



# Japanese Civil Society and U.S.-Japan Security Relations in the 1990s

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The rise of civil society in Japan in the 1990s has had an impact on the country's national security policy and security relations with the United States. Japanese civil society organizations have increasingly interacted with the Japanese and US governments on security issues such as US bases in Okinawa, nuclear ship visits, and global nuclear disarmament. [M&GS 2001;7:20-25]

**T**he 1990s witnessed a remarkable surge in the public's interest in civil society in Japan. An increasing number of Japanese non-governmental organizations (NGOs) work in both international and domestic fields.<sup>1</sup> National security issues have not been immune from these latest stirrings of Japanese civil society. Citizens and civil society organizations, along with some local governments, have challenged the country's security policy and its security relations with the United States on such matters as the US bases in Okinawa, the so-called Kobe Formula regarding nuclear ship visits, and Japan's global nuclear disarmament ini-

tiatives. All three issues, directly or indirectly have had significant bearings on Japan's security policy and alliance relationship with the US.

In combination with the more active roles played by Japanese civil society organizations, local governments have sometimes played independent and defiant roles vis-à-vis the national government even in the foreign and security policy realm, when those policies seriously affect local communities, most typically in the case of Okinawa after the mid 1990s.<sup>2,3</sup>

## Growth of Japanese Civil Society

Since around the mid 1990s, there has been a strong and sustained public focus on both domestic and international NGOs in Japan. Japan's coming of age as an economic superpower has created a somewhat obsessive interest in anything international in the past decade and half. "Kokusai-koken (international contribution)" has become a buzz word in Japan, especially after the Gulf War. Not only did Japan dramatically increase its foreign aid budget during this period but the government, the Foreign Ministry in particular, also came to emphasize partnership with NGOs in implementation of its aid policy.

The 1995 Kobe [Hanshin-Awaji] earthquake is said to have ushered in the "Age of

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Volunteerism” in Japan. Not only do more Japanese individually involve themselves in “volunteer activities,” but increasing numbers of NGOs have started to channel such volunteer energy.<sup>4</sup>

There has also been a significant recent increase in the number of local initiatives and referenda that have directly challenged local, regional, or even national policy agendas since the mid 1990s on issues such as construction of industrial waste dump sites, nuclear power plants, or dams, and the relocation of US military bases. Many of these challenges have revolved around concerns for the environment and local autonomy. The number of successful referenda has increased dramatically since 1995 from less than five per year to more than 20 per year toward the end of the 1990s, despite the difficult political hurdles imposed on the Japanese referendum system.<sup>5</sup>

### **Okinawa and the US Base Issue, 1995-1998**

The Okinawa case is a complex story in which a local government, led by an active and articulate governor, Masahide Ota, first challenged and then lobbied and “negotiated” with both the Japanese and US governments, in collaboration with supportive citizens and civil society organizations on the island and, to a lesser degree, on the mainland and abroad. Ota sought not only to change Tokyo’s policy on US military bases in Okinawa but also to “renegotiate the policymaking process itself by giving the prefectural government a greater role.”<sup>6</sup>

After a twelve-year-old Okinawan girl was raped by three young American military personnel in September 1995, igniting a wave of indignant protest throughout Okinawa and, to a lesser but significant extent, on the mainland, Ota appealed to Japan’s court system for a clarification of the Local Autonomy Law, made annual trips to Washington, DC to advocate for changes in US basing policy, and supported the organization of a prefectural referendum on the base issue in September 1996. Ota met regularly with citizens’ groups and with two successive, sympathetic prime ministers.<sup>6,7</sup>

The US government took the situation quite seriously. Fearing that half-hearted measures after the rape incident would only worsen the situation and jeopardize continued military presence on the island, the US acted quickly to soothe the emotional wounds. Beginning with apologies by the local commander and the consul general, US military and political leaders on an ever higher level followed suit, culminating in President Clinton’s formal expression of regret over the incident. The US government also moved

swiftly to establish with the Japanese government a Special Action Committee on Okinawa (SACO) in November 1995 to “rearrange and consolidate” US bases on the island.<sup>8</sup>

With the presence of sympathetic Japanese prime ministers and accommodating US attitudes against the backdrop of a highly mobilized public in Okinawa, Ota momentarily created a situation in which the Japanese government had to negotiate with him over continued use of US bases.<sup>6</sup> The central government agreed in December 1995 to establish Okinawa Beigun Kichi Mondai Kyougikai (Consultative Committee on Okinawa Base Problems), an unprecedented forum in which representatives of Okinawa Prefecture directly negotiate the base consolidation and reduction issue with the top-level representatives from the central government. This Tokyo-Okinawa negotiation continued in parallel with SACO negotiations between Tokyo and Washington.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout this process, Ota was strongly supported not only by leftist parties and the labor movement—the traditional enclave of anti-base activism—but also by various citizens’ movements in Okinawa. Women’s groups in particular, such as Women Against Military Violence, not only protested the presence of US military bases but also engaged in activities to help rape and other crime victims. Civil society, in effect, with the help of a sympathetic governor, successfully reformulated the US base issue into a post-Cold War shift toward protection and promotion of human rights and environmental values.

