

# Japan's Middle Eastern Policy in a Dilemma

by Naoki MARUYAMA

## I. Introduction

In the post-World War II period, Japanese foreign policy has been centered on building and maintaining a close relationship with the United States. Successive governments have cultivated strong ties with the United States in the political, military and economic fields. It is on April 28, 1952 that Japan regained independence, thus returning to international politics. The previous year Japan entered into an alliance with the United States by concluding the Mutual Security Treaty. This was justified by the transformation of the external environment surrounding Japan in the wake of the cold war in East Asia, the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950. At the same time, Japan's policy toward the Communist countries with which she had no diplomatic relations was based on the principle of separation of economic and political matters, facilitating her economic and cultural exchanges with such countries as the People's Republic of China and North Korea.

This kind of principle is also noticed in Japan's policy toward the Middle East. The Japanese Foreign Ministry published its first diplomatic *Blue Book* in 1957. It outlined Japan's Middle Eastern policy to promote friendly

relations with the Middle Eastern countries which had been increasingly drawing Japan's attention in view of the oil resources and political influence of the Afro-Asian group, and at the same time emphasized her cooperation with the free world.<sup>1)</sup> However, the Japanese government maintained a neutral stance toward the Arab-Israeli conflict, although it criticized Israeli occupation of the Arab territories in the Six Day War of 1967 publicly at the United Nations forum. Without committing to either side in the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Japanese had increased their trade with the Arabs. This was also based on the principle of separating economic matters from politics.

Since the mid-1960s, Japan's trade balance with the United States changed in the former's surplus of exports. With Japan's miraculous economic recovery and the return of Okinawa in May 1972, which marked the end of the post-war period for Japanese-American relations, the Japanese government sought a more independent direction in some foreign policy issues.

Japan's pro-Arab policy statement in the 1973 oil crisis is one such examples. However, this kind of policy deviation has sometimes collided with American interests in the Middle East. In addition, Japan's trade friction with the United States has become increasingly serious. The American government has gradually increased its pressure on Japan to open her doors to American goods, make more military efforts and support the American policies in Iran, Afghanistan, Libya and other areas where the American administration finds itself stranded. This is a dilemma for Japanese policymakers.

The purpose of this article is to analyze Japan's recent policy toward the Middle East and its implication for Japanese-American relations. Three

cases — the oil crisis of 1973, the American Embassy's hostage crisis and the American bombing of Libya — will be used for the analysis.

## II. Separation of Economic and Political Matters

In the early days of independence, Japan pursued her Middle Eastern policy on the basis of the separation of economy from politics: namely, maintaining economic relations with the Middle Eastern countries without any commitment to the Middle Eastern conflicts.<sup>2)</sup> Although it was not until the early 1970s that she learned that this principle no longer worked, she deliberately evaded any involvement in the Middle Eastern conflicts, aware of the risk of damaging her economic recovery in the post-war period. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that the Japanese government has stuck to the basic position that the Arab-Israeli conflict should be resolved at the United Nations. This United Nations-centered diplomacy has been one of the three pillars — cooperative and friendly ties with the Free World and the Asian nations — of Japan's post-war foreign policy since her entry into the United Nations.

The first diplomatic *Blue Book*, published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in September 1957, forcefully declares "... it is desirable that peace be maintained in this area in order for commercial relations between Japan and the Middle East to make smooth progress."<sup>3)</sup> In 1956, when Egyptian President Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal, Japan's position was that this conflict should be settled subject to the Charter of the United Nations and that free and secure passage through the canal should be maintained from the viewpoint of international law. At the United Nations General

Assembly following the Suez war, Japan became one of the 24 countries which drafted a resolution calling for Israeli withdrawal from Egyptian territory, although the Japanese delegation showed sympathy for Israel's difficult position in terms of leaving the Sinai Peninsula.

At the same time, Japan's energy dependence on oil and shortage of raw materials were made strikingly clear.

Table 1 shows the ratio of Japan's primary energy supply. Table 2 explains Japan's imports of energy and raw materials from overseas sources.

Table 1. **Percentage of Japan's primary energy supply**

	electric power		coal	petroleum	natural gas	firewood and charcoal
	water	atomic energy				
1955	21.2	—	49.2	20.2	0.4	8.0
1960	15.3	—	41.5	37.7	1.0	3.9
1961	15.4	—	39.9	39.9	1.2	3.1
1962	13.4	—	36.0	46.1	1.3	2.8
1963	13.0	—	31.0	51.8	1.5	2.4
1970	6.3	0.4	20.7	70.8	0.9	0.5
1975	5.8	1.7	15.4	73.3	0.7	0.0
1977	4.5	2.0	15.0	75.0	0.8	0.0

Source: Ministry of International Trade and Industry, *Enerugi Tokei Nenpo (Year-book of coal, petroleum and coke statistics)*, 1977.

