



Witnessing a Turning Point for Japanese Diplomacy: The War Against Terror and Japan-US Relations as Seen from the Heart of Political Power

Fukuda Yasuo, former Prime Minister of Japan
Interviewed by Tanaka Akihiko, President of the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS)



Tanaka Akihiko



Fukuda Yasuo

Tanaka Akihiko: On September 11, 2001, a series of terror attacks occurred in the United States. Subsequently, the world entered the age of “fight against terrors.” It was six months after the Koizumi Administration had been launched. As the then Chief Cabinet Secretary, you were at the heart of that administration, so how did you interpret these events at the time?

Fukuda Yasuo: It was around ten at night when the first report of the terror attacks reached me, amidst a meeting with media representatives. The report was that a plane had hit one of the New York World Trade Center buildings. At first, I thought it was an accident, but just as I left for home, I received news that a second plane had hit the towers. I realized that this was something extremely unusual and quickly turned back to the Prime Minister’s Official Residence. Later, the Pentagon was hit too, and I understood that this indeed was very extraordinary.

The Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law enacted with unprecedented speed

Fukuda: Prime Minister Koizumi and Aso Taro, the then Chair of the LDP’s Policy Research Council, were at the Official Residence. The three of us monitored the situation, consulted on how Japan must respond properly, and quickly summoned Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Furukawa Teijiro to start working. I recall that since the European markets were in considerable turmoil, at around 6 am the following day, I telephoned Minister of State for Financial Services Yanagisawa Hakuo and instructed him to consider measures to prevent disturbance in Japan’s stock and money markets.

After that, we held a meeting of the Security Council of Japan and announced a [six-item government response](#). The full picture of the damages still wasn’t known at the time, and there were talks of about

6,000 casualties (ultimately, it was around 3,000). So, the matters of priority were to collect accurate information, including confirming the safety of Japanese nationals, and consider the early dispatch of an international disaster relief team to the sites to help evacuate victims of the attacks.

Tanaka: The Koizumi Administration's response was extremely speedy, from moments immediately after the attacks. The Prime Minister announced clear support to the United States at the [press conference](#) on the morning of September 12. One week later, on September 19, he announced immediate measures of the [seven-item policy](#). Within that, he referred to dispatch the Self Defense Forces for medical, transport, refueling and other support activities, which led to the enactment of the [Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law](#) on October 29. Then, in connection with that, Prime Minister Koizumi [visited the United States](#) on October 24 and 25.

Fukuda: Because it was a grave matter of our ally facing a horrendous crisis, we needed to clearly express our unwavering will to cooperate with the United States, and we responded quickly, with the unwavering determination to make proactive proposals to the US regarding what Japan could do.

At the forefront of our minds was the 1990 Gulf crisis (Iraq's invasion of Kuwait) and our bitter experiences after the Gulf War in 1991. Even though we contributed 13 billion dollars at the time, there was little positive recognition from the international community. It was during the Kaifu Toshiki administration, and the LDP Secretary-General at the time was Ozawa Ichiro. I was a freshman Diet Representative and a member of the Committee on Foreign Affairs in the House of Representatives. At the time, it felt as though Japan was waiting for requests from the United States before considering our own policy. That passive stance was criticized by the US.

So, in that seven-item policy we set out a direction of Japan's intention to make use of the Self Defense Forces. I believe that President Bush really did understand our intention. It was also at that point that we began considering to dispatch Aegis ships for Japan's own information gathering activity.

Tanaka: The bombing of Afghanistan by US forces started on October 7. The combat period was short and by November 13 the Northern Alliance (United Islamic National Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan) took Kabul. Following the Bonn conference [UN Talks on Afghanistan, from November 27 to December 5] on December 5, the Interim Administration of Afghanistan commenced on the 22nd of the same month.

Fukuda: 9.11 was called "a second Pearl Harbor" and it inflamed US public opinion. That's why the US launched its war in Afghanistan at quite an early stage. I don't think the US applied much thought or made careful preparations to the military conflict, let alone the "post-war" Afghan situation.

On October 8, the day after the aerial bombing began, the Japanese government set up an [Emergency Anti-Terrorism Headquarters](#), and on October 10 Diet deliberations on an Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law and amendment to the Self Defense Forces Law began. These were approved by the House of Representatives on the 16th and by the House of Councilors on the 29th; they were enacted, and became effective on November 2. That same month a Self Defense Forces fleet was dispatched to the Indian Ocean.

Tanaka: Unlike the time of the Gulf War, the response was speedy and substantial, I think.

