

& success of Japan may be the model for Bangladesh to combat the no. 1 problem of our land.

# Japan's Policy Towards Southeast Asia Since 1952

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This paper seeks to study in depth Japan's policy towards Southeast Asia in the post-1952 peace treaty period. It attempts to examine the changing political, economic and military situation of the region and highlight the following points:

- (a) Factors shaping Japan's post-war Southeast Asia policy.
- (b) Characteristics of Japan's policy and role.
- (c) Global detente (1972-78) and the Fukuda doctrine.
- (d) The Cambodian crisis and Japan's attitude.
- (e) The end of the cold war — The Role of the United Nations in the Cambodian Question — Japan's opportunity — Its peace-keeping role.

Southeast Asia forms the immediate neighbourhood of Japan and as such controls its vital sea and air routes to West Asia, Africa, South Asia and Oceania. It is a major source of raw materials for Japan's manufacturing industry, and an important market for its finished products. Today Japan extends the largest quantum of economic assistance to the region. Its investment and trade links with the region have grown phenomenally.

The path to Japan's present strong economic position in Southeast Asia has, however, been hard and tortuous. Japan's post-war Southeast Asia policy has been largely moulded by two factors — (a) the impact of the Cold War, and (b) the legacies of the Second World War. When in 1952 Japan returned to the international community as a sovereign nation, it had already committed itself to the Western bloc because of its security alliance with the United States. Japan was regarded as a vital link in the defence of the 'free world' against the spread of communism. From then on, Japan supported the US in the cold war rivalry between the two blocs though it also strove hard to develop its own perspectives on issues like China, for instance. Though it extended diplomatic recognition to Taiwan, it found avenues to build up economic relations with the People's Republic of China. Its commitment to the Western bloc posed serious problems while dealing with some of the non-aligned countries like Indonesia and Burma. They not only opposed military alliances, but also rejected the San Francisco Peace treaty. They believed that it would be consistent with their policy of non-alignment to

enter into bilateral peace treaties with Japan.

The second factor was the memories of the Second World War. They posed a formidable barrier to the smooth evolution of bilateral relations. Even a country like the Philippines, despite its ideological affinity, showed great hostility to Japan in the early post-war decades. Japan's normalisation of relations was contingent upon the settlement of a series of reparations agreements with the countries of the region. Japan had to use its utmost diplomatic skills and patience to arrive at such reparations settlements. At the turn of 1960, Japan had succeeded in normalising its relations with most countries of the region. But even today new questions like the sufferings undergone by the comfort women continue to cause considerable embarrassment to Japan. There are also criticisms that Japan has achieved by peaceful economic penetration what it failed to do by military means earlier.

Certain characteristics of Japan's Southeast Asia policy deserve to be noted. Its approach to the region has been marked by extreme caution and circumspection. Secondly, Japanese policy has been governed predominantly by non-military, economic considerations. Successive Japanese governments have always stated that Japan's peace and prosperity are closely linked with the political stability and economic health of Southeast Asian countries. Thirdly, given the complexity of the region and despite its own alliance with the US, Japan had for a long time endeavoured to underplay the role of ideology in its relations with Southeast Asian countries.

While examining Japan's Southeast Asia policy, one has to make a distinction between the ASEAN group and the Indo-chinese countries. Relations with the former, have grown tremendously and constitute a major pillar of Japan's foreign policy. Japan's continued emphasis on economic cooperation with the ASEAN group has paid off in policy terms. Japan has outstripped Western industrialised countries and emerged as the biggest economic factor in the ASEAN region. It has acted as a catalyst in the impressive economic growth of the ASEAN countries. Both Japan and ASEAN have indeed set a model in harmonious economic growth.

On the contrary, the political instability and economic backwardness of Indochinese countries discouraged Japan from developing meaningful linkages. During the Vietnam War, Japan broadly supported the U.S. position, but was careful to avoid direct involvement in the war. When in 1976 a unified Vietnam emerged, Japan showed its keenness to participate in its economic reconstruction. The then prevailing atmosphere of global detente encouraged Tokyo to broaden its diplomacy by pursuing a multi-dimensional foreign policy approach. The Fukuda doctrine of 1977 was enunciated by which Japan hoped to create a political structure in Southeast Asia that would help it to interact with both ASEAN and Indochina. Fukuda Takeo clarified that close relations with ASEAN would not be inconsistent with fostering mutual understanding with Vietnam and other Indochinese countries. Economic relations between Japan and Vietnam started developing.