As can be seen in Table 1, Japan's primary energy source switched from coal to petroleum by 1962. This 'energy revolution' made possible Japan's rapid economic recovery and pushed economic growth to an unexpectedly higher level. Since 99.8% of Japan's oil supply comes from abroad, as shown in Table 2, any foreign policy issues which involve oil take on great importance from the Japanese leaders. The US oil embargo to Japan in August 1941 finally triggered Japan's decision to enter into war with the United States. It is no wonder that in March 1952, just a month before Japan's independence, a Japanese oil company entered into negotiations with a mission secretly sent by the Iranian government which was desperately looking for countries to import Iran's nationalized oil. The first Iranian oil arrived in Japan in May 1953. Similarly, in December 1957 another Japanese oil company also succeeded in obtaining an oil concession off the coast of the Neutral Zone between Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

Aware of the importance of oil, Japan's stance toward the Middle East has changed from passive to active since the latter part of the 1960s. Her dependence on Middle Eastern oil increased to 88.3% in 1965, as shown in

**Table 2. Percentage of Japan's imports of energy and raw materials**

petroleum	99.8	lead	77.4	tungsten	74.7
natural gas	92.1	zinc	59.0	bauxite	100.0
iron ore	99.7	nickel	100.0	chrome	98.4
coal	83.4	tin	95.3	phosphorus	100.0
copper	97.1	manganese	94.9		

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Waga Gaiko no Kinkyō (Diplomatic Blue Book)*, 1984, No. 28.

Table 3. Japan's exports to the Middle East grew from US\$213 million in 1962 to US\$432 million in 1966, while her imports from the Middle East increased from US\$609 million in 1962 to US\$1,264 million in 1966.<sup>4)</sup>

**Table 3. Percentage of Japan's crude oil imports  
from overseas sources**

	The Middle East			China	Indonesia	Latin America	Others
	Total	Arab	Iran				
1965	88.3	66.7	21.6	—	7.0	1.2	3.5
1970	85.4	42.7	42.7	—	13.2	0.3	1.2
1973	78.4	44.8	33.6	—	14.3	—	7.3
1975	79.6	54.8	24.8	3.6	11.4	0.1	5.4
1977	78.5	61.4	17.1	2.8	13.6	0.1	5.1
1979	76.6	66.7	9.9	3.1	14.4	0.2	5.9
1981	70.7	67.2	3.5	4.6	15.8	3.9	8.9
1983	71.3	60.3	11.0	5.2	14.0	4.7	9.5
1984	70.8	63.9	7.0	6.0	13.1	4.8	5.3

Source: *Sekiyu Shiryo Geppo (Monthly Report of Oil Statistics)*

Therefore, in May 1965, a new Middle Eastern and African Affairs Bureau was established to deal with a wide range of policy matters in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In June 1966 the League of Arab States opened its Tokyo office.

Bearing the growing economic importance of the Middle East in mind, the 1965 *Blue Book* raised the following points in connection with promoting trade with the Middle Eastern countries: (1) necessity of promoting

mutual understanding; (2) problems developing from the intensification of local regulations on trade barriers; (3) transformation of Japanese export structure from consumer goods to capital goods and plants; (4) consideration of buying primary commodities from countries with which Japan had an export surplus; (5) Arab boycott (about 40 Japanese companies were blacklisted on the charge of doing business with the Israelis).<sup>5)</sup>

When the third Arab-Israeli war broke out in June 1967, Japan upheld strict neutrality. At the United Nations Security Council meeting which was convened after the truce, the Japanese delegation strongly called for Israel's withdrawal from Arab territories occupied in June 1967, the establishment of a durable peace in the Middle East, and the adoption of effective means of relief for the refugees. On November 22, 1967, the Japanese government supported Security Council Resolution 242 on the grounds that it would substantially contribute to the establishment of a just and durable peace in the Middle East.

However, such a stance — avoiding deep involvement in the conflict while continuing commercial relations with the Middle Eastern countries — was difficult to maintain in the 1970s.

In September 1970 Libya succeeded in raising her oil price for the first time in the history of OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries). This was a foreboding of further blows to the consumer countries. The outbreak of the fourth Arab-Israeli war and the subsequent oil crisis of 1973 gave a critical blow to Japan's policy based on the separation of economic and political matters.