Efforts towards Afghan reconstruction and improving the position of women

Tanaka: Another pillar of Japan’s “fight against terror” was support for reconstruction in Afghanistan. In January 2002, Japan hosted the [International Conference on Reconstruction Assistance to Afghanistan](#) in Tokyo. Ogata Sadako, Special Representative of the Prime Minister of Japan, worked very diligently to organize an aid package, resulting in up to half a billion dollars in assistance for the first two-and-a-half years, and up to 250 million dollars for the first year. Following this, Japan was involved in Afghan reconstruction for a long time, and the Japanese government contributions have reached around 6.8 billion dollars since 2002.

Fukuda: The actual initiatives for Afghan recovery, including the conference on reconstruction, were taken more by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs rather than the Prime Minister’s office. Since Japan’s capabilities are in the areas of economic and development cooperation, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and NGOs went to Afghanistan, of course, with the governmental support.

I was also the Minister of State for Gender Equality at that time, and I wanted to be proactive in assisting to improve the position of women in Afghanistan. Therefore, in February 2002 the Cabinet Office established an [Advisory Council on Assistance to Women in Afghanistan](#) to promote upgrading the position of women in Afghan society, which was characterized by extreme discrimination. It was chaired by Hara Hiroko, a members of the Council for Gender Equality. Hara worked very enthusiastically. In March she and several other members of the council, including Kita Etsuko, flew to Afghanistan, which had by then restored a certain stability, to investigate the situation on the ground for us. In May, a policy proposal was put together that incorporated a female/gender-issue perspective into a wide range of assistance areas.

Unease about the Iraq War

Tanaka: In the “fight against terror,” the US’s attention next turned to Iraq.

Fukuda: From early on, there were murmurs in US diplomatic circles to the effect that “After Afghanistan, it would be Iraq.” To be honest, I really didn’t understand the chain of reasoning in that discussion. But the result was, I think, that the political force known as Neo-conservatism gained weight and launched the military action aiming at the regime change in Iraq. In fact, even before the war started, the US military had been bolstering the number of troops based in the countries neighboring Iraq. They assembled a military force numbering over 200,000 in the Gulf nations. Given such a situation, in terms of both a fiscal perspective and the morale of troops, it was difficult to keep forces waiting indefinitely. The United States was clearly heading towards the start of war.

Tanaka: Unlike the Afghan case, there certainly wasn’t any solid unanimity in the international community’s response when the Iraq war started, but ultimately Japan supported the US’s decision.

Fukuda: I believe that had Iraq accepted inspections from the beginning, war could have been avoided. Yet, be that as it may, Prime Minister Koizumi was consistently skeptical about war with Iraq. Even in meetings with President Bush, from the start, he said things to the effect that “You mustn’t go to war. It will damage US prestige.” Nevertheless, when we were repeatedly told, “There are weapons of mass destruction in Iraq” by the President himself, by Vice President Dick Cheney, by Secretary of Defense

Donald Rumsfeld, and by Secretary of State Colin Powell, we had to believe them. There was no evidential information in Japan to overturn the American view. That was the biggest problem. In the end, the US went ahead with the war in March 2003.

Meanwhile, our own diplomatic efforts had entailed dispatching special envoys to Europe and the Middle East in a month or two before the war started, in order to prevent to the extent possible the situation from escalating. This happened as an initiative of the Prime Minister's office. Its rationale was to try, as far as possible, to unify cautious or skeptical voices regarding the Iraq war in the international community as the single voice of free societies. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, always placing utmost importance on Japan-US relations, was filled with the observation that the war was inevitable. I wanted a little more exploration of possibilities to avoid the war. So on this point I wasn't completely happy with our Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Perhaps, this isn't something to mention in a magazine published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs...

Tanaka: So, both Prime Minister Koizumi and you were skeptical about American rhetoric and actions, and explored possibilities by closely watching moves of the European countries. Meanwhile, at that very time, the North Korean situation was becoming increasingly serious. In January 2003, North Korea again declared that it would withdraw from The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). This effectively wrecked the 1994 Agreed Framework between the United States of America and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. In December 2002 the US stopped supplying North Korea with heavy oil. Did the North Korea situation influence Japan's support for the Iraq war?

Fukuda: Regarding North Korea, I assume that there was a temporary "two-front war" mind in the U.S., causing a deep sense of crisis. So, Japan and the United States cooperated very closely, such as by mutually supplying information.

The Iraq and North Korea issues were fundamentally different, but of course the US probably had an intention to use the North Korea card to gain some kind of leverage and secure Japanese agreement for going to war with Iraq. At times, I felt a very tough stance like "If there is anything we can use, use it!" on the US side.

