

ABE'S FOREIGN POLICY

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Abstrak

Tulisan ini berusaha menjelaskan mengenai Perdana Menteri Jepang, Shinzo Abe, dalam isu diplomasi keamanan sebagai langkah responsif terhadap perubahan keamanan di sekitar Jepang. Data dalam tulisan ini berasal dari sumber sekunder, terutama jurnal, laporan resmi dan buku. Temuan dari sumber-sumber tersebut menunjukkan bahwa karena menghadapi ancaman eksternal, langkah berani dibuat untuk mengatasi ancaman keamanan meskipun ada protes besar. Selain itu, di bawah tema diplomasi bernama "diplomasi perdamaian proaktif", tampaknya Abe bertujuan untuk membentuk aliansi keamanan yang dipimpin Jepang di wilayah tersebut. Jepang dalam konteks Asia, sebagai poros aliansi keamanan Jepang-AS. Terdapat hambatan konstitusional, khususnya pasal 9 yang bersangkutan mengenai kebijakan luar negeri yang independen akan dibatasi.

Kata Kunci: *Kebijakan Luar Negeri, Shinzo Abe, dan Jepang*

Abstract

The essay seeks to examine the Japanese Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe's security diplomacy in responsive to changes in the security environment surrounding Japan. The data referred in the essay is from the secondary sources, mainly academic journals and books. The finding showed that due to external threat, a bold move was made to pass the security bills despite a major protest. Moreover, under his theme of diplomacy named "proactive peace diplomacy", it appears that he aims to form a Japan-led-security alliance in the region. In spite of this, Japan is embedded in the Asia context on the axis of the Japan-US security alliance. As long as the constitutional constraints, especially the article 9 clause are concerned, the pursuit of independent foreign policy would be limited.

Keywords: Foreign Policy, Shinzo Abe, and Japan

INTRODUCTION

The incumbent Japanese Prime Minister (PM), Shinzo Abe, regained the power after the landslide victory over the election in late 2012. It has not been seen in the Japanese politics that the leader of Japan is proactively visiting countries around the world as frequently as him to strengthen economic cooperation, to deepen the political engagement, and promote cultural exchanges. The negative political image in the Japanese premiership due to yearly routine of changes in the leadership since 2006, has transformed into a stable, strong and active leadership. It has been observed that the dramatic shift in the security environment surrounding Japan due to the China's economic and military rise, unstable North Korea's regime, and the decline in American presence in the Asia Pacific Region is striking nowadays. It is true that in terms of economic power Japan has played crucial roles in the Asia Pacific in provision of aid, humanitarian assistance, technical support and its influence has been substantial; however, in the wake of the China's incredible economic progress as well as development of military capabilities, the power balance in the region can be strikingly observed, which uncertain outcomes could be expected. The intrusion by the Chinese navy or air force into the

Japanese territory is as frequent as ever and this is posing a challenge to Japan. Moreover, in the absence of strong US leadership in the Asia Pacific, despite commitment to rebalancing to Asia by the President Obama and indifference of the incumbent Trump's policy, the power imbalance has placed Japan in a difficult situation.

This essay aims to examine the evolving Prime Minister Abe's security diplomacy responsive to changes in the security environment surrounding Japan: The decline of the US presence in Asia and China's rise. These factors are selected because Japan tends to gear up the engine when Tokyo encounters threats from external powers. The diplomacy of proactive contribution to peace originates from these external factors and the pursuit of the policy has been initiated by the leader of Japan to mitigate the situation. This essay is organized as follows: In the first section, it gives explanation of external factors of China's growing influence and the US ambiguity in Asia. In the first part of second section, the changes in the domestic politics, policies, and measures will be addressed while in the second part, Abe's proactive diplomacy is examined. Based on the analysis from both parts, the conclusion will be derived.

METHOD

The research methodology of this paper involves the use of primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are obtained from Cabinet Office of Japan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Defence. The secondary sources are derived from existing literatures, journals, books, and online news articles. Based on these sources, the essay discusses Prime Minister Abe's shift in the security policies and diplomacy.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

External Threat to Japan

Japan is a country whose domestic politics has been fluctuated from external shock. The modern Japan started from the response to the arrival of black ship by Thomas Perry in 1853. Due to the economic sanctions on natural resources, the government decided to expand movement towards Southeast Asia and moved onto the Pacific War. The current shift in the policy could be also explained from the external shocks such as relative decline of the US presence in the Asia and Chinese economic and military strengthen. These two factors will be discussed in this section.

