

Japan's foreign policy towards peacekeeping activities (1990-2019)

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Japan is regarded as a top provider of assessed contributions to the UN peacekeeping operations (hereinafter UN PKOs) but the country's foreign policy towards peacekeeping activities has always been controversial. While during the Cold War era the government of Japan promoted the policy of noninvolvement into the international affairs and focused on domestic issues, during the post-Cold War era the country has become determined to show itself as a leading international player and a contributor to the maintenance of international peace. The reason for such modifications in Japan's foreign policy towards UN PKOs can be viewed through the theoretical framework of neoclassical realism: the perception of threats and opportunities provided by the new global order has adjusted the state's foreign policy towards peacekeeping diplomacy in accordance with the domestic policy implementation process.

Thus, when Japan became a UN member in 1956, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (hereinafter MOFA) expressed its determination to participate in all activities of the Organization. However, it faced sudden opposition from the political parties and the public who were against the government's intention to be more proactive in the world community [2]. However, when the Gulf crises occurred in 1990 and given the circumstances of the changing international environment, Japan's initiative to participate in UN PKOs seemed to be very logical and predictable. It was an adaptation within an agreed policy framework and was a further evolution for Japan to become an international power [1]. The Japan-US alliance also played its role as an external force. Since the alliance with the US was a central pillar of Japan's foreign policy, the government would rather work along with the US, rather than go against its ally [4].

Given such circumstances of the external environment, the reason for MOFA to promote Japan's participation in UN PKOs was the intention of the government to become a global power, not just remain middle power. From the surface, Japan had everything to make such shift due to its economic capabilities and regional influence but Japan lacked diplomatic and military competences to exert greater influence in world affairs [7].

Therefore, a possible way to become a legitimate great power was to gain social recognition from the world community through not only contributing to the UN financially but also through sending its Self-Defense Forces overseas [6]. However, Japan's foreign policy towards peacekeeping was constrained by domestic factors: the public shared the thought that revival of the military was not acceptable for Japan and the political elite argued in the Diet that UN PKOs would violate the Constitution. Therefore, a Peacekeeping Law was promulgated only in 1992 still restricting dispatch of the Self-Defense Forces abroad [7].

In present times, the foreign policy of Japan has changed. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has set a vector of a policy aiming to turn Japan into a 'normal nation'. To do so, a number of reforms have been implemented which have stretched Japan's self-imposed restrictions on the use of force or expenditure only 1% of the budget on defense spending [3]. In such circumstances of proactive foreign policy, which also aims to finally clarify Japan's role in the post-Cold War international community, the perception of the SDF participating in peacekeeping missions

has changed. Successful operations have increased an understanding of PKOs in Japan and decreased strong resistance [5].

The results of the research show that while Japan has taken significant steps in securing its role as a contributor to peace, the constant change of international structure and domestic factors are increasingly dictating the nature of Japan's foreign policy towards peacekeeping operations. In other words, while international expectations in the current multipolar world order implies certain actions from Japan to remain its status as a proactive contributor to international peace, domestic characteristics of the states as its legal-institutional framework, political leadership, strategic culture, and public opinion play an intervening role in defining the country's foreign agenda towards peacekeeping activities.

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