Momentum for a drastic reduction of US bases in Okinawa lost steam, however, in 1997 because of difficulties finding an alternative marine air facilities site. The central government succeeded in re-formulating the base issue into an old one of jobs and subsidies, and closed the “loopholes” in military land expropriation procedures by enacting Tokuso-hou (Special Measures Law), which denied governors the indispensable role they had played previously in these procedures.<sup>6</sup> In the end, Ota lost his reelection campaign in 1998 largely due to the deadlock over plans to relocate the Futenma marine base<sup>9,10</sup> and the subsequent shrinkage of central government funding to the island, which added economic injury to the already precarious Okinawan economy.

Ota was successful to the extent that he could muster strong public support behind his bold initiatives. Citizen activism played a critical role, at least initially, as long as Ota could define the issue as a new post-Cold War concern for human rights or the environment instead of jobs and the economy.

The Okinawa case suggests a potentially powerful, but at the same time limited and ambivalent, role local governments can play between the central government and civil society in Japan.

### The Antinuclear Movement and Disarmament Initiatives

The antinuclear movement has had a long and impressive history in Japan since the US atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. Centering around the hibakusha (atomic bomb victims) and their families and relatives, the antinuclear movement, with political support from intellectuals, the labor movement, and leftist parties, has successfully created in postwar Japan political momentum for national victim support measures as well as for antinuclear and global disarmament initiatives. During the Cold War, however, successive conservative govern-

ments gave utmost importance to the security relationship with the US and refrained from advocating any policy initiative that would jeopardize US strategic interests. They gave mostly lip service to the antinuclear cause through such measures as the so-called “three non-nuclear principles” enunciated by Prime Minister Eisaku Sato in 1967.

The cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and their successive mayors tended to represent more genuinely the central goal and aspiration of Japan’s antinuclear movement: the immediate abolition of all nuclear weapons on

Earth. According to Hiromichi Umebayashi, this all-or-nothing approach was quite natural for the antinuclear movement in Japan, which was indeed the only country to have suffered from atomic bombings. This gave a particular slant to the Japanese antinuclear movement, however, by making any intermediate language, such as “reduction” or “freeze,” somewhat unrespectable. This “absolutist” stance, argues Umebayashi, helped generate tendencies to refrain from hard-headed analysis of international politics and to pay less attention to the direction and roles of overseas NGOs, which tended to emphasize influencing international politics.

Another problem has seriously undermined the effectiveness of the Japanese antinuclear movement. The antinuclear movement developed rapidly in Japan after the end of US occupation in 1952, and accelerated after the 1954 Bikini hydrogen bomb test and

the subsequent Lucky Dragon incident, in which crews of a Japanese fishing vessel suffered from the deadly effects of nuclear fallout. After successfully organizing the first World Conference Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs in Hiroshima on August 6, 1955, a broadly based coalition of politicians, scholars, and representatives of civil society organizations established Gensuikyo (the Japan Council Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs) in the following month. Gensuikyo, however, soon fell victim to the international Cold War conflict and was beset by domestic political repercussions, especially the rivalry between the Communists and the Socialists. Opposed to the increasing domination of the organization by the Communists, who acquiesced in Soviet nuclear tests while strongly denouncing Western tests, groups led by the Socialists split from Gensuikyo and, in 1965, established a separate organization, Gensuikin (Japan Congress Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs), with the Communist-led movement remaining as Gensuikyo.

As a result of this politicization and split of the Japanese antinuclear movement, the overall movement “no longer attracted a broad cross section of the Japanese population.”<sup>11</sup> Although the Japanese antinuclear crusade continued, argues Lawrence Wittner, it lost “much of its grassroots, popular flavor, as well as a substantial portion of its influence.”<sup>11</sup> The two organizations were locked in a bitter political struggle and competed with each other for the leadership of worldwide grassroots antinuclear activism, holding separate World Conferences for nuclear abolition on the Hiroshima and Nagasaki Days. These organizations failed to have much impact on the policy of successive conservative national governments during the Cold War, despite their strong international moral appeals.

