



Japan's Contemporary Approach to Foreign Policy Aligns With Its Strategic National Interests

A Case Study of United Nations Mission in South Sudan

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Introduction

Since the defeat and massive destruction in the country during WWII, Japan established itself as a peace-loving country through the Peace Constitution 2047, which renounces military involvement during war. In the postwar period, Japan continued to be major economic force in the world, and played an important role in foreign relations by using foreign aid and loans as its driving factors. Through the Japanese International Cooperation Agency's (JICA) Official Development Assistance (ODA) program, Japan supports many countries in terms of development, investment and capacity building, and it does the same in Africa through TICAD¹. The island country showed its renewed interest for Africa – which used to be considered a dark, distant and unfamiliar place – especially after the oil

¹ Tokyo International Conference on African Development, a Japan's long-term commitment to fostering development and peace in the continent through collaborative partnership with World Bank, UNDP, UN, AU, private sectors, civil society organizations.

crisis in the 1970s, sending 10 percent of its total development aid (Kolmas, 2019). Later in 1991, Japan had a bitter experience for its financial contribution, a form of "checkbook diplomacy";² the country received frustratingly little recognition for its Gulf War contribution of USD \$13 billion to a coalition military operation (Hwang, 2004).

In response to that lack of attention and in an effort to play a more proactive role in fostering international peace, Japan passed the International Peace Cooperation Act (1992),³ aligning with the United Nations Peace Keeping Operation's (UNPKO) principles⁴. Japan was now positioned to increase its international and diplomatic presence through human resource/military deployment. In addition to the financial contribution, Japanese peacekeepers basically carry out logistical and reconstruction activities while maintaining international peace during UNPKO. As a result, Japan subsequently resumed its international and diplomatic presence with its first-ever military deployment in Angola in 1992 and later in Cambodia, Mozambique, El Salvador, East Timor, Timor-Leste, Nepal, Sudan, Haiti and Southern Sudan. This marked the end of Japan's checkbook diplomacy (Hwang, 2004).

However, peacekeeping interventions have been a controversial issue in Japan because of the constraint of Article 9 in the Japanese Constitution, which states: "Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as a means of settling international disputes." Such restrictive provision of "use of force" in the constitution created a barrier in the establishment of foreign policy that could effectively address the changing global security dynamics. At this backdrop, Japan's National Security Strategy (NSS) – adopted in 2013 – reinforced the need of such an approach to its foreign policy, as "Japan must have the power to take the lead in setting the international agenda and to proactively advance its national interests, without being confined to a reactionary position to events and incidents after they have already occurred" (13-14). NSS also focuses on the need for an "even more proactive role in establishing international peace, stability and prosperity," based on the international cooperation principles.

² "Checkbook diplomacy" uses recourse of economic aid and investment, exclusive of military, as a foreign policy strategy between and among the countries.

³ The law came as a response to the government's realization that Japan, besides financial and material contribution, should play a proactive role in international community in terms of human resources such as sending personals in UNPKO, International Humanitarian Relief Operations and International Election Observation Operations.

⁴ UN defines three basic principles namely, Consent of the parties; impartiality and non-use of force except in self-defence of the mandate. More can be found: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/principles-of-peacekeeping>

Therefore, it is important to evaluate how Japan's more contemporary approach to foreign policy aligns with its national interests as expressed in NSS.

In this context, Japan's deployment of Self Defense Force (SDF)⁵ in its full capacity in the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)⁶ in 2011 to the fragile and conflict-affected South Sudan stood as its strategically significant presence in Africa to show its revitalized gesture in international security. Though the government of Japan called back its mission from South Sudan in 2017 as the security situation was deteriorating due to the political conflict in the capital city of Juba, it continues to send some officers as a part of UNMISS to show its unity with the international community for the implementation of Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019). Given Japan's objective of fulfilling "strategic national interest" while setting foreign policy, and its stated "more proactive role" in establishing international peace, it is important to analyze UNMISS from the perspective of Japan's broader foreign policy agenda. It means UNMISS provides the useful context to understand Japan's rapidly changing foreign policy approach through the proactive contribution to the international system while fulfilling its own national interest.

My essay assesses UNMISS as a case study of Japan's foreign policy which is being implemented in order to fulfill its strategic national interests. In order to trace these interests firstly, it analyzes UNMISS as Japan's tool to attain the international power; secondly, as an economic strategy to secure its access to the oil and other critical natural resources in Africa; and thirdly as a political strategy to outweigh China's strategic influence in the region. Before assessing these three different strategic interests, this essay describes Japanese peacekeepers' activities in a way to consolidate peace in post-conflict South-Sudan.

