



Special Roundtable: Japanese Foreign Policy in 2020—Let us be a bond for a multilateral international order

How can we make the United States and China, countries with immense national power that at times opt for unilateralism, commit to the international order? Foreign Minister Motegi answers questions on how he intends to guide Japan's foreign policy in 2020.

Motegi Toshimitsu, Minister for Foreign Affairs vs **Tanaka Akihiko**, President, National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS)

Tanaka Akihiko: You have served in many important ministerial roles before now, but could you share your thoughts on your time so far as Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Foreign Minister Motegi Toshimitsu: It has already been almost four months since September 11, 2019 when I took up my role as Minister for Foreign Affairs. Immediately after becoming Foreign Minister I visited New York to attend the General Assembly of the United Nations, where I attended multi-party meetings on topics such as reforming the UN Security Council, disarmament and non-proliferation, and development. Meanwhile, I also met with the Foreign Ministers of various states. In November, we hosted the G8 Foreign Ministers Meeting in Nagoya, where I was able to have lively discussions with various foreign ministers on topics such as global governance and promoting free trade, sustainable development (SDGs), and African development. Also, during the extraordinary session of the Diet, I was at the center of concluding negotiations for the Japan-US Trade Agreement and the Japan-US Digital Trade Agreement, which was approved in December and came into effect on January 1 this year.



Foreign Minister Motegi Toshimitsu
Photo: Watanabe Shigeki

On the other hand, although it was necessary for me to remain in Japan while the Diet was in session to participate in debates on the Japan-US trade agreement, once the session ended, I was able to properly start making overseas visits. At the end of November, the Japan-India 2+2 Foreign and Defense Ministerial Meeting took place in New Delhi, in December I visited Sri Lanka, and I

also attended the ASEM (Asia-Europe Meeting) Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Spain. Furthermore, in Moscow I discussed the Japan-Russia peace treaty and other bilateral relations with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. At the end of the year, I also attended the China–Japan–South Korea Trilateral Summit, which was held in the Chinese city of Chengdu. In the New Year I visited the four countries of Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia. I also visited the United States, where I exchanged opinions with Secretary of State Pompeo.



Foreign Minister Motegi on January 9, 2020, while visiting South-East Asia. Following a courtesy visit to President Duterte in Manila, the Philippines, he visited the Philippine Coast Guard. Motegi inspected the BRP *Malabrigo*, a patrol boat that was built following a JICA loan agreement.

The Japan-US Trade Agreement and the free trade system

Tanaka: As you have mentioned, the Japan-US Trade Agreement and the Japan-US Digital Trade Agreement came into effect on January 1. You have been involved in concluding these two agreements from the time of your previous role as Minister in charge of Economic Revitalization. Could you share your thoughts on the significance of that?

Motegi: The Japanese and US economies together make up 30 percent of world GDP. By bringing the Japan-US Trade Agreement into effect alongside the TPP11 (The Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership) and the Japan-EU EPA (Economic Partnership Agreement), a Japan-centered free trade and joint economic area has been created that covers 60 percent of the total world economy. The global trend is for protectionism to rise as

a reaction to globalization, so I consider the expansion of a free trade economic area with Japan at its center to be of enormous importance.

Tanaka: I am sure that there were some difficult times during the negotiating process for the Japan-US Trade Agreement.

Motegi: They were tough negotiations that pitted national interest against national interest. Following the start of negotiations in April 2019, I had eight ministerial meetings with Trade Representative Lighthizer. But I believe that in the end we were able to construct a win-win relationship for Japan and the United States, and that it became a chance to build trust.



On August 25, 2019, the second day of the G7 Summit 2019 in Biarritz, Japan and the United States reached a general agreement on the Japan-United States Trade Agreement on goods (TAG) which accounts for about 30% of the global GDP. The TAG was negotiated by Motegi Toshimitsu, then Minister in charge of TPP and Japan-US Trade Negotiations (left), and Robert Lighthizer, United States Trade Representative (second right), in line with the Joint Statement of Japan and the United States on September 26, 2018.

Photo: CABINET PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICE

The agreement focuses on agriculture, forestry, and fisheries products, and also on automobiles. As specified in the September 2018 Japan-US joint statement, “with regard to agricultural, forestry, and fishery products [imports to Japan], outcomes related to market access [will be] as reflected in Japan’s previous economic partnership agreements”. Meanwhile, thanks to TPP11 and other agreements coming into effect, the United States was able to resolve a situation where its beef and other main products were losing out to those of other countries, so we can probably consider the agreement contents satisfactory for them too.

