Japan's Contribution to UN Peacekeeping Operations in Southern Africa. The Quest for Peace or Prestige?

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Abstract

Peace and security within the African continent seems to be the result of weak interdependent factors. UN peacekeeping operations are one of the most fundamental tools to promote and maintain peace in a continent vulnerable to recurrent wars and conflicts. During the post-Cold War period, the southern African region, while observing increasing instability and conflict, hosted large-scale UN peacekeeping operations in Angola, Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Although geographically and politically distant from Africa, Japan decided to engage with the southern African region in its initial international peace cooperation assignments, based on a unique set of peace-related values. This paper aims at providing an assessment of the Japanese engagement and contributions to peace and security in the southern African region and how the promotion of and engagement with peace-related policies in Africa may improve Japan's level of influence, attraction, and reputation within the international community.

Background

Africa has been particularly exposed to conflict and war, a factor that triggered the involvement of external actors with the region's peace and security issues. The extent and human costs of conflicts in Africa are particularly exposed by the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), as underlined by Hawkins (2008, 24-25), "the conflict in the DRC is by far the deadliest conflict in the world in recent years. In fact, it is possibly the deadliest conflict in the world since World War II, … and is the deadliest conflict in recorded African history." If we expand this analysis to a continental level, the trends are also clear. Africa has been host to the vast majority (88 percent) of conflict-related deaths. The only non-African conflicts that can be found among the world's ten deadliest conflicts are Afghanistan and Iraq (Hawkins 2008, 25).

Problems with peace and security within the African continent seem to be the result of weak interdependent cause and effect links, with many factors, past and present, contributing "not least", according to Esther Pan (2005) "the continent's history of colonialism and conflict".

Furthermore, the end of the Cold War coincided with the collapse of state institutions in countries like Liberia, Somalia, Sierra Leone, and the Congo (DRC). Disputes over natural resources led to armed conflict that evolved into guerilla warfare involving mercenaries, warlords, militias, and child soldiers. A massive influx of weapons and small arms from Eastern Europe in the 1990s fed the conflict (Pan 2005).

When analyzing peace and security in Africa, it seems also relevant to take into consideration the causal nexus between the structure and the behavior of the actors or political units within the international system. Today's international distribution of power and global order still configures a system headed by the United States, along with rising powers like Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS). Despite the emergence of new powers, the current global order may endure for the next coming decades with relevant implications for peace and security issues within the African continent.

Monteiro (2012) recently laid out a theory of unipolarity that accounts for how a unipolar structure of the international system provides significant incentives for conflict. The disengagement of the hegemon power with Africa is one of the factors making the region more vulnerable to conflict.

> The unipole, … could pursue offensive dominance in one region, defensive dominance in another, and disengagement from yet another. For instance, between 1990 and 2001, the United States implemented a strategy of defensive dominance everywhere except in Africa, from which it largely disengaged after withdrawing from Somalia in 1994 (Monteiro 2012, 22).

More evidence of the continuity of the US disengagement with Africa can be found in the number of visits of the former US Secretary of State to different regions in the globe. In her first three years in office, Secretary Hillary Clinton visited 36 countries, including some more than once, and Africa was the region least visited by the US Secretary of State (Manyin 2012, 17). The path taken from the unipole's strategy and the current structure may make the African continent more vulnerable to conflicts.

The vacuum of power that emerged from the post-Cold War US disengagement with Africa underlines the importance of international institutions such as the United Nations (UN) in terms of promoting peace and security in Africa. Taking the year of 2008 as a sample, more than half of the peace operations in Africa were conducted by the UN. One of these was the United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), conducted along with the African Union (AU). In 2008, the UN accounted for 88 per cent of all peace operation personnel on the continent, and around 70 per cent of all UN mission personnel were located in Africa. The United Nations' total deployments in the region increased tenfold between 1999 and 2008. Other organizations

conducting or leading missions in Africa were the AU, the European Union (EU), and the Economic Community of the Central African States (CEEAC) (Sodder 2009).

