

**A NEW PILLAR OF
JAPANESE FOREIGN POLICY:
THE ARC OF FREEDOM AND
PROSPERITY—
JAPANESE POLICY
TOWARD THE GUAM ORGANIZATION**

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**I. Arc of Freedom and
Prosperity as a New Pillar of
Japanese Diplomacy**

On 30 November, 2006, Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs Taro Aso¹ delivered a policy speech entitled “The Arc of Freedom and Prosperity: Japan’s Expanding Diplomatic Horizons.”² The foreign minister later made another speech with this title and clarified the details of his conception on 12 March, 2007.

In his speech, Taro Aso introduced a new vision of Japanese foreign policy and added a new pillar to it. Until recently, Japanese foreign policy was based on three existing pillars: reinforcement of the Japan-U.S. alliance, international cooperation, most notably under the auspices of the United Nations, and relations with neighboring countries, namely China, Russia and the Republic of Korea.

The new pillar of Japanese diplomacy places the emphasis on universal values such as freedom, democracy, the rule of law, fundamental human rights, and the market economy. In his speech, Minister Aso stated that Japan would engage itself to create an Arc of Freedom and Prosperity along the outer rim of the Eurasian continent starting from Northern Europe and the Baltic states, crossing Central and South Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, the Middle East, the Indian continent, and Southeast Asia, and finally reaching Northeast Asia. According to the Minister’s speeches, Japan has been traveling the road to peace and happiness through economic prosperity and democracy and will cooperate with the states of the above-mentioned territories to create a prosperous and stable region. Thus a region of stability and plenty—the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity—with its basic universal values will begin to take shape. As Minister Aso publicly stated in his speech, Japan will serve as an “escort runner”³ to support the countries of the region that have just entered into this process.

This article is based on the author’s personal view and does not reflect any official policy.

¹ Taro Aso was Japanese foreign minister from October 2005 to September 2007.

² The full text of Taro Aso’s speech is available at [<http://www.mofa.gov.jp/announce/fm/aso/speech0611.html>]

³ Quoted from: T. Aso, “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity.”

Soon after Minister Aso's speech "Arc of Freedom and Prosperity," the Japanese Foreign Ministry clarified in detail how Japan will implement the new pillar of its foreign policy. As one element of its foreign policy, Japan will work to create this Arc of Freedom and Prosperity by facilitating the attainment of universal values. It will pursue this goal by maintaining a balance between political stability and economic prosperity and always taking into full account each country's unique culture, history, and level of development. In specific terms, Japan will be acting in partnership with other nations that shape Japan's fundamental values to jointly bring about a society characterized by both freedom and prosperity. It will accomplish this by cooperating in trade and investment, as well as by making use of official development assistance to provide support for basic human needs, such as health care and education, and enhance infrastructure and legal frameworks. This will be one of the critical building blocks of the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity and, furthermore, will contribute to realizing the human security that Japan has been advocating.⁴

In the East of the Arc, ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations) has been developing and making steady progress in democratization and working toward intraregional stability through regional integration. Japan will increase its support of ASEAN and the CLV nations (Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam joined ASEAN later), so that it can be part of the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity.

In Europe, democracy emerged after the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Japan supports and will continue to actively support the Baltic states and the newly democratic countries participating in organizations such as GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova) and the CDC (the Community of Democratic Choice—Ukraine, Georgia, Lithuania, and Rumania) in their efforts both toward democratization and the establishment of market economies.

The countries of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan) have been gradually making progress toward democratization and market economies since their independence from the Soviet Union. Japan will render support to the Central Asian countries on a bilateral level and within the framework of the "Central Asia plus Japan" Dialog (established in 2004). Japan will also render support by promoting open regional cooperation with a view to possible expanded regional cooperation with Afghanistan and Pakistan to develop transportation and shipping routes that provide these areas with access to the sea.⁵

In creating the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity, Japan will cooperate with the United States, its ally, with whom it has the same values and strategic interests. It is also important that Japan strengthen its relations with other countries and organizations with which it shares the same values, such as Australia, the G-8 countries, other countries of Europe and the European Union (EU), as well as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The basic form of the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity will result from expansions generated from points along the rim of the Eurasian continent.⁶

Japan is already holding policy discussions within various formats with many of the countries along the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity. The CLV-Japan Summit and the Foreign Ministers' Meeting of the CLV and Japan, Central Asia + Japan Dialog, and dialogs with the V4 group of four Central European nations (the Visegrad Four: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia) are among the key meetings that have been convened as of today. Japan considers it critical to establish meetings and dialogs with these and other new groups and hold them on a regular basis. As mentioned in the "Diplomatic Bluebook 2007" of the Japanese Foreign Ministry, in the years to come, Japan will

⁴ See: "Diplomatic Bluebook 2007," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, p. 3, available at [<http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/2007/index.html>].