Japan's Involvement in UNMISS as a Tool for Peace Consolidation

South Sudanese Independence Referendum, 2011 followed by The 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement – meant to develop democratic governance, sharing of oil resource revenues and end the Second Sudanese Civil War – and the

⁵ With the defeat in WWII, Japanese constitution (2047) renounces military engagement in war which led to the formation of Japanese Self Defense Force (JSDF) consisting Japanese Ground Self-Defense Force (JSDF), Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) and Japan Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF).

⁶ United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS) which is the first peacekeeping mission in Africa since the PKO (1992) law came into effect. MOFA (Japan) website mentions total 10045 SDF members were deployed for its operation. (https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/ipc/page22e_000684.html)

2011 South Sudanese Independence Referendum were the watershed documents leading to the end of the 30-year conflict in Sudan. Political disorder being the greatest problem of nation building in post-conflict South Sudan, the government of Japan, under the International Peace Cooperation Act, have dispatched approximately 2,560 self-defense force personnel since November 2011 to take part in UNMISS. The focus of this effort is in alignment with fulfilling the integrated mandate of supporting South Sudan through “peace consolidation” and “nation building” (UMMISS, 2011). Since Japan started its ODA in South Sudan immediately after the signing of CPA⁷ in 2005, it has disbursed more than \$1.3 billion to assist the government in peace building and development (MOFA, 2015). Japanese peacekeeping military engineers were involved in helping the Government of South Sudan (GoSS) in development/humanitarian and state assistance activities such as constructing or restoring roads, development of grounds, building government buildings, disaster response and other infrastructure engineering activities in a way to gear up post-conflict reconstruction (Boutellis and Smith, 2014; MOFA, 2012).

In addition to the reconstruction activities, Japanese peacekeepers were also involved in providing emergency humanitarian assistance as the humanitarian situation was deteriorating (MOFA1, 2015). As a further response, some 400 Japanese personnel were dispatched through the establishment of the Regional Protection Force to help Sudan initiate a dialogue and reconciliation among the various ethnic groups, which, according to the Japanese government, marks substantial progress toward attaining further stability and nation building (MOFA, 2017). Upon the return of SDF to Japan, South Sudan President Salva Kiir voiced his appreciation to Japan for the island nation’s contributions to stable nation building and peace building through its ODA and peacekeeping operations (MOD, 2017).

Japan implemented its “All Japan Project”⁸ during UNMISS to make a proactive contribution to peace and development, which brought effective results to the concerned community and populations (Uesugi 2014). As part of this contribution, “ACLO [Assistance Coordination Local Office] was set up to identify projects through which UNMISS and Japan can collaborate so that Japan can appeal its All-Japan Approach to South Sudan and the international community.” (Uesugi,

⁷ Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) which is also known as Naivasha Agreement, was signed between the Government of Sudan and Sudan People’s Liberation Movement in January 9, 2005, which marks the end of Second Sudanese Civil War between Southern and Northern Sudan, and set the time table for a Southern Sudanese independence referendum.

⁸ Uesugi (2014) defines it as Japan’s integrated framework for better coordination among civil/military inter-agencies such as Embassy, SDF, JICA, NGOs etc. and UNMISS to bring the quality results.

2014: 231) It provided SDF engineers an opportunity to enhance Japan's reliability in an international setting by demonstrating the quality of work undertaken by its leadership (MOD, 2014).

UNMISS as a Tool to Attain International Power

Japan's desire to be a responsible major player in the world is quite explicit in its National Security Strategy: "Japan must have the power to take the lead in setting the international agenda and to proactively advance its national interests," (13) and wants to make effective participation in UNPKO as a 'proactive contributor to peace based on the principle of international cooperation.'" (14) According to Suzuki (2017), this clause "is not just the focus of the diplomatic security policy of the Abe administration (but) is also intended to clarify Japan's role in the post-Cold War international community, a position for which Japan has been searching since the Gulf War." (53) Davies (2008, 56) found a similar strategic interest behind the African engagement: "Sub-Saharan Africa is a conspicuous recipient of Japanese ODA as it serves to increase the visibility of Japan in the international arena."