### III. The 1973 Oil Crisis

The fourth Arab-Israeli war broke out on October 6, 1973. On October 16 the Persian Gulf states of OPEC raised the posted price of crude oil by 70%. The following day, OAPEC (Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries) agreed on the use of oil as a weapon in the conflict, decided to cut oil production by 5% of the September level, and recommended an embargo against 'unfriendly' states. This was a great surprise to both the Japanese government and business circles. The fear that Japan would be listed as unfriendly spread over the country. This oil shock hit the nation more seriously than had been expected. Panic buying and a shortage of soap and toilet paper at supermarkets were sensationally covered on the front pages of newspapers. Previously, Japanese decision-makers had believed that Japan had never taken hostile acts against the Arabs and that her diplomacy was based on the principle that economic issues should be kept separate from political ones. This was no longer tenable. Subsequently, on November 4 Arab oil ministers decided on a further cutback by 25% of the September level. By that date, the Japanese government had become aware that some drastic means had to be taken in order to cultivate more friendly relations with the Arabs and to avoid the critical situation of being listed as unfriendly. In late October Arab ambassadors in Tokyo called on the Foreign Ministry to positively support the Arab cause in the conflict. Particularly annoying to the Arabs was the fact that Japan's stance did not go beyond the pre-oil crisis one, namely her support for UN Resolution 242, so the Arabs exerted more pressure on the Japanese government to change its position on the Arab-Israeli conflict. It was reported that Saudi Arabia had advised the Japanese government to break



diplomatic and economic ties with Israel if Japan hoped to gain most-favored status with regard to Saudi and other Arab oil supplies. Faced with growing pressure from the Arabs, the government was split on its policy toward the Middle East. Foreign Minister Ohira Masayoshi, Vice-Minister Hogen Shinsaku and other high officials of the Foreign Ministry were apprehensive about the American reaction in the case of Japan's departure from her traditional position. In fact, the American government informally asked Japanese Ambassador Yasukawa Takeshi not to rush to support the Arab side.<sup>6)</sup> On the contrary, MITI (Ministry of International Trade and Industry) Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro, who was more nationalist-oriented, was aware that a further oil cutback would pose a serious threat to Japan's industrial development. Thus, Nakasone advocated a change in Japan's policy toward the Middle East.<sup>7)</sup>

On November 14, US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger arrived in Tokyo and met with Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei and Foreign Minister Ohira, warning them not to succumb to Arab blackmail and destroy the American peace efforts then underway in the Middle East. In response to this, the Japanese leaders explained Japan's economic predicament and vulnerability caused by her dependence on the Middle Eastern oil sources. Unless the United States guaranteed Japan oil supplies, they added, the Japanese government would have to adopt a policy in favor of the Arab cause. However, Kissinger did not offer the Japanese side any concrete assurances about US oil supplies. This made Japan feel she had no choice but to go her own way.<sup>8)</sup> By early November, Tokyo had already sent special emissaries to the Arab oil producing countries in an attempt to obtain information and find a way out of its imminent crisis.<sup>9)</sup> On November 6 the EC (European Community) foreign ministers at Brussels declared the

European common stand on the Middle East, calling on Israel to end the territorial occupation of Arab lands. This declaration was welcomed by the Arabs. On November 6 the EC (European Community) foreign ministers at Brussels declared the European common stand on the Middle East, calling on Israel to end the territorial occupation of Arab lands. This declaration was welcomed by the Arabs. On November 18 the Arab oil ministers suspended the scheduled 5% cut in production for the EC countries except the Netherlands. This contributed to Japan's final decision.

Meanwhile, within the cabinet, Foreign Minister Ohira was still unwilling to change Japan's Middle Eastern policy in a pro-Arab direction, while MITI Minister Nakasone advocated a pro-Arab stance. In principle, the cabinet would never adopt such a Middle Eastern policy as it would antagonize the American peace efforts and sacrifice the Japanese-American relationship. However, the domestic situation caused by the oil shock changed for the worse. The newspapers carried sensational articles. Business circles were rushing to push a pro-Arab policy change on the government. In their eyes, Japan without a drop of oil would be catastrophic; however, some business leaders were sensitive to the reaction of the American Jewish lobby. The special envoys whom the Foreign Ministry dispatched to the Middle East and Mizuno Sohei, President of the Arabian Oil Company, a Japanese overseas oil company, returned to Tokyo one after another carrying critical information and messages from Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia's posture made the Japanese leaders more pessimistic. According to these missives, Saudi Arabia warned "If Japan does not change its attitude toward Israel, it will experience a very cold winter."<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the election for the House of Councilors was to be held in 1974. In the end, these domestic pressures gained the upper hand in manipulat-

ing Japan's policy decision on the Middle Eastern conflict. On November 22 Chief Cabinet Secretary Nikaido Susumu stated Japan's new Middle Eastern policy as follows:

