



Abe and Pro-Active Pacifism in the Face of Climate Change 気候変動を前にして安倍首相の積極的平和主義とは

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In a wide-ranging interview with the Wall Street Journal on October 25, 2013, Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo outlined his plan to enhance Japanese leadership in Asia. He meant leadership on multiple fronts, including the economy, military affairs, and regional engagement. Abe insisted that his interactions with regional representatives showed that "Japan is expected to exert leadership not just on the economic front, but in the field of security in the Asia-Pacific." He lamented Japan's economic malaise of the past two decades, arguing that it has led to an "inward-looking" country, in which students are reluctant to study overseas and the public is unenthusiastic about providing aid to other countries. He linked his still quite vague economic reforms with a vision of productive resurgence: "By regaining a strong economy, Japan will regain confidence as well, and we'd like to contribute more to making the world a better place."[\[1\]](#)

Abe's initiatives in the security sphere centre on a "pro-active pacifism." The ambition is explicitly aimed at legitimating the use of military force as well as transforming much of postwar Japan's dependence on the military alliance with the United States. This ambition has elicited the usual denunciations from Chinese and other observers as – to use one example – "a dangerous course towards militarism."[\[2\]](#)

On the other hand, in the October edition of Forbes, regular contributor Stephen Harner – formerly with the US State Department – is decidedly enthusiastic about what Team Abe is trying to do. Harner depicts the various undertakings as key to building autonomy. Harner praises Abe's proposal to create a National Security Council under the PM's office so as to get a firm grip on the country's diplomatic and defence policy machinery. He also looks forward to Japan's elimination of restrictions on its arms industry. Rather than cumbersome rules prohibiting the export of "dual use" product and technology and constraints on joint-weapons development, Japanese industry would be freed to get fully into the arms trade. This will "help ensure that Japan will remain capable of developing and building new weapons – i.e., be more self-reliant and autonomous – should its alliance relations change." Another important arm of reform will be to allow Japanese military units to engage in "collective self-defense," key to preparing Japan's forces to "operate autonomously." Harner views these and other moves as breaking free of subservience to the US, and the core of a "true, comprehensive and autonomous self-defense, adjusting to the inevitable end – in substance if not in name – of the US-Japan alliance, and a new regional order of shared US-China power."[\[3\]](#)

Whether it is appropriate for Japan to legitimate the use of coercive force and get fully into the international arms trade is not of concern to this article. Rather, the concern here is the assertion that autonomous self-defence is in fact possible in the 21st century. Related to that, I ask whether Abe should be so focused on weapon-centred security to the exclusion of cooperation and collaboration, particularly in the area of climate change and its fallout.

National Security and Climate Change

For some observers, of course, climate change is an exaggerated threat – at best decades off the radar – and certainly has nothing to do with national security in the present.[\[4\]](#) On the other hand, Muniruzzaman Khan, chairman of the Global Military Advisory Council (GMAC) on Climate Change,[\[5\]](#) and a former major-general in the Bangladeshi military, clearly disagrees. His eloquent dissent is worth quoting at length:

"Bangladesh, is a frontline state in the face of climate challenges. It is ground zero for the effects of climate change and the security implications they present. In Bangladesh, climate change is not a theory, a story, or a concept; it is a way of life. As I write, lives are being lost to rising seas, water shortages and the resulting diseases. Gradual and large-scale displacement of people is taking place, and every day the threat is increasing."

And Khan points out that this threat is generalized. He tells us that his discussions with GMAC generals and admirals from round the world shows him that "[a]ll countries of the world are experiencing changes that are destabilizing communities and increasing security concerns. Diseases are spreading, wells are drying up, storms are smashing cities and destroying crops, and rain is either a distant memory or an acute danger."[\[6\]](#)

Nor are Khan and his military colleagues alone in their concerns and willingness to speak out. On June 30 of 2013, UK foreign secretary's climate envoy Rear Admiral Neil Morisetti warned that climate change was a present and collective threat. He added that this is true even when its effects are not directly wreaking havoc on the home front:

"Just because it is happening 2,000 miles away does not mean it is not going to affect the UK in a globalised world, whether it is because food prices go up, or because increased instability in an area – perhaps around the Middle East or elsewhere – causes instability in fuel prices."[\[7\]](#)

The knock-on effects of climate change may already include such phenomenon as the "Arab Spring." A provocative February 2013 volume examined wheat and water shortages as "threat multipliers" in the Arab Awakening. In her lucid preface to the papers in the volume, Anne-Marie Slaughter details the compelling evidence and laments that climate change is absent from the discourse of international relations:

