

December 23, 2005

Japan Should Establish Account to Keep PKO Funds

By **SHIRAISHI Takashi**

Reform of the United Nations is entering a new phase. The United States has insisted that a provisional budget be compiled for the world body before the regular 2006-2007 U.N. budget is adopted, which would come after a U.N. reform package backed by the United States is put into place. Japan has come out in favor of the U.S. initiative.

The United States currently contributes 22 percent and Japan 19.5 percent to the regular U.N. budget, meaning the two countries account for 41.5 percent of contributions of all U.N. members.

Under the circumstances, it is likely that overall approval of the regular budget will not be made by the end of the year, despite bitter objections by developing countries to any delay in its passage and strong arguments by the European Union for not linking U.N. reform to budget discussions.

Changes sought by the United States in U.N. reform, however, are for reforming the Secretariat, such as strengthening the powers of the secretary general and restructuring U.N. organizations, all in the name of enhancing efficiency. From Japan's viewpoint, what the United States is seeking is different from reform priorities – that is, reform of the Security Council. Reforming the Secretariat's management and various operations should not be deemed the end to the world body's reform.

Reform – Long-term Project

With this in mind, I would like to state here my views concerning why reform of the Security Council should be considered the top priority of U.N. reform and what Japan should do to impress on the international community the need to improve the decision-making body.

As is widely known, this year Japan teamed up with Brazil, Germany and India in a bid to reform the council. But the resolution sponsored by this so-called Group of Four, which called for expanding the council to 25 member states, failed to be adopted in September.

A major reform such as altering the makeup of the Security Council, which requires revisions to

the U.N. Charter, is not an easy task.

Changing the U.N. Charter is impossible without the agreement of at least two-thirds of member states. Such a change also cannot be put into force without ratification by two-thirds of all U.N. members, including the five permanent members of the Security Council.

This makes the task of reforming the council a long-term project. The failure of the G-4 resolution in September, therefore, should not be considered a total failure in council reform efforts.

Why should the Security Council be reformed? How should it be reformed?

The primary aim of the United Nations is to prevent armed conflicts between nations. The U.N. Charter stipulates that member states should refrain from using force, while empowering the Security Council to identify an act of aggression and take action against it.

Because World War II was a war among great powers, the Security Council was designed to act through consensus among major powers in an effort to maintain world peace. Consequently, veto power has been given to the five permanent states on the council – Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States – under the assumption that these great powers should act as one in coping with challenges to world peace and security.

These ideals, however, have become ill-suited to current realities in two respects.

First, the United Nations of today is confronted with a host of new security problems, particularly transnational threats such as international terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, failed states, genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

The other factor is the issue of representation in the United Nations.

Geopolitical Distribution

At the time of its founding, the United Nations comprised 51 countries. Today there are 191 member states. The five permanent Security Council members no longer command the same overwhelmingly potent power compared with the rest of the world or reflect fairly the world's geopolitical distribution of influence as they did 60 years ago.

In their “Outcome Document” in September about reforming the United Nations, the heads of state and government attending a U.N. summit reaffirmed that “member states have conferred on the Security Council primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security.” They also said, “We support early reform of the Security Council as an essential element of our overall effort to reform the United Nations, in order to make it more broadly

representative, efficient and transparent, and thus to further enhance its effectiveness and the legitimacy and implementation of its decisions.”

However, greater representativeness and efficiency of the Security Council cannot necessarily be reconciled with each other.

For example: The Security Council’s primary responsibility is the maintenance of peace and security in the international community, but it has no capability to implement its decisions. Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has provided that capability, and the Security Council gave international approval for the use of force by the United States in the Gulf War of 1991 and the war in Afghanistan.

Nonetheless, the Security Council initially refused to provide international approval for the U.S. military intervention in Iraq. Against this background, U.S. President George W. Bush, speaking in the Azores on March 16, 2003, just before the invasion of Iraq, said, “We hope tomorrow the United Nations will do its job. If not, all of us need to step back and try to figure out how to make the United Nations work better as we head into the 21st century.”

From the U.S. perspective, U.N. efficiency means the Security Council’s conferment of international endorsement to the United States for its use of force. This is why Washington is reluctant to see the Security Council expanded.

Some Progress Seen in Reform

Therefore, the measures listed on the Outcome Document for reforming the Security Council are little more than compromises to postpone the council’s expansion. However, this does not mean there was no progress toward council reform.

The document incorporated the doctrine that not only each nation, but also the international community has the responsibility to protect people from genocide, war crimes and similar menaces. It also pledged that members “are prepared to take collective action...through the Security Council.”

Likewise, the Outcome Document referred to an agreement to establish a Peace-building Commission as an institutional mechanism for the international community to achieve sustainable peace and post-conflict reconstruction and development.

In Japan, there are various discussions about how best to achieve Security Council reform. One is the latest move by Japan and the United States to jointly push for the aforementioned reform of the U.N. Secretariat and partial budget approval. Others have argued for a reduction in Japan’s contributions to the United Nations.

But it is not wise for Japan to seek a reduction in its contribution to the U.N. budget even if it does not appear to have a chance to gain a permanent seat on the Security Council. Playing such a card can only be done once. Indeed, Japan would see its influence in the United Nations decline in relation to its reduced contribution.

Create New Special Account

More importantly, Japan has been financing U.N. peacekeeping operations at a rate three times more than its regular dues. Such ad hoc provision of funds is based on Security Council resolutions. Nevertheless, the council is not always responsive to contingencies, nor do its decisions always work to enhance U.N. operations. For instance, the world body now regards efforts in the fields of human security and peace-building as its new key mission. With Security Council reform now going nowhere, the council may not act timely on emergencies concerning human security.

I wonder whether it is wise in this context for Japan to keep paying its dues to fund U.N. peacekeeping operations in compliance with Security Council resolutions only whenever the council makes its resolutions, while taking no action if the council does not make any such decision. Instead, in the interest of strengthening the function of the United Nations, Japan should establish a special account to which its peacekeeping operations dues can be entrusted and used in support of U.N. General Assembly resolutions even in the absence of Security Council resolutions.

I make this proposal to underline the importance of reforming the U.N. Security Council to make it more representative and reflective of the changing geopolitical distribution of power in the world, while making substantial contributions to empower the United Nations in its new mission to achieve human security and peace-building, and uphold global norms of universal justice, freedom, peace and human rights.

(This is the text of an article by Prof. SHIRAISHI Takashi, Vice President of the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies and Policy Council Member of the Japan Forum on International Relations, which originally appeared in the “Insights into the World” column of the “Daily Yomiuri” on December 19, 2005.)