⁵ See: *Central Asia as a Corridor for Peace and Stability*, Speech by Mr. Taro Aso, Minister for Foreign Affairs at the Japan National Press Club, 1 June, 2006, available at [<http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/speech0606.html>].

⁶ See: "Diplomatic Bluebook 2007," p. 3.

make an effort to intensify such policy discussions while also establishing dialogs with countries with which discussion forums are lacking or weak, such as the CLV countries, the V4 countries, and the GUAM states.⁷

II. Japan's New Foreign Policy Objectives

After Foreign Minister Taro Aso delivered his speech on the “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity” and the new vision of Japanese foreign policy was introduced, scholars and experts on Japanese foreign policy started to give their interpretation of why it was necessary to revise Japan's traditional foreign policy course. A number of articles were written to explain and analyze the new vision of Japanese foreign policy introduced in the minister's speech.⁸

As is commonly known, after its defeat in World War II, Japan did not play a prominent role in international affairs. The alliance with the United States was the main pillar of Japanese foreign policy. Within the secure and stable strategic-political framework provided by the Japan-U.S. alliance, the Japanese could focus their activities on the task of economic reconstruction, which resulted in Japan becoming a highly efficient, competitive, industrial economy.⁹ While protected by the U.S. security umbrella, Japan has been concentrating its interests on economic affairs and expressing its national interests exclusively through economic power. Its foreign policy has been relying primarily on economic tools of power and influence. These tools include foreign aid and contributions to international organizations, as well as overseas foreign direct investments.

The new course of Japanese foreign policy was produced in the context of the transformation of international relations after the end of the Cold War. In addition, the terrorist attack on the U.S. on 11 September, 2001 in particular and the threat of growing terrorism in general prompted Japanese policy-makers to revive Japan's foreign policy course.

One of the main objectives of Japanese foreign policy is to become a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council and assume responsibility for international security on the global arena. Before the end of the Cold War, Japanese foreign and security policy focused on the Asia Pacific Region. Recently, Japan has started to increase its contribution to stability and peace in some regions. The Japanese government dispatched its Self-Defense Forces to participate in peacekeeping operations in Cambodia, East Timor, and Nepal. Japan also contributed to the reconstruction activities after the wars in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Since 2001, the Japanese Self-Defense Forces have taken part in the international antiterrorist operations in the Indian Ocean.¹⁰ At the same time, the Japanese government is carrying out more active diplomacy on the African continent and in Latin America.¹¹ The

⁷ See: “Diplomatic Bluebook 2007,” p. 3.

⁸ See: Sh. Mutsushika, *New Trends in the Black Sea Area and Big Power Interests*, Speech presented at the Second Japan-Black Sea Area Conference, Tokyo, 20-21 November, 2007 (see also: Sh. Mutsushika, “The Black Sea Cooperation—Japanese Foreign Policy toward the Black Sea Area and the ‘Arc of Freedom and Prosperity’ Diplomacy,” The Japan Institute of International Affairs, March, 2007), available at [http://www2.jiia.or.jp/pdf/global_issues/h18_BSEC/h18_BSEC.pdf] (in Japanese).

⁹ See: M.E. Weinstein, “Japan's Foreign Policy Options: Implications for the United States,” in: *Japan's Foreign Policy. After the Cold War: Coping with Change*, ed. by G.L. Curtis, M.E. Sharpe, New York, 1993, pp. 218-219.

¹⁰ The SDF have been deployed in the Indian Ocean to conduct refueling services for allied warships based on the antiterrorism special measures law, which was enacted to support the military operations of U.S. forces in Afghanistan. The Japanese government is seeking permanent legislation that would allow Japan to dispatch its Self-Defense Forces overseas (see: *The Asahi Shimbun*, 21 June, 2006).