It is under these circumstances, resulting from the post-Cold War environment, that Japan attempted to contribute to peace and security in Africa and simultaneously improve its prestige among the international community. Tokyo's policies regarding peace and security issues have been formulated within the limitations imposed by its constitution and the legal framework provided by the "Law Concerning the Cooperation for United Nations Peacekeeping Operations and Other Operations" (the International Peace Cooperation Law) enacted in June 1992. Under this framework, Japan underlines the role of the United Nations as the main institution to promote peace and security worldwide. The 1992 law establishes the three pillars of Japan's international peace cooperation: 1) Participation in UN peacekeeping operations; 2) contribution to international humanitarian relief operations and 3) contributions to international election observation operations.

The International Peace Cooperation Law also stipulates that Japan's peacekeeping operations shall be carried out according to five principles: 1) agreement on a cease-fire shall have been reached among the parties to armed conflicts; 2) consent to the undertaking of UN peacekeeping operations as well as Japan's participation in such operations shall have been obtained from the host countries as well as the parties to armed conflicts; 3) the operations shall strictly maintain impartiality, not favoring any of the parties to armed conflicts; 4) should any of the requirements in the above-mentioned guideline cease to be satisfied, the International Peace Cooperation Corps shall suspend International Peace Cooperation Assignments (unless the requirements cease to be satisfied again in the short term, the Government of Japan shall terminate the dispatch of the personnel engaged in International Peace Cooperation Assignments) and; 5) the use of weapons shall be limited to the minimum necessary to protect the lives of personnel, etc (Government of Japan 2010, 1).

Unlike other national structures on International Peace Cooperation, which traditionally underline the Ministry of Defense as the main domestic institution that deals with peacekeeping operations, Japan conducts its International Peace Cooperation Assignments in accordance with implementation plans drawn up under its unique structure. The International Peace Cooperation Headquarters is situated within the Cabinet office to administer Japan's participation in peacekeeping operations and other related contributions. Headed by the Prime Minister, the Headquarters has a deputy chief, members, and the Secretariat. In addition, in order to conduct International Peace Cooperation Assignments and other activities, International Peace Cooperation Corps are set up for a specified time in accordance with each implementation plan. The members of the International Peace Cooperation Corps are selected by screening volunteers or dispatched from the administrative organs concerned. After receiving training by the

Secretariat, they undertake International Peace Cooperation Assignments, including peacekeeping operations (Government of Japan 2010, 4).

Japan's actual participation in peacekeeping operations seem to be rather weak when compared, for example, with Tokyo's efforts on Official Development Assistance (ODA) towards Africa or other major powers' contributions to peace and security in Africa. However, Japan appears to be gradually seeking a stronger role on contemporary international peace cooperation and security issues. The current Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, since taking power in December 2012, has promised an increase in Japan's defense budget and a boost in the size of Japan's military personnel. Moreover, he intends to ease its domestic laws that severely limit the operational scope of its military. Such a change will allow Japanese troops to fire at enemy forces if friendly troops came under fire during peacekeeping operations (Hayashi 2013). This could give Japan a more prominent role in peacekeeping operations, therefore increasing its global influence in peace and security issues.

Conflict in the southern African region may not directly affect Japan's security interests. However, Tokyo aims at reaffirming itself as a global player and find allies within international institutions to fulfill its international ambitions, such as becoming a permanent member of the UN Security Council. It seems therefore important to analyze the interrelatedness between the causal and motivational links and the effective outcomes of the Japanese participation in peacekeeping operations in such a far away region from Japan as southern Africa.

Japan's Contribution to UN Peacekeeping Operations in Southern Africa

Japan's participation in peacekeeping operations in southern Africa seems to be the result of Tokyo's intentions to improve its international prestige and regional influence during the post-Cold War period. However, the relatively small-scale deployments and its limitations in terms of its ability to engage have also produced weak outcomes. In fact, Japan's participation in UN peacekeeping operations has long suffered from an underlying tension between the country's engagement with multilateralism, through the UN, and its political values that urge for the renunciation of military force. It was only in 1992, during the post-Cold War period, that the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan managed to implement the International Peace Cooperation Law, therefore enabling the dispatch of Self-Defense Forces (SDF) abroad (Heinrich, Shibata and Soeya 1999).

