



# The Spheres in International Politics and Summit Diplomacy

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Pursuing a number of independent initiatives, Japanese diplomacy has entered a rare period of productivity in recent years. Despite apparently intensifying turmoil, international politics is actually divided into three spheres. How Japan should react to the situation is the next challenge.

Amid the plethora of challenges for the international community, the foundation for Japanese diplomacy is stronger than ever before. This is the situation in the wake of the G7 Summit and the upper house elections. There is strong uncertainty over the future of European unity following Britain's national referendum on leaving the EU. In Bangladesh, many people, including seven Japanese nationals, have fallen victim to terror. On July 12, an arbitration tribunal under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea completely dismissed the thinking that underpins China's territorial claims in the South China Sea. China insists the ruling is invalid and has signaled its intention to take effective control of the territory. In the US presidential elections, the words and conduct of Donald Trump, the Republican Party candidate, have strengthened the sense of unease about the United States and the future of world politics. The world is confronted with a range of unprecedented challenges including turmoil in the developed democracies, the emergence of geopolitical power politics in Russia and China, and defiance of the international order evident in the frequency of terrorism incidents.



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Meanwhile, Japan has seen the formation of a stable administration, something rarely seen in recent years. As a result of the upper house elections, the Abe administration has secured a stable majority in the upper house, in addition to its two-thirds majority in the lower house. Compared to the six years prior to the formation of the second Abe administration, when a replacement prime minister had to be found every year, there has been a complete change. In addition to a stable internal administration, it should also be noted that the Abe administration has found solid solutions to issues that were sensitive points for diplomacy in the past. As suggested by President Obama's visit to Hiroshima immediately after the G7 Summit, relations between the United States and Japan, which had been strained for a time, are now extremely stable. Prime

Minister Abe's statement commemorating the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the defeat of Japan and the agreement with South Korea over the issue of comfort women has brought calm to the "historical issue." As discussed below, relations with China remain the biggest issue for Japanese diplomacy, but even there, a level of agreement over the Senkaku Islands was won in 2014.

### **Abe diplomacy has made great strides**

There has also been progress in the institutions that develop diplomacy. It is important that the new security legislation recognizes the limited use of collective defense, but it should also be noted that a number of legal gaps have been closed. A National Security Council has been established and in another groundbreaking move, substantial policy decisions are now formulated by the Prime Minister and the Cabinet with the support of the National Security Secretariat.

Diplomatic issues with neighboring countries have been settled and diplomacy is becoming more active amid the improvements to the institutions for effective policy-making. Japan has never before had a prime minister traveling the world to build relations with other heads of state in the way that Prime Minister Abe does. The G7 Ise-Shima Summit was a great success from at least two perspectives. First, the other participating heads of state indicated their understanding of diplomatic issues that are important to Japan. European heads of state are inclined to view issues in Asia solely from an economic perspective, so to have them acknowledge the importance of the problems in the South China Sea was a diplomatic achievement. Another great achievement was to gain understanding for the territorial issues between Japan and Russia, an issue specific to Japan, and the need for continued contact at the highest level between Japan and Russia.

The second point was hardly covered by the media, but Japan scored another long-term diplomatic success by getting one of its key issues on the agenda for the international community. Japan first presented infectious disease prevention as an important item on the agenda at the Kyushu-Okinawa Summit in 2000, leading to the establishment of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria. The activities of the Fund are said to have saved the lives of seventeen million people with infectious disease. At this time, Japan again made constructive proposals for the health sector by becoming the first state to raise the importance of universal health coverage or other systems of national health insurance on the agenda of a G7 Summit. It is a low-profile story, but in addition to the prevention of infectious diseases, Japan has for some years now continued to assert the importance of basic healthcare systems from the viewpoint of "guaranteeing human security." This is also the outcome of summit diplomacy.

### **EU Withdrawal, South China Sea — the Sphere of Divisive International Politics**

Nevertheless, the world is currently confronted with problems that have no easy solutions. What course should Japanese diplomacy take in the future? To start with, some kind of rough outlines of the problems in the international community must be found. Twenty years ago I authored *The*

*New Middle Ages*, a book where I discussed the need to distinguish between three spheres: international politics among the countries that make up the developed democracies (the neo-medieval sphere), international politics in the modernizing countries (the modern sphere), and politics in the fragile regions that are unable to form effective modern states (the chaotic sphere). I would suggest that Brexit (Britain exiting the EU), the South China Sea issue and the frequent terror attacks are classic examples of these three types of politics respectively. I will discuss them one by one below.

Among the developed democracies where interstate wars are nearly unthinkable, the old frameworks of the sovereign states are relativized, market integration across borders is progressing, and there is a tendency for matters that were once sovereign to be transferred to regional bodies as seen in the example of the EU. On the other hand, within states, there is a tendency for decentralization and surrendering the functions of government to non-governmental organizations. The modern state is split apart from the top and from the bottom. It is only natural that the sovereign people are confused about the locus of their own sovereignty. Pressuring the people of Britain for a declaration of intent regarding Scottish independence and withdrawal from the EU are representative of such politics.

