow of energy resources to consumer states; the United States also became an active mediator in the Middle East peace process and a protector of the Arab oil monarchies against Iraq and Iran. Parallel to this, Japan's energy vulnerability to the Middle East further declined as a result of the US role in the region, the continuation of the oil glut in the nineties, declining dependency on imported oil for energy, and the further fragmentation of the Arab-Islamic states as a result of the Gulf War. On the other hand, in East Asia, toward the end of the 1990s, Japan became more concerned with security threats from rising Chinese power and North Korean nuclear development, hence more sensitive to the possibility of US abandonment after the disappearance of Cold War superpower rivalry (Keukeleire, 2001, p. 173; Amaki, 2003, p. 194). Also, when the bursting of Japan's bubble economy in 1991 threw the country into economic stagnation while US economic decline was reversed, US leverage over Japan also increased and trade disputes declined.

Given the decline in Japan's vulnerability to MENA, increases in US leverage and pressure on Japan for cooperation in MENA, and the enhanced US dominance over the Gulf, both the need of and scope for an independent Japanese policy in MENA contracted. Hence, Japan's regional diplomacy began a further tilt toward the United States. Japan's involvement in Arab–Israeli peace diplomacy deepened after the Gulf

War when in 1992 it officially joined the United States-led Madrid Middle East peace initiative as a regular member of the multilateral working groups. The peace process gave Japan an opportunity to appease the United States and raise its claim to an international leadership role through the provision of Official Development Assistance (ODA) to states which supported US peace initiatives, such as Egypt, which had signed a peace treaty with Israel and gave pivotal assistance to the United States in the Gulf War, Jordan, which became the second largest recipient of Japanese aid in the region after Egypt once it signed a United States-sponsored peace treaty with Israel, and even Syria as a reward for allying with the United States in the Gulf War and entering negotiations with Israel in the 1990s (conversely, when Syrian–Israeli peace talks stalled from the late nineties and the United States lost interest in the Syrian track by the new millennium, Japanese diplomatic interest in and ODA to Syria both started to decline) (Tateyama, 1992/93; Kuroda, 1994a,b; Noboru, 1997; Rynhold, 2002).

The most significant departure from Japan's traditional policy after the Gulf War, however, was its modest activation of heretofore eschewed military deployments. This began with the sending of Maritime Self-Defense Force minesweepers to the Persian Gulf in the aftermath of the war, a mission Japan had previously declined during the Iran–Iraq war. After the passage of the PKO Law in 1992, SDF participation in UN peacekeeping operations, international humanitarian missions, and international supervision of elections was made legally possible; in the late 1990s, Japanese personnel were sent to observe elections in Palestine, to participate in nuclear inspections in Iraq (UNSCOM), and to join the UN assistance mission in Afghanistan. Restrictions remained on the tasks the SDF could undertake, however, as was clear in the case of its participation in the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), a cease-fire observation mission on the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, where the SDF was restricted to rear support tasks (Dobson, 1998; Oikawa, 1998). However, the amendment of the PKO Law in November 2001 expanded allowable SDF duties in PKO missions to include patrolling of demilitarized zones with appropriate armament.

The next watershed in Japan's MENA policy resulted from the post-9/11 US engagement in two wars, against the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001 and on Iraq in 2003. Japan came under pressure to take part in these United States-led operations launched under the banner of

'coalitions of the willing'. In order to allow SDF co-operation with US forces in Afghanistan, the government passed the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law (*Tero Tokuso Hō*) in October 2001, with the UN resolution enabling the military attack on Afghanistan providing the legal justification. This law enabled SDF logistical support for United States-led 'coalition' forces in combat operations, removed the PKO Law requirement of a cease-fire and consent of the parties for Japanese involvement, and authorized the SDF's use of force for defense of its own and US troops and other lives 'under their protection' under certain conditions. However, the government's initial intention of sending ground troops to Afghanistan and an Aegis intelligence-gathering vessel to the Indian Ocean to support US operations had both to be abandoned owing to political resistance, even from within the ruling party; the best the government could manage was the dispatch of a vessel to provide water and fuel for 'coalition' naval vessels in the Indian Ocean supporting operations in Afghanistan (Patterson, 1997; Iwamoto and Edirippulige, 2002; Katzenstein, 2002).