Japan's initial engagement with UN peacekeeping operations included peace cooperation assignments in Angola, Mozambique and the former Zaire. In the context of Japan's initial contributions to peacekeeping operations, the relevance of the promotion of peace and security within the southern African region was underlined. However, its initial engagements were not confined to southern Africa. Due to Japan's regional sphere of interests, promoting peace and security in Asia was also one of its main priorities. In September 1992, under the new law, Japan

sent approximately 600 SDF construction unit personnel, 80 military observers, 75 civilian police monitors and 41 civilian election monitors to the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) operations.

The engagement with southern Africa was initially seen cautiously not only by policymakers but also by the Japanese public that was naturally averse to military operations or related missions. In May 1993, Japan sent more than 150 SDF personnel to the UN Operation in Mozambique (ONUMOZ). Initially, the Japanese government was resistant to the idea of dispatching SDF to Mozambique, but the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) promoted and pushed through this idea into an effective contribution. In this context, a Japanese government official informally said:

> The participation in Cambodia's PKO alone is not enough for Japan. It is something like graduating from college with minimum requirements. In order to come up to the standard mark in the international community, Japan must participate in at least two UN peacekeeping operations simultaneously (Ochiai 2001, 41).

The first Japanese contribution to UN peacekeeping operations, although it didn't involve SDF personnel, was within the southern African region. The United Nations Angola Verification Mission II (UNAVEM II) observed and verified the presidential and legislative elections held in Angola on 29-30 September 1992. Japan dispatched three election observers, one each from the national government, local government, and private sector, to assist this mission. The Japanese observers worked together with an observer from another country in their assigned area for checking any dual voting or election disturbance, monitoring the elections (Government of Japan 2010, 11).

In the context of the UN Operation in Mozambique (ONUMOZ), approximately 200 personnel from various countries served as staff officers in the northern, central, and southern parts of the country. Japan dispatched a total of 10 SDF personnel as staff officers to the headquarters of ONUMOZ. Two staff officers were assigned to the general headquarters in Maputo, one to the southern regional headquarters in Matola, and two to the central regional headquarters in Beira. These officers helped ONUMOZ to prepare medium and long term operating plans and to plan and coordinate transport operations. Japan also dispatched three movement control units of 48 SDF personnel each, 144 personnel in total, between 1993 and 1995.

Working with a multinational team of peacekeepers, Japan's movement control units primarily coordinated the entry and exit of people and cargo at airports and harbors. Finally, the Japanese contribution to ONUMOZ included 15 election observers, sent between 27-29 October 1994, to cooperate in the holding of presidential and legislative elections. The observers

comprised 3 national government officials, 1 local government official, and 11 individuals from the private sector. The Japanese personnel were tasked with contributing to the monitoring and ensuring of fair elections in Mozambique (Government of Japan 2010, 15-16).

The country's participation in ONUMOZ attracted less attention from the Japanese government and the Japanese people when compared with the Cambodian operation. Few Japanese had knowledge or interest about Mozambique. The operation was relatively safe, although there were some frictions between the political forces in Maputo, which resulted in postponing the Mozambican elections twice. There was a relatively small element of risk, this in a region of less relevance for Japan. The Mozambican mission ended up largely ignored in Japan (Heinrich, Shibata and Soeya 1999, 26-27).

In the second half of 1994, Japan had the opportunity to participate in its first humanitarian relief operation under the International Peace Cooperation Law. Japan sent two teams of refugee relief units with 283 members in total to the aid of Rwandan refugees in eastern Zaire. Both units were composed of Ground SDF personnel, who engaged with medical activities, helped build roads at refugee camps and provided logistical support, in response to requests from local aid organizations. Working under extremely difficult conditions and adversities, the medical care personnel treated a total of approximately 2,100 outpatients and performed about 70 medical surgeries. Along with the refugee relief units, an Air SDF unit transported Japanese personnel and supplies in the C-130H transport planes between Nairobi in Kenya and Goma in the former Zaire. This unit also transported personnel and supplies for the UNHCR and NGOs conducting relief operations (Government of Japan 2010, 18-19). The Japanese contribution to the Rwandan operation was the result of the UNHCR director, Sadako Ogata's efforts and appeals to the Japanese government which was first reluctant but finally agreed to send the SDF to assist this mission. The 283-person SDF first contingent arrived after the most intense moments of the Rwandan refugee tragedy occurred, but it did provide vital services while the lightly armed Japanese soldiers were a reassuring presence (Heinrich, Shibata and Soeya 1999, 29).

