

# ***AJISS-Commentary***

**The Association of Japanese Institutes of Strategic Studies**

**IIPS**

Institute for International  
Policy Studies



The Japan Forum on  
International Relations

**JIIA**

The Japan Institute of  
International Affairs  
(Secretariat)

**RIPS**

Research Institute for  
Peace and Security

Editor:

Akio Watanabe

Editorial Board:

Kenichi Ito  
Masashi Nishihara  
Seki Tomoda  
Taizo Yakushiji

Online Publisher:

Yukio Satoh  
President, JIIA

No.25. 20 February 2008

## **SDF PEACE MISSIONS FOR STABLE JAPAN-CHINA RELATIONS**

*Tomohide Murai*

While Japan's international influence is diminishing, that of China is rapidly expanding on the back of its growing economic might. It is only a matter of time before our country is overtaken by our neighbor in economic size. "Two tigers cannot share the same mountain," warns a Chinese proverb.

*The views expressed in this piece are the author's own and should not be attributed to The Association of Japanese Institutes of Strategic Studies.*

China is strongly opposed to Japan's admission to the UN Security Council for fear that this will put Japan on an equal footing with itself on the world stage. In the East China Sea, the country claims sovereignty over the Senkaku Islands ("Diaoyu Islands" in Chinese) and is pushing ahead with the development of gas fields in defiance of Japanese protests. What allows Japan to effectively control the islands is its naval supremacy over China, which is maintained by the Maritime Self-Defense Force with the support of the Japan Coast Guard. China, however, is rapidly building up its sea and air forces. The power balance in the East China Sea could be totally different in five or ten years at the latest. It should be remembered that Vietnam and the Philippines have lost control of the Spratly Islands to China because of their relative weakness in naval power.

Chinese leaders currently advocate "peaceful development." However, once the country's economic growth is stalled, the Chinese Communist Party may want to divert public frustration by straining relations with Japan. This is because public support for the party has been largely sustained by anti-Japanese sentiments nurtured through the patriotic education that strongly criticizes Japan's militarist past. The level of a threat is measured by multiplying a country's military strength by its intent to use force. The intent can shift according to the political will of the time. When one acquires military supremacy, it diminishes the cost of using force, making a military option more effective and attractive. Unlike Japan, China is not the type of country that hesitates in using force.

Stability in East Asia requires a stable Sino-Japanese relationship. As Mao Zedong stated, political power grows out of the barrel of a gun, and the Chinese Communist government is highly sensitive to military power. Thus striking a proper military balance is key to a stable relationship between Japan and China. "Speak softly and carry a big stick" is a basic premise of diplomacy, but all Japan has been doing since the end of World War II is speaking softly without carrying any stick. The international community is losing interest in and respect for our country. If Japan is

to retain influence in Asia, it must carry a visible stick. China, for its part, has been actively using force for political purposes, sending its military to engage in UN peacekeeping missions and conducting joint exercises with foreign militaries.

Various surveys have shown that the most appreciated contribution post-war Japan has made to international society is the provision of economic aid. Some people then argue that Japan should continue to rely on its economic power in order to maintain international influence. However, given that China's GDP has already passed Japan's in terms of purchasing power parity due to the sluggish growth of the Japanese economy, it is highly likely that Japan will lose the overseas economic aid race to China. Economic aid is no longer a Japanese monopoly.

Since the victory of its navy in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), Japan had long been preoccupied by the concept of an "all-big-gun" battleship. This led Japan to build *Yamato* -- the largest, heaviest, and most powerful battleship ever constructed-- and wage an anachronistic battle against the United States in the Pacific War. To argue that Japan should continue to rely on economic power to maintain international influence is tantamount to clinging to the "all-big-gun" battleship idea in an age of aircraft.

Japan must rationally consider what to make its specialty in the international community. One option is dispatching the Self-Defense Forces overseas to contribute to international peace. In terms of capabilities, the SDF can perform the kind of missions in which NATO troops are now engaged. The international community needs both physicians and surgeons to cure the maladies it is facing. But there are many problems that cannot be solved by physician-type economic aid alone. What is now urgently required is "surgical" treatment to stop the bleeding in conflicts. Once peace has been shattered, force is needed to end the battle. Activities in combat zones to address the parties, means, and causes of the conflict may entail human costs. These are surely not easy tasks, but will earn Japan international respect. If Japan desires an honorable position and stability in East

Asia, it must consider more fully committing the SDF to international peace support missions. 

*Tomohide Murai is Professor of International Relations and Director of the Library at the National Defense Academy in Japan. This article originally appeared in Japanese as RIPS' Eye, No. 83 (January 4, 2008).*