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Yoshida Doctrine is a myth

by Yoneyuki Sugita

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OSAKA — President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe held a summit on April 24. Unfortunately, this summit was rather boring and not really worthy of making any serious academic analysis. However, this summit reminds us of the so-called Yoshida Doctrine, a Japanese principle or strategy that concentrates on pursuing economic growth while leaving the burden of national military defense on the United States.

Obama and Abe made an important strategic agreement. At a joint press conference, Obama said, "Let me reiterate that our treaty commitment to Japan's security is absolute, and Article 5 [of the U.S.-Japan security treaty] covers all territories under Japan's administration, including the Senkaku Islands." Facing a tense situation with China over the Senkaku Islands (or the Diaoyu Islands as China calls them), Japan seems to have maneuvered Washington into giving Tokyo full assurance that it would protect Japan if a military conflict ever took place over these islands.

On the other hand, the United States and Japan failed to reach any agreement on trade issues. The Japan-U.S. joint statement issued one day after the summit says, "Today we have identified a path forward on important bilateral TPP issues. ... [but] there is still much work to be done to conclude TPP."

Taro Aso, Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister, said he believes that Japan does not have to accept an unfavorable agreement on the TPP because "President Obama doesn't have the political power to do much before the midterm elections in November." Japan seems to be powerful enough in protecting its own economic interests from strong U.S. pressure that is exerted.

The Yoshida Doctrine seems to be working even today. However, having reviewed the historical development during the Allied occupation of Japan, the overall conclusion is that the Yoshida Doctrine is all but a myth.

Many Japanese specialists take it for granted that the Yoshida Doctrine has been a cornerstone for Japanese diplomatic and security policy in the post-World War II era. Indeed, Japan's rearmament started during the Allied occupation and continued afterward, but the size and speed of military spending was considerably less than the United States had requested. What Japan effectively carried out was a constrained rearmament. Japan experienced spectacular economic growth in the 1950s and the 1960s. The Yoshida Doctrine seemed to set Japan on the right track and was working well.

The basic assumption of this argument is that Japan, a once devastated country, was able to achieve its own policy of light military spending with a heavy emphasis on economic growth which was against the strong will of the United States, then a hegemonic country. Even under the occupation, Japan was able to negotiate with the United States on an equal basis and to make its own independent decisions about its future. This assumption comfortably stimulated Japanese self-esteem and satisfied their nationalist feelings.

However, this was not exactly what really happened. There was a conflict between the two competing norms of the United States, rather than Japan's initiative or the Yoshida Doctrine, which made it possible for Japan to pursue its constrained rearmament in the postwar era.

The United States as a hegemonic power in the late 1940s established two norms: the establishment of anti-communist democracy and liberal capitalism throughout the world. These two norms at first had a cooperative relationship. Vibrant liberal capitalism fostered anti-communist democracy. However, in terms of Japanese rearmament, these two norms precipitated conflicts. The anti-communist democracy norm strongly demanded that Japan should have implemented a more rapid and large-scale rearmament program in order to protect itself from communism. On the other hand, the liberal capitalist norm strongly advocated by the Dodge Line in 1949 helped the rise of the Japanese financial authorities, the Bank of Japan and the Finance Ministry, that actively and continuously pursued the balanced budget in Japan. Consequently, they were against rearmament from fiscal point of view.

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Consequently, they were against rearmament from moral point of view.

These two American norms conflicted against each other concerning the validity of Japanese rearmament. It was this conflict of norms rather than the Yoshida Doctrine that caused Japan's contained rearmament. In this sense, the Yoshida Doctrine is nothing but a myth in postwar Japanese foreign and security policy.

If the Yoshida Doctrine is not an appropriate Japanese principle to analyze postwar Japanese foreign and security policies, what principle can we utilize? That may be a theme for further research to be done in this area and one that I would like to write about at a later date.

AUTHOR INFORMATION



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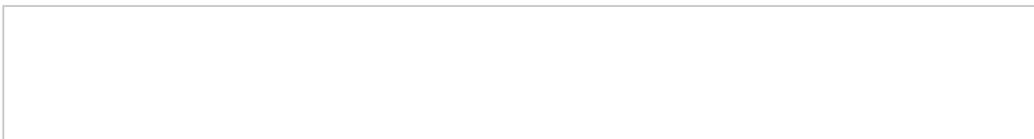
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