The last time Japan contributed to peacekeeping activities within the southern African region was during the presidential and legislative elections conducted in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) on July 30, 2006. At the request of the UN, Japan sent 13 election observers to these elections, which included two rounds of voting. During these two missions, the Japanese observers, mainly in Kinshasa, carried out observations at various stages of the election process, including the campaign, preparations for the polling day, voting, and counting (Government of Japan 2010, 33).

The 2011 Diplomatic Bluebook points out the Japanese commitment in working for peace and stability, advancing various cooperation measures for the consolidation of peace in Africa:

Japan also provided election support and dispatched election observation teams to support the democratization process in such countries as Burundi and Tanzania. In addition, Japan continued to provide support for peacekeeping operations training centers in Africa to increase the peacekeeping capability of African countries (MOFA 2011, 16).

The funds provided by Japan to peacekeeping training centers in Africa, including the center located in South Africa, are used to train the personnel involved with the six current UN peacekeeping operations and one Africa Union operation in the continent. This consists of an important but cautious contemporary contribution to peace and security issues in the region, including southern Africa.

In the post-Cold War period, Japan's participation in UN peacekeeping operations continues to be undertaken with caution and deliberation. During the early 1990s, Japan seemed to have demonstrated a clear intention of promoting peacekeeping operations in southern Africa, a region that was particularly vulnerable to conflict and insecurity, a region that still faces today one of the major world conflicts in the DRC. As represented in figure 1, after an initial engagement with and commitment to peace and security in the region from 1992 to 1995, it seems that the efforts and contributions of Japan to peace and security in southern Africa clearly diminished.

Deployment of Japanese Personnel in UN PKO in Southern Africa

(1992 - 2013)
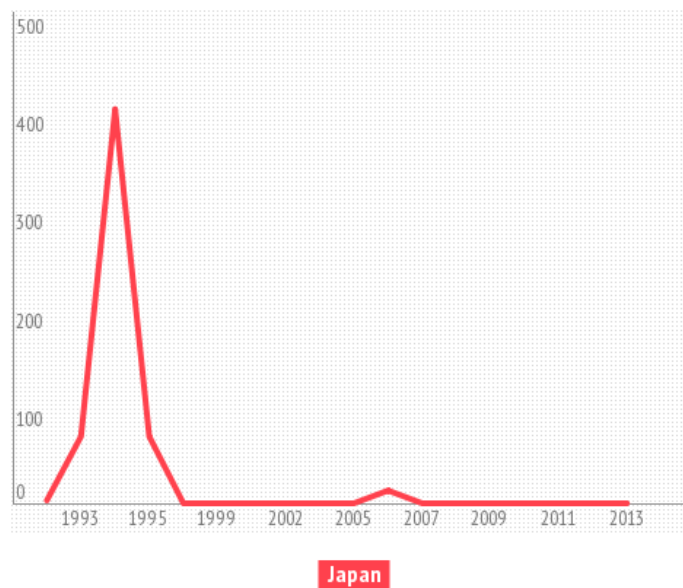
Total Current Deployment of UN PKO in Southern Africa
MONUSCO: 23,407

Figure 1 / Sources: UN Peacekeeping Fact Sheet; Inoue, 2011

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the only peacekeeping operation in the southern African region since the late 1990s has been in the DRC. Therefore, if Japan were to engage in peacekeeping operations in the southern African region since the 2000s, the DRC would be the only choice available.

The implementation of peace-related policies in the southern African region during the 1990's aimed at leveraging Tokyo's influence, attraction, and reputation within the international community. Promoting human rights, peace and security in southern Africa could be a win-win situation for Japan and the region, if effective, continuous and successful outcomes were produced as a result of such engagement. However, Japan's initial contribution to peacekeeping operations in southern Africa seem to be closely related with a strategy more focused on Japan's intentions to leverage its international prestige than a strategy focused on expected outcomes in terms of peace and security in the region.

