

## Japan's Assistance for Fragile States: Potential for U.S.-Japan Cooperation

September 3, 2015

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On September 3, 2015, the Stimson Center hosted Kazuo Tase of Deloitte Tohmatsu Consulting and Kazuto Tsuruga of Osaka University. The duo drew upon their vast experience in international development—and, in the case of Tase, international development, government service, and the private sector—to lend insight on Japan's capacity to furnish assistance to so-called "fragile" states, both unilaterally and in concert with the United States.

Tsuruga, a former member of the Japanese diplomatic mission to the UN, first reflected on Japan's current domestic political environment—particularly the debate over new security laws proposed by the Abe government—before offering his perspective on the nation's capacity to assist fragile states. While drawing a clear distinction between his commentary on controversy over the new security legislation and the issue of Japan becoming more actively involved in the affairs of fragile states, the overarching message of his remarks demonstrated the connection between the two. Tsuruga expressed concern for the political inclinations of the Japanese people, particularly younger generations: though he allowed that youth opposition to new security bills could be viewed as a testament to Japan's successful post-WW2 transition to a peace-loving nation, he suggested that such activism was founded on misperception or misunderstanding of not only Japanese domestic politics, but also broader global trends, threats, and opportunities. He blamed the Japanese media for feeding an insular narrative at the expense of genuine international awareness and empathy for the fellow man – particularly with regards to the refugee crisis. He argued that many newspapers shirked their duty to direct the public discourse on the refugee crisis, and in so doing, allowed the public to dismiss the issue as a problem for other developed nations to resolve rather than one of political and moral responsibility for Japan.

Tsuruga later circled back to the notion of youth detachment to suggest that Japan needs to do more at myriad levels of society to incline the public away from selfish interest toward global engagement. The problem, of course, is that people cannot simply be made to see the pursuit of global progress and prosperity—an admittedly arduous and costly undertaking—as an honorable and necessary national objective that serves the core interests of the homeland. Individuals must come to this conclusion on their own terms. Unfortunately, Japanese culture is not naturally amenable to such a worldview, despite successive governments having spent the past seventy years atoning for its role as an aggressor in WW2.

Tsuruga contended that the United States did not regard fragile states as especially concerning until Bush 43's presidency and suggested that in Japan, too, fragile states have in recent years begun to attract more serious consideration, particularly since the 2015 renewal of its development charter. Yet, reflecting on his time working on Cambodian reconstruction and Afghan development, he concluded that Japan has traditionally focused on the humanitarian and economic aspects of development, letting security and political considerations fall by the wayside. He argued that Japan ought to take greater initiative in influencing the internal political processes of fragile states, engaging relevant governments in bilateral diplomacy and integrating their leadership structures into the UN policymaking process.

Tsuruga pointed to the case of Cambodian reconstruction, noting that Cambodia was the first instance in which Japan inserted itself into a "complex conflict situation." He was quick to add that Japan must look to extend a helping hand beyond its neighborhood. Tsuruga advocated investment in expertise to

develop policymakers with a firm understanding of the political, economic, cultural, and security dynamics attached to the country or countries for which they are tasked to formulate policy solutions. He noted that Japanese development assistance experts have a regrettable tendency to avoid political discussions while operating in the countries to which they are assigned for fear of rankling key domestic power-holders. And yet, stationing personnel (in-country) who are willing to immerse themselves in the culture to the greatest extent possible, familiarize themselves with local grievances and domestic challenges, and discuss potentially sensitive political, economic, and social issues with commoners and officials, alike, is absolutely essential to the success of any development assistance mission.

According to Tsuruga, another almost laughably straightforward change would help Japan reach its full potential as a benefactor of fragile states: expanding a woefully light footprint within the United Nations organizational structure. Tsuruga noted that few Japanese have participated in reviews of UN peacekeeping operations, despite Japan's distinction as the world's second-largest contributor to such efforts. Partially to blame for this limited presence is the low mobility of Japanese professionals who choose to devote their careers to international service. In stark contrast to the so-called "revolving door" of professionals in the United States, Japanese culture is such that individuals almost invariably prefer to climb the ladder of their respective organizations rather than transfer to a different institution—much less drift between the private and public sectors. Experts employed by JICA, for example, typically do not consider making the leap over to the UN, and likewise for Japanese diplomats and other government officials. Unfortunately, this cuts off communication among knowledgeable, uniquely skilled individuals; systematizes isolation; and stymies discussion of political issues among both professional circles and the public. Exacerbating the situation is a Japanese educational system that gives short shrift to the study of modern history and, by extension, leaves many young people with a limited and sometimes misguided or biased understanding of international institutions such as the UN. Thus, it is hardly surprising that more young Japanese do not aspire to a career of international service.

