

**EAI  
Commentary  
No.3**

Sook-Jong Lee  
Yeong Jun Park

EAI Security Net Commentary seeks to play a leading role in providing profound perspectives and timely suggestions toward current issues.

The East Asia Institute  
909 Sampoong B/D  
310-68 Euljiro 4-ga  
Jung-gu  
Seoul 100-786  
Republic of Korea

© EAI 2009

[www.eai.or.kr](http://www.eai.or.kr)

## Japan under the DPJ: Changes in Foreign and Defense Policies

September 1, 2009

On August 31, 2009 the Democratic Party of Japan's (DPJ) landslide victory in the country's national election brought fifty-four years of Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) political dominance to an end. The DPJ won 308 of the 480 seats in the Lower House. Combined with 118 of the 237 seats in the Upper House that it won in July 2007, for the first time, the DPJ now controls both houses. By contrast, the LDP performed miserably. It managed to hold onto only 119 of the original 304 seats that it had held in the Lower House. Since its founding in 1955, the LDP had only lost power very briefly for a ten-month period between 1993 and 1994 when a non-LDP coalition came to power.

The DPJ's rise to power has been remarkable. The party was formed in 1996 during the run-up to the Lower House election of that year. The formation of the DPJ was in opposition to the LDP's long dominance of Japanese politics and the policies of the reformist parties such as the Social Democratic Party and the Japanese Communist Party. The DPJ emerged as the third largest party behind the LDP and the now defunct New Frontier Party. By merging with members who had seceded from other opposition parties, such as the New Frontier Party, it would soon come to be a major challenger as it became the second largest party with the 1998 Upper House elections. However, its political influence waned and was only strengthened again through its merger with the Liberal Party, then led by the powerful Ichiro Ozawa in September 2003.

This merger would also considerably boost its low public approval rating. However, it still trailed behind the LDP with a comparatively lower approval rating and a smaller number of parliamentary seats. In spite of these initial disadvantages, the DPJ's victory was mainly due to a public backlash against the neoliberal reforms initiated during the 2001-2006 Koizumi administration and the inefficiencies of the short-lived cabinets of Shinzo Abe, Yasuo Fukuda, and Taro Aso.

With this election victory, analysts widely expect that there will be considerable changes in Japan's domestic and foreign policies under the DPJ. On its domestic agenda, the DPJ is likely to increase its political control over the bureaucracy and to strengthen the social safety net by providing farming subsidies and cash allowances for child-rearing families. In its foreign policy, the DPJ is expected to maintain the U.S.-Japan alliance but pursue a more independent stance than that of the LDP. At the same time, the DPJ will place greater emphasis on improving its relations with other Asian countries. This will also mean that South Korea-Japan relations will be improved as the DPJ addresses from a different perspective the controversial historical issues that have strained relations between the two countries. In general, there will not be significant changes to Japan's foreign policy while substantial reforms will be focused on domestic political issues. Based on an analysis of the DPJ's foreign and security policy, this commentary examines the prospects for South

Korea-Japan relations as well as changes to Japan's foreign policy.

### **The Outlook for the DPJ's Foreign Policy**

The election manifesto of July 27, 2009, together with the finalized version announced on August 11 and the Platform for Government released on July 23, 2009, set the tone for what can be expected from the DPJ's foreign policy. In addition to these official pledges, the views expressed by party leader Yukio Hatoyama, Secretary General Kasuya Okada, and former party leader Ichiro Ozawa help in understanding the DPJ's foreign policy. This can be organized relevant to its approach toward the United States, Asia, and defense policies.

#### **More Assertive U.S. Policy**

The DPJ has long been critical of what it considers to be the LDP's subservient and dependent United States policy. Since 2001, the DPJ has opposed the LDP's Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law (2001), Iraq Reconstruction Assistance Special Measures Law (2003), and the Refueling Assistance Law (2008), which were all necessary to provide assistance for the United States-led War on Terror and its operations in Afghanistan. From the DPJ perspective, these wars were committed without the consent from the United Nations (UN) or the international community. Therefore, Japan should not be involved in the United States' unilateral actions. In the run up to the elections, the DPJ maintained that it would not extend the mandate for the refueling operations that the Maritime Self Defense Forces are conducting in the Indian Ocean as part of

Japan's logistical role in the War on Terror.