In the same vein, GOJ expressed the rationale of UNMISS deployment as "The Government of Japan, as a responsible member of the international community, remains committed in cooperating with the international community and making proactive efforts toward the achievement of peace and stability in South Sudan" (MOFA, 2013). UNMISS, coordinated with ODA, investment and humanitarian assistance, is a tool for "engineering peace" (Smith and Boutellis, 2014). It also serves as Japan's revitalized strategic interest in Africa: to increase its international and diplomatic presence by helping newly independent South Sudan, thus fulfilling its mandate to support the consolidation of peace and nation building.

Dispatchment of SDF troops in UNMISS is a remarkable initiative in Japan's proactive contribution to international peace. This is evidenced when compared to previous peacekeeping missions and in that UNMISS heralded a couple of significant breakthroughs in Japan's security strategy for the sake of human security and peacebuilding in South Sudan under prime minister Shinzo Abe's administration. Firstly, the widened mandate of *kaketsuke keigo*⁹ under the new Legislation for Peace and Security (2016) allowed "restrictive" use of force

⁹ Akimoto (2017) defines it as ('rush and rescue') which was assigned by Japanese government to rescue staff of international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGO) in preparation for possible armed attacks during peacekeeping operations. It also allows SDF troops to rescue and protect the civilians by using the weapon, if necessary.

for collective self-defence to rescue the civilians who are under the attack. It is because Article 9 of the Constitution of Japan, as stated before, strictly limits its peacekeepers to abide by the five principles of PKO¹⁰ participation and use of force, even in the situation of civilians enduring attacks by armed elements (Suzuki, 2017). But armed violence broke out later in 2016, killing more than 300 civilians, including two Chinese peacekeepers, which obstructed SDF personnel from performing the duties under the new mandate. These personnel were withdrawn in May 2017. However, through the new mandate *kaketsuke keigo*, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe was successful in implementing the new law in a very short period (Akimoto, 2017), demonstrating Tokyo's "incremental policy adjustment under domestic and international constraints" (Esley, 2016). Such revisionist strategy of security policy by the Abe administration laid the foundation for Japan's "even more proactive contribution to peace" in a rapidly changing global security environment (NSS, 2013) through the necessary revision of Peace Constitution 2047.

Similarly, according to MOFA (2014), the local security situation was increasingly deteriorated in December 2013 as armed anti-government forces indiscriminately attacked civilians in highly populated areas of the South Sudan capital of Juba. Amid such turmoil, Japan received a request from both the UN and Republic of Korea (ROK) to supply 10,000 rounds of ammunition necessary to protect 15,000 civilians, including ROK unit personnel; GOJ fulfilled the urgent request (Suzuki, 2017). Although such transfer of weapons to South Korean troops contradicts Japan's arms-transfer principles of 1967 (Kolmas, 2019), Japan's chief cabinet secretary addressed the deviation, issuing a statement: "Given the urgent necessity and the highly humanitarian nature of the situation ... provision of ammunition was implemented under the contribution-in-kind framework set forth in Article 25 of the Act on Cooperation for United Nations Peacekeeping Operations" (MOFA, 2014). Such insufficiency was incorporated later in Japan's Legislation for Peace and Security in 2016. It is living evidence to prove how Japan was highly committed in peace consolidation in South Sudan as a "proactive contributor to peace." Suzuki (2008, 58) states: "its [Japan] choice of participating in UNPKO helped Japan to protect an image that it was willing to play a part in the mission civilisatrice [civilization] of international society, just as 'legitimate great powers'¹¹ were expected to." Japan's ODA approach to Africa was once guided by

¹⁰ Namely they are: complete ceasefire, consent of the parties, impartiality, limited use of weapons to protect the lives of the Japanese personnel, withdrawal of the mission if the above conditions are not met.

¹¹ Suzuki defines the legitimate great powers as the improved national dignity which is accepted by the international society especially by its peers and it requires large economy, territory, military, population and a permanent seat on United Nations Security Council.

assisting in social transformation. It is more recently a focused investment that can be clearly seen in the changing objectives of the Tokyo International Conferences on African Development (TICAD), designed to promote high-level policy dialogue between African and development partners, such as Japan. Japan's recent foreign policy approach of pursuing its national interests through its mixed strategy of ODA, investment and peacekeeping helps to create the conducive environment for Japanese businesses in Africa.

