

Chapter 1: Japan's Course: Year One for Both Challenge Sharing and National Strategy

◆ The inaugural year of the era of challenge sharing

The 80th anniversary of the end of World War II will be commemorated in 2025, which may also prove a year of fundamental change in the nature of post-WWII international relations, one in which the world will no longer be able to rely entirely on the power and will of the United States to stabilize international relations. US allies and like-minded nations willing and able to defend a free world order will find it necessary to share the responsibility that the US has heretofore borne. This will be a full-fledged transition from an era of “burden sharing” to one of “challenge sharing” in which the challenge of resolving conflicts itself has to be shared.

The United States is still the world's only superpower in terms of sheer might, but its willingness to use its power to resolve international conflicts is rapidly weakening. According to a September 2023 Chicago Council on Global Affairs survey, only 47% of Americans believe that active involvement in international affairs is good for America's future. More seriously, the younger the respondents, the more hesitant they were about US involvement. A slightly older (November 2018) Pew Research survey found that 64% of Americans 65 and older believed that being the world's strongest in terms of military power is a top foreign policy priority, well above the 20% who disagreed, but the former percentage declined among younger age groups, falling to 30% (vs. 34% disagreeing) for 18- to 29-year-olds. This means that the trend will continue for a long time to come. Trump did not make the US what it is today; it is the US today that made Trump.



New project “JIIA Platform” (photo: JIIA)

◆ Need for collaboration among countries of an “arc of stability”

What does this mean for Japan as an ally of the United States? Not many countries have the will and the ability to defend a free world order. There is an “arc of stability” consisting of three poles: the nations of North America, Europe, and the democracies of Asia (e.g. Japan, South Korea, and Australia). These countries need to work together to urge the United States to apply itself to resolving international conflicts such as the war in Ukraine. Otherwise, the conflicts will continue and more lives will be lost.

To achieve this, the three poles must first pursue closer cooperation amongst themselves. With NATO binding North America and Europe together and bilateral alliances linking Asian democracies and North America, whether more robust cooperation between Europe and Asian democracies, the weakest link, can be established or not is the key to maximizing the overall strength of the arc of stability.

◆ Institutionally strengthening engagement with the Global South to meet the need for a majority

Furthermore, the cost of engaging in international dispute resolution is high as there are no solutions that all parties welcome. Conflict resolution is usually achieved through concessions and some form of dissatisfaction on the part of all parties, with the resolver incurring resentment. While the US has borne

this “resentment” to date and become resilient to such sentiment, other allies and like-minded nations are not accustomed to sharing this “challenge” in the first place and are vulnerable to resentment. Thus, the more support from the international community for a solution, the better. That is why it is important to gain the support of the nations of the Global South.

The countries of the Global South do not fall into the camps of the US, Europe, China, or Russia, but rather conduct careful diplomacy in their respective strategic environments to achieve the positions most in accord with their national interests, and thus they do not constitute a simply-defined group. To gain the support of these countries and form a majority, it is first necessary to understand the situation and position of each country well, select the countries to be engaged in a priority manner, unify the expectations of those countries with the views among the countries of the arc of stability on cooperation tailored to realize those expectations, and coordinate and share responses among them.

◆ G7 utilization and reform

There is no better forum for such coordination than the G7. The G7 should essentially serve as a forum for such strategic discussions and, still further, it needs to design its own institutional framework to function as a forum for engaging the countries of the Global South.

The G7's *raison d'être* as a group of like-minded nations that can respond to new issues with creativity and breakthroughs as an efficient and global steering group has been reaffirmed. We should therefore be cautious about increasing the number of participating countries. Admitting certain countries will make it difficult to demarcate between them and other countries, likely making the G7 similar to the G20 at the cost of its efficiency and breakthrough capabilities. On the other hand, the creation of Permanent Outreach Partners (POPs) is a possibility.

The G7 still invites outreach partners to its summits, but the choice is up to the host countries, though India and Brazil were invited to both Hiroshima and Puglia, and a certain standard has emerged. One suggestion might be to have India, Brazil, Indonesia and the ASEAN Chair, South Africa and the AU Chair, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, and Australia as POPs in view of their future potential and regional balance.

Such new and concrete actions will be necessary in this inaugural year of the challenge sharing era.

◆ Year to start creating National Strategy

The year 2025 is the year in which Japan's GDP will be overtaken by India's as well as that of ASEAN as a whole, which in 2002 was less than 18% of Japan's GDP. This is the year that GDP can no longer be seen as a source of national power. For Japan to maintain a certain level of influence and expand its circle of friends in the era of challenge sharing, it must urgently find a new source of national power to replace GDP and prioritize the concentrated investment of increasingly limited resources to strengthen this new source of national power. This approach is synonymous with the development of a comprehensive strategy broader than a national security strategy that covers such aspects as human resources utilization, the education system, and interactions with foreign human resources. This means to create a national strategy.

In September 2024, The Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIJA) announced the launch of a

three-year industry-government-academia platform to create and propose national strategy. The year 2025 will be the first year for re-examining Japan's national identity 80 years since the end of World War II and discussing the national strategy Japan needs to maintain its influence and voice 80 years hence in the 22nd century. We look forward to reporting on the progress of our deliberations in the 2026 Strategic Outlook.

(November 29, 2024, Masafumi Ishii, JIIA Platform Managing Director)