The abovementioned constitutional limitations on the projection of Japan's hard power resources resulted in the unbalanced prioritization of prestige over an effective engagement with the promotion of peace within the southern African region. Additionally, considerations over the security of Japanese personnel in peacekeeping operations within the southern African region[1], namely in the DRC, along with the lack of political interest in the region when compared with the engagement with other regions, notably Asia (see figure 2, chart 1), resulted in a tenuous engagement with peace and security in the region after 1995. This also resulted in a disharmony with the priorities of the United Nations peacekeeping operations deployments, the majority of them in the African region (see figure 2, chart 2).

## Japan's Quest for Effective Peace or International Prestige?

Japan's initial post-Cold War attempt to increase its international prestige and reputation with its participation in peacekeeping operations in southern Africa, seems to be in harmony with an increasing importance of soft power strategies in contemporary international politics. If the official policies of nations like Japan are consistent with peace, democracy, human rights, openness, and respect for others' opinions, they will benefit from the trends of this new global information age, enhancing their level of attractiveness, and ultimately maximizing their power (Nye 2005, 31-32).

The new public diplomacy niche presents an innovative approach, through the dissemination of information to the general public and coordination of press relations. Constructive dialogue with foreign audiences is now a condition of success in foreign policy (Mellissen 2007, 13). This dialogue may address international norms, peace and security or human-centered policies.

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[1] Interview with a Japanese Government Official at Japan's Secretariat of the International Peace Cooperation Headquarters, July 18, 2012.

Deployment of Japanese PKO Personnel by Region 2000 - 2010

Chart 1
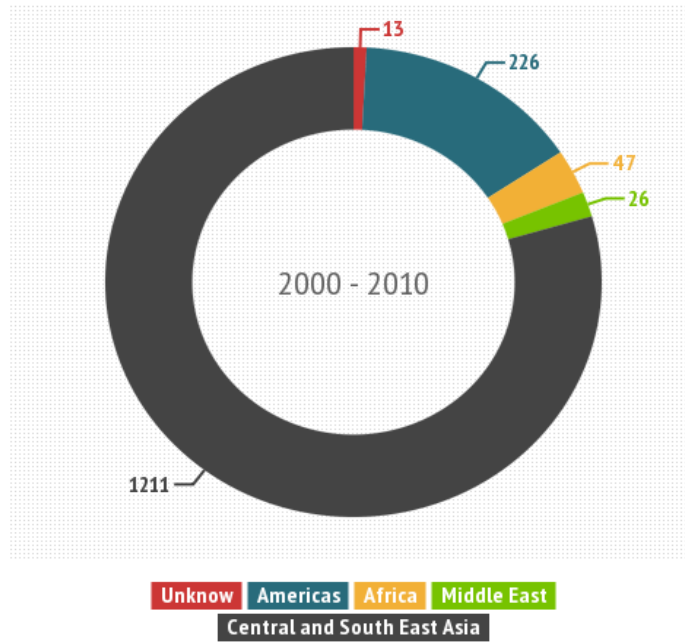
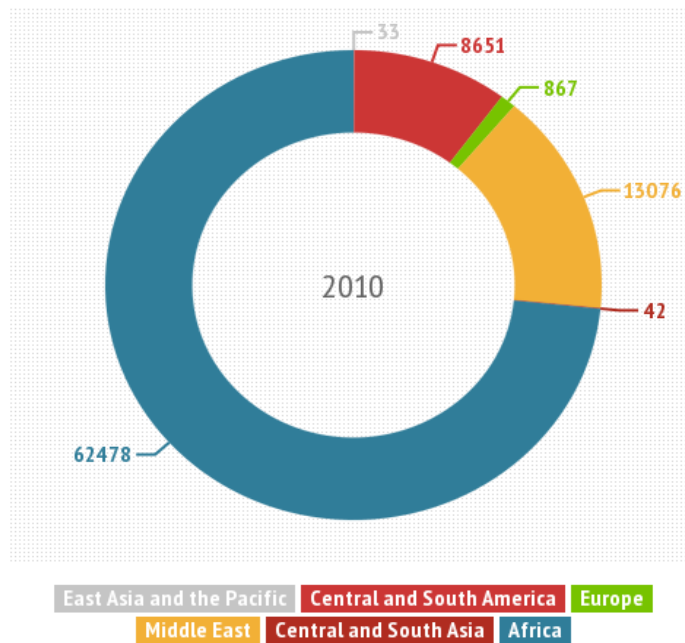Deployment of UN Military Personnel by Region in 2010