The Iraq war of 2003 marked the most extreme case of Japan's tilt toward the US in the Middle East. Already in the nineties, Japan had bowed to US pressures to cut all economic links with Iraq, had co-sponsored a 1998 UN Security Council resolution calling for Iraq to cooperate with UN weapons inspections, and had publicly supported the subsequent US–UK bombings of Iraq when Iraq expelled the inspectors. When, in 2002, the United States began its drive for international support to attack Iraq over its purported WMDs, Japan immediately supported it, even though most other states were critical of a rush to war. When international support for the US attack on Iraq was not forthcoming, Japanese diplomats started lobbying UN Security Council member states for a resolution authorizing an attack; remarkably, thus, Japanese diplomacy was actually seeking to facilitate a war, an unprecedented departure from its anti-militarist norms and its normal practice of seeking to mediate conflicts. This was because while the US government was prepared to invade Iraq without a resolution and would expect Japan to participate in its campaign, the government knew it would not be able to secure the Diet legislation enabling its involvement without the legitimacy of a UN resolution. Since the UN resolution did not materialize, the government was only able to give the United States political support for the war and waited until the 'official' end of the war before

extending military support. In order to enable SDF co-operation with US forces in Iraq after the war, the Law concerning Special Measures on Humanitarian and Reconstruction Assistance in Iraq (*Iraku Tokuso Hō*) was passed in July 2003, which, for the first time, legalized the deployment of the Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF) on foreign soil, although only to support peacekeeping and reconstruction activities and only after a UN resolution authorizing such reconstruction was internationally agreed. The ASDF also helped transport US troops to Iraq, in sharp contrast to the 1990 Gulf War when Japan had rejected a similar US request. Reflecting these changes, the National Defense Program Guideline of December 2004 redefined Japan's security as not merely defense against an immediate attack on Japan but also to include improving the international security environment to reduce the chances of threats reaching Japan (JDA, 2006; Miyagi, 2009).

Parallel to this, ODA resources were concentrated, at US behest, on post-war reconstruction of Afghanistan and Iraq.[5] The Japanese government's policy was to supply 10% of the total international assistance for both Afghanistan and Iraq. Of the total US$4.5 billion internationally pledged at the conference for the post-war reconstruction of Afghanistan in January 2002, Japan offered US$500 million; it also pledged US$5 billion at the conference for Iraqi reconstruction held in October 2003, nearly 10% of the $55 billion called for by the United States. The average share of total Japanese ODA allocated to the Middle East rose from 10% since the 1970s to 17.31% after the Iraq war, a peak in Japan's expenditure in support of US MENA policy (MOFA, 2003).

In spite of the long-term shift of Japan's policy orientation toward the United States, the war against Iraq was in some respects exceptional because of a special combination of circumstances. Japanese policy-makers did not, in this case, see a conflict among Japan's major interests at stake, namely, maintaining the US alliance, securing oil relationships with Middle East states, and promoting Japan's international prestige. First, Japanese elites perceived US global and regional hegemony as unchallengeable and discerned an exceptional US determination to lead a 'coalition of the willing', from which Japan could not afford to exclude itself; having suffered US opprobrium for non-involvement in the 1990

5 The US request was made through the Japanese ambassador to United States (*Asahi Shinbun*, 9 October 2003).

Gulf War, they grasped the opportunity to demonstrate Japan's value to the US alliance and hence reinforce the US commitment to Japan's defense against East Asian threats. Second, the oil factor which had been the main force behind an independent Japanese policy in the Middle East was neutralized in the Iraq case because Japan had abandoned its oil interests in Iraq during the nineties under strong US pressure; moreover, because Iraq under Saddam Hussein had been internationally isolated for a decade, Japanese policy-makers believed US-engineered regime change would go unopposed in the Middle East, would be easily achieved, and would re-open oil opportunities for Japanese business in Iraq, provided that Japan bandwagoned with the United States in the war (Miyagi, 2009).