1) US's presence in Asia

The President Obama's initial Asian policy had given China opportunities to leverage over the region and the presence of the US in the region had dwindled. The Washington's security role in Asia became ambiguous because the economic interest outweighed security interest. Obama (2009) stated at the U.S/China strategic and economic dialogue that the US and China share mutual interests wherein emphasis was on the economic cooperation, nuclear weapon problems, and transnational threats, which are advanced by cooperation. In his early tenure, it was clear that his reluctance to express negative view on Chinese such as human right violation, suppression of ethnic minorities, and political opponent was evident. It seems that the US foreign policy towards China was emphasized on the economic cooperation to gain the access to the Chinese market. It can be analysed that soft China policy stemmed from economic opportunity resulted in the China's expansionism behaviour in Asia. For example, one of the Chinese military officer offered to a top US Admiral to halve the Pacific Ocean between America and China (Pubby, 2009). The China's aim is to exclude American's influence in this Asia Pacific so that Beijing dominates the region economically and militarily. Gordon (2012)

reported that as China's interest is increasing, the degree of US influence is declining. US's influence was substantial in the past, but it is not the case in the current period. Moreover, the announcement by the Obama (2013) "*we should not be the world's policeman*" has also significant implication to China although this speech aimed at the Syrian crisis on the issue of military intervention. Towards end of his tenure, the President Obama has committed to Asia as "pivot to Asia"; however, it appears that his action was rather late. During his appeasement period, China's militarization of islands and artificial isles in the South China Sea (SCS) are surging and tensions are raising without the US military presence. These two statements, which Obama announced, have significant implication for China and countries concern.

Furthermore, the Japan's political turmoil during Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) is also a cause of decline of the US presence. Although the strong Japan and US security alliance contributed to the stability and security in this region, politicians from DPJ did not comprehend how important this alliance is. The Prime Minister Hatoyama's fragile leadership and ambiguity over relocation of US military base in Okinawa fuelled mistrust with the

US counterpart. Also, his "*Yuai*" diplomacy (fraternity diplomacy) that is based on the Constructivist's view of values, norms, and cultures has hints that the US is not as important partner as used to be because his vision to establish the East Asian Community is exclusion of the United States. DPJ's policy of exclusion of the US from regional community, indecision over relocation of the military based, and less dependence on the US had led to the uncertainty in the region (Easley, 2017). It can be said that the decline of the US presence in the Asia is due to the Obama's unwillingness to commit to this region and Japan's domestic political fiasco. Although Obama modified the its policy later to counterbalance the China's expansionism, Beijing has gradually made a progress in the islands in the SCS. PM Abe's commitment to strengthen the bilateral relationship with America is attributed to the fact that weakened security ties between Tokyo and the Washington under DPJ's rule, which gave leeway to China to develop strategies and to expand influence in Asia.

2) China's rise

Understanding China's recent transformation as a second largest economy in GDP term, its growing military expenditure to build up the latest military

capabilities, and expansion of economic advantages in the international order are of importance. Zhang (2015) argues the Japan's anxiety is resulting from the fact that China became the second largest economy in the world, Beijing has been increased defence budget year by year, and she shows strong ambition over territorial disputes in Diaoyu/Senkaku islands. China has improved its economic progress since the introduction of opening up policies by Den Xiao Ping. When China was in the process of progress, assertiveness or aggression was seldom seen. It could be said that increased economic power has given the tremendous confidence. Also, it can be analysed that hosting the Olympic game in 2008 was an entrance to become a matured economic nation.

It can be said that Beijing's aim is to regain the Sino-centric system in Asia like they used to dominate the East Asia and part of Southeast Asia until defeat in the Opium War in the 19th century. BBC (2013) reported that Xi's speech on China's dream was "*strive to achieve the Chinese dream of great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation*". Xi's speech seems to imply that great rejuvenation is to bounce back to the Chinese dynastic system with the strong military army, with dominating cultural influence towards peripheries' states and

obedience to the central government. In order to fulfil this aim, Chinese initiative can be observed in many areas; firstly, the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is one of the areas that Beijing is aiming to play a leading role in China-led system. Secondly, the new economic strategy called "One Belt, One Road" policy is announced to increase the Chinese presence in Asia, Central Asia, and Eastern Europe. The Silk Road Project, which is complemented by the fund from AIIB, is vital economic project to consolidate China's political and economic power in the international society so that she could build the Beijing-led international order.