### Local Government Initiatives

In the 1980s, the Japanese antinuclear movement was reinvigorated by strong antinuclear and nuclear freeze movements that spread throughout Europe, the US, and the South Pacific. Japanese towns and cities—now numbering more than 2,000—declared their communities nuclear-free. About 200 of these nuclear-free local governments established Nihon Hikaku Sengen Jichitai Kyougikai (Consortium of Nuclear-Free Local Governments) in 1984 for consultative purposes. The consortium, however, has remained more or less a ceremonial organization without much active political role in pushing the nuclear disarmament agenda domestically or internationally. The Sekai Heiwa Rentai Toshi Shichou Kaigi (Mayors’ Conference on World Peace Solidarity), established by the mayors of Hiroshima and

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Nagasaki in 1983 and with a current membership of 456 local governments from 100 countries and regions, has played a more substantial role. The Conference holds annual meetings between August 6 and 9 in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and provides member municipalities with information and materials related to the atomic bombing of the two cities.<sup>12</sup> These antinuclear movements of Japanese municipalities, while having symbolic appeal, have failed to seriously challenge the government's nuclear disarmament policy, which strictly avoids any initiative that might jeopardize US nuclear deterrence and capabilities.

#### Kobe Formula and Nuclear Ship Visits

A nuclear-free policy adopted by the City of Kobe in 1975 under the leadership of a newly elected *kakushin* (progressive) mayor, Tatsuo Miyazaki, with a strong backing from citizens and local labor unions, has been more important and influential than these other local initiatives.<sup>13</sup> This so-called "Kobe Formula" has generated a great deal of political controversy in the past few years, after years of benign neglect by the national government. Under the Kobe Formula, the city requires visiting foreign military ships to present certificates of their nuclear-free status. While most nuclear-free declarations or resolutions by local bodies do not specify measures for implementation, the Kobe Formula is based on the City Council's March 1975 resolution rejecting port visits by ships with nuclear weapons—an administrative measure continuously upheld and practiced by Kobe City since 1975.<sup>13</sup> US military ships, which had visited the city port 423 times between 1960 and 1974, ceased their visits after the adoption of the policy because of the US Navy's policy to neither deny nor confirm the presence of nuclear weapons on a particular ship. The legal basis on which Kobe's local government can accept or deny requests for visits by foreign military ships is said to be *Kowan-ho* (Port Law), which designates the local government as the administrator of a civilian port located within its jurisdiction.<sup>13</sup>

The Kobe Formula had remained in force without much challenge from the Japanese national government or visiting foreign ships until very recently when Kochi Prefecture, under the leadership of Governor Daijiro Hashimoto in 1998, began earnestly to emulate Kobe's example. Kochi went a step further by introducing a local code that requires certification of visiting foreign ships by the Foreign Ministry.<sup>14</sup> The city of Hakodate, at the initiative of citizens' groups, started deliberations on adopting a similar measure. The national government, especially the Foreign Ministry, mounted a

vigorous campaign to stop Governor Hashimoto from enacting a nuclear-free code, insisting that it infringed upon the state's foreign policy making prerogative. Hashimoto rebutted that his government was not trespassing on the state's jurisdiction, but was only trying to implement Japan's three non-nuclear principles. Ultimately, strong opposition from Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) representatives in the Prefectural Assembly, which constituted its largest faction, and the lack of strong support from public opinion and other local governments, made Governor Hashimoto retract his nuclear-free proposal in early 1999.

According to the *Asahi Shimbun*, most local governments with major ports are reluctant to introduce a Kobe-style nuclear-free policy. The government of Osaka City, for example, which declared itself nuclear-free, has sent inquiries to the Foreign Ministry and to the local US Consulate General regarding the nuclear status of visiting US ships. The Foreign Ministry always responds that there are no nuclear weapons on board because there was no request for previous consultation by the US government. The US Consulate responds that, generally speaking, visiting US ships do not carry nuclear weapons, but that they can not certify the status of individual ships. Legal scholars are divided on whether local governments can use their authority to prohibit port visits by foreign ships admitted by the national government.<sup>15</sup> According to Kajimoto Shushi, behind the vigorous opposition to Kochi's nuclear-free proposal by the national government and LDP lies the fear that the spread of a Kobe Formula would effectively ban US warships from these ports at a time when the US and Japanese governments are trying to give US warships easier access to Japanese civilian ports and other facilities.<sup>16</sup>

#### NGOs and Global Disarmament Initiatives

The mid 1990s witnessed an emergence of highly focused and internationally well connected NGOs and think tanks devoted to advocacy and research on national security and disarmament. Several peace research institutions were established, affiliated with universities or based on grassroots contributions. What distinguishes these from the more established Japanese think tanks and research institutions is the fact that they are free from control by traditional sponsors including the national government, political parties, business, or the labor movement. Hiroshima Peace Institute, for example, was established in 1998 by the City of Hiroshima as an affiliate of Hiroshima City University, and successfully organized the Tokyo Forum

on nuclear disarmament in collaboration with the government-supported Japan Institute of International Affairs. Although the policy impact of the Hiroshima Peace Institute is somewhat mixed—it essentially co-organized the Tokyo Forum rather than influencing official policy with original and independent ideas of its own—it is remarkable that a research organ of Hiroshima City jointly organized a major global nuclear disarmament initiative with a research arm of the Foreign Ministry, with which the city had had awkward and sometimes antagonistic relations in the past.