Moreover, Japan's participation in Iraq (and also in the Afghan war) was not merely the result of external pressures and interests but was also seen by the government as an *opportunity* to further expand the permissible use of the SDF, justifying it as necessary to contribute to the US alliance (Okamoto, 2003; Ishiba, 2005). Indeed, the lesson of the 1990–91 Gulf War for Japan's new generation of elites had been that international leadership required Japan to acquire military capabilities, abandon its non-military security strategy, and start to act like a conventional great power. These elites saw Middle East crises as opportunities to wear down anti-militarist resistance to their agenda from the Japanese public and to alter the very identity of the country from an anti-militarist trading state based on an independent foreign policy to one that seeks to be a 'normal' state playing a military role in world politics as an active junior partner of the United States. However, these ambitions were far from fully realized in the Iraq war. The hostility of the public and constitutional limits on SDF activity meant the government was forced to confine the SDF to non-combat-related roles and to turn down a US request for the SDF to provide rear combat support of its forces in post-Saddam Iraq, where the United States was facing an on-going insurgency. The constitutional limits could not be circumvented because the lack of UN Security Council authorization for the war hardened Japanese public opinion against it, showing how important UN endorsement remained if Japan's military involvement was to have legitimacy. Moreover, it took the unprecedented strong leadership of Prime Minister Koizumi to force through even this diluted policy innovation in the face of anti-militarist public opposition and hesitation within parts of his

own policy-making circles; without his role, Japan's policy would have been more minimalist in its military participation and less blatant in its pro-US stance (Tachibana, 2003).

After Koizumi, Japan's appetite for MENA involvement seemed to decline. In 2005, it declined to commit SDF troops for a proposed UN Mission (UNMIS) in Dhafur (a high conflict area) although in October 2011 it did decide to deploy SDF units for infrastructure building following the establishment of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) (a post-conflict mission). In the next internationalized regional crisis unleashed by the Arab Uprising of 2011, Japan was largely a bystander, merely following the Western lead, e.g. in imposing sanctions on the Libyan and Syrian regimes, where it had no important energy stake at risk.

As such, there is still no across-the-board militarization and Americanization of Japanese policy in the Middle East. Indeed, the Iraq case apart, Japan's Middle East policy continues to display aspects of its earlier political neutrality or balancing between the United States and the Arab and Islamic states and also its stress on the use of economic instruments of influence. One salient example is Japan's continued stress on assistance to the Palestinian community, the core Arab party to the Arab–Israeli conflict. The Japanese government has seized every opportunity to advertise its support for the Palestinian Authority (PA) since its formation in 1993, initially in response to Washington's expectation of a large Japanese contribution in support of the 1993 Oslo Accord, for which Japan pledged US$2 billion dollars, the third largest amount after the EU and US pledges, for infrastructure and institution building, in order to 'encourage and accelerate the peace process'. When, a decade later, US President George W. Bush announced the 'Road Map for the Peace Process', the Japanese government announced a package of economic assistance called the 'Road Map for Japanese Assistance to Palestinians', and on the electoral victory of Mahmud Abbas, the American-backed candidate, as president of PA in January 2004, Japan increased its financial aid. However, that Japan's commitment was not purely driven by US expectations was indicated by the fact that its financial aid to Palestine did not end following the victory of HAMAS (Islamic Resistance Movement) in the first Parliament election in January 2006, despite the US push to cut international aid for the HAMAS-ruled Palestinian regime. This was because neutrality in the Arab–Israeli conflict remained a normative cornerstone of Japan's

Middle East policy, and because the Palestine issue remained an important way of placating Arab opinion that would otherwise be disenchanted with Japan's tilt toward the United States in MENA, especially in the Iraq war. However, in 2011, Japan bandwagoned with the United States in refraining from support for the PA's bid for UN recognition of Palestinian statehood, most likely under intense US pressure.