Criticizing the LDP's dependency on the United States, the DPJ has publicly pledged to build a more assertive U.S.-Japan alliance that is based on an equal and close partnership. For that, it plans to reexamine several issues, such as the realignment of U.S. military forces in Japan and the revision of the U.S.-Japan Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). Particularly, the DPJ opposes the Okinawa relocation plan in the 2006 Japan-U.S. Agreement on Realignment of U.S. Military Forces, which calls for the relocation of the U.S. Marine Corps Air Station at Futenma to Nago in the north of the island. The DPJ favors relocating the base outside of Okinawa. In regards to the U.S.-Japan SOFA, the DPJ holds the view that Japan needs to exercise more jurisdictional authority over U.S troops who commit offenses in Japan.

These statements by the DPJ on the U.S.-Japan alliance have raised major concerns and uneasiness in Washington. Having noted these concerns, DPJ has been backpedaling towards a more realistic approach. For example, on July 17, 2009, Hatoyama announced the possibility of the Maritime Self Defense Forces continuing their refueling operations in the Indian Ocean past the expiration date of January 2010. Furthermore, the manifesto released on July 27, 2009 excluded any explicit references to the refueling operations, leaving open the possibility of more realistic policy options. Therefore, it is possible that the DPJ, who has advocated establishing a more equal U.S.-Japan alliance, will adjust its policy in light of resistance from Washington, who wants to maintain existing agreements. Still, the DPJ will be reluctant in responding to United States' demands for increased support for its overseas military operations. In this regard,

*“Criticizing the LDP's dependency on the United States, the DPJ has publicly pledged to build a more assertive U.S.-Japan alliance that is based on an equal and close partnership.”*

*“What is very striking about the DPJ’s East Asia policy is its proposal for a Northeast Asia nuclear weapon free zone.”*

Japan’s continued involvement in supporting U.S. operations in Afghanistan and Pakistan will only be possible if they are viewed as a moral obligation under the UN banner rather than in the name of the U.S.-Japan alliance. Should Japan’s support decrease the United States will more than likely expect South Korea to fill in the void and play a more active role in supporting U.S. operations in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

### ***More Asia-Embracing Policy***

The DPJ is stating that it will give equal importance to Asia, as well as the United States. Party leader Yukio Hatoyama has introduced his diplomatic principle, known as *Yuai* or fraternity, which aims to establish an East Asian community and create a regional currency. He explains that restraining excessive nationalism, strengthening economic integration, and establishing a multilateral security mechanism in East Asia are fully in line with the principles of Japan’s constitution of pacifism and international cooperation.

Alongside Hatoyama, prominent DPJ leaders, including former party leader Ozawa and Secretary General Okada, have also collectively emphasized the importance of relations with other Asian countries such as China and South Korea. In fact, Ozawa has led a DPJ delegation every year to China in order to promote party-to-party exchanges with the Chinese Communist Party. Noting the controversy and detrimental effect the Yasukuni Shrine has had on relations with Japan’s Asian neighbors, Ozawa has also called for Class-A war criminals to be removed from the shrine. Okada has maintained that Japan must shift its position in favor of voting rights for foreign residents including ethnic Koreans in Japan.

The DPJ will also handle delicately the other controversies in South Korea-Japan relations such as the Dokdo dispute by stressing the importance of managing tensions rather than stick to Japan’s position.