¹¹ It should be indicated that in his speech “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity,” as well as in his other speeches and interviews, Foreign Minister Aso also mentioned the importance of activating relations with the African and Latin American continents. There was criticism that compared with other industrialized and developed countries, Japan has fewer em-

Japanese public also started to advocate the necessity for the Japanese government to conduct more active foreign policy in the international arena. A survey carried out by a Japanese newspaper in 2006 showed this tendency. Fifty-seven percent of the respondents agreed that there was a need to review Japanese foreign policy and contribute more to international security, while 55% said that there was a need to revive the Japanese Pacific Constitution.¹² In this sense, new Japanese diplomacy can be understood as Japan's desire to be involved more actively on the international arena.

III. Japanese Engagement on the Eurasian Continent and in Eurasian Diplomacy

As for the Eurasian continent, the global changes that have occurred since the end of the Cold War in 1989, in particular the disintegration of the Soviet Union, presented Japan with the need and opportunity to adjust and broaden its diplomatic relations with the states of the continent. Many Japanese governmental officials stressed the importance of Eurasia as a region of political and cultural diversity with which Japan should intensify its relations.

However, Japan's response was rather slow. Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto¹³ did not declare his so-called Eurasian Diplomacy until 1997.¹⁴ It was aimed at strengthening political and economic relations with the new states in Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus. Hashimoto announced Japan's intention to play a more assertive role across this region: "Positive assistance by Japan for the nation-building efforts of these countries will most certainly be constructive for these newly independent states. I am certain that it will expand the frontier of Japanese foreign policy to the Eurasian region at the dawn of the 21st century."¹⁵

In his speech, Prime Minister Hashimoto linked his Eurasian Diplomacy to the images of the Silk Road that connected China and Imperial Rome through the Caucasus and Central Asia. This diplomacy became known also as the Silk Road Diplomacy.¹⁶

bassies in the countries of both continents and its budget was not enough for foreign policy activity in African and Latin American countries (see, for example: *Speech by Deputy Foreign Minister Yasuhisa Shiozaki at a conference organized the Institute of Central Asia and Caucasus studies on 31 July, 2006*, available at [<http://cari.727.net/>]).

¹² Questions about whether to revise the Constitution in order participate more actively on the international arena, for instance, in peacekeeping operations, have been asked since 1997. The 2006 survey showed a gradual increase since then in the percentage of respondents who support constitutional revision. In 2004, the percentage of the supports of those saying revision was needed exceeded 50 percent for the first time (see: *The Asahi Shimbun*, 4 May, 2006).

¹³ Ryutaro Hashimoto was prime minister of Japan from January 1996 to July 1998.

¹⁴ Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto introduced his Eurasian Diplomacy concept in his speech at the Keizai Doyukai, the Japan Association of Cooperate Executives. The full text of Hashimoto's speech is available at [<http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/0731douyukai.html>]. Details of the Eurasian Diplomacy and its interpretation are also available in "Diplomatic Bluebook 1998."

¹⁵ It is necessary to note that in his speech, Hashimoto also explained his new policy toward Russia (see: "Diplomatic Bluebook 1998," p. 210).

¹⁶ The concept of the Silk Road as a region with historical and cultural elements has been popular in Japan. There was an extremely popular television documentary series titled *The Silk Road* in Japan in the late 1980s. The 1990s saw a boom in everything related to the Silk Road states. While cooperating with the Silk Road's countries politically and economically, the Japanese government placed particular importance on cultural diplomacy and Japan allotted large cultural grants (see: R. Driete, "Japan's Eurasian Diplomacy: Power Politics, Resource Diplomacy or Romanticism?" in: *The Caspian: Politics, Energy and Security*, ed. by Sh. Akiner, Routledge Curzon, London, 2004, pp. 281-282). For the Silk Road Diplomacy, among others, see: M.R. Hickok, "The End of the Silk Road: Japan's Eurasian Initiative," *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 2000, pp. 17-39; Yu. Takeshi, *Japan's Multilateral Approach toward Central Asia*, a paper presented at an International Symposium of Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University, Japan, on 6-7 July, 2006, available at [http://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/coe21/publish/no16_1_ses/04_yuasa.pdf].

Hashimoto ended his speech with a call for Japanese business to take advantage of the oil and gas resources in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Hashimoto's approach to engaging the region was articulated in the Silk Road Action Plan prepared by the Ministry of Trade and Industry, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Finance of Japan at Hashimoto's directions and released on 7 March, 1998.¹⁷ The Action Plan consisted of three pillars: "strengthening political dialogs, assisting with economic and natural resource development, and cooperation in facilitating democratization and stabilization for peace." It also called on to promote high-level official visits and open new embassies in the Silk Road countries.