The 1990s have also been characterized by increasing networking among grassroots Japanese NGOs with a focus on peace and disarmament advocacy and NGOs outside the country, as well as by the emergence of new NGOs with expertise and organizing skills. One of the most successful has been Peace Depot in Yokohama,<sup>17</sup> the creation and activities of which may most clearly indicate the coming of age of Japanese civil society in the area of national security.

Peace Depot is unique among Japanese NGOs in that its focus is not just advocacy but also on collection, analysis, and dissemination of national security information for citizen use. With roots going back to the Pacific-wide anti-Tomahawk campaign in the mid 1980s, it was formally established in 1997 by current director Hiromichi Umebayashi and other disarmament advocates and scholars. Peace Depot works as a hub for a network of citizens peace organizations in Japan. Since its establishment, Peace Depot has quickly become a standard bearer in Japan's nuclear disarmament movement, with international disarmament NGOs often designating Peace Depot or Umebayashi himself as a point of contact and collaboration with Japanese organizations.

One of the reasons behind this rapid rise of a newcomer in Japan's antinuclear movement may have been widespread frustration among nuclear disarmament advocates with the long-standing political and ideological conflicts and divisions among older organizations, especially between Gensuikin and Gensuikyo. The two rival organizations, it should be noted, have made some concerted efforts in recent years to repair the historical divisions of the Cold War era, and to form a stronger single voice. There have also been gradual efforts to end a domestic "Cold War" between the national government and the Japanese peace movement. Gensuikin, in par-

ticular, has taken the lead to initiate a dialogue with the government on nuclear disarmament policy. Gensuikyo also has taken advantage of the new global environment regarding nuclear disarmament by increasing contact with such new and effective international forces as the New Agenda Coalition.

Peace Depot has enjoyed close attention from the national government and transnational networks. An unprecedented collaboration took place between the Japanese Foreign Ministry and Japanese disarmament NGOs—particularly with Peace Depot—during the April 2000 NPT Review Conference in New York. The Foreign Ministry, traditionally very jealous of its prerogative in nuclear disarmament diplomacy, for the first time invited NGO representatives, including Umebayashi and other Peace Depot members, for a series of pre-conference consultations. The Ministry in the end did not concur with Peace Depot's recommendation that Japan support the New Agenda Coalition initiative to secure more concrete pledges from nuclear states for the abolition of nuclear weapons.<sup>18,19</sup> Nonetheless, Peace Depot had been requesting these consultations since its establishment and only recently, especially during the past year or so, has the Foreign Ministry become amenable. According to Umebayashi, now that most other developed countries have come to form a close link with civil society organizations, the Japanese Foreign Ministry could not but actively pursue a similar course, even in the realm of security and nuclear disarmament.<sup>18,19</sup>

## Conclusion

The influence on actual policy of newly emerged NGOs and think tanks, such as Peace Depot and Hiroshima Peace Institute, has been limited. The Japanese government took an explicitly different, pro-US, position in the 2000 NPT Review conference despite NGO recommendations for more "drastic" steps toward the abolition of nuclear arms. On the other hand, the very fact that the Japanese government began to take NGOs seriously in the area of disarmament and national security policy is itself an achievement of Japanese civil society. Still, Japanese NGOs have a long way to go compared with those in other developed countries in terms of their number, size, and expertise. Especially wanting is their influence on the political process and on security policy making in particular (although this latter weakness is not limited to Japanese NGOs but is also found among their counterparts in Western countries). There are two particular weaknesses in Japanese NGOs: insufficient availability of funds and lack of security-related information from the Japanese government. These weaknesses, however, might

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be overcome gradually, in part, because of the recent enactment of the NPO (Nonprofit Organization) Law and the Information Disclosure Law.

During the Cold War, differences over security issues were often described more or less as a political and ideological conflict between the conservative national government and “progressive” anti-government forces (hoshu vs. kakushin), or as a conflict between national and parochial local interests. The emerging concept of civil society could allow for a broader and more flexible perspective. Because of the “underdeveloped” nature of civil society in Japan, collaboration between civil society actors and local governments is likely to remain crucial in the coming years. Collaboration with, and support from, civil society actors are also crucial for local governments when they find themselves in a position to challenge national policy. ☪

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