A second manifestation of independence in Japan's Middle East policy has been its promotion of a WMD-free zone for the Middle East, a stance that pleased the Arab states but was unwelcome to the United States and Israel. As a state especially committed to nuclear disarmament, Japan has been an active promoter of this zone, one of the unfulfilled agenda items of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference held in 1995. Japan was even vocal in criticizing the lack of commitment to it on the part of the United States and Israel.[6]

On the Iranian nuclear issue, Japan has only reluctantly succumbed to US pressures. Japan has shown considerable ambivalence, being caught between its anti-nuclear normative commitment and US alliance, on the one hand, and its energy security, on the other. In the 1990s, the reformist Iranian President Khatami had offered Japan a privileged position in the development of the potentially rich Azedegan oil fields, an offer Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), in particular, was keen to pursue since it would allow Japan to secure an oil concession in an area not yet claimed by Western firms, develop the upstream exploration and extraction capacity of its oil industry, and secure Iranian hydrocarbon supplies on a long-term basis (Takahashi, 1993, 1995a).

However, the United States, which was seeking to isolate Iran, disapproved of any move that would strengthen the Iranian regime President Bush had famously put in his 'axis of evil'. Once the issue of Iran's supposed quest for nuclear weapons became an international crisis, the United States used the issue to pressure Japan to divest itself of its stake in Iran. As the issue rose on the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Board of Governors' agenda in the summer of 2003, Japan

6 Interview with a former ambassador to Iran and a current senior researcher on arms control at JIIA on 8 September 2005; MOFA Statement by Ambassador Takasu Yukio, Representative of Japan at subsidiary body of Main Committee II of the 2005 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), 20 May 2005, http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/un/disarmament/upt/conf0505-7.html (9 August 2005, date last accessed).

actively cooperated with the United States by co-sponsoring a resolution against Iran with the United States and European states. Japan supported this international pressure on Iran in the belief that it would raise the profile of Japan's anti-nuclear activism, but also that Iran would capitulate and hence the obstacles the nuclear issue placed in the way of Japan's business and energy relations with the country would be removed. This (mis-)perception derived in part from Japan's optimistic belief that US regional hegemony had been so enhanced by its occupation of Iraq that Iran would succumb to US demands. However, when Iran resisted the pressure and warned Japan that it was risking its oil stake in the country, Japan backed off and reverted to its more traditional policy of balancing, generally taking, for a time, a more neutral or low-profile position when the Iranian nuclear issue was raised at IAEA and in the UN Security Council. In the end, the United States had its way: the Security Council imposed several rounds of sanctions on Iran, and Japan largely withdrew from Azedegan, only to see its place taken by China (Bungei Shunjū Nihon no Ronten, 2003; Sadamori, 2007; Miyagi, 2008, pp. 127–155). Japan held on to a lowered 10% stake in Azedagan as a gesture toward Iran of Japan's commitment to their relationship until the decision for complete withdrawal in October 2010 under US pressure to apply sanctions. Japan continued, however, to buy Iranian oil and even initiated semi-official business forums in anticipation of re-building in future its energy and business relationships with Iran. However, it diverted most of its investment to downstream petrochemical projects in Saudi Arabia and to oil development in post-war Iraq, where its involvement coincided with its US alliance.

What explains the continuing measure of independence in Japan's policy? First, at the systemic level of material power balances and vulnerabilities, the aftermath of the Iraq war showed that US hegemony was still contested, notably by key European states, with whom Japan at times now tacitly aligned in order to 'soft-balance' against US pressures on it, notably over Iran. Moreover, in MENA itself, the United States had become deeply unpopular while its limited ability to stabilize the region was exposed by the turmoil unleashed after the destruction of the Saddam Hussein regime, including a considerable empowering of radical Iran and, with it, its trans-state allies such as Hizbollah. Second, the end of the oil glut and the increasing global competition over finite oil supplies, and rising demand from newly industrialized Asian powers, such as

India and especially China, renewed Japan's vulnerability vis-a-via MENA oil producers; too close an association with an unpopular US administration would damage Japanese soft power and could retard the deepening of Japan's economic interdependence with MENA. On the other hand, the double nuclear issues of Iran and North Korea, where Japan's norms and security interests coincided with US policy, limited its distancing from US campaigns against both states.