As mentioned earlier, China gained confidence from its increasing influence outside of the world and this led to aggressive behaviour against Japan in the issue of territorial or history in the past. It has reported that territorial intrusion into Japanese airspace has increased sharply. According to the Ministry of Defense (2017), the figure for scramble by the Japanese air force hiked to 851 out of 1168 in total. This figure has quintupled in 2016 in comparison with 5 years ago. Needless to say, the incursion into the territorial water by Chinese vessels near Senkaku/Diaoyu islands has dramatically increased from 2 in

2011 to 131 in 2016 (MOFA, 2017 a). It is true that intrusion into territorial water dramatically increased since the nationalization of the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands in 2012 by the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ). It appears that China takes a threatening measure so as to win the concession from Tokyo. In the past, it may withdraw concession from Japan; however, unlike predecessors, Abe is determined to take different approach to protect national interest of Japan. Abe's diplomacy has differed from predecessors' government and this will be discussed in the following sections.

Changes in The Internal Policy

The national diet passed the Security Bill in 2015 after the controversial debates and stream rolling of the law, which angered the certain public and opposition parties. Under the new security law, there are mainly three points to be discussed. Firstly, greater role of the Self-defence forces in overseas is expected if conditions are met. Secondly, limited collective defence will be allowed to exercise if conditions are in scope of the new guideline. Lastly, relaxation on transfer of defence equipment and technology to overseas countries introduced in the Abe Cabinet. It could be argued that these changes are made to contest the emerging

threat from external factors examined above. The external factors have devised the security policy of Japan. Domestic politics and controversial changes are to be discussed in the following.

Domestic Politics

Despite a short-term tenure and weak political figure in his first term as PM, Abe has regained the popularity in his second term. An opinion poll conducted by the NHK (2017), the national public broadcasting, reveals that public supports Abe's cabinet at roughly 50 % although approval rating plumped in 2015 when controversial national security bill was debated. One of the main explanations of this could be resulted from external threats such as China's aggressiveness, North Korea's reckless act, and South Korea's insincerity on the so-called comfort women issue. Nagy (2017) claims that Abe demonstrated the China card effectively like former PM Koizumi so that he could centralize the power in the domestic politics. Increase in the party and public support are related to the tough stance against countries mentioned above. It can be said that the hard-liner policy against foreign nations would be contributable to the increase in the approval rating. As external threats are linked to the national security problems, inflaming nationalism is

rather easier way to gain public support because opposition parties are unable to oppose it and public in general support the view. This strategy is generally carried out by the Chinese authority when the Communist Party intentionally organized the demonstration or rallies against Japan over historical issues. Abe's tough posture against North Korea's attempt of missile and nuclear experiments and China's aggressive behaviour in the Japanese territorial water is strongly applauded. Also, as for South Korea's case, under the Abe government, Japan has endeavoured to make a progress on the comfort women issue and reached the conclusion with the Government of South Korea and announcement of "*the issue is resolved finally and irreversibly*" was made (MOFA, 2015). It could be argued that the stability in the domestic politics stems from the centralization of the power in response to the external factors and Abe has proved that his reaction to each case have produced positive outcomes so far.

Reinterpretation of The Constitution

The decision by the Japanese Cabinet to make Constitutional reinterpretation and legislature of national security bill are one of the key strategies in Abe's police. As Abe (Cabinet Office, 2014) stated the international environment

surrounding Japan has become tense in recent years, urgent response to secure the lives and peaceful livelihood of the Japanese people is undoubtedly a necessity. Under the existing legislation frameworks, even the Japanese allies, for example, the United States attempts to rescue Japanese people under the attack from invaders, the Japanese self-defence forces are not able to fight back for the United States. The US-Japan security alliance is said to be unilateral agreement although Japan offers lands for US military bases and financial support. Under the conflict situation, it is the US military officer to sacrifice on behalf of Japanese citizens under the current framework. Abe's cabinet adopted the re-interpretation of the Constitution in order to handle the unforeseen situation. It is argued that even though the way the government interprets the constitution is revised, the Constitution still limits the exercise of the Japanese military power. Strong opposition voices exist in domestic Japan against the collective defence. An opinion poll conducted by Nikkei (2014) showed that 51% of the people participated disagree with the exercise of the collective defence right while 28% responded as agree. It could be said that the fear of being forcefully involved in the war of America may be one of the reasons that public