Chart 2

Figure 2 \ Sources: Inoue, 2011

Another concept of relevance and scope for some policymakers today is 'nation-branding', defined as "the unique, multi-dimensional blend of elements that provide the nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all of its target audiences (Dinnie 2009, 15)." Within the brand identity components it's possible to underline the ideology that each country advocates. The nation-brand manifestation of a country like Japan seems to be in harmony with peace-related values, human rights, and sustainable development (Dinnie 2009, 44). Acknowledging this tool while attempting to compete on the global stage, may give relative advantages to countries attempting to successfully communicating with foreign publics or negotiating with other nations.

Japan's post Cold War engagement with international peace cooperation in Africa seemed to follow the idea that the most common form of deploying states' hard-power resources in soft-power settings is through UN peacekeeping operations. Nevertheless those contributions are often not enough to serve as an effective means for the maintenance of peace and security in the region. Nye (2007) underlines that "while there are currently more than 100,000 troops from various nations serving in UN peacekeeping missions around the world, member states are not providing adequate resources, training, and equipment."

Japan seems to recognize that engaging with UN peacekeeping operations constitutes a valuable opportunity to enhance its international influence and prestige, which will therefore result in a relative advantage while negotiating with other countries, or appealing for votes at multilateral institutions. However, after an initial post-Cold War attempt to contribute to UN peacekeeping operations in the southern Africa region, Japan's contemporary engagement seems to be cautious and hesitant.

In fact, contemporary Japan is facing increasing challenges and it may need to define a foreign policy strategy that underlines its political values in a soft power context. The 21st century is considered by many to be the Asian Century. At the same time, politically it's possible to observe a loss of democratic *momentum*, with the loss of credibility of Europe and the US as global models. This came along with the growing appeal in some parts of the world, including Africa, of China's and Russia's versions of "authoritarian capitalism", offering an alternative to the Western model for developing or transitional countries. Indeed, China, Russia, and other authoritarian powers are asserting an increasing international political influence in a way that works against the spread of democracy (Carothers 2012). While we observe the rise of China and other autocracies in Asia, Japan stands out in the region, holding political values clearly aligned with the promotion of international peace, democracy and the universality of human rights.

The formulation of Japan's international public policies seems to be clearly influenced by a triangulation between human rights, human security and peace-related values, giving Japanese security and foreign policy a unique character and an hybrid structure, mixing realist elements connected with the country's national interest, and idealist elements related with human-centered

and peace-related principles. This not only benefits Japan's reputation, image, and level of attractiveness, but also, eventually, the international protection of human rights and the promotion of democratic and peace-related values within the international society.

The post-World War II Japanese constitution, as the main normative text for the formulation of policies in Japan, indicates the existence of strong pacifist norms among the Japanese people, as well as the respect for human rights and the commitment to human security through the promotion of freedom from fear and freedom from want:

> We, the Japanese people, desire peace for all time and are deeply conscious of the high ideals controlling human relationship, and we have determined to preserve our security and existence, trusting in the justice and faith of the peace-loving peoples of the world. We desire to occupy an honored place in an international society striving for the preservation of peace, and the banishment of tyranny and slavery, oppression and intolerance for all time from the earth. We recognize that all peoples of the world have the right to live in peace, free from fear and want. (Japan 1947)

The preamble of the constitution clearly states the importance of peace, human rights and human security. The article 9, unique to Japan when compared with any other constitutional framework, underlines the commitment to peace-related values, renouncing war and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes (Japan 1947). When these norms were translated into customary practices within the Japanese policymaking process, various self-restraining measures were imposed on Tokyo's security and defense policy.

