

Speech by Mr. Taro Aso, Minister for Foreign Affairs
on the Occasion of the Japan Institute of International Affairs Seminar
“Arc of Freedom and Prosperity: Japan’s Expanding Diplomatic Horizons”
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I understand that three years from now, in December of 2009, the Japan Institute of International Affairs will be reaching an important milestone, the 50th anniversary of its founding. In 1959 when the JIIA was launched I was in my first year of university. It might have been that I was busy devoting all my energies to simply enjoying college life, but the fact is I had very little knowledge of what Shigeru Yoshida was up to at the time—certainly much less knowledge than I had had as a youngster when I used to see him every weekend down in Oiso.

But as I prepared to speak to you today I came to be fully aware of what exactly the situation was—yes, I know now, it was at that time that you were creating the JIIA, Granddad Yoshida.

Today I am going to be speaking on the topics of “value oriented diplomacy” and “the arc of freedom and prosperity.” Both of these are new bases for our foreign policy and new expressions at that, but I very much hope that you remember these two phrases when you leave here today.

The basis of Japan’s foreign policy is to strengthen the Japan-US alliance, as well as a strengthening of our relationships with our neighboring countries, such as China, ROK, and Russia. Now, this is, of course, not in need of being repeated here. What I would like to tell you today is that beyond that, we are aiming to add a new pillar upon which our policy will revolve.

First of all there is “value oriented diplomacy,” which involves placing emphasis on the “universal values” such as democracy, freedom, human rights, the rule of law, and the market economy as we advance our diplomatic endeavors.

And second, there are the successfully budding democracies that line the outer rim of the Eurasian continent, forming an arc. Here Japan wants to design an “arc of freedom and prosperity”. Indeed, I believe that we must create just such an arc.

I know that there will be people who hear this and insist that this smacks of a Western approach somehow—that it is unbecoming for Japan, saying, tell the man who looks at home in traditional wooden *geta* clogs not to go fancying himself dressed up in a Western suitcoat.

So too will there be people saying, when exactly did this country that suffered such a heavy defeat in a war and caused such great adversity both at home and abroad suddenly arrive at such a “virtuous conscience” that it now can lecture to others?

And yet to that I can only reply that it is not normal to insist that the “self” that one sees in the mirror is merely an imitation or a clever invention; what one sees when one looks in the mirror is the real thing.

You can forget everything else you hear today. But Japan is already of age, and what we need is to let go of that way of thinking that makes us squirm when we see our reflection in the mirror. We need to be able to look at it without feeling ill at ease. That is my view on things.

Generally speaking, it is the attitude that is rooted in neither arrogance nor servility that is most appropriate, and if we examine things with an open mind, shedding ourselves of our preconceived notions, what we find is that—obvious as it may be—modern Japan is the country it is today through the long succession of events in her history.

In the case of democracy, a long string of experiences and failures is necessary for a democracy to mature. In Japan’s case, we typically say that democracy started in the Meiji era, but concepts such as the rule of law and observance of contracts are those that Japan has had from quite long ago. There is some lively discussion going on about what we should consider the proper start line to be, such as the Seventeen Article Constitution that existed some 1400 years ago, or the *Joel Shikimoku* code formulated some 800 years ago during the Kamakura era.

Yet what I regard as critically important was the blossoming of a civic civilization that took place during the Edo period.

If you look for example at the book lenders of the day, it seems that a single book lender would have over a hundred customers. When a new title was released, the book lenders would put it into a bag and take it round to their customers. The customers would then slice open the seal on the bag to get the latest release. This, incidentally, is where the word for “the latest release,” *fukiri*—literally “seal-slicing”—has its origins, and we still use that word to this day, although in recent years to describe the release of new movies.

What we know from the advertisements printed within the books and other such clues was that the reading public spanned a broad segment of the population, from samurai to townsmen to their wives and kids. What’s more, this was not a phenomenon limited to Edo or Osaka and its surroundings by any means; it seems that there were any number of these book lenders carrying their wares around in every corner of the country.

With such a large proportion of the common folk reading things for entertainment even in the Edo era, then it is no wonder that in modern Japan *manga* has flourished.

In any event, the Japan of the Edo era was a society characterized by peace and amicable goodwill, to such an extent that we can say it was truly rare. If we were to rephrase that in the terminology of the modern day we could say it was a society in which there was relatively good governance. It was because these foundations existed that in the case of Japan modern institutions could be fitted atop them with ease. This is how I view it.

Now when it comes to freedom or democracy, or human rights or the rule of law, there is not a single country on the planet that can claim perfection. Yet, that said, as we look back on history, with Japan having been honoring these universal values, what we see is that Japan deserves to be considered as one of the true veteran players out there on the field.

In addition to this, since the end of the war, Japan has been making achievements in pacifism, such that no one can possibly point a contemptuous finger at Japan. Find for me even one other country that has an organization like Japan's Self-Defense Forces, that for 60 years has shot not a single round of artillery, nor a single bullet from a gun.

Recently members of the Self-Defense Forces have been giving their all in Iraq and various other places around the globe. Thanks to those efforts, the image of a Japanese in uniform has changed dramatically. The image of Japanese in uniform as scary has disappeared, replaced instead by an image of Japanese as smiling and enthusiastic. Japanese are viewed as people who will stand alongside and undertake efforts hand-in-hand with the local people.

Now, coming as we are from this background with such achievements, when it comes to talk of "universal values" that are commonly held in the world in general, whether it be talk of democracy, or peace, freedom, or human rights, Japan will no longer hesitate to state its views. This is what I am referring to when I speak of value oriented diplomacy, and my remarks to you here today constitute both a declaration of our qualifications and an expression of our determination.

Next I would like for you to take a look around the outer edge of Eurasia—just follow that line all the way around. This belt has seen great changes upon the end of the Cold War as the curtain was being drawn on the confrontation between East and West.

It is these countries in which we hope to help build "the arc of freedom and prosperity" of which I spoke, and I would like to address this issue from now.

Why not Africa, you might say. Or what about Latin America—clearly a very important region, you could argue, keeping an eye on other parts of the globe.

I will be speaking about this in greater detail later in my remarks, but one consideration for Japan is that we are looking to strengthen our cooperation with both the EU and NATO. What naturally comes to mind upon me mentioning this fact is the band of countries I mentioned earlier forming this nice arc. This region includes countries whose systems have been undergoing great changes now that the confrontation between the East and the West has ended. My statement was that we should make that into an "arc of freedom and prosperity".

Now of course the Middle Eastern region also lies within this arc. I believe that I need another speech to address our policies concerning the Middle East, so I will not be discussing those issues in any detail today.

Concretely speaking, what I have in mind right now is Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, for

example, which as a belt is sometimes referred to by the countries' initials of "CLV." In addition, there is the example of the countries of Central Asia, and the countries of the Caucasus region, such as Georgia and Azerbaijan, which are extremely important with regard to the supply of natural resources to the globe. Still further we have Ukraine, which I visited this summer, and whose capital, Kyiv, and other major cities I felt share the atmosphere of the cities of the world powers, as might be expected.

Japan seeks regular interaction with all of these countries, such as through Foreign Ministers' meetings. Through such efforts it has become much easier to grasp the situation existing in these countries.

If I were to put it into a single phrase, I would say that many countries are now walking down the road to "peace and happiness through economic prosperity and democracy." And, as I am fond of saying, this is exactly the road that Japan herself walked down after the war, and the road down which the countries of ASEAN are currently making their way.

However, democracy is a never-ending marathon. And it is the first five kilometers or so that are widely understood to be the most difficult part of all