opinion showed the negative outcomes. Although the general public is not in favour of the collective defence, Nakanishi (2015) and Lee (2015) observed that reinterpretation of the Constitution is the turning point for Japanese security and defence, which might take actions if required. Although, the clear guideline such as a grave threat to Japanese people's lives, happiness, and survival in order to exercise the right of collective defence is set, it could be said that the reinterpretation of the Constitution is a great achievement for Abe cabinet to show seriousness of Japan's attitude against external parties. The reinterpretation of the constitution has surely positive impact on security strategy as the surrounding situation in recent years remains unstable and uncertainty.

Relaxation on The Transfer of Defence Equipment and Technology

Apart from the reinterpretation of the Constitution and legislature of national security bill, another distinctive achievement in the Abe's government is the relaxation on the transfer of defence equipment and technology. Abe's government has adopted the three principles on the arms export which allows Japan to pursue further security and defence cooperation not only specifically the United States but also other countries such as

Australia, India, the UK and ASEAN (Nakanishi, 2016). It is observed that this is a major transformation in the Japanese security diplomacy since Tokyo has not encouraged to export weapons to third countries except America. However, this would allow Tokyo to export military equipment or conduct a joint development of the defence equipment with countries interested. The lease of TC-90 training plane to the Philippine as well as donation of the patrol vessels to Hanoi are one of the examples (Jain, 2017).

Also, the official development assistance charter was modified so that grants to be applicable to the training and equipment for coastguard operation and disaster relief of nations (Easley, 2017). Despite the fact that the objective of the relaxation of the arms export is further defence and security cooperation in order to minimize the risks, the general public in Japan may come to take this as an acceleration of being merchant of death. Providing military related equipment to third countries mean that Japan is indirectly involving in the conflicts or war to some extent because recipient nations would use the weapons manufactured in Japan. According to the opinion survey, 71% of the Japanese people showed the negative view on relaxation of defence equipment

(Sakurai 2014). It makes sense that any military related policies would be taken as negative perspectives in Japan because of peaceful posture and peace addicted mind set are widespread. The peace-addicted mind that has nurtured over the course of seven decades would react to any moves that may be associated to the militaristic movement although transferring defence possessions would not lead to wars immediately. This mind or the way people enjoy the peace should be encouraged due to the fact that the Japanese has enjoyed “Peace” in the domestic society since the end of the Pacific War; however, it should be noted that situation in Asia has also transformed since the end of war.

Proactive Peace and Shared Value Diplomacy

The pursuit of the progressive policy changes implemented by Abe’s government could be resulted from the America’s unclear appeasement policy towards China and the rise of China. It is argued that these policy changes are carried out because PM is a patriotic politician whose ultimate goal is to revise the American-imposed Japanese Constitution. While Abe is the head of the government, he remains as the president of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). The one of the party’s founding platforms were to make

amendments on the constitution on a basis of condition of the country as well as the preparation of the armament to protect freedom of the people and to maintain the world peace and independence of the states (LDP 1955). It can be analysed that Abe’s proactive contribution to the peace diplomacy departed from not only the changes of geopolitical situation in Asia but also the party’s founding ideal and general principles. His political ideology come along with the LDP principle, which is interpreted as nationalistic ideology.

His diplomatic posture of proactive peace based on the common values such as freedom of speech, democracy, human right, and rule of law are the key features in his diplomacy. The proposal of establishing the security diamond amongst Australia, India, Japan and the United States is a reflection of this value and sign of counter-measurement of the growing influence of China in East Asian and SCS (Abe, 2012). The security diamond, which is envisioned by Abe, is framework of the maritime security alliance to maintain the freedom of navigation in Indian and the Western Pacific Ocean, South China and East China Sea. The significance of this maritime alliance is substantial to Japan because securement of the sea route from the Middles East to Malacca strait. As the

natural resource from the Gulf of Persian travels from the Malacca strait to Japan, the stability in the sea route is of importance since Japan is dependent on the import of the resources. Lee and Lee (2016) argued that the formation of security diamond would serve India's interest because New Delhi is in the pursuit of transforming to maritime nation by development of the naval capabilities and protection of maritime security. The trade value travelled from Indian Ocean account for 70 %. The anxiety lies ahead for India if Beijing takes further naval expansion in the Indian Ocean. Abe (2012) argues that once China's militarization in SCE is finalized, it would be hard to enter the South China Sea. It would be interpreted that prior to completion of the building of military base, Japan attempts to collaborate with countries in the scope of the security diamond and strengthen the further relationship with Philippine and Vietnam under the name of proactive peace diplomacy. This move taken by Abe is welcomed by nations such as Australia, India, and Southeast Asian countries wherein China and North Korea oppose it (Lee, 2015).