“1. The Government of Japan has consistently hoped that a just and lasting peace in the Middle East will be achieved through the prompt and complete implementation of Security Council Resolution 242 and has continued to request the efforts of the parties and countries concerned. It has been prompt in supporting the United Nations General Assembly Resolution concerning the rights of the Palestinian people for self-determination.

2. The Government of Japan is of the view that the following principles should be adhered to in achieving a peace settlement.

- (1) The inadmissibility of acquisition and occupation of any territories by use of force;
- (2) The withdrawal of Israeli forces from all the territories occupied in the 1967 war;
- (3) The respect for the integrity and security of the territories of all countries in the area and the need of guarantees to that end; and
- (4) The recognition of and for the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations in bringing about a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

3. The Government of Japan urges that every possible effort be made to achieve a just and lasting peace in the Middle East in compliance with the above-mentioned principles. Needless to say, it is the intention of the Government of Japan to make as much contribution as possible towards that end.

The Government of Japan, deploring Israel's continued occupation

of Arab territories, urges Israel to comply with those principles. The Government of Japan will continue to observe the situation in the Middle East with grave concern and, depending on future developments, may have to reconsider its policy towards Israel.”

Several points in this statement deserve careful analysis. First, the government made it clear that it followed the Arab interpretation of UN Security Council Resolution 242, namely, calling for the return of “all the territories” occupied by Israel. This interpretation was made much clearer in the Joint Communiqué issued in September 1978 when Prime Minister Fukuda Takeo visited Saudi Arabia: the Arab territories from which Israel was urged to withdraw included “the Arab section of Jerusalem occupied by Israel” in the 1967 war.<sup>11)</sup> Japan’s attitude to this controversy had previously been vague.

Second, the statement reiterated Japan’s position at that time on the Palestine problem which was manifestly set forth in the Joint Communiqué between Japan and Saudi Arabia in May 1971, in which it was mentioned that “the problem of Palestine should be solved on the basis of rightfulness and justice and that the people concerned should be entitled to their lawful rights.”<sup>12)</sup> Third, the unusual usage of the strong phrase “reconsider its policy towards Israel” in the last sentence was later severely attacked not only by the US government but also by some Japanese diplomats abroad. It was clear that the breaking of diplomatic relations with Israel would cause more deterioration in Japan’s relations with the United States. Later it was reported that Vice-Minister Hogen of the Foreign Ministry said that “nothing had really changed.”<sup>13)</sup> This seems rather strange, but Kuroda analyzes the statement as follows: What Japan seems to have done is to

give in the Arabs' request, but not all the way, stopping at warning Israel that it may have to reconsider such a move.<sup>14)</sup> In short, this clause was the product of escaping the dilemma which the Japanese leaders faced between the Arabs and the United States.

At any rate, the Arabs received Japan's new pro-Arab policy favorably. At the same time, the Japanese government dispatched Vice-Prime Minister Miki Takeo to the Arab countries on December 8, hoping that it would further contribute to the Arabs' sympathetic attitude. Consequently, on December 25 OAPEC ministers met in Kuwait, apparently appreciated Japan's recent attitude and decided to list Japan as a friendly nation.

In 1973 oil crisis was a turning point in the context of Japan's relations, not only with the Middle Eastern countries but also with the United States. For the first time Japan stated a specific policy toward the Middle Eastern conflict. The new pro-Arab policy showed the first deviation from the former attitude in which Japan's decisions on international problems were traditionally in conformity with those of the United States in the post-war period. Also, finally the principle of the separation of economic and political matters became inoperative in the era of politicization of the economy.

#### **IV. American Embassy's Hostage Crisis of 1979—1980**

Since the first oil crisis, Japan has strengthened her bilateral ties with the Middle East at both the economic and political levels. In 1979 Japan's exports to the Middle East reached US\$11,242 million, seven times that in

1973, and her imports from the Middle East US\$29,517 million, six times that in 1973. In the political field she has played more active roles. In 1976 Prime Minister Miki and Foreign Minister Miyazawa Kiichi received Farouk Kaddoumi, Head of the Political Department of the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization), agreeing with Kaddoumi to open a PLO office in Tokyo.

