

## **Japan needs to step up and exercise its 'soft power'**

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Harvard University Professor and former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense of the Bill Clinton administration Joseph Nye has been chosen to be the next U.S. ambassador to Japan. It was Nye's "redefinition" of the Japan-U.S. alliance that saved Japan-U.S. relations in the wake of the Cold War era, when some began to challenge the *raison d'être* of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty and trade disputes between the two countries intensified.

The Nye initiative elevated the status of the Security Treaty from its original conception as a measure against the Soviet threat to a pillar of peace and security in the Asia-Pacific region, leading to Japan's increasing cooperation with the U.S. and eventually to the dispatch of its Self-Defense Forces to Iraq.

The "right of collective self-defense," which is the most highly disputed point in the Japanese Constitution today, was originally claimed as essential in strengthening the Japan-U.S. alliance. It is not insignificant that one of the leading polemicists on the issue has been appointed to be the next U.S. envoy to Japan.

However, the Japanese public has not displayed much of an interest in the issues surrounding the Constitution. Their lives have been threatened by a worldwide recession, and they likely feel they have "more pressing problems" at the moment.

There has also been little interest among politicians. With the passing of the National Referendum Law two years ago, deliberative committees on the Constitution were established in both houses of the Diet. However, regulations regarding the number of committee members and the manner in which proceedings will take place have yet to be established, and neither committee is in a state to engage in deliberations.

The sense of deadlock enveloping Japan is not limited to economic problems. Japan has yet to maximize its potential, which many Japanese seem to find frustrating.

Thinking about the Constitution is an act of examining a nation's role and path. The deeper a country's state of disarray, the more valuable such an investigative process should be.

There are mounting problems, also, in the area of national security. Of particular importance is a review of whether Japan's current security policy is appropriate in light of power shifts taking place in the world today. Professor Nye's concept of "soft power" is useful material in undertaking such reconsideration.

The George W. Bush administration lost the world's confidence after overestimating its hard power and plunging into war with Iraq. Recently, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton vowed to exercise "smart power" in U.S. diplomacy, which balances the country's military might with its soft power. In other words, it's a vow to encourage voluntary cooperation from other countries through a value system that emphasizes human rights and through U.S. cultural appeal, instead of using coercion.

Japan, a major U.S. ally, is proof of soft power's effectiveness. Prime Minister Taro Aso was the first foreign leader invited to the White House by President Barack Obama, who has thereby indicated the value he places on American relations with Japan. Nye's appointment is another part of this U.S. approach.

Still, the U.S. has made it very clear that it is absolutely necessary for Japan to exercise its right for collective self-defense in order to maintain the Japan-U.S. alliance. Professor Nye said in a lecture that the American public would not be tolerant of a relationship in which the U.S. helps intercept a missile heading towards Japan, while Japan takes no action as a missile heads towards the U.S. Indeed, the alliance has entered a very difficult stage.

We must also direct our attention to the fact that the G2 idea -- bilateral China-U.S. cooperation in managing the world economy -- is gaining steam in the U.S. Does this indicate that American priority in Asia has shifted from Japan to China? Under the current circumstances, in which North Korea is unwilling to abandon nuclear and missile development, an alliance with the U.S. is crucial for Japanese security. However, if Japan merely follows others on the world stage, it will be driven to the sidelines of international politics, and will find itself no longer able to protect its national interests.

President of the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ) Charles Lake, who also served in the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) as director of Japan affairs has said that there will be no more "black ships" coming to Japan, in reference to the shift in the U.S. approach to Japan. The U.S. will no longer be applying pressure to Japan in the way it once did, because provoking anti-American sentiment will not bring about any benefits in the long run.

In the past, Japan often utilized foreign pressure to mute resistant voices within the country when trying to implement major reforms. This approach, however, can no longer keep up with the world's ongoing structural changes. Japan must think for itself about to what degree it will expand and strengthen the Japan-U.S. alliance and will participate in peace-building efforts that entail risky missions, and formulate a national consensus on these matters.

In undertaking this task, Japan should make strategic use of its soft power. What about its policy on international students, for example? Nye points out that the experience of studying at Columbia University in the U.S. influenced Alexander Nikolaevich Yakovlev, the number two official in the Mikhail Gorbachev administration in the former Soviet Union, in making his push for deregulation. According to a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) survey, Japan tied Canada in likeability around the world. Japan can afford to be more confident.

As a result of its unique diplomacy, Japan has forged amicable relations with countries with whom the U.S. has not been on good terms, such as Iran and Myanmar. These relationships are a valuable political resource in establishing security in the region. Though Japan fell from being the world's number two foreign aid donor to fifth place according to recent calculations by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Japan's Official Development Assistance (ODA) efforts have in no small way allowed Japan to maintain its voice in the international community.

It may not so much be the U.S., but Japan, whose soft power is now being called into question.

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