Relief regarding Iraq reconstruction assistance and the work of the Self Defense Forces

Tanaka: Japan also actively worked on Iraq reconstruction. In particular, the Special Measures Law for Humanitarian and Reconstruction Assistance in Iraq was enacted and Self Defense Forces dispatched to Samawah.

Fukuda: In the context of "fighting terror," Japan could not send its Self Defense Forces to a war zone. On the other hand, Prime Minister Koizumi made a clear statement on supporting reconstruction at a Japan-US leaders' summit. I had frequent exchanges of opinions with the then US Ambassador to Japan Howard Baker concerning specific measures. We probably met around twice a week during the period.

What I said to him was that, while fighting continued in Iraq, there was little that Japan could do, but that if the fighting came to an end, situations would arise where Japan could act. Nonetheless, because of constitutional and legal constraints, even after the war ended, the Self Defense Forces wouldn't be able to do such things as peacekeeping... that was the gist of our talks.

Tanaka: So that led to the Special Measures Law for Humanitarian and Reconstruction Assistance in Iraq, which was enacted in July 2003. The Self Defense Forces were dispatched to the noncombat zone of Samawah, but were you worried?

Fukuda: I was worried. In dispatching the Self Defense Forces to Iraq, we couldn't send them to an unstable region with fierce fighting taking place. Initially, the US took an over-optimistic view of the situation in Iraq. Ambassador Baker told me that fighting would soon end, that public order would be restored, and that they wanted to make Iraq a country like Japan. However, in August that year, the security situation in Iraq got worse by the day, including the murdering of United Nations Special Representative for Iraq, Sérgio Vieira de Mello, in Baghdad, by a terrorist bomb. Because the situation was so severe, we had a tremendous difficulty finding a region that would meet the "noncombat zone" condition specified in the Iraq Special Measures Law. We proposed a number of candidate regions and after much deliberation we chose Samawah. The region was relatively stable compared to the country as a whole, and the Self Defense Forces were able to conduct reconstruction assistance activities there. I believe they were of use to the region.

Once during the exchange of opinions with the US concerning reconstruction assistance, I said, "There are constitutional restrictions and we can't do that." Of course, because the US side wanted the Self Defense Forces to start working in Iraq as quickly as possible, they sometimes asked for the impossible. Thanks to our Constitution, I was able to clearly refuse their request on those occasions, which they understood. I was grateful to our Constitution, and Prime Minister Koizumi had the same feeling.

Tanaka: It seems there were some rather serious exchanges but, in general, I believe Japan's Iraq reconstruction assistance was received very positively.

Fukuda: It helped Iraq, and was also useful to the United States, I think. The way the US showed us its gratitude then was quite exceptional. Japan-US relations at that time were extraordinarily favorable. I'll share one episode in that connection. Back then, the US Congress looked unfavorably on how a Japanese company had been making progress on a contract with the Iraqi government to develop the Azadegan oil field. When Ambassador Baker returned home during the summer vacation, however, he visited the influential members of the Congress and briefed them on Japanese contributions in Iraq. As a result, the US ultimately gave the consent and the contract was successfully signed. That's how happy they were with Japan's cooperation.

The Cost Performance of International Contributions

Tanaka: Although the Ground Self Defense Forces withdrew from Samawah later on in 2006, Indian Ocean refueling activity continued until 2010. During your administration, the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law was opposed by the Democratic Party and lost effect prior to the enactment of a new law.

Fukuda: As the situation in the House of Councillors was deadlocked, the bill wouldn't pass. I had enormous difficulty. In the end, the refueling activities by a Self Defense Forces vessel based on the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law got through after much trouble. It passed for the second time in the House of Representatives after having been rejected by the House of Councillors. I believe that the law was beneficial to Japan; not only for Japan-US relations. Since the Indian Ocean had become a place of

international cooperation, so many nations were grateful to us. Nevertheless, it cost billions of yen a year, and the refueling activity was halted when the Democratic Party of Japan came to power. The Hatoyama Administration, perhaps as an alternative, committed to five billion dollars in assistance to Afghanistan over five years. Had the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law continued to be effective, our financial burden might not have been so heavy.

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Born 1936. After graduating from Waseda University, worked at a company that refined and sold oil. Then after roles such as Private Secretary to the Prime Minister, in 1990 was elected to the House of Representatives for the first time (former Gunma 3rd District). Was then elected a consecutive seven times until retirement in 2012. Served as Parliamentary Vice Foreign Minister, Director of the LDP’s Foreign Affairs Division, Chief Cabinet Secretary (2001 to 2004, Mori and Koizumi cabinets), and Prime Minister from 2007 to 2008.

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