However, the Japanese government found it difficult to pursue its Middle Eastern policy as the result of stiff American policies toward the Middle East in the late 1970s.

In both the detention of American hostages in November 1979 and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, the US government looked more strongly than ever to Japan for support of its measures against the Iranian and Russian regimes. In the latter case, Japan joined the United States in imposing sanctions against the Soviet Union. On the contrary, in the former the Japanese government had to face a more difficult choice between the United States and Iran since Japan had developed closer relations with Iran in the post-war era.

In the hostage crisis, American President Carter ordered Americans to stop purchasing Iranian oil on November 12, and on November 14 resorted to the International Emergency Economic Act to freeze Iranian assets in the United States in reaction against the Iranian decision to withdraw Iranian funds from US banks. At the same time, the US government requested West European countries and Japan not to increase their imports of Iranian oil. However, US Secretary of State Vance met Japanese Foreign Minister Okita Saburo in Paris on December 10 and expressed his disappointment on learning of Japanese firms' purchases of Iranian oil on the spot market. Responding to the US criticism, the Japanese Foreign Minis-

try issued a statement on December 12 condemning the hostage detention as an act against international law. In 1978 Japan imported about 46 million kl.oil from Iran, which accounted for 16.9% of total oil imports. Japan's trade with Iran reached US\$2.7 billion in exports and US\$4.2 billion in imports in 1978. Moreover, a Japanese industrial group had been constructing a joint petrochemical project, IJPC (Iran-Japan Petrochemical Company) in cooperation with Iran at Bandar Khomeini. This joint venture, which was concluded between the Mitsui group and Iran's National Petrochemical Company in October 1971 with the aim of producing 300,000 tons of ethylene a year, became a national symbol for Iran and continued without interruption even after the revolution until the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war.<sup>15)</sup>

Therefore, the conflict between the United States and the revolutionary regime of Iran put Japan into another dilemma. In January 1980 Washington decided to take stricter measures and submit a resolution to the UN Security Council for economic sanctions against Iran. When this resolution was killed by the Soviet veto, Washington dispatched a special envoy, former Undersecretary of State Habib, to Tokyo on January 16. Habib urged the Japanese side to agree with American economic sanctions against Iran. Meanwhile, on January 14 Iranian Foreign Minister Ghotbzadeh called on European countries and Japan not to follow the American economic sanctions. Further, Petroleum Minister Moïnfar warned the Japanese Ambassador in Iran that Iran would cease oil supplies to Japan if Japan joined the American efforts for economic sanctions. On January 17 Chief Cabinet Secretary and acting Foreign Minister Ito Masayoshi, explaining Japan's close economic relations with Iran, called for American understanding of this distress. This was quite different from Japan's quick

decision to follow US actions against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Further, on April 7 the United States severed diplomatic relations with Iran and banned American exports to Iran. The Western allies, including Japan, were requested to join the United States' retaliatory acts against Iran. Responding to this, Foreign Minister Okita said that Japan understood the situation under which President Carter was forced to sever diplomatic relations with Iran, while Chief Cabinet Secretary Ito reacted coldly, saying that "Japan's relations with Iran cannot be compared with the US ties with Iran."<sup>16)</sup> Faced with such growing tension between the United States and Iran, however, the Japanese government tried to take a common stance on the US-Iranian conflict with the EC countries. Following the EC's decision not to take any stronger action against Iran, Tokyo showed its unwillingness to respond to the US appeal on April 11. Instead, Tokyo condemned Iran for taking American hostages in strongly worded statements, and summoned its ambassador from Iran in concert with the EC decisions. There was no doubt that these lukewarm actions would not satisfy Washington.

Consequently, on April 11 Foreign Minister Okita said at a press conference that "the problem of oil is vital for Japan. But if there are other issues of greater importance than the oil problem, then we have to think of taking steps to answer this cause <sup>17)</sup>..... In response to the US request that Japan do its utmost in support of the US," continued Okita, "we are seriously studying what we can do to discharge our responsibility as a member of the international community." It was obvious that "other issues of greater importance" meant Japan's maintenance of good relations with the United States. Okita's remarks were confirmed by Prime Minister Ohira the following day. Ohira made clear Japan's position in the hostage



crisis, giving more importance to her relations with Washington than to those with Teheran.<sup>18)</sup>

It is noteworthy that Japan sided with the United States in face of the choice between the US and Iran over the hostage problem, even if Iran's oil supply to Japan was interrupted. In fact, on April 21 Iran stopped oil exports to Japan for the reason that negotiations between Japanese companies and NIOC had reached a deadlock.