UNMISS to Secure the Access to Critical Natural Resources in Africa

Energy security has been the integral part of Japan's foreign policy, especially after the oil crisis of 1973, and Japan's strategic focus on Africa has been changed as a result of that crisis. This is because, since 2000, one-third of the oil discoveries in the world have been witnessed in Africa (Ghazvinian, 2007). Likewise, Africa has the fastest-growing economies – growth of 19.5 percent (Hirano, 2012) – achieved by exploring their abundant natural resources. It is for the same reason China and other Asian giants, such as India and Malaysia, have already invested billions of dollars in the oil industry of South Sudan (Colum, 2014), whereas Japan's Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) was less than one percent of its total FDI in 2012, and its foreign trade with the region only accounted for two percent of its total trade.

In this context, Japan lately has realized it is very important to explore the resources and other potential of African economies to maintain its energy security and to grow its own businesses overseas and at home. Embedded in NSS, Japan's Africa policy states the same ethos, "Africa is a prospective economic frontier with abundant strategic natural resources and sustained economic growth... (and) Japan will continue to contribute to the development and consolidation of peace in Africa." (15) Moreover, Japan's ODA Policy on Conflict and Development further explains: "Such (development) cooperation will also lead to ensuring Japan's national interests such as maintaining its peace and security, achieving further prosperity." (MOFA1, 2015) And while pursuing those national interests, South Sudan has become for Japanese policy-makers the frontier from which they can expand their revitalized strategic interests in Africa; besides Nigeria and Angola – Africa's two biggest oil producers – South Sudan has the third-largest oil reserves in Sub-Saharan Africa (BP, 2014) and is rich in minerals and other energy resources (SOMO, 2015). South Sudan – where Japan has sent its first peacekeeping mission in Africa – is part of the East Asian country's broader foreign policy approach to secure the energy security necessary to keep its economy accelerated. In this context, Japan believes it needs a non-conventional way – using ODA through

coordination among MOFA, JICA and SDF – while determining foreign policy on the continent. UNMISS is a pillar of Japan’s mixed strategy of combining human security, nation building and investment to secure easy access to African resources such as oil, cobalt, zirconium and platinum, which Japan needs for manufacturing at home and overseas so as to maintain its booming economic growth.

Likewise, NSS further states “Japan also needs to strengthen its capacity to promptly and accurately identify the needs of Japanese nationals and firms to support their overseas activities.” (15) So, Japan’s recent Development Cooperation Policy is more aligned to fulfill the national interest through “improvement of business environment, including the consolidation of legal systems which will lead to the facilitation of overseas direct investment by Japanese companies.” (MOFA1, 2017) Japan Bank for International Cooperation and JOGMECs¹² serve similarly in support of Japanese private companies such as Toyota Tsusho Corp., JETRO, Mitsui and Hanwa – leading investors in the exploration of energy resources in Africa. Through such support comes an increase in Japanese investment overseas in energy security opportunities.

For example, Japanese trading company Hanwa has invested significantly in Africa’s Waterberg mining project in South Sudan. Expected to become one of the world’s biggest platinum group metal (PGM) mines, the Waterberg produces the refined PGMs used in exhaust emission catalytic converters, automobile fuel cells and nickel and other metals for rechargeable batteries that Japan’s major high-tech industries seek (Platinum Group Metals, 2018). And, Japanese imports of these minerals and fuels from Africa are equivalent to \$8.75 billion – an important economic complement to South Sudan, whose primary export to Japan is oil (Veras, 2018; PGM, 2018). Along with the Platinum Metal Exploration Project, the Frontera Copper and Gold Exploration Project in Chile, the Gas Exploration Project in Mozambique and the Petroleum Exploration Project in Kenya are recognized for the best exploration results, and each will significantly contribute to secure the stable supply of energy to Japan in the future (JOGMEC, 2013). In this context, UNMISS is foundational in the success of Japan’s foreign policy strategy to advance the expansion of its businesses and investment in Africa; the stability of both Sudan and South Sudan are critical to the overall stability of the continent. By comparison, China, during its involvement in UNMISS, was more active in securing its investment in Africa and maintaining the steady flow of energy access – the Asian republic is a consumer of more than 80 percent of South Sudan’s oil – than

¹² Japan Oil, Gas and Metals National Corporation (JOGMEC) is a Japan’s governmental body to oversee the energy and mining operations in Africa. It also supports Japanese private companies interested in investing on exploration of natural resources in terms of fund and connections.

it was in following its peacekeeping mandate (Tiezzi, 2014). Bodetti (2019) quotes Suisheng Zhao, a professor of international studies at the University of Denver, who argues that besides securing access to Africa's regional markets, China wants to outcompete the Japanese and American influences in South Sudan.