Second, at the domestic level, norms continued to filter the way Japan viewed its interests. To be sure, the normative factor did sometimes legitimize a pro-US policy when WMDs were at issue, as in Iraq in the 1990s and during episodes of the Iran nuclear crisis in the early 2000s. However, more often norms worked to constrain Japan's pro-US policy. The anti-nuclear norm encouraged a Japanese initiative for Middle East de-nuclearization at odds with US policy and the norm of neutrality in the Arab–Israeli conflict limits how far Japan can embrace Washington's pro-Israel policy. The constitution, reinforced by public anti-militarism, has limited how far Japan could militarily support the United States in Afghanistan and Iraq. While the government has been able to erode national norms such as anti-militarism, and notably exploits the on-going North Korean nuclear threat to do so, policy-makers are still far from being free to implement their preferred policy when it violates these norms. Indeed, post-Koizumi governments have been too short of political strength and cohesion to take further steps in such a direction.

3. Conclusion

MENA has been a prime site of contestation over Japan's role in international affairs, and successive MENA crises have altered this role. Japan's MENA policy has been shaped by the demands, constraints, and pressures emanating from the global, regional, inter-regional, and domestic contexts in which policy-makers must operate. When these factors converged, they tilted Japan's policy either toward MENA (1970s) or the United States (1990–2000s); when they were in conflict, Japan balanced between the two.

Japan's 1970s' tilt away from the United States in favor of an independent Japanese policy in MENA was driven by a convergence of forces at all levels: declining provision of public goods by a declining hegemon combined with rising energy vulnerability in MENA and lessening

salience of military vulnerabilities in East Asia. This scenario was congruent with the persistence of Japan's identity as a non-military trading state and, therefore, Japan sought to address its energy vulnerability to MENA with the corresponding instruments of soft and economic power.

In the eighties, US hegemony was recovering at the global level, security threats in East Asia revalidated the importance of the US alliance, and energy vulnerability in MENA was declining with the oil glut and the fragmentation of the Arab power bloc of the seventies. At the same time, Japan's rise as an economic superpower was both putting its US alliance under great strain and also precipitating growing ambitions in the policy-making elite for international prestige. Yet, constrained by Japan's anti-militarist political culture, this was pursued by becoming an 'aid power', which in MENA chiefly meant the use of economic assistance to support US objectives and conflict resolution, both expected to enhance energy security.

The nineties ushered in an era of US hegemony globally (with the end of the Soviet Union) and in the Middle East (with its victory in the Gulf War). This, combined with the reversal in the economic tangents of the United States and Japan and the rise of security threats in East Asia (North Korea especially), increased Japan's need for the US alliance at a time when its energy vulnerability vis-a-vis MENA seemed to further decline. The Gulf War had empowered Japanese elites keen to redress Japan's lopsided power profile by enhancing its military deployment options, who used North Korea's threat to erode anti-militarist norms. This was manifest in a further tilt toward the United States in MENA, at first in the form of economic support for the peace process but increasingly in support of Washington's ongoing feud with Iraq, climaxing in unprecedented, if largely symbolic, involvement in an unprovoked war lacking UN legitimation. Japanese elites expected that Japan's energy security would be secured by partnership with the US hegemon in MENA and that the war would provide an opportunity to upgrade its military profile, although these expectations were only partly realized. In the first decade of the new millennium, continuing threats in East Asia kept Japan closely aligned with the United States, but uncertainty over US hegemony (in MENA and East Asia), an end of the oil glut, and Chinese competition for energy required Japan keep some minimal distance from the United States while fiscal constraints diluted the realist ambitions of the policy-making elite.

From the point of view of IR theoretical debates, Japan seemed to be 'stuck' midway between a trading state and a traditional great power. Yet, Japan's security policy remains realistically congruent with its own situation. Economic prowess remains its first priority, with the government still unwilling to jeopardize fiscal or economic stability by breaching traditional limits on military spending; also, normative restraints on military activism persist, as the Iraq case exposed. In MENA, Japan remains a trading state, pursuing energy security through economic interdependence. Yet, Japan has steadily upgraded its military capability and deepened its US security alliance, and MENA crises have played a pivotal role in this evolution. The outcome is best seen as a more militarily enhanced version of mercantile realism.

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