What is very striking about the DPJ’s East Asia policy is its proposal for a Northeast Asia nuclear weapon free zone. Okada, who is currently leading the nuclear disarmament movement in the DPJ, has called for Japan, together with the two Koreas and Mongolia, to conclude a treaty for establishing a nuclear weapon free zone in Northeast Asia, which would ban the development and possession of nuclear weapons. He has also called on the United States, Russia, and China to declare that they will not use or threaten the use of nuclear weapons against the four Northeast Asian countries, push actively for nuclear disarmament, and codify these principles into an international treaty. Okada’s vision for a Northeast Asian nuclear weapon free zone is likely to be the foundation of a multilateral security mechanism for the Northeast Asian community, which Hatoyama advocates. However, prospects for creating a regional currency or establishing a multilateral security mechanism are complicated by the conflicting interests of individual countries, and the DPJ has not yet proposed a specific or concrete plan to achieve this end. Therefore, it is yet to be determined to what extent the idealistic goals of the DPJ leadership can be implemented.

### ***Enhancing Japan’s Defense Policy***

Despite some differences between the LDP and the DPJ’s viewpoints, there will be little change to Japan’s defense policy; especially in regards to the policies it will pursue to en-

*“Despite significant differences between the two parties, Japan under DPJ rule will continue to pursue security policies based on basic national interests, including maritime and outer space interests.”*

hance its national interests, such as its maritime and outer space agenda.

The LDP has been pushing ahead with policies designed to expand the scope of the Self-Defense Forces’ (SDF) operations. This has been shown with the SDF’s expanded role in supporting the United State’s War on Terror and its related operations in Afghanistan. In January 2009, Prime Minister Taro Aso organized the ‘Council on Security and Defense Capabilities,’ which is convened every five years to review and revise the National Defense Program Guidelines. Its findings were that Japan’s current defense guidelines should be partially revised to allow for collective self-defense. It also recommended efforts to strengthen Japan’s preemptive strike capability.

Conversely, the DPJ has long argued that Japan’s military operations must be restricted to those centered on Tokyo’s policy of exclusive-defense; as such, Japan should not participate in any operations that do not have a UN mandate. It can be expected that the LDP’s plans for transforming the role of the SDF will either be put on hold or adjusted to reiterate the policy of exclusive-defense.

This stance on Japan’s defense policy by the DPJ should not be understood to mean that the DPJ is not interested in strengthening national security. Although the DPJ has generally disagreed with the LDP on most laws regarding national security, it has supported the LDP’s Basic Law of the Sea (enacted April 2007), designed to defend Japan’s maritime interests, as well as the Basic Law of Outer Space (enacted May 2008), which permits the use of outer space for both civilian and military purposes.

It is worth noting that the leading party figures that are expected to govern the DPJ’s security policies, such as former party leader

Seiji Maehara and Member of Parliament Akihisa Nagashima, are expected to have a similar hard-line approach to defense issues like the LDP. Under the leadership of such prominent figures, the DPJ has publicly pledged to strengthen intelligence operations and establish an emergency management office to deal with crises, such as mass terrorism and natural disasters. Furthermore, it also plans to create the Japan Space Agency under the Cabinet Office to promote outer space activities, including those for military purposes. The creation of a single agency aims to integrate the diverse and separate aerospace initiatives currently driven by several governmental agencies, including the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry.

Therefore, despite significant differences between the two parties, Japan under DPJ rule will continue to pursue security policies based on basic national interests, including maritime and outer space interests.

### **The Prospect for Change in South Korea-Japan Relations**

In contrast to the LDP, the DPJ will seek to avoid upsetting South Korea over sensitive issues such as the Yasukuni Shrine or history textbooks. Instead, the DPJ will focus more on improving and stabilizing South Korea-Japan relations. The policies outlined in the DPJ’s “Index 2009” imply how the DPJ will prioritize its foreign policy. Accordingly, the main priorities will be comprised of the following: creating a new era in the U.S.-Japan Alliance; strengthening Japan’s Asia diplomacy; building confidence and trust in South Korea-Japan

*“Confidence building in South Korea-Japan relations is possible primarily due to the DPJ leadership’s forward-looking view of history.”*

relations; and increasing cooperation in China-Japan relations. Although the DPJ wants to communicate aggressively with Japan’s neighboring countries for an early and peaceful settlement of its territorial disputes, it is unlikely that the DPJ will risk deteriorating South Korea-Japan relations. Moreover, in regards to economic cooperation, progress is expected to be made with the South Korea-Japan Free Trade Agreement (FTA). Since both countries recognized the FTA as one of the top items on their agenda, it is very likely that negotiations will be resumed.