Contesting China's Strategic Influence

Japan and China have similar strategic interests in their broader African engagement, which is accurately captured by Goto (2014): "A new scramble for Africa is unfolding ... among Asian nations, most notably China and Japan." Such a growing strategic competition between China and Japan in the continent has been presented as "Japan has replaced Taiwan in the Chinese policymakers mind vis-à-vis its aid strategy in Africa" (Davies 2008: 57). And in order to materialize their respective strategic national interests in Africa, they have their own multilateral institutions namely, TICAD and China's FOCAC.¹³ By increasing their investment in the exploration of oil and minerals, both seek to secure the supply to their home for long run (Hirano, 2019).

Such growing strategic competition can be observed in terms of the two countries' growing ODA and investment in African countries. For example, Japan promised \$32 billion in public and private funding, including \$14 billion in ODA from 2014-2018 (Goto, 2014), whereas China increased its investment from \$2.4 billion, offering \$60 billion of development assistance in 2016. Likewise, China's import from Africa increased to \$66 billion, and Japan's amounted to \$14 billion (Hirano, 2019). South Sudan exported 77 percent of its crude oil to China and 14 percent to Japan in 2011; the figures changed to 86 percent and 8 percent, respectively, in 2013 (SOMO, 2015). It is evident that China's strategic influence through aid, trade and investment¹⁴ is increasing (Poon, 2015), while both China and Japan leverage aid in their foreign policy strategy to influence the African countries.

Some African governments prefer the Chinese model of aid, compared to the Western model. For example, Senegal, Ethiopia, Rwanda and Mauritius are gearing up their economies by accepting Chinese model of industrialization. In this context, Japan seeks to contest China's growing influence by establishing an alternative model to the Chinese development and investment model that is often criticized for being of poor quality, the nature of its coercive debt and high level

¹³ Forum of China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) is a mechanism established by the Chinese government to promote diplomatic, trade, security and investment relations between China and African countries.

¹⁴ China has projected 60 billion USD of financial package to Africa for 2016-19. <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2015/12/18/china-sets-out-its-focac-focus-in-africa/>

of corruption (Morreale and Jain, 2019). It is because China gives less emphasis on African empowerment – whereas Japan has emphasized quality aid – that Japan realizes better project results than those of the Chinese (Aglionby, 2016). Moreover, Japan is driven to compete as a “global technological leader” by training African nationals with the latest technology and engineering (Goto, 2014), and as a “pacesetter” for other multilateral paradigms through TICAD.

Hirano (2019: 849) presents this rivalry as: “Japan’s emphasis on African ownership of its development, (the) importance of nurturing human resources and focusing on the private sector is another way of differentiating Japan’s aid from China’s” (849). He further explains, “While comparison of the amounts of ODA given by China and Japan to Africa shows a quantitatively asymmetrical rivalry, given China’s significant aid, Japan’s strong sense of quality shows a qualitatively asymmetrical rivalry.” (850) Such rivalry is also evident as China has surpassed Japan to become the second-largest financial contributor, bearing 10.3 percent of the entire UN peacekeeping budget; Japan remains in third position with 9.7 percent in 2018 (Hirano, 2019). The multilateral nature of UNMISS provided Japan an opportunity to distinguish its high-tech development model from its Asian neighbors while supporting South Sudan’s infrastructure development and other nation-building activities.

While describing the benefits of Japan’s participation in UNPKO, Suzuki (2008: 58) argues, “The multilateral nature of UNPKO also served to allay the fears of its Asian neighbors [China and India] ... with responsibilities to protect the core norms of international society. In this light, UNMISS is a strong tool for Japan to refine its ODA budget through extensive coordination among the components of Japan’s African engagement: SDF, MOFA and JICA, which significantly helps Japan to differentiate itself from China and Western donors as a committed development partner.”

Conclusion

As discussed earlier in the essay, Japan will find it harder to compete China with the amount of investment that it has been doing in Africa. However, Japan can outcompete the strategic influence of China and Western donors by focusing on its quality aid/investment and its contribution for African empowerment. The island country can do this through the strong coordination among its bodies such as MOFA, JICA, SDF, NGOs and private sectors. Such positive and strong influence will significantly help grow Japanese investment in oil and critical natural resources to ensure the stable supply of energy back home. UNMISS, as the largest contributor to Japan to any UN Mission to Africa, has worked to revitalize its strategic interest in the continent. And Japan’s proactive

contribution to UNMISS as a responsible major player in the international community, has remained a successful mixed strategy of peacekeeping and aid in a way to pursue its strategic national interests as stated in the NSS of 2013.

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