Tase echoed Tsuruga's assessment of deep-seated cultural conventions, speaking from long experience in the Japanese Foreign Service, with the UN, and most recently in the private sector. His remarks revolved around the concept of "human security," a phrase that first appeared in the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report and which he attributed to Sadako Ogata and Amartya Sen, co-chairs of the UN Commission on Human Security (created in 2000). He described the expression as an attempt to establish a concept that would allow the flow of foreign assistance to beleaguered societies notwithstanding the functional status of their respective governments. In other words, when taken to mean individuals' freedom from violence or displacement, human security could be said to be under threat even if a state was deemed "secure" or stable. Efforts to advance the cause of human security within the international community had met with mixed results, as Ogata and Sen attempted to imbue the phrase with "added value" by including not only the physical but also the psychological well-being of individuals, or what Ogata dubbed the "vital core" of human existence. Unfortunately, the concepts of human security and vital core have elicited debate and confusion since receiving formal UN General Assembly recognition in 2005, with many expressing varying degrees of frustration over its ambiguity. Human security has proven too broad a concept to focus the international community around.

Tase criticized Japanese efforts to bring the concept of human security into the mainstream as an "economic assistance agenda" at a time when Canada, frustrated that UN procedure had handicapped efforts to staunch the Rwandan genocide, sought to advance human security as "responsibility to protect," a phrase similar in intent but lacking the negative connotations attached to "humanitarian intervention." Tase argued that Tokyo, perhaps unwisely, invested heavily in the then newly formed United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security without encouraging the participation of other like-

minded UN member states or first pushing for a UNGA resolution that would clearly define the concept and thereby circumscribe the mandate of the fund.

The first question pertained to Japanese ODA toward conflict-affected and fragile states, zeroing in on Tokyo's preference to do business with foreign governments while ignoring non-state institutions such as NGOs. Tsuruga acknowledged that Japanese bureaucracy suffers from a certain rigidity when it comes to the process of developing and executing assistance programs, as direct coordination with NGOs or individuals on the ground in other countries requires prior approval from Tokyo. Tase offered more criticism of the inflexibility, pointing out that while a declining budget has limited the number and scope of such operations, the greater problem is systematic: public entities and civil society share a poor view of one another. The sad reality is that Japanese citizens believe NGOs do the work of "self-sacrificing volunteers" who receive paltry pay; there is little incentive for a young person to join an NGO and even less for an established academic, private sector professional, or government. This prevailing mentality discourages public and private investment in non-state organizations that seek to positively affect the livelihood of domestic or foreign populations. Thus, Tase argued that the Tokyo should hire individuals from myriad professional backgrounds on a temporary basis so that government policy might benefit from a diversity of experiences and perspectives.

In response to other questions, Tase noted that he hopes Japan will raise the concept of human security as it relates to global health, disaster risk reduction, and private investment at the G-7 summit to be held in May 2016, though he added that Tokyo ought to first incorporate the notion of human security into its domestic policies as a model for other nations. He also explained that the \$400 million in Japanese investment into the aforementioned UN fund has gone to as many as 200 projects in quasi-states or emerging states where human security was believed to be endangered. Japan, deeming human well-being inherently indivisible into exclusive segments such as health or agriculture and hoping to promote dialogue and maximize return-on-investment, required that aid proposals be submitted to the fund by more than two UN organizations encompassing more than two different sectors.

Tsuruga shared his view that one of the leading impediments to UN effectiveness in delivering aid is inadequate communication between different levels of policymaking: those on the UNSC are out-of-step with government agency executive board members, who are out-of-sync with embassy personnel. Without better coordination and integration, any expectation for consistent, high-quality results is mere wishful thinking. He later elaborated this view, positing that since "peacekeeping cannot substitute for political solutions," those involved in development efforts must do more to develop coherent strategies for executing meaningful, *but achievable*, goals. Indeed, he explained that his experience in Afghanistan ten years ago revealed systematic deficiencies that undermined efforts to assist fragile states, making it difficult to put policy into practice on the ground.

Both speakers also opined on Japanese assistance to Africa. Tase qualified his expectations for a marked increase in investment on the continent by Japanese corporations by adding the caveat that many such companies remain wary of various African governments and may in the near term focus their attentions on India, Myanmar, and Bangladesh. Tsuruga agreed, adding that it is precisely because Japan is interested in assuming a greater assistance role in Africa and beyond that it has expressed such fervent interest in being made a permanent member of the UNSC.