The provision of Official Development Assistance (ODA) became the main pillar of Japan's Silk Road Diplomacy. Japan's ODA was aimed at establishing a foundation for sustainable economic development, supporting democratization and the transition to a market economy, and alleviating social problems.

The involvement of Japan's private economic sector in the Silk Road countries has been slow to take shape. In 1998, the share of the eight countries together in Japan's total exports was 0.04 percent, and in Japan's imports it amounted to 0.06 percent. The most important trade partner in 1999 and 2000 was Kazakhstan, followed by Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan.¹⁸

In 1997, when Prime Minister Hashimoto launched the Eurasian Diplomacy, one of its targets was the Caspian Sea basin. The oil and gas resources of Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus make the region increasingly important for Japan strategically and economically. Japan, as the fourth biggest energy consumer in the world, has a continuing interest in diversifying its energy supply. Since the oil crisis of the 1970s, Japan has tried to shift its oil dependence from the Middle East to other energy resources. At the same time, the emphasis of the Japanese government has been placed on promoting reliable supplies of natural gas. Trying to reduce its dependence on Middle Eastern oil, as well as to meet its promised greenhouse gas emission curbs under the Kyoto Protocol on climate change, Japan has been emphasizing the importance of natural gas in recent years.¹⁹

Thus, Japanese foreign policy toward the Eurasian continent, particularly in the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union, first manifested itself in the second half of the 1990s. Silk Road Diplomacy can be considered the first conceptualization of Japan's diplomacy toward the newly independent countries. It was Japan's first attempt to become engaged in the Silk Road countries; however, Japan's role in the region was mainly as a development aid provider. The EU was involved more than Japan in the region in helping the Silk Road countries to establish political and governmental institutions, reform legal systems, and deal with similar governmental issues, while Japan considered the role of economic affairs.²⁰

The new pillar of Japanese foreign policy, the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity, covers the Eurasian continent. Therefore, it can be argued that there are some conceptual similarities between the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity and Eurasian Diplomacy. Eurasian, or Silk Road, Diplomacy was the first attempt by Japanese foreign policy to become actively engaged on the Eurasian continent, to be followed by the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity diplomacy.

One of the main tasks of the new Japanese foreign policy introduced by Minister Aso has been its contribution to democratization, economic prosperity, and stability in Eurasia. As is mentioned in

¹⁷ See: M.J. Green, *Japan's Reluctant Realism: Foreign Policy Challenges in an Era of Uncertain Power*, Palgrave, New York, 2003, pp. 162-163.

¹⁸ See: R. Drifte, op. cit., p. 286.

¹⁹ For Japan's energy policy, see, for example: *Rethinking Energy Security in East Asia*, ed. by P.B. Stares, Japan Center for International Exchange, Tokyo, New York, 2000, pp. 59-78; *Energy and Security: Toward a New Foreign Policy Strategy*, ed. by J.H. Kalicki, D.L. Godlwin, Woodrow Wilson Center Press, Washington, D.C., 2005, pp. 305-328.

²⁰ See: R. Drifte, op. cit., pp. 289-291.

a work on the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity concept, Japan's diplomatic horizon has moved from the economic dimension and has reached the dimension of universal values. This is partly because universal values have become more important in current international relations.²¹

IV. Japanese Policy Toward the GUAM Organization

In his Arc of Freedom and Prosperity speech, Taro Aso stated that Japan was prepared to cooperate with the new Eurasian organizations, such as the Community of Democratic Choice (CDC), the Visegrad Group of Four Central European Nations (V4), and the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development—GUAM.

As far as the GUAM organization is concerned, the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity diplomacy mentioned the Organization as being very important for Japanese foreign policy objectives and, while having good and productive relations with member countries of the Organization at the bilateral level, it regarded its member states as a united entity.