The 'three non-nuclear principles' are a strong example of the commitment with peace-related values: Japan decided not to possess, manufacture or permit the introduction of nuclear weapons on its territory. These principles came along with the ban on arms exports and the introduction of a 1 percent of GDP limit on defense spending. In addition, Tokyo has refrained from acquiring 'offensive' weapons as long-range strategic bombers and intercontinental ballistic missiles. Some of these restrictions are currently open to debate or different interpretations, yet the fact that the Japanese government had to introduce them to justify or rationalize its security and defense policy is indicative of the existence of a strong consideration about peace-related values among the Japanese people (Miyashita 2007, 104).

Despite these unique values displayed along with a unique normative and institutional structure, cultural and legal limitations prevent a deeper commitment with UN peacekeeping operations, like the constitutional and legal constraints that result from the interpretation of Article 9, and strong anti-militarism in domestic politics. In addition, there is a strong Japanese public opinion dominated by deep remorse about the pre-WWII militarism, as well as the public resistance to debating issues related to military, security or war (Berger 1998). This seems to be

changing of late, however, given the emergence of China, the North Korean threat and the election in 2012 of the new Abe administration.

Since 9/11, Japan has taken significant steps towards loosening legal restrictions on the SDF's overseas missions. Despite these changes, the possibilities for the SDF's participation in UN peacekeeping missions are still limited to traditional peacekeeping missions and peace support operations, and Tokyo remains reluctant to commit troops to peacekeeping operations (Stengel, p. 51), particularly in the southern African region.

In the 'Interim Report of the Study Group on Japan's Engagement in UN Peacekeeping Operations' (2011), the Japanese government recognized the need for the country to reengage with its commitments to international peace cooperation and UN peacekeeping operations in particular:

> With the further strengthening of international interdependency as a result of the advancement of globalization, there has been an increasing number of cases in which some form of confusion arising even in a country geographically far removed from Japan has substantial political and economic impacts on Japan's national interests. For example, if the situation becomes unstable in the Middle East or Africa, both of which regions are rich in energy resources, the ensuing instability in the energy supply will have an enormous adverse effect on the Japanese economy. The safety and prosperity of Japan, which is open to the world, can only be secured based on the peace and stability of the international community (Government of Japan 2011).

In fact, Japanese interests in southern Africa go beyond security. The relationship between Tokyo and the region evolved from perceptions related with geographical distance, cultural gap and lack of historical ties, to one of considerable economic and political ties. South Africa, for example, has become strategically vital for the Japanese economy, supplying the country with twenty-eight principal minerals, along with agricultural commodities and foodstuffs. Moreover, the southern African region is becoming unavoidably relevant for any actor with the ambition of engaging with Africa. SADC represents 40 percent of Africa's population, 81 percent of Africa's GDP, 81 percent of Africa's total imports and 80 percent of Africa's exports. Therefore the region is highly attractive for foreign investment and the implementation of cooperation projects with Japan (Alden and Hirano 2003, 108).

An increased participation of Japan in peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations in the southern African region would simultaneously allow Tokyo to reaffirm its global role. The abovementioned report underlines that:

> Japan's active participation in UN peacekeeping operations and other joint efforts of the international community for maintaining and promoting a peaceful environment, contributes to securing the

national interests of Japan, whose destiny is to coexist with the world as a whole. In view of its national strength and its position and influence in the international community as well, Japan has the responsibility to lead such efforts and to play an active role, making full use of its capacity (Government of Japan 2011, 6).

This statement presumes the acknowledgement of the interrelation between the promotion of international peace and security, even in distant regions like southern Africa, and the Japanese national interest.

Considering the benefits to Japan's global prestige and reputation that result from holding such an engagement with peace-related principles and policies, it is necessary for Tokyo to live up to its ideals in order to make international peace cooperation mutually beneficial and effective to not only Japan's national interest but also the conflict or post-conflict affected areas.

Indeed, southern Africa seems to be an important case study due to its exposure to conflict and war. It is also a region rich in mineral resources, and it holds considerable political and economic importance. Additionally it represents an important source for votes in international institutions, particularly important to Japan and its quest for permanent membership in the Security Council.

During the post-Cold War period, the southern African region, while observing increasing instability and conflict, hosted large-scale UN peacekeeping operations in Angola, Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). An assessment of the Japanese engagement and contributions to peace and security in this region may show that the quest for prestige was prioritized over an effective contribution over peace. Showing the uniqueness of Japanese political values through international peace cooperation missions seems not to be enough to have an effective impact in peace and security issues in the region.