Regarding automobile exports, we achieved clear confirmation that additional tariffs (our biggest worry) would not be applied. What's more, another highly significant point is that trade measures such as quotas were ruled out. On this point too, I think that the agreement will contribute significantly not just to the development of the Japanese and American economies, but also to the development of a world economy based on freedom and fair rules.

Tanaka: What are your thoughts on the Japan-US Digital Trade Agreement?

Motegi: As the data-driven economy spreads rapidly, we can also expect digital trade itself to expand. Japan and the United States are at the cutting edge of this field and have set out rules with high benchmarks. These are likely to serve as a guide in the future. At the June 2019 G20 Osaka summit too, the Osaka Track was launched as part of the DFFT (Data Free Flow with Trust) concept. In keeping with this trend, Japan will lead the creation of 21st Century rules for the world of data flows. I believe that momentum has been established.



Tanaka Akihiko, President, National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS)

Tanaka: As you mentioned, Japan has agreed high quality trade agreements such as the TPP11, Japan-EU EPA, and now this Japan-US Trade Agreement. I believe these are vital contributions to the maintenance and development of international free trade.

On the other hand, during negotiations the United States has made use of “Section 232” of its Trade Expansion Act and other measures, and doesn't hesitate to adopt a position in which it uses tariffs as a lever to exert pressure, even on its ally Japan. We can also see a trend of US unilateralism in actions such as its opposition to the appointment of replacements for two WTO Appellate judges who had reached the end of their terms, which resulted in the body being unable to function. What kind of approach is needed to preserve a multilateral order in international society?

Motegi: I think that, to an extent, the world is quite perplexed by the United States' sometimes seemingly unilateral approach. Nevertheless, when we consider how it accounts for a very large section of the world economy, a world trade order without the United States is impossible. In that sense, the above also applies to China too, and it is extremely important to encourage the active participation of the United States and China in the creation of various rules. The same goes for WTO reform.

To date the United States has played a leading role in the setting up of a free trade structure, but with its departure from the TPP, trade friction with China that somehow doesn't end, and stalled negotiations for the TTIP (Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership), Japan's role

has been firstly to keep the United States in the free trade economic bloc through the Japan-US Trade Agreement. Regarding China too, negotiations for the RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership) are approaching their conclusion. This process too is one in which we hope China becomes a major player with considerable responsibilities in the world of trade. In that sense, Japan intends to keep working to involve the United States and China in a high-quality free trade network.

Tanaka: That's an important role for Japan, isn't it?

Motegi: At the least I can say that, during my meetings with the foreign ministers of various nations, I have received praise for managing to conclude the TPP11 and Japan-US Trade Agreement. It's not just that we concluded the negotiations; I believe it's an expression of an expectation that Japan will take the lead in preserving and strengthening the free trade system. I would like to keep fully meeting those expectations.

Japan and the struggle between the United States and China over technological hegemony

Tanaka: In Japan, there are some people with a misapprehension along the lines that since China's GDP has overtaken ours, we have fallen to the level of a minor economic power. But Japan is still the third economic power and, as such, has a substantial duty to encourage the first and second largest economies to actively contribute to the stability of the international order. In that sense, what you have just said is very reassuring.

However, the struggle between the number one and number two powers is becoming a long-term issue. Regarding the trade disputes between the United States and China, although the nations agreed a "first phase" during trade talks at the end of last year, this difficult situation is likely to continue into the future. In fact, since the second half of last year there has been ongoing and considerable restructuring of global value chains. What's more, the scope of the disputes has expanded to cover advanced technology and areas of technology related to security. How do you think Japan should be involved in this state of confrontation between the United States and China?

Motegi: As you point out, the friction between the United States and China is not limited to trade friction. We could say that it has reached the stage of a struggle for technological hegemony and it's not a situation where everything can be solved at once. Nevertheless, at the very least an escalation where the number one and two economies impose punitive sanctions on each other would not benefit either of those countries or the world economy. I make this point clear to both countries when I have the opportunity; and in any case, we must watch with great concern the effect friction between the United States and China has on the Japanese economy and on the world economy.

At the same time, at the end of 2019 we put together an unprecedentedly large supplementary budget. Although its main objective was disaster recovery measures, another main aim was to

securely prepare for downward risk to the world economy, and to create a situation where the Japanese economy will not slump even if something unexpected should suddenly happen. We intend to closely watch the world economic trends and respond unhesitatingly with the most appropriate measures.

Tanaka: What are your thoughts on the issue of technology?

Motegi: A technological revolution — what you might call a fourth industrial revolution — is now truly in progress, in which AI, robots, IoT, electronics and other technology will fundamentally change the economic system and the lives of citizens. Here too, conflict between the United States and China is becoming fiercer. Moreover, it's an issue that relates to the realm of security so, from that perspective, I recognize that it is extremely serious.

