

Japan as a Champion of Human Security

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For over a decade, Japan has been a vocal champion of the human security approach. This brief paper looks back to its genesis and how the human security approach persisted as a pillar of Japan's foreign policy in spite of recent political turmoil characterized by rapid changes in the leadership at the highest level of the government. It was 1998 when then-Foreign Minister Keizo Obuchi, who later became Prime Minister, introduced the concept of human security in his policy speeches. Since then, Japan has had nine Prime Ministers, and experienced major regime change from the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) in 2009. In other areas, there have been some shifts in government policy commensurate with the regime change. However, Japanese government has continued to promote mainstreaming of the concept of human security throughout this political merry-go-round. To understand this persisting commitment, it is useful to analyze the reasons from three perspectives: historical background, personal beliefs of political leaders, and the institutionalization of the concept at the UN and in the Official Development Assistance (ODA) policy.

The Gulf War in 1990-91 was an international incident that challenged Japan's foreign policy at its core. In the spirit of their long-standing security alliance, the U.S. government urged Japan to send Self-Defense Force units to join the U.S.-led multinational forces. But due to constitutional constraints, the Japanese government was unable to provide even the minimum of logistical support, and resorted to providing only financial assistance. This experience pushed Japanese political leadership to redefine Japan's potential role in its global security arrangement and led to the practical expansion of Japanese Self-Defense Forces' engagement in international crisis under the law, "Act on Cooperation for United Nations Peace-Keeping Operations and Other Operations", passed in 1992. In this context, the linkage between Japan's ODA programs and peace-building were eagerly pursued and strengthened. In addition, in the larger development community, human-centered approaches were gaining more traction, and a strong consensus around the importance of such an approach was evident at the World Summit for Social Development in 1995. The concept of human security thus became increasingly relevant for Japan by providing proactive meaning to its ODA policy within the constitutional constraints.

Another key event that further solidified the incorporation of the human security concept into Japan's policy-making was the signing of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Antipersonnel Mines and on Their Destruction in 1997. Initially, the Japanese government had taken the position of refusing to accede to the convention, following the position taken by the United States. Then, in a bold demonstration of political leadership, Foreign Minister Obuchi made a decision to join the convention against protests from Japan's defense officials and U.S. counterparts. According to Professor Keizo Takemi, then State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Obuchi needed a solid concept upon which to build a compelling argument for joining the convention, and the human security approach served as his inspiration. These historical episodes illustrate how the human security approach was not only accepted but has become a guiding principle for Japan to remain relevant in the post-Cold War world, within the "pacifist" constitutional constraints which limit Japan's active engagement in traditional security issues.

The concept of human security has also resonated with the personal beliefs of successive Prime Ministers. Foreign Minister Obuchi's speech in Singapore in May 1998 was the first policy announcement that embraced the concept of human security. However, it was Tomiichi Murayama who echoed the concept of human security officially for the first time as Japanese Prime Minister in his speech at the Special Commemorative Meeting of the General Assembly on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the UN. Murayama was the first socialist prime minister since 1948 under a coalition government of LDP, Social Democratic Party of Japan (SDPJ) and Sakigake, and the concept of human security was a good fit for his political principle of a "caring society."

When Obuchi proposed human security as a policy concept to couch the importance of extending assistance to the socially vulnerable populations affected by the Asian financial crisis in his speech in Singapore, it reflected a tone expressed by Murayama. It is said that Obuchi's embrace of human security reflected his character and the importance he placed on taking care of people. The concept of human security continued to resonate with a more recent Prime Minister, Naoto Kan, who served in this position until just last year. Kan referred to human security several times in his remarks as Prime Minister as the political motto of his governance, which is directly translated as "the creation of society with the least unhappiness." This is a deliberate contrast to Bentham's "greatest happiness" principle. It is fair to say that the concept of human security has been in concert with the core

principles or beliefs of the major political leaders of the last few decades, explaining Japan's continued commitments to human security.

After Obuchi's official pronouncement that Japan would embrace and promote the concept of human security, the Japanese government actively advocated the concept at the UN, and made efforts to mainstream the concept in its ODA policy. For example, as a tool to promote practical application of the concept of human security through UN agencies, the Japanese government created the Trust Fund for Human Security within the UN in 1999. Then, to redefine human security as a policy concept based on the experiments of the Fund, the Japanese government initiated the establishment of the Commission on Human Security in 2001, co-chaired by Madame Sadako Ogata and Professor Amartya Sen. The Commission subsequently published its report *Human Security Now* in 2003, which continues to serve as a milestone document. The Japanese government also created, in collaboration with Mexico, an informal network called "Friends of Human Security" among various UN member countries to promulgate an understanding of a human security approach through non-military means. These efforts resulted in paragraph 143 on human security in 2005 World Summit Outcome, and UN Resolutions in 2010 (A/RES/64/291) and 2012 (A/66/L.55).

As for Japan's ODA policy, the "grassroots grant aid" that has been available to NGOs and local governments in developing countries was redesigned and renamed as "grassroots human security grant aid" in 2003, with the explicit intention of advocating for the concept. Furthermore, in August 2003, Japan's ODA charter was revised for the first time in ten years, and human security was explicitly stated as one of Japan's fundamental policy frameworks. The Midterm Policy on ODA also placed human security as a central policy tool for Japanese aid. The Japanese government was hence successful in institutionalizing human security at the UN system and in its own ODA policy.

By the time of the publication of this paper, Japan will have yet another government in place. It is not yet clear if the newly-elected Prime Minister will have a personal affinity towards the concept of human security. Either way, considering that the ODA budget – a critical tool to promote the human security approach -- has been cut by half since 1997, the challenge for the Japanese government to remain a champion of human security is significant.

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