That same day Tokyo dispatched Okita to Luxembourg to discuss the sanctions against Teheran. The EC foreign ministers decided to impose the phased sanctions on April 22. The measures to be taken immediately included reduction in embassy staffs in Teheran, the introduction of a visa system for Iranians travelling to the EC states, and the withholding of permission for the sale or export of arms or defence-related equipment to Iran. The sanctions to be taken at the final stage included a total embargo on all exports to Iran except food and medicine. In parallel with this, on April 24 the Japanese government took the same measures, believing that such a course would deter the United States from adopting a more hardline attitude, including military options, toward Iran.

The following day, however, the Japanese decision-makers were surprised to learn of the US attempt to rescue the American hostages in Iran. The whole situation deteriorated even further, and then the Japanese government decided to impose more economic sanctions. These sanctions were lifted in January 1981 when all the American hostages were freed.

## V. American Bombing of Libya

The US hardline attitude toward Libya, which President called a main sponsor of international terrorism, also placed Japan in a dilemma.

In retaliation for a series of terrorist acts, especially after the Arab guerilla groups' attacks in the Rome and Vienna airports on December 27, 1985, which left 19 dead, including 5 Americans and 124 wounded, by Executive Order Reagan prohibited all American economic activities with Libya and on January 7, 1986 called on all Americans living in Libya to leave immediately, and on January 9 froze Libyan government assets in the United States. At the same time, the US administration appealed to West European countries and Japan to join in these sanctions against Libya. However, those Western allies which had been involved in trade with Libya hesitated to antagonize the latter by joining in the US economic sanctions. They had greater economic stakes in Libya than the US did.<sup>19)</sup> Japanese Foreign Minister Abe Shintaro said in the statement issued on January 8 that the Japanese government understood the process through which the United States had reached her decision to take economic sanctions against Libya, although Abe did not make clear whether Japan joined the US actions. However, MITI Minister Watanabe Michio stated on January 9 that MITI was ready to strongly request that Japanese enterprises operating in Libya not "undermine" the US economic sanctions.<sup>20)</sup> On January 24 the US administration strengthened its unyielding determination by demonstrating naval maneuvers of the US 6th Fleet in the Gulf of Sidra. This show of force escalated into the American-Libyan military clash in the disputed Gulf on March 24. At the end of his news briefing, White House Deputy Press Secretary Larry Speakes warned "We have taken appropriate

measures to defend ourselves in this instance... We reserve the right to take additional measures as events warrant."<sup>21)</sup> The following day, Arab foreign ministers met in Tunis and condemned the American air actions against Libya. The vicious circle did not end. On April 5 a bomb exploded at a West Berlin discothèque, killing two persons, including an American soldier, and wounding 230. Although there was no evidence of Libya's direct involvement in that incident, it triggered the American air bombing of Libya on April 15. In the air raids, 37 Libyans were killed and 93 were injured, although Libyan leader Kaddafi managed to narrowly escape the attack. Western European leaders were upset over the American air raids because they came immediately after the EC foreign ministers' emergency meeting ended, in which they condemned Libya and agreed to impose sanctions against her. The US actions were denounced all over the world. British Prime Minister Thatcher faced severe criticism for allowing the Americans to use bombers stationed in Britain. Thatcher never forgot that Reagan came to Britain's aid in the Falkland Islands War of 1982. Meanwhile, the American bombing was also untimely for Japanese Prime Minister Nakasone, who was finishing his visit to the United States when American bombers carried out their air raid missions against Libya. Japan's first reaction was cautiously expressed by Nakasone, who said that he would closely examine what was happening in Libya before deciding on the Japanese government's position on the US attack on Libyan military facilities.<sup>22)</sup> However, it was reported that Nakasone was informed of the attack beforehand.<sup>23)</sup> Although this was confirmed on April 16 when Nakasone said at a press conference that he had received advance information from President Reagan about the US air raid on Libya,<sup>24)</sup> it was not clear whether Nakasone had given his support for the US bombing. On April 16

Speakes reportedly said that Foreign Minister Abe expressed his government's understanding of the US explanation that the attack was "fully consistent with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter."<sup>25)</sup> This was later denied by the White House spokesman.<sup>26)</sup> Japan's cautious attitude to the US military action clearly reflects her dilemma in the US-Libyan conflict.