However, we need not assume that international politics in the developed democracies is moving in extreme directions as a result of the vote to leave the EU. Europe will not return to the pre-World War II system of sovereign states competing with each other, neither is there any possibility for a return to war between states. It is not yet clear whether Britain will actually withdraw from the EU, but it is certain that the future holds complex negotiations about the political, economic and social systems over the long term. It is a complex business that will not stop at the three levels of jurisdiction of Europe, the United Kingdom, Scotland and England, but will likely unfold among the people living in the United Kingdom and the people living in other regions of Europe. We should consider this the “normal state” of politics in developed democracies in the twenty-first century.

### **How does Japanese diplomacy influence the three spheres?**

Unlike the issue of withdrawal from the EU, any blunders in the approach to the South China Sea problem could very well lead to a war between nations. Establishing itself as a modern sovereign state is a matter of the first priority for China. The nation cannot accept restraints where “core interests” are concerned and “core interests” will be secured by force including military force. This appears to be the attitude in China. However, the logic of such classic international politics is that it will almost inevitably cause a reaction. This is the balance of power. At present, the forces resisting China over the South China Sea issue are in the process of forming. US rebalancing strategy is certainly consistent with this tendency. Both the Philippines and Vietnam have been compelled to strengthen their relationships with the United States because of China’s behavior. Even though some of the ASEAN countries have adopted neutral attitudes, the line of resistance

to China is growing increasingly strong. At the moment, the question of how to manage this balance of power is the biggest hurdle for international politics in East Asia.

The frequent terror attacks are a new aspect of the war on terror that followed the 9/11 attacks. Fortunately, there have been no attacks on the scale of 9/11, but there has been a marked rise in the frequency of international terror attacks since 2012. According to data from the Global Terrorism Database, there has been a dramatic rise in both the number of terrorist incidents and the number of deaths with approximately 15,000 dead in 2012, 22,000 dead in 2013, 44,000 dead in 2014, and around 38,000 dead in 2015. Along with the civil war in Syria and the rise of Islamic State (IS), the context is destabilization in the region extending from Central Asia to the Middle East and the northern parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, as well as radicalization within developed democracies.

In short, the three phenomena that have recently shaken world affairs can be viewed as symbolizing each of the three spheres in the international system. How should Japanese diplomacy respond to this situation? To start with, problems like Brexit will continue to occur in the future, but they are not likely to cause much turmoil. It is a matter of complex readjustments of the frameworks of political and economic society through the democratic process. The fact that such areas of sovereignty are debated through the democratic process is a normal feature of developed democracies.

On the other hand, diplomacy with China as symbolized by the South China Sea issue is a matter of priority for Japan. It would be preferable to get China to change its policies in a way that allows the Chinese to keep a certain degree of face. Since China itself will never announce a change of policy, it is really a question of forcing a change of behavior. Specifically, it is a matter of putting a stop to the deployment of weapons, or new landfills in the South China Sea. In September China will serve as the host nation for the G20, which will be immediately followed by ASEAN summit meetings. China will likely want to avoid a threatening atmosphere at the G20 where Xi Jinping will serve as host, and they hardly want to be isolated at the subsequent East Asia Summit.

If so, diplomatic efforts should quietly focus on getting China to change its actions rather than rhetoric. It is, of course, possible that China will not adopt any change of action. In such a case, Japan will have no choice but to strengthen cooperation with the United States and the South-East Asian nations, and to boost its state of alertness to maintain maritime order in the East China Sea and elsewhere.

There is no perfect cure where international terrorism is concerned. We have to strengthen international information-sharing, immigration screening systems and police capacity. Japan has already done so in the past, but we should continue to provide ODA that addresses these matters in developing countries. Japan is not capable of direct military operations in Muslim countries. However, it is necessary to continue to provide assistance to Iraq and other countries in the vicinity of Syria.

In the longer term, Japanese diplomacy needs to implement what Prime Minister Abe calls proactive contribution to peace. Today when the United States and Europe are turning inward

because of the presidential elections and Britain's exit from the EU, Japan is one of a handful of countries among the developed democracies with a stable government. We should seriously consider what we could do to restrain power politics in areas like the South China Sea to build peace in the fragile areas of the world.

At the end of August, the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD VI) will be held in Nairobi. Africa is a frontier of international politics where the potential for growth is mixed up with vulnerabilities such as terrorism and civil war. At this very moment, the Self-Defense Forces have been dispatched to South Sudan, which is once again facing the crisis of civil war. It is necessary to work out strategies for building peace by utilizing the PKO, the ODA and all NGO activities. We must do more to focus our energies on diplomatic activities to create peace including mediation and peace initiatives.

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