What's important here, I believe, is the preparation of transparent and shared rules relating to technology development and trade; and, moreover, how we create a structure that enables the application of various technologies. For example, this is also related to the dysfunction of the WTO that you referred to earlier. It is a fact that currently many countries, not just the United States, have doubts about the WTO, including its current state... and how it is not creating rules based on the accurate collection of data and circumstances. I think that Japan needs to play a central role in WTO reform too.

Improving Japan-China relations and the maritime order

Tanaka: Considering that US-China friction began with trade and also involves a struggle for technological hegemony relevant to security, the issue of how Japan — a US ally — can build a relationship with China is quite challenging.

In December, Prime Minister Abe attended a Japan–China–South Korea trilateral summit and, generally speaking, relations between Japan and China are tending towards improvement, including the preparations that were made for President Xi Jinping to visit Japan in the spring (although this was postponed due to the COVID-19 outbreak). On the other hand, there are various as yet unresolved issues in our relationship with China. One example is activity by Chinese government vessels in the area around the Senkaku Islands and last year there was the case of a Japanese researcher studying Chinese history being detained. Moreover, the technology dispute between the United States and China is an issue that greatly affects Japan's security, not just that of the United States. While we face such issues, how should we improve relations with China?

Motegi: Firstly, my understanding of the current situation is that the Japan-US alliance is stronger than ever. Prime Minister Abe and President Trump have a personal relationship of trust, while on its side Japan is working on various structures and practical measures to support the alliance, including legislation for peace and security. Regarding Japan-China relations, on the other hand, there has been a period where visits by the nations' leaders have been rare and normal mutual

understanding has been difficult. But at present mutual visits take place regularly and Japan-China relations have fully returned to a normal course. My own view is that relations with the United States or with China are not a zero-sum game for Japan. The Japan-US alliance is the cornerstone of Japan's diplomacy, but cooperating with China in various areas and developing that relationship is in our national interest. And this is more than just a relationship between two countries. There are good examples, such as the North Korea issue, of how China's cooperation is essential to the solution of unresolved issues in East Asia and also international society. Japan needs to play a role in setting up an environment for the United States, China and also itself to come up with solutions to such problems together.

Tanaka: How will Japan deal with Chinese maritime excursions in the East China Sea and South China Sea?

Motegi: As I said earlier, Japan-China relations have fully returned to their normal course. On the other hand, there are ongoing moves to unilaterally change the status quo in the East China Sea and South China Sea by force. Japan must keep strongly stressing the universal values of free ocean navigation and the rule of law. At the same time, negotiations between Japan and China on security issues are continuing. For example, in the maritime security area, there has been progress on such issues as a hotline between defense authorities to avoid air and sea clashes, as well as an agreement on maritime search and rescue. Going forwards, we will keep giving form to this cooperation between our two countries.

Tanaka: What are your thoughts on economic issues?

Motegi: Here too, there is agreement on bolstering win-win practical cooperation according to international standards in fields with potential. In the trade arena too, a November 2019 agreement on cooperation in animal health and quarantine was signed: an important first step towards restarting exports of Japanese beef to China.

Regarding the current state of Japan's relationship with China, I am aware that there are various opinions in Japan, including critical views. However, in order to solve pending issues between Japan and China, such as security, the safety of Japanese nationals, and also human rights, I believe it is important to deal appropriately with these issues through high level mutual visits and frequent meetings of top leaders.

The shared underpinnings that link a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” with the “Belt and Road Initiative”

Tanaka: At a December 2019 Japan Institute of International Affairs symposium [with the theme of “Is it possible to build an international order based on free, fair and transparent rules?”] you delivered a speech on Japan's vision for the Indo-Pacific. The “Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)”

proposed by Japan is related to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). I think that affected countries in South-East Asia and South Asia will be wondering whether Japan and China will have a relationship of conflict or one of cooperation, and they will have both hopes and concerns. What are your views on these issues?

Motegi: This expansive region that extends from the Pacific to the Indian Ocean and as far as Africa includes about half the world's population and has huge potential for economic growth. On the other hand, it's a region with various needs, so in order to realize economic growth, how are we going to meet those needs? I don't think there are such big differences between Japan, the United States and Australia, or China, India and others in the way they think about this. In Japan's case, in order to realize the FOIP we'd like all countries with the same values and way of thinking to participate; and of course, that includes China.

In fact, I think there's room for Japan and China to work together and cooperate in various ways. Therefore, the FOIP is absolutely not in opposition to China's BRI. Also, if the BRI that China is implementing were to have projects in which Japanese companies could participate, I think Japan would also like to support it.