More annoying to Reagan was that Western allies other than Britain did not manifestly support the US policy toward Libya, in sharp contrast to the domestic public opinion polls which revealed that 77% of the Americans supported Reagan's hardline policy toward Libya.<sup>27)</sup> However, on April 21 the EC foreign ministers agreed to reduce diplomatic ties with Libya. The EC's decision, which was designed to stop the US from attacking Libya again, was welcome in Washington as a "concrete measure" in the fight against terrorism.<sup>28)</sup> It cleared away an obstacle to Japan's new posture toward the American-Libyan conflict. On April 28 Nakasone stated that some of the terrorist activities received support from official organizations in certain nations and that he would take up terrorism as a major subject for discussion at the coming Tokyo summit.<sup>29)</sup> Although deliberately worded, his remarks were taken to understand Reagan's struggle against international terrorism. Furthermore, on May 1 the Japanese government moved a major step forward by directly naming Libya as a nation involved in terrorism. Hatano Yoshio, Director General for Public Information and Cultural Affairs of the Foreign Ministry, stated in a press conference "We now have a better understanding of Libya's involvement in terrorism."<sup>30)</sup> It was reported that Hatano also said that the changes in the Japanese position followed briefings "in the past several days" from the United States and West European countries, implicating Libya as a supporter of international terrorism.<sup>31)</sup> This position was reiterated in Nakasone's meeting

with Reagan on May 3. Since the United States and the EC mended their relations, it was not wise for Japan as the host state of the Tokyo summit to go alone. Also, at the coming economic summit the Japanese leaders expected the West to exert pressure on Japan to open her doors to more Western goods.

On May 3, however, the Libyan Foreign Ministry summoned the Japanese ambassador in Libya and expressed its regret over Japan's departure from her former neutral position.<sup>32)</sup>

Notwithstanding, the leaders of the seven major industrialized countries showed a strong unity on international terrorism. In the declaration on international terrorism issued on May 5, they condemned Libya by name for sponsoring or supporting international terrorism. This was what Japan had tried to avoid. Faced with American-EC unity in accusing Libya, however, Japan succumbed. At a press conference, Foreign Minister Abe said that the statement did not represent any change in Japan's diplomacy toward the Middle East.<sup>33)</sup> In response to the Tokyo summit declaration, however, on May 7 the Libyan government asked the ambassadors of those countries to explain the declaration. Moreover, it was reported that Libyan leader Kaddafi ordered a boycott of Japanese and West European products in reaction to the declaration.<sup>34)</sup> Although it was considered that the Libyan boycott, even if it was enforced, would not cause a considerable loss to Japan, the Japanese government tried to tone down the strained relations not only with Libya but also with the other Middle Eastern countries. *The Japan Times* quoted a Foreign Ministry official as saying "Japan's foreign policy in the Middle East remains unchanged," with an emphasis that the summit statement was a joint communiqué and did not necessarily reflect the particular policies of the signatory nations.<sup>35)</sup> At the same time, Japan's

Foreign Ministry dispatched an envoy to the Middle East to reassure the Middle Eastern governments that Japan's policy toward the region did not change as the result of the summit declaration.<sup>36)</sup> It was reported that Kaddafi showed a flexible attitude toward Japan, in appreciation of Japan's efforts, in his speech on Libya's September 1 revolutionary anniversary, although the United States was still condemned.<sup>37)</sup>

## VI. Some Observations

The Japanese government shifted its Middle Eastern policy in favor of the Arabs under the critical condition caused by the first oil crisis of 1973. This was a departure from the traditional, post-war posture of going along with the US foreign policy. Furthermore, among the Japanese leaders and people a sense of being a great power, accelerated by Japan's higher economic development, stressed the different approach to the Middle East from the US Middle Eastern policy.

Nevertheless, the Japanese-American relationship is pivotal in Japan's foreign relations. However, Japan's recent unbalanced trade surplus is beyond the American tolerance level: Japan's trade surplus with the United States increased to US\$13.3 billion in 1981 and US\$33.1 billion in 1984. Meanwhile, as far as the US policy toward the Middle East is concerned, the United States has continued to lose influence in the Middle East following the crises in Iran and Lebanon. Frustration of the trade deficit on the American side has been intertwined with its poor management of the Middle Eastern policy, leading to its pressure on Japan to support the US efforts in the Middle East which the Japanese government is hesitant to

follow, owing to Japan's heavy dependence on Middle Eastern oil. Faced with such a dilemma, that is, maintaining friendly relations with the Middle Eastern states on the one hand and taking a more cooperative role as an American ally on the other hand, the Japanese government has sent special envoys to those countries which were disgraced to express that nothing had really changed. Not making clear its policy position, Tokyo's "nothing has really changed" policy may sooner or later arouse suspicion and disappointment on both sides. So long as the Middle Eastern conflicts remain unsettled and American interests collide against those of the countries of the region, there is no guarantee that Japan will continue to be on good terms with both the United States and the Middle East.

