

Seminar on “Japan’s Evolving Role in U.N. Peacekeeping Operations”

Hiromi Fujishige, Hosei University

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Discussants:

Hiromi Fujishige, Associate Professor, Hosei University

Yuki Tatsumi (Moderator), Senior Associate, East Asia Program, Stimson Center

Website:

<https://www.stimson.org/content/japan-evolving-role-un-peacekeeping-operations>

The Stimson Center hosted Hiromi Nagata Fujishige of Hosei University for a public seminar about Japan’s role in peacekeeping operations. Fujishige began the discussion by giving a brief history of the Japan’s security legislation and its constraints. Japan has had a rather reluctant defense position since the drafting of its Constitution after the end of World War II, mainly stemming from Article 9 which prohibits Japan from engaging in war abroad or maintaining a military. However, because the legal constraints of the Constitution hindered Japan’s ability to contribute to peacekeeping, Japan’s security legislation over the years has slowly grown more relaxed, starting with a bill in 1992 that allowed Japan’s Self-Defense Force to participate in U.N. peacekeeping missions. Gradually the scope of what and how Japan could contribute expanded further with a series of amendments to Japan’s security legislation that took place in 1998, 2001, and in 2015. Fujishige stated that the amendment in 2015 was the most significant as it introduced a new capability for Japan’s Self-Defense Force: *kaketsuke-keigo*, or rush-to-rescue. However, Fujishige questioned whether the amendments would result in a real-world change to Japan’s contributions to U.N. peacekeeping.

Kaketsuke-keigo capabilities allow Japanese peacekeepers to extend their use of weapons beyond individual self-defense as well as the defense of civilians under their protection to civilians they may encounter on their mission who are at risk of harm. Before the capabilities of Japanese peacekeepers were expanded, Japanese peacekeepers were unable to use force to defend civilians they encountered who were in danger, which resulted in much criticism and backlash from the international community. The rush-to-rescue capabilities are intended to counteract that criticism.

However, despite this change in security legislation, Fujishige stated that she does not think that this will strongly impact Japan’s contributions to U.N. peacekeeping operations. Japan does not have a history of sending infantry units to U.N. peacekeeping operations, which Fujishige stated was not likely to change in the near future. The government is hesitant to send infantry units due to the history of Japan’s security legislation and public scrutiny, as well as the general trend of developed nations rarely contributing infantry units. Fujishige emphasized that Japan will most likely continue to send engineering units who now have expanded capabilities to assist civilians in need, rather than sending infantry units.

Yuki Tatsumi observed that in addition to engineering units, Japan could also contribute to peacekeeping operations by providing other nations with community-based policing training, one of the other aspects of peacekeeping that are necessary to ensure the stability of peace. Tatsumi asked Fujishige if Japan’s focus is too narrow. Fujishige agreed with her observations, stating that military

contributions are not Japan's greatest strength, and so it could bode well for Japan to expand the scope of its contributions in order to ensure that conflict does not recur in the countries where peacekeeping operations are based.

Tatsumi opened the discussion to the audience for questions and answers. One audience member asked about whether *kaketsuke-keigo* allowed peacekeepers the initiative to conduct their own reconnaissance missions or if they must stumble upon civilians in order to protect them. Tatsumi replied that the concept of *kaketsuke-keigo* is very ambiguous about whether or not Japanese peacekeepers would be able to go on patrol on their own initiative. Most likely, the peacekeepers would have to be directed to go on patrols in order to use *kaketsuke-keigo* capabilities. However, the likelihood of a force commander ordering a Japanese engineering unit to go on patrol is very low.

Tatsumi expanded upon this question, asking Fujishige, based on her conversations with government officials, if the Japanese government was going to expand missions with the new security legislation. Fujishige recalled a conversation she had had with a Japanese government official, stating that she experienced a misunderstanding concerning Japan's capabilities to contribute to peacekeeping operations. She expressed surprise at this misunderstanding, and therefore doubted that these sorts of conversations were widely taking place in government despite being discussed in the media.

One audience member asked Fujishige to expand upon her point regarding Japan's potential contributions of community-based policing training. Fujishige stated that while this could be an area to which Japan could contribute, it would have to be in the interests of the National Police Agency.

Another audience member had a question regarding Japan's pledge at the Leader's Summit on Peacekeeping in 2015, asking if there were any locations to which Japan would refuse to send peacekeepers. Fujishige stated that during the summit Prime Minister Abe did not mention contributing infantry units or the use of *kaketsuke-keigo*. However, it was mentioned that Japan would contribute aircraft transportation as well as shift attention to gender-related violence. Fujishige added that she did not recall a specific pledge. The audience member responded that Japan had pledged a Level 2 hospital. After some clarification of the question from Tatsumi, Fujishige stated that with public support, Japan would be able to participate in any mission. Tatsumi elaborated that nation-building is a palatable concept to the Japanese people, which is why the mission in South Sudan has support from the public. If a mission can be made palatable to the Japanese people, it is more likely to gain government support as well. As a counterexample to this point, Fujishige brought up the mission in Kosovo, stating that because the Japanese public was not familiar with Kosovo, the mission there did not gain much public support.

Another member of the audience asked about the accountability or enforcement of using *kaketsuke-keigo*. Both Tatsumi and Fujishige responded that there are a lot of gray areas concerning *kaketsuke-keigo*. Because of the complex nature of Japan's security legislation and the capabilities peacekeepers have under certain circumstances, it is a logical next step to ask if there is an after-review process, but it is unclear if there is currently a process in place.

A member of the audience asked how Japan's current position on the U.N. Security Council will affect its contributions to peacekeeping operations. Fujishige stated that she was not entirely sure what Japan was currently doing, but cited the example of Slovenia's time on the Security Council as a possible example of what Japan could do. Although Slovenia is a small country, during its time on the Security Council it was a very active member and able to persuade the council to pay more attention to security sector reform. Because of this, Fujishige was optimistic that Japan could contribute positively to peacekeeping as well.

Tatsumi thanked Fujishige and the audience for the discussion and closed the seminar.