In his speech on the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity, Foreign Minister Aso mentioned the GUAM organization three times, while also touching upon Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Ukraine separately. Azerbaijan and Georgia, for instance, were considered very important for Japan with respect to natural resources. He emphasized the importance of bringing stability to the GUAM nations, which was the one of the main regions in the minister's Arc of Freedom and Prosperity belt. The foreign minister stated that Japan should foster contacts with the GUAM nations (as well as the countries of the Community of Democratic Choice—CDC, namely Ukraine, Georgia, Lithuania, and Rumania), while voicing some dissatisfaction that there are no satisfactory diplomatic functions within the GUAM states, and stressing the need to increase the number of foreign affairs personnel in those countries.²² Later, the Japanese Foreign Ministry stated in its report that Japan will make an effort to intensify policy discussions and establish dialogs with the GUAM countries.²³

In June 2007, Deputy Japanese Foreign Minister Mitoji Yabunaka visited Azerbaijan and met with the foreign ministers of the GUAM countries. It was the first meeting between the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development—GUAM and Japan and was held within the framework of the Organization's second summit in Baku on 18-19 June, 2007.

The participants welcomed the first meeting between GUAM and Japan and expressed their desire to continue and further enhance a dialog between the Organization and Japan. The participants also welcomed the new pillar of Japanese foreign policy—the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity, which emphasizes fundamental values such as democracy, freedom, human rights, the rule of law, and the market economy.

During the meeting, the participants discussed the main topics of the GUAM-Japan political dialog, including initiatives in strengthening democracy, increasing security and stability, and peaceful settlement of conflicts on the basis of the United Nations Security Council resolutions. Cooperation in the economic sphere was also discussed at the first meeting. GUAM members stressed their interest in Japanese investments in energy, transport, particularly the Europe-Asia corridor through GUAM, and the environment.²⁴

²¹ See: Sh. Mutsushika, *New Trends in the Black Sea Area and Big Power Interests*.

²² Within the GUAM countries, Japan has embassies in Ukraine and Azerbaijan and has made a decision to open its embassy in Georgia in the 2008 fiscal year.

²³ See: "Diplomatic Bluebook 2007," p. 3.

²⁴ See: *Joint Press Statement GUAM-Japan Meeting*, Baku, 18 June, 2007, available at [<http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/guam0706.html>].

Further cooperation between GUAM and Japan was discussed at a meeting between Deputy Foreign Minister of the Republic of Azerbaijan Araz Azimov and Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Aso during the Azerbaijani deputy minister's visit to Japan. Minister Aso stressed the importance of the first step of the dialog between GUAM and Japan held in Baku in June, 2007, and Japan's willingness to continue relations with the GUAM organization. Azimov expressed his gratitude that Deputy Foreign Minister Yabunaka attended the first GUAM-Japan meeting and his desire that dialog between the GUAM countries and Japan continue. He stressed that Azerbaijan highly valued Minister Aso's Arc of Freedom and Prosperity concept, as it met the strategic interests of Azerbaijan, which connects Asia with Europe, and fully supported the concept.²⁵

The second meeting between GUAM and Japan took place in Tokyo, Japan on 4-5 December, 2007. Before the meeting, the Japanese Foreign Ministry instituted the position of Special Representative for GUAM Affairs and appointed deputy director of the European Affairs Bureau of the Japanese Foreign Ministry to this position. This appointment undoubtedly showed the great importance the Japanese Foreign Ministry attached to the GUAM organization.

The National Coordinators of GUAM had a meeting with Japanese Foreign Minister Masahiko Koumura and held consultations with high-level officials of the Japanese Foreign Ministry. The participants discussed further cooperation in various areas such as trade and investment promotion, tourism promotion, energy, and transport, as well as the peaceful settlement of conflicts on the basis of the United Nations Security Council resolutions. The Japanese side expressed its intention to continue supporting GUAM and its members in their efforts to move toward democracy and a market economy.²⁶

During the visit of the National Coordinators of GUAM, a conference dedicated to the 10th anniversary of GUAM's foundation was held at the Japan Institute of International Affairs attended by more than 120 people, including members of the Japanese parliament and government, mass-media, researchers, and business circles. The National Coordinators presented comprehensive information about GUAM, its history, and activity, as well as GUAM-Japan relations and their prospects. The attendance of such a large number of participants from different circles showed Japan's growing interest in GUAM.

²⁵ See: "Deputy Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan A. Azimov Pays Courtesy Call on Foreign Minister Taro Aso," 29 June, 2007, available at [http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/2007/6/1174277_828.html].

²⁶ See: *Joint Press Release of 2nd «Japan-GUAM» Meeting*, 10 April, 2008, available at [<http://www.mfa.gov.az/eng/international/organizations/guam/GUAM-Japan.shtml>].