"Insecurity in this world is defined largely in terms of military threats posed by rising or declining powers; security dilemmas between rival states, which must assume worst-case motivations on one another's part; physical and virtual terrorist attacks; and denial of access to any of the world's common spaces—ocean, air, outer space, and, increasingly, cyberspace."[\[8\]](#)

Yet there is evidently some momentum towards increasing recognition of reality. We saw that earlier in Khan's remarks concerning what his military colleagues are thinking. Moreover, research indicates that over 100 countries now regard climate change as a national security concern.[\[9\]](#) That does not mean their governments prioritize the issue, due to the capacity of vested energy and other carbon-intensive interests to shape policy. It only means that in the national security dimension, there is plenty of potential for cooperation and collaboration. The incentives are manifold, as even developed countries' militaries can find themselves overwhelmed by the extreme weather and other fallout from climate change. This fact was highlighted by the UK climate envoy, Rear Admiral Neil Morissetti, [\[10\]](#) and is also stressed in a March 25, 2013 analysis of the downstream implications of climate change for the Australian military.[\[11\]](#)

The US Military and Climate Change

The US military has been the most proactive of the global militaries for some time. In 2006, in order to assess the threat of climate change, the US military's Center for Naval Analysis (CNA), a "federally funded research and development center (FFRDC) for the Navy and the Marine Corps," convened a Military Advisory Board (MAB) of eleven retired three-star and four-star admirals and generals. The MAB assessment was released the next year, in April 2007, in a landmark report "National Security and the Threat of Climate Change." The report depicted climate change as a "threat multiplier for instability in some of the most volatile regions of the world." It also cautioned that climate change had to be "fully integrated into national security and national defense strategies." But even more than that, the report urged that the US take "a stronger national and international role to help stabilize climate change." The report also stressed the importance of "global partnerships that help less developed nations build the capacity and resilience to better manage climate impacts."

The report acknowledged the lack of 100 percent scientific certainty, and declared that it was not likely ever to be achieved. Retired General Gordon R. Sullivan, chairman of CNA's MBA and the U.S. Army's former chief of staff, wrote that:

"the trend line is very clear. We never have 100 percent certainty. We never have it. If you wait until you have 100 percent certainty, something bad is going to happen on the battlefield. That's something we know. You have to act with incomplete information. You have to act based on the trend line. You have to act on your intuition sometimes."

The US military has also been acting on this concern by organizing collaboration. One example is the 2013 Pacific Environmental Security Forum (PESF) held during mid-April of 2013. The event was co-sponsored by the US Pacific Command and the Australian Department of Defence. It brought together delegates from 18 countries, including Japan, China, India, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Maldives, Papua New Guinea, Thailand, New Zealand, Timor L'este, and Nepal. The result, according to US Brigadier General Mark McLeod was "Crystal clear, unanimous consensus on the need to build cooperation and partner capacity to lower our risk... Never before have we been able to bring together so many to draw attention to the importance of environmental security in military planning." The event "set the stage for the first-ever multilateral baseline for future environmental sustainability, biosecurity and disaster management collaboration."

Also very important in this respect is the rapidly proliferating US-China collaboration. During late August of 2013, US and Chinese naval forces worked together on exercises that include coping with climate change. During the exercises, the guided-missile destroyer USS Mason and the Chinese destroyer Harbin landed helicopters on one another's ships, a first for the two navies.[\[12\]](#) The Chinese will also be included in the 2014 "Rim of the Pacific" naval exercises, the world's largest with 22 nations and 40 warships confirmed as of September.[\[13\]](#)

How About a Whole Lot of "Pro-Active Pacifism"?

The Japanese public debate is relatively quiet about climate change. For its part, the Japanese left seems worried in part that paying attention to the issue might allow the nuclear village to make the case for restarting nuclear reactors in order to reduce carbon emissions. But the problem is more general, and appears to start from the top-down. Writing in the *Japan Times*, Sawa Takamitsu, President of Shiga University, suggests that the general public is distracted because Abe "has pursued a strategy of leading people to concentrate on the economy. His administration has made virtually no mention of environmental issues. Thus mass media have stopped taking them up."[\[14\]](#)

The evidence strongly suggests that climate change is an accelerating crisis, one whose fallout has already led to expanding military concern and cooperation. The American and other initiatives suggest that there is plenty of scope for expanding constructive collaboration. Japan is hardly immune from the consequences of climate change, and is perhaps more exposed than other developed states. Among other things, it is heavily reliant on food and other imports. Only a defiant ignorance of the facts on 21st century climate science could underpin an argument that Japan will find autonomy in 20th century-style power politics. So it is simply mistifying that Abe talks about taking a leadership role in the region, a role centred on security in terms that seem certain to exacerbate Japan-China conflict, without addressing what may well be the region's direst security threat. And it is incredible that the media, domestic and overseas, let him talk about "pro-active pacifism" and contributing to global peace without calling him out on this point.

