

5th Australia-Japan Dialogue

Brisbane, December 10, 2015

Policy Convergence and Divergence in Australia and Japan: Assessing Identity Shift within the Bi-Lateral Relationship

Background

Debate over the meaning and desirability of a more “normal” Japan has continued since the early 1990s when Ichiro Ozawa announced his *Blueprint for a New Japan* in response to what he saw as the new realities of the post-Cold War era. Indeed, some of the reforms called for by Ozawa either have been achieved in the political and electoral domain, or are still in progress. These include the shelving of the post-war Yoshida Doctrine and incremental moves towards freeing up Japan’s legal restrictions on the use of its military. There has been a debate in Japan for some time over the necessity or otherwise of these mooted changes, and other countries in the region have made their perspectives clear on key issues surrounding this debate.

The development of a new and more conventional security and diplomatic identity for Japan – Ozawa’s main objective – has progressed rapidly under current Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe. This was underscored by the Abe Cabinet’s high profile ‘re-interpretation’ of Article 9 in 2014, and the Government’s increasingly ambitious pronouncements on strategic policy more broadly. Criticised by some as an ultra-nationalist keen on glorifying Japan’s military past, and applauded by others for navigating Japan’s escape from the uncertainty of the “lost decades”, Prime Minister Abe’s policies are controversial and their eventual legacy remains unclear.

What is clear, however, is that Japan’s identity in the broader region is changing, and the meaning of the various changes – political, legal, aspirational – underpinning Japan’s collective makeover as a nation state remain disputed at home and abroad, particularly in Northeast Asia. When examined only through the lenses of Japan’s “peace constitution” and its past occupations of Korea, China, and Southeast Asia, concern over any departure from the formal renunciation of military force that has characterised Japan’s foreign policy for more than six decades is understandable. But when viewed in the context of Asia’s increasingly fluid strategic environment, a broader perspective on the Abe government’s policies, what is driving these policies, and their likely effects in shaping Japan’s future identity, becomes possible.

Objectives and Approach

The 2015 Australia-Japan Dialogue seeks to locate Japan’s political and security reforms within this context by examining the level of convergence and divergence between Australian and Japanese policy responses to contemporary international pressures. The Dialogue is aimed at identifying the extent to which Japan’s emerging identity as a more active international actor is being driven by structural and material change in the global order and to what extent it is being shaped by domestic factors in Japanese politics. Australia and Japan’s similar political systems and values; strategic alignments; and foreign policy priorities, including the further development of trade and investment ties, provide a strong basis for gauging the level of external influence on domestic policy and debate in both countries. Indeed, comparing the Japanese experience with the Australian experience is significant because both countries face similar challenges in Asia with respect to geopolitical shifts triggered by the redefinition of the US-China relationship and economic forces resulting from

multilateral initiatives, including the Trans-Pacific Partnership. How Japan redefines its own role in Asia and beyond will impact on the future of the Australia-Japan relationship, so it is critical to grasp the various dynamics that will shape that redefinition.

Thus, a broader, more contextualised, analysis of the drivers behind Japan's current shift away from its traditional pacifist identity towards that of a more engaged state actor able to act beyond only the realm of economic and financial contribution and influence is important for better understanding both i) the drivers of Japan's identity shift; and ii) the kinds of policy interests that are likely to evolve from this shift and their likely effects on the Australia-Japan bi-lateral relationship.

Collaborative Goals and Outcomes

The Australia-Japan Dialogues are focused on the bi-lateral relationship of two sovereign states and are conducted, therefore, within the domains of foreign policy analysis and International Relations. But while theoretical approaches operating only at the international or system level, as with Neo-Realism for example, can generate general conclusions about the behaviour of states in an anarchical international environment, analysing the foreign policy behaviour of *individual* states requires analysis at *both* the international and domestic levels if we are to also recognise how structural and ideational influences at either level combine to influence and shape foreign policy thinking and behaviour. The annual Australia-Japan Dialogues and their goal of better understanding the bi-lateral relationship's various challenges and opportunities thus provide a valuable opportunity for collaboration between political scientists, international relations specialists, and policy experts. Indeed, the 2015 Dialogue's theme is squarely focused on promoting both interdisciplinary and institutional cooperation in Australia-Japan related research, and seeks to do so by bringing together experts and scholars from various fields and areas of expertise to participate in a comparative analysis of Japanese and Australian politics and policy making, an analysis we expect to provide important insights into the nature and drivers of Japan's identity shift, and the types of challenges and opportunities it is likely to present for the bi-lateral partnership.

GAI intends to publish the Dialogue papers from each session (2,500-3,000 words) in a joint research volume, to be distributed in Japan and Australia, but also encourages collaboration between the presenters, and also participants, in each session toward the production of expanded papers that can be submitted for publication in peer reviewed journals. Toward this end and also for the purposes of their presentations, Presenters are encouraged to contact each other during the development of their Dialogue papers to outline and coordinate topics and ideas.

Session Structure

Each session will comprise the presentation of two written discussion papers (15 mins each) followed by open discussion and contributions (approximately 45 mins, including chairperson's remarks; Session 1 is limited to 30 mins discussion time) from the audience and other panellists. The following five panel session topics will comprise the 2015 Dialogue's targeted areas of comparison between Japan and Australia:

- 1) The Regional Security Environment: Overview of Issues, Actors and Trends
- 2) Legislative Action on Security
- 3) Executive Influence and Accountability in Security Policy Making and Implementation
- 4) Government Perceptions of the Contemporary Regional and International Environment
- 5) Changes in Australian and Japanese Party Politics – Electoral issues and political trends