Confidence building in South Korea-Japan relations is possible primarily due to the DPJ leadership’s forward-looking view of history. In addition to planning to restore the Yasukuni Shrine to memorializing only the war dead and not Class-A war criminals, DPJ leaders have clearly expressed their intentions to stand by Murayama’s 1995 apology, which acknowledged Japan’s role as a perpetrator in World War II and the “tremendous damage and suffering” it caused to neighboring Asian countries. The year 2010 will mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Japan’s annexation of Korea. Considering the DPJ’s progressive perspective on historical issues, 2010 will mark a perfect opportunity for both countries to release a joint statement that looks beyond the unfortunate history and towards a future of cooperation and peace to build a more stable Northeast Asia. In order to develop the South Korea-Japan partnership announced by President Kim Dae-Jung and Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi in 1998 to the next level, such a joint statement must include a clear vision for the future of Northeast Asia and a call for China and North Korea’s active participation.

In principal, the DPJ will be taking a tough stance towards North Korea regarding

the issues of the Japanese abductees and UN sanctions over Pyongyang’s nuclear program. However, as stated by party leader Hatoyama, a Japan-DPRK summit could take place that will allow both countries to not only normalize relations but to resolve existing tensions. In fact, former Prime Minister Ichiro Hatoyama, who is incidentally Yukio Hatoyama’s grandfather, boldly visited Moscow and drastically normalized diplomatic relations between Japan and Soviet Union in 1956. This is an achievement Hatoyama may wish to repeat in the context of Japan-DPRK relations. Any overture toward North Korea will require Pyongyang to reverse its stance on the nuclear issue. Nevertheless, restoring diplomatic relations between Japan and North Korea will be a positive step in persuading Pyongyang to give up its nuclear capability as well as bringing about the structural changes needed for a peaceful regime.

The DPJ’s denuclearization framework could provide the foundation for building a denuclearized Korean Peninsula and establishing a non-nuclear order in Northeast Asia. It can be expected that the DPJ will propose its Northeast Asia nuclear weapon-free zone scheme to the two Koreas as well as to the other nuclear powers. South Korea, then, needs to accept the idea of a denuclearized Northeast Asia and make it compatible to the U.S. nuclear umbrella. Such a framework would pressure North Korea to give up its nuclear capability and prevent Japan from developing its own.

Establishing a regional currency and a multilateral security mechanism are the focal points for the DPJ’s promotion of a Northeast Asian community. Achieving this vision will be very challenging and difficult to overcome, considering the complex relations and inter-

*“The ramifications of the DPJ’s election victory and the changes in Japan will be felt across Northeast Asia”*

ests between the Asian countries. Japan under the DPJ will be able to coordinate its policies more with the goals of South Korea as the newly elected party overcomes Japan’s former passiveness toward Northeast Asian regionalism. With the challenge of multifaceted security threats and desires for a more open regional economic system, a more cooperative economic and security relation needs to be established between the countries in East Asia. To achieve this goal, the South Korean government, in tandem with Japan, should create agendas that will lead to increased cooperation in the areas of finance, currency, security, environment, and energy, and promote policy measures to spread that cooperation out to other East Asian members.

The ramifications of the DPJ’s election victory and the changes in Japan will be felt across Northeast Asia. South Korea needs to develop various discussion channels with Japan and take an assertive approach toward Japan so that in any cooperation with new DPJ government, both countries can achieve common goals, such as stable development of South Korea-Japan relations, a peaceful resolution to the North Korean nuclear issue, and expansion of regional cooperation in East Asia. South Korea’s cooperation with Japan should not be to alienate China, but to also be expanded to a trilateral cooperation among China, Japan, and South Korea.■