So, what becomes important is a shared global philosophy, such as transparency and openness on essential projects for promoting development, and on debt sustainability. Surely it is vital to share this foundation and, at the same time, work hard together to develop these regions?

The fluid situation on the Korean Peninsula

Tanaka: Lastly, I'd like to ask about the situation on the Korean Peninsula. What are your thoughts on dealing with the denuclearization of North Korea and the Japan-South Korea and Japan-US-South Korea cooperation key to doing that?

Motegi: Considering the current situation in North Korea, cooperation between Japan and South Korea and between Japan, the United States and South Korea has never been more important. Therefore, regarding our relations with South Korea, I think it is extremely important to build a future-oriented relationship between Japan and South Korea. Unfortunately, however, due to 2018 judgements made by South Korea's Supreme Court, the foundations of Japan-Korea relations to date have been overturned, and there's an ongoing situation of South Korea breaking international law. We intend to keep strongly urging the South Korean government to rectify this situation at the earliest possible opportunity.

On the other hand, it is clear that North Korea's launch of ballistic missiles of various range are in breach of United Nations Security Council Resolutions. We are taking various opportunities to convey Japan's position on this to the United States, China and other involved countries. I believe that involved countries are in agreement on this issue. In Japan's case, we are keeping a close watch on future developments in US-North Korea negotiations while engaging in close Japan-US and Japan-US-South Korean cooperation. Furthermore, we intend to actively support the US-North

Korea process while cooperating with China, Russia and the rest of international society. Solution of the abduction issue, meanwhile, is a top priority for the Abe administration. Both the victims and their families have aged so a solution is needed as soon as possible. This is an issue that Japan must work on proactively, and we intend to act boldly based on a calm analysis of the situation and making sure not to miss any opportunity.



Foreign Minister Motegi attending talks with South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha on December 24, 2019, during a visit to Chengdu in China. The talks took place just before the Japan-South Korea summit on the same day, so the timing was important. Motegi reaffirmed cooperation with South Korea on North Korea and other issues, and again strongly urged South Korea to rectify the situation in which it is breaking international law with regard to the issue of workers originating from the former Korean Peninsula, the most significant issue for relations. Meanwhile, Japan and South Korea agreed on the importance of various interchange between their nations.

Tanaka: From your forthright opinions regarding the United States and China, I see that you will lead Japan in a positive direction as Foreign Minister. I have great hopes for future progress.
(Recorded December 11, 2019. Final confirmation January 17, 2020)

Translated from "Tokushu "Toranpu gaiko wa Seikai wo dokoni michibikuka" – Tokubetsu taidan: 2020 nen no Nihon gaiko, Takakuteki kokusaichitsujo no chutai taran (Feature "Where will Trump Diplomacy lead the world?" – Special Roundtable: Japanese Foreign Policy in 2020—Let us be a bond for a multilateral international order)," Gaiko (Diplomacy), Vol. 59 Jan./Feb. 2020pp. 6-15. (Courtesy of Toshi Shuppan) [June 2020]

MOTEGI Toshimitsu

Motegi was born in 1955. He graduated from the University of Tokyo in 1978 and completed a master's degree in public policy at Harvard University in 1983. He has worked at Marubeni Corporation, as a journalist for the Yomiuri Shimbun and as a management consultant for McKinsey & Company. In 1993 he was elected to the House of Representatives for the first time. He has since been elected nine consecutive times (former Tochigi 2nd District and the Tochigi 5th District). He has served as Senior Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, Minister of State for Okinawa and Northern Territories Affairs, Science and Technology Policy, and Information Technology, Chairman of the House of Representatives Committee on Health, Labour and Welfare, Minister of State for Financial Services and Administrative Reform, Minister for Economy, Trade and Industry, Minister in charge of Economic Revitalization and Minister of State for Economic and Fiscal Policy. Since September 2019 he has served as Minister for Foreign Affairs. Within the Liberal Democratic Party, he has held posts such as Acting Secretary General, Chairperson of the Federation of Tochigi Liberal Democratic Party Branches, Chairperson of the Public Relations Headquarters, Chairperson of the Policy Research Council, and Chairperson of the Election Strategy Committee.

TANAKA Akihiko, Ph.D.

Tanaka graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Graduate School of Political Science in 1981 (with Ph.D.). He has served as a professor at the University of Tokyo and as an Executive Director and Vice President of the institution. Formerly, he was President of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) before taking up his current role in 2017. Since 2019 he has worked as the Editor-in-Chief of this publication. His published works include *Posuto kuraishisu no sekai* (The post-crisis world), *Ajia no naka no Nihon* (*Japan in Asia: Post-Cold-War diplomacy*) and *Atarashii chuusei* (*The New Middle Ages: The World System in the 21st Century*).