Moreover, the positive initiative taken by Abe makes strategic preparation for formation of the Japan-led-security community based on the values or interests

earlier stated above. Tokyo's aim is to promote further international cooperation and Japan as a pacifist nation plays a vital role in promotion of peace and stability in the international community (MOFA 2017 b). The is interpreted as the message directed to nations which disrupt the regional stability by increasing missile capabilities or aim to change the status quo by force or coercion. The cabinet's effort to reinterpretation of the constitution, legislation of security bill, and relaxation of arms equipment is interconnected with the vision that Japan steers the ship of the community built from the common interests and values.

Although countries in scope of the security diamond share the basic values, not all southeast Asian states do not share the same political system or economic structure. Countries like Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar, so-called Chinese satellite countries, would not be in favour of the policy that contain China since they are recipients of a vast amount of financial assistance and infrastructure projects. It is true that China's influence is already widespread on countries in Mekong region; nonetheless, Japan is also attempting to promote further economic partnership with Mekong countries. Jiye and Jusheng (2016) argued that Japan is seeking a support to

establish pro-Japan country block in this region. At Mekong-Japan summit in 2016, Japan pledged to provide 200 billion dollars over next 5 years for quality infrastructural project to contribute to the GDP growth and discussion over security matter on SCS and promotion of regional security based on mutual trust and understanding (MOFA, 2016). Although progress may be behind China, Japan's endeavour to gain confidence from Mekong countries can be clearly seen. Japanese national interest lies in the Southeast Asia, though, small states might not show affection that Tokyo expects because these states want to maximize the gain from both parties. Japan-Mekong regional framework approach would be effective measures to receive favouritism from Southeast Asian states. The creation of positive environment is contributed to the stability of the region and this serves for aim of Abe's value diplomacy.

The role of Japan in Asia Pacific has been clearly increasing since Abe is back in the office. As far as Japan is concerned, with Japan-US security alliance at the core, Tokyo takes proactive initiative and plays a wider role in Asia Pacific in a hope that formation of a Japan-led-security community is realized. It goes without saying that unless Japan revises the pacifist

clause of article 9, it is imperative to seek support from the US and this helps to rebalance the uncertain Asia's power balance. As the ruling party won the general election in 2017 and secured two-thirds in the house of representative, the first step to revise the constitution might be taken over the course of next 4 years.

CONCLUSION

Passive Japanese diplomacy is left behind and Japan puts proactive diplomacy forward. This active engagement is not usually seen in Japanese politics since Japan is the country who takes initiative when the nation is being threatened by external pressure. Green (2014) supports this view that Japan is taking balance of power approach in response to external threats. Abe's hawkish political ideology can be explained for the radical shift in Japanese diplomacy, but it is only one of the factors. The essay has identified the major changes in recent years, which are the changes of external surrounding; the decline of US presence and the rise of China. Obama's appeasement policy towards China in his early tenure has augmented the expanding assertiveness of Chinese naval and air forces in the Asia. This highlights revision of internal security law, amendment on the transferring of

defence related equipment, and debatable reinterpretation of the Constitution. These factors may explain the positiveness of the Abe's diplomatic policy. Japan has taken actions beforehand in case unforeseen incident occurred between Japan and a nation from outside. Proactive peace diplomacy in formation of the Japan-led-security alliance is the outcome of the emergence of the uncertainty. In spite of this, Japan is embedded in the Asia context on the axis of the Japan-US security alliance. As long as the constitutional constraints, especially the article 9 clause are concerned, the pursuit of independent foreign policy would be limited. The victory in the snap election in 2017 would make a strategic move towards the amendment of the constitution and it may be expected that Japan undergoes the historic changes in the constitution before the next the upper house election in 2019.

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