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AJISS-Commentary

Japan and the Transformation of the United Nations - Catalyzing a Comprehensive Collective Security for Our Common Future

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Introduction

On the occasion of his first formal General Debate address at the United Nations General Assembly in the *Reiwa* era (2019), Prime Minister Shinzo Abe openly called for the audience to "recall" the principles of the United Nations, has walked a path that has been steadfast, always intending to strengthen the United Nations." He further added that "(F)or the UN, which has now come three quarters of its founding, structural reform, especially that of the Security Council, is absolutely imperative for the realization of such reform." It was Japan's latest call to "transform" the UN, in terms of its model and performance to be more relevant and effective in building a better world for our future.

Certainly without its dynamic reform, the 15-member UN Security Council, whose permanent powerful veto power are still limited to the 5 victors of the World War II - the United States, France, the Russian Federation and China, who are also nuclear weapon states - would not have made the progress of the post-war world as well as enhancing the legitimacy of its decisions. The permanent membership to this body, once approved, together with other eligible countries, would be a true departure from the historical baggage but its much anticipated update to reflect the new world.

1. Japan's transformative role in the transformation of the UN

The UN today needs transformation well beyond the Security Council reform, too. Japan can play a key role in that process. Recalling the entire history of Japan's engagement with the UN, one can see a reversal from wartime enemy to indispensable member of this world body. Indeed over the years, from *Showa* to *Heisei* to current *Reiwa* eras, Japan also has transformed itself to a leading industrial power, playing highly responsible roles in the UN.

On the diplomatic front, the Abe Administration has put forward the policy of "Proactive Diplomacy" based on the principles of international cooperation and pursued to ensuring the peace, stability and prosperity of the international community. In this regard, today's UN proves to be an important policy instrument that advances its national interests as well as multilateral initiatives for global issues ranging from security (North Korea, UN PKOs <Peacekeeping Operations> and Peacebuilding, disarmament and just a few) to development (SDGs <Sustainable Development Goals>, UHC <Universal Health Coverage> <Disaster Risk Reduction> and environment, particularly climate action, for example) and humanitarian affairs. Japan has actively engaged in the UN reform process, so as to become a more effective and fit for purpose within available resources. Tokyo therefore is fully engaged in supporting the Secretary-General's initiative of management and sustainable development system reforms in highly professional manners.

2. The UN's Four Governance Models and Japan

As it enters the third decade of the new millennium and Japan enters the *Reiwa* era, the world faces a chain of mutually intertwined challenges: Protracted conflicts across and within borders, terrorism, extremism, devastating environmental and natural disasters, which are growingly exacerbating economic inequalities, migration, and global health, to list the least. Nothing is more apparent in our globalized world, a crisis in a remote corner of the world can spread across the globe much more rapidly than we imagine, just as evident in the ongoing pandemic of Coronavirus disease (COVID-19). While women's empowerment still need to be highlighted while making determined efforts to tackle gender-based violence cases. The rapid game-changing progress in science, technology and innovation must be managed so as to avoid any negative repercussions.

Under these circumstances, we will realize that "collective security" today would no longer be a purely political and defense perspective alone but encapsulate the measures to protect and empower nations from social, economic and environmental challenges as well as taking actions against global security agenda. In this comprehensive way, every nation can ensure its pathway to achieve national efforts and international partnership and by bring both public and private stakeholders do we proceed? This is the test we face today. And for the UN to be relevant and effective in the needed catalytic role, it requires yet another, the fourth, transformation of its governance. The proposal to introduce here is "*comprehensive collective security*" - and I believe that Japan help promote the UN to perform its expected role.

Before jumping to the blueprint of the *comprehensive collective security* model, however, let us review the previous three incarnations of the United Nations: mechanisms for *collective self-defense*, *collective (national) security* and *collective (human) security*. The UN, as today's most universal inter-governmental organization, already incorporated these functions in its mandates over the years as it expands its scope. This process was intrinsically linked to the Japan's history in *Showa* and *Heisei* eras.

The first governance model of the UN is *collective self-defense*. While it is often overlooked, it was formed as an alliance during World War II brought together by the "Declaration by United Nations." The "United Nations" here meant two things: One was to join forces to "complete victory" against the Axis and the other was to unite against "making" a separate armistice or peace with the Axis. Imperial Japan was clearly an enemy to the UN. This right of self-defense, both individual and collective, subsequently enshrined in Article 51 of the current UN Charter.

The UN's second governance model is *collective (national) security*. It was embodied in the formation of the United Nations by Franklin Roosevelt, turning the war-time alliance into a general international organization. The heart of its mandate was "to maintain international peace and security" and "to that end: to take effective collective measures for the removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of international law." It is a wonder that Showa Imperial Japan, which announced its surrender after the UN Charter was initially slated as one of the "enemy" states who were suspected to pose threats to the world.

This is a classic ramification of *collective security* among sovereign nations in international law. At the very least, to deem an aggression to one country the concern of all. The international community's response in the event when threats to, and breaches of, peace were posed by aggressor(s) was to call for a UN Security Council. The Council was tasked to decide on actions including coercive military, as well as non-military measures, to maintain or restore international peace and security. This procedure was incorporated in the UN Charter Chapter VII. And the UN-authorized coalition against the first post-Cold War crisis of Iraq, the Gulf War of 1991 - was one such case in point.

In fact, the end of Cold War coincides with the start of *Heisei* Japan in 1989. And Japan's new foreign policy articulated by then-Prime Minister Noboru Takeshita. In his historic speech in London in March 1989, he articulated a new foreign policy of "Japan contributing to the world," which had three elements: namely,

The set of global consensus we reached in 2015 under the UN auspices are the key found to build on: Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement on climate a Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on financing for others.

The High-level Segment of the 74th UN General Assembly in 2019, or *Reiwa 1*, was exceptional to discuss issues of high profile that ranged from SDGs, Climate Actions, and Universal Health for Development on top of annual General Debates by heads of states and governments. At the SDGs Summit, Prime Minister Abe stated, by laying out his recent leadership roles: "Japan building and human resources development all over the world, founded on the philosophy to realize a society where no one is left behind, which is what the SDGs stand for. With this as a goal, at the G20 Osaka Summit and TICAD7 which were held in Japan this year, as the chair presiding over the debate to address issues such as environment, education, health, quality infrastructure, and technology innovation." This remark exemplified Japan's willingness and capabilities to expand its partnership roles that the world of today anticipates.

In *Reiwa* era, it is my expectation that Japan will lead a constructive and creative role, while designing and implementing "*comprehensive collective security*" initiatives to improve speed in the way we can collectively save and empower people, promote national SDGs implementation, and address transborder environmental challenges through national ownership and international partnership. This would be more impactful as it becomes the new permanent member of the UN Security Council at a possible timing.

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