

The Role of Japan in the War against Terror: Show the Flag

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October 26, 2001

By Tatsujiro Suzuki

I. Introduction

This essay is by Dr. Tatsujiro Suzuki, co-founder and Director of Peace Pledge, Japan. Dr. Suzuki currently serves as a senior research scientist at the Central Research Institute of Electric Power Industry (CRIEPI) and is also a professor at the Graduate School of Media and Governance at Keio University. Dr. Suzuki opposes Japan's recent move to send the Japanese Self Defense Forces abroad to support the US' anti- terrorism campaign. Instead, Dr. Suzuki offers several non-military actions Japan could take in order to actively and positively contribute to the campaign against international terrorism.

II. Essay By Tatsujiro Suzuki

"The Role of Japan in the War against Terror: Show the Flag."

By Tatsujiro Suzuki, Peace Pledge, Japan

"Show the flag." Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage told the Japanese Government when he referred to the role of Japan ought play in the "War against Terrorism." Given that the Japanese government and people continue to harbor a sense of guilt regarding Japan's strictly monetary contribution to the Gulf War, this was a simple but powerful message to Japan.

In an effort to avoid a similar mistake, the Japanese government was quick to announce its support of the US anti-terrorist actions. And now the Diet is debating the so-called, "Anti-Terrorist Emergency Law," which is intended to allow the Japanese Self Defense Forces (SDF), to go abroad and support the military anti-terrorism operation of the US. This is unprecedented since World War II.

Both domestically and internationally, this is a very sensitive issue, as it potentially violates Article IX of Japan's Peace Constitution, as well as immediately raises concern among Japan's Asian neighbors. Is this truly an ideal way of "showing the flag?" Or are there alternative actions Japan should pursue before sending SDF abroad to assist US military actions.

A top priority is to minimize the risk of terrorism worldwide and in Japan. In particular, Japan can take a leading role in protecting sensitive materials such as nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons that can be used for Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). For example, the International Guidelines on Civilian Plutonium Stockpile, and the Convention on Physical Protection of Nuclear Materials need to be enhanced. There exists over 100 tons of civilian plutonium stocks worldwide with approximately 5 tons residing in Japan.

Given Japan itself is vulnerable to terrorism attacks, as proven by the Aum Shinrikyo sarin gas attack in 1995, Japan should take a leading role in promoting secure management and early disposition programs. Moreover, the physical security of major facilities, including airports, power stations, and communication facilities, all need to be enhanced.

Second, Japan can and should make maximum efforts to boost humanitarian aid, not only to Afghanistan, but to other parts of the world as well. Japan has already responded to the United Nations High Commission on Refugees' (UNHCR) request to send food, water and blankets to Pakistan. These efforts should be further promoted and increased in scope as much as possible. The SDF can be extremely effective in such non-military missions. Furthermore, no new laws need be introduced.

Third, Japan can and should take a leading role in diplomatic efforts to fight against terrorism. Specifically, Japan should assert itself in promoting the Comprehensive Treaty Banning Terrorism, which is intended to strengthen the international legal framework to eliminate terrorism. There are already 12 related international conventions, but establishing a new comprehensive treaty will facilitate international coordination and collaboration.

In short, Japan can do many things to "show the flag" before sending SDF overseas to directly support US military operations, especially since the specific nature and length of US military actions are still unclear. There remains a chance for Japan to show its commitment to its Peace Constitution, and refrain from making the same mistakes Japan made during WWII. Rather than acting prematurely and committing to controversial actions, there are far superior ways of "showing our flag." Please, act now and act quickly, Mr. Koizumi.

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