But the Vietnamese military occupation of Cambodia in 1978 belied the assumption of the Fukuda doctrine. It was soon followed by the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan

and the process of global detente received a serious set-back. Further, the transfer of Soviet mediumrange missiles to the Far Eastern theatre and its growing military presence in Vietnam were perceived by Japan as posing a serious threat to its own security. Tokyo from that stage onwards tended to increasingly identify itself with the Western bloc. It suspended all its economic relations with Vietnam.

The Cambodian crisis polarised the Southeast Asian region into two groups and Japan firmly stood by the ASEAN's position. It spoke loudly at various international fora condemning the Vietnamese action. In particular, it sponsored resolutions at the UN and mobilised support for the ASEAN group. It was about this time that Japan started extending what it called 'strategic economic aid' to countries which were located close to crisis areas and considered to be of strategic importance for the preservation of peace. Under this new concept, both Japan and the U.S. started holding official level talks on the question of the distribution of official development aid (ODA). Countries like Thailand, Pakistan, the Philippines, etc. received such strategic economic assistance.

It should be borne in mind that though Japan threw in its lot with the ASEAN group, it nevertheless had some ideas about its own role in the Cambodian peace. As early as 1981, it advocated the need for convening an international conference for settling the issue. It argued that since the success of any peace effort would depend upon its comprehensive nature, it was necessary to secure the participation of as many countries as possible. It wanted the conference to be kept open to Vietnam and the Soviet Union. It urged that such a conference should endeavour to present a 'scenario for the peaceful settlement' of the Cambodian question in a manner that "Vietnam would regard worthy of consideration". It articulated that the objectives of such a conference should be to bring about (a) the withdrawal of foreign forces from Cambodia, (b) the establishment of a government truly representing the different sections of the Cambodian population, and (c) the creation of a Cambodia that would pose no threat to any of its neighbours.

In 1984, the Japanese government put forward a formula envisaging a major role for Japan in peace-keeping and economic reconstruction in Indochina. The three main features of the formula were: (a) Following the phased withdrawal of Vietnamese military forces, Japan would be willing to bear a part of the expenses of peace-keeping, (b) Elections in independent Cambodia would be supervised by impartial observers; and (c) After the restoration of peace to Cambodia, Japan would be willing to provide economic assistance.

But progress towards a peace settlement assumed real momentum only with the convening of the Paris Conference 1989-90. By that time Beijing, Moscow and Hanoi, governed by their own compulsions, began to look for a solution to the issue. Japan was very much involved in the negotiations when the Paris Conference was confronted with questions like the Supreme National Council (SNC). In June 1990, Japan convened a summit conference of all four factions involved in Cambodia to settle the composition of the SNC.

When the U.N. became involved in the Cambodian peace parleys, Japan found it much more comfortable to play its role under the UN banner. In a way, it used the U.N. as a

'conduit' to seek a greater political role. For one thing, such a role under the U.N., would not arouse the suspicions of other nations. Secondly, the U.N. tag would help the Japanese government steer clear of the usual domestic resentment to any expanded role overseas. But in reality, the Japanese government under Miyazawa Kiichi had to make political compromises with some of the opposition parties to get the peace-keeping legislation passed in the Japanese Diet. Thirdly, Tokyo knew that it would have to make a 'tangible human contribution' to Cambodian peace.

Japan's contribution to the successful Completion of the UNTAC was complimented by the U.N. Japan convened two international conferences (1992 and 1994) for the economic reconstruction of Cambodia and made its own substantial financial contribution. Though the situation in Cambodia is still somewhat fluid, Japan has now resumed its normal relations with Vietnam. Indochina as a whole is well-poised for greater economic interaction with Japan. Tokyo now advocates closer political and economic linkages between ASEAN and Indochina.

## Japan's Role in Regional Conflict — Resolution in Southeast Asia: The Case of the Cambodian Problem

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Japan's role in regional conflict-resolution has often been viewed as passive, gaining no appreciation from the international community. Throughout the postwar period, the US-Japan Security Treaty has so successfully ensured Japan's national security that there is almost no need for Japan to play an active political-security role. But as many changes have taken place in recent years, commonly called the post-Cold War changes, the above characterization of Japan's role is no longer accurate. We can see this in Japan's roles in the case of the Cambodian problem. The Cambodian problem had seriously affected peace and security in the region. Its solution demanded the involvement of almost all major powers, including the United Nations. In the conflict-resolution efforts of this complicated problem, Japan has contributed in various ways: diplomatic mediation, sending military personnel to join the United Nations peacekeeping operations, and the reconstruction of postwar Cambodia. Since 1990, Japan's roles have included the following:

1. Organizing the Tokyo Meeting on Cambodia during June 4-5, 1990 inviting the