Japan's lack of direct contributions to the peacekeeping operations in the DRC is at the core of the current disengagement with southern Africa in terms of peace and security issues. The DRC's new peacekeeping operation United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) has been authorized to use all necessary means to ensure the protection of civilians, humanitarian personnel and human rights defenders under imminent threat of physical violence and to support the Government of the DRC in its stabilization and peace consolidation efforts.

Given the scale of the conflict (the world's deadliest), and the implications that peace and security in the DRC have not only for the region but also for the continent and indeed the world, contributions to the peacekeeping operations in that country can constitute a precious opportunity for Japan to show its commitment to peace and security and its engagement in contemporary world affairs. Moreover, taking into consideration the abovementioned Tokyo's limitations in peacekeeping operations, it may be difficult to engage with the volatile situation in the East of

the DRC. Nevertheless, there are more stable areas inside the country in which the SDF can give important contributions.

Therefore, Tokyo's lack of engagement with the DRC seems to be the result of a predominant political disinterest in Africa among some Japanese political elites. As one Japanese government official said: "Africa is the last continent we have to concentrate in. Other actors are giving more resources to Africa and it is increasingly difficult to compete with them."[2] Moreover, the Japanese civil society seems not to have enough information about Africa, consequently having an impact on Japanese foreign policymaking regarding this region. Japanese media often suffers from the *sakoku* (national isolation) syndrome and lacks a cosmopolitan view. In this regard Hawkins (2012) says,

> It is paradoxical that the inward looking and insular nature of the Japanese media persists. The widely held notion that Africa holds little strategic relevance for Japan carries little validity today. … But there remains a powerful perception in Japan of Africa as a part of the world occupying the bottom of geostrategic, socioeconomic and/or racial 'hierarchies'. … The resulting lack of awareness/familiarity among the public perpetuates the notion that there is little appetite for news on Africa. … In the absence of media and public interest, policymakers have little incentive to engage with the continent in a substantive fashion.

Conclusion

Japanese contributions to UN peacekeeping operations in the southern African region seem to be the result of domestic politics and legal constraints, along with the quest for international prestige and reputation through a soft power strategy that prioritized the expression of Japan's political values in a distant region. Ultimately this can benefit Tokyo's global aspirations, e.g. garner votes to get a permanent seat at the UN Security Council. Nevertheless there seems to be a considerable lack of assertiveness and effective commitment with peace and security within the southern African region and Africa in general, and particularly after 1995. A stronger commitment to the resolution of the conflict in the DRC would reinforce the Japanese contribution to peace and security in southern Africa. That may only be possible if the reinterpretation of the Japanese pacifist constitution allows for "collective self-defense", therefore being able to protect peacekeepers under attack during UN peacekeeping operations and providing logistical support to other nations engaged in peacekeeping missions.

However, loosening legal constraints will have to be accompanied by a deeper awareness about Africa among Japanese policymakers, among Japanese scholars and Japanese university

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[2] Interview with a Japanese Government Official at Japan's Secretariat of the International Peace Cooperation Headquarters, July 18, 2012.

students, the media and the civil society. In a highly globalized word, the neo-isolationist trends observed in Japanese society may result in a civilizational setback with wide implications for Japan's international and domestic politics. The Japanese government strategy for peace and international prestige can only be successful with an effective engagement and attention of the whole Japanese society to Africa, one of the regions in the world more exposed to war and conflict.

Today, Japan is adapting to new domestic, regional and global challenges, particularly in security related issues like the rising Chinese military budget and the Senkaku dispute or the North Korean threat and the cross-strait issue, along with the US-Asia pivot. While the world is turning its attention to Asia, Japan has an opportunity to reaffirm itself as a global player. Effectively providing for global public goods like international peace and security, while holding a unique set of peace-related values and principles in its foreign policy, reinforces Japan's influence and reputation within the international community. Engaging with southern Africa and the conflict in the DRC in this context should be a key element in Japan's strategy. A smart power strategy that balances prestige and peace not only benefits the Japanese national interest in the southern African region, but also allows it to effectively engage in promoting peace and security within the African continent.

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