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[\[1\]](#) See George Nishiyama, "Abe Says Japan Ready to Counter China's Power," Wall Street Journal, October 25, 2013: <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702304799404579157210861675436>

- [2] See the article by the deputy director of the Department for International and Strategic Studies, China Institute of International Studies, Su Xiaohui. "Japan steering dangerous course towards militarism," *Global Times*, October 8, 2013: <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/816273.shtml>
- [3] See Steven Harner, Abe Boldly Placing Japan On A Path To Foreign And Defense Policy Independence," *Forbes*, October 24, 2013: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/stephenharner/2013/10/24/abe-boldly-placing-japan-on-a-path-to-foreign-and-defense-policy-independence/>
- [4] An example of this kind of argument is offered by Peter Brookes, Heritage Foundation senior fellow and former US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, "Is The Climate the Biggest Threat?" March 21, 2013: <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/the-climate-the-biggest-threat-8248>
- [5] The Global Military Advisory Council includes active and retired military officers, and was initiated by the Climate Change and the Military Project. The latter is an international initiative led by the Institute for Environmental Security, the Brookings Institution, Chatham House, and other think tanks. The Council was quite active in advance of the 2009 UN climate negotiations, but then became less visible. It would appear that the gravity of climate change in the present has led to a renewal of the Council's efforts. See Brooke Jarvis, "Military Leaders Call for Urgent Climate Action," *Yes Magazine*, October 30, 2009: <http://www.yesmagazine.org/peace-justice/military-leaders-call-for-urgent-climate-action/> The website for Climate Change and the Military is at: <http://www.envirosecurity.org/cctm/outline.php>
- [6] See Muniruzzaman Khan, "Global Warming and Global Security," *Project Syndicate*, October 17, 2013: <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/on-climate-change-as-a-military-problem-by-muniruzzaman-khan>
- [7] Quoted in Damian Carrington, "Climate change poses grave threat to security, says UK envoy," *The Guardian*, June 30, 2013: <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/jun/30/climate-change-security-threat-envoy>
- [8] See *The Arab Spring and Climate Change: A Climate and Security Correlations Series*, edited by Caitlin E. Werrell and Francesco Femia (preface by Anne-Marie Slaughter), Center for American Progress, February 2013: <http://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/ClimateChangeArabSpring.pdf>
- [9] The authors of the American Security Project study also note that "[m]ost countries with a more detailed national security planning apparatus and with more resources for planning, such as the United States, Great Britain, China, and Scandinavian states, have specifically listed climate change as a threat to national security in official National Security Strategies, Defense White Papers, or other official government documents." See Andrew Holland and Xander Vagg, "The Global Security Defense Index on Climate Change: (Preliminary Results) National Security Perspectives on Climate Change from Around the World," *American Security Project*, March 21, 2013: <http://americansecurityproject.org/ASP%20Reports/Ref%200121%20-%20Global%20Security%20Defense%20Index%20P-Results.pdf>
- [10] See Ed King for an excellent summary article that draws together Rear-Admiral Morisetti's concerns along with the evidence elicited by researchers at the American Security Project
- [11] See Anthony Press, Anthony Bergin, and Eliza Garnsey, "Special Report Issue 49 - Heavy weather: climate and the Australian Defence Force," *Australian Strategic Policy Institute*, March 25, 2013: http://www.aspi.org.au/publications/publication_details.aspx?ContentID=354&pubtype=10
- [12] This exchange was part of increasing collaboration in the face of piracy as well as the need to cope with climate change. On these issues, see Hendrick Simoes, "US Navy seeks more cooperation with China in counter-piracy exercise," *Stars and Stripes*, August 26, 2013: <http://www.stripes.com/news/navy/us-navy-seeks-more-cooperation-with-china-in-counter-piracy-exercise-1.237354>
- [13] See Shishir Gupta, "India to play sea war games with 22 nations," *Hindustan Times*, September 09, 2013: <http://www.hindustantimes.com/India-news/NewDelhi/India-to-play-sea-war-games-with-22-nations/Article1-1119373.aspx>
- [14] Sawa Takamitsu "Interest in climate change ebbs," *Japan Times*, August 18, 2013: <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2013/08/18/commentary/interest-in-climate-change-ebbs/>