The only way for Japan to free herself from this dilemma is to do her best to bridge over the chasm of the conflicting views between the Middle Eastern countries and the United States. This is what both sides expect of Japan. Otherwise, Japan will continue to find herself in an untenable policy position.

\* This article is partly based on the Nahum Goldman Chair in Diplomacy lecture delivered at Tel Aviv University on March 11, 1986.

Notes

- 1) Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Waga Gaiko no Kinkyō (Diplomatic Blue Book)*, 1957.
- 2) This is the case in Japan's trade with the Arabs: most Japanese companies are sensitive to Arab boycotts.
- 3) *Waga Gaiko no Kinkyō*, 1957.
- 4) *Waga Gaiko no Kinkyō*, 1962 and 1967.
- 5) *Waga Gaiko no Kinkyō*, 1965.
- 6) Yanagida Kunio, *Ookami ga Yattekita Hi (The Day the Wolf Came)*. Tokyo, Bungeishunju, 1982. p. 66.
- 7) Kuroda Yasumasa, "The Oil Crisis and Japan's New Middle East Policy, 1973" *Annals of Japan Association for Middle East Studies* 1(1986) pp. 156—157.
- 8) Katakura Kunio, "Narrow Options for a Pro-Arab Shift: Japan's Response to the Arab Oil Strategy in 1973" *Annals of Japan Association for Middle East Studies* 1(1986) p. 140.
- 9) According to Yanagida, these envoys were Tamura Hideji, former Ambassador to Saudi Arabia and Morimoto Keiichi, former official of the Foreign Ministry. Yanagida, pp. 66—66.
- 10) Kenneth Juster, "Foreign Policy-Making During the Oil Crisis" *The Japan Interpreter*, 11—3(1977)
- 11) Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Japan and the Question of Palestine*. April 1980.
- 12) Ibid.
- 13) Michael M. Yoshitsu, *Caught in the Middle East: Japan's Diplomacy in Transition*. Lexington, Lexington Books, 1984. Kuroda, p. 173.
- 14) Kuroda, p. 175.
- 15) The total cost of the investment was at first estimated at US\$358 million, but it actually increased to about US\$3 billion by early 1981 in the wake of the first oil crisis, the Iranian revolution and the Iran-Iraq war.
- 16) *The Japan Times*. 1980. 4. 9.
- 17) *The Japan Times*. 1980. 4. 12.
- 18) *The Japan Times*. 1980. 4. 13.
- 19) The United States and her allies' trade with Libya (US\$ million)



	Exports		Imports	
	1975	1983	1975	1983
France	405	334	189	848
Germany	537	841	1,391	2,476
Japan	240	363	280	5
USA	232	191	1,120	1
Italy	1,038	2,104	1,239	2,688
Britain	237	417	289	340

(Source) IMF *Direction of Trade Statistics Yearbook*.

- 20) *The Japan Times*. 1986. 1. 10.
- 21) *Official Text*. Press Office, US Information Service, American Embassy, Tokyo.
- 22) *The Japan Times*. 1986. 4. 16.
- 23) *The Asahi Shimbun*. 1986. 4. 15.
- 24) *The Japan Times*. 1986. 4. 17.
- 25) *The Asahi Shimbun*. 1986. 4. 17.
- 26) *The Asahi Shimbun*. 1986. 4. 20.
- 27) *The New York Times*. 1986. 4. 17.
- 28) *The Japan Times*. 1986. 4. 23.
- 29) *The Japan Times*. 1986. 4. 29.
- 30) *The Japan Times*. 1986. 5. 20.
- 31) Ibid.
- 32) *The Japan Times*. 1986. 5. 4.
- 33) *The Japan Times*. 1986. 5. 6.
- 34) *The Japan Times*. 1986. 5. 15.
- 35) *The Japan Times*. 1986. 5. 23.
- 36) *The Asahi Shimbun*. 1986. 5. 8. The envoy, Miyake Wasuke, Director of the Middle Eastern and African Affairs Bureau visited Tunisia, Egypt, Iraq and Turkey from May 28 to June 8.
- 37) *The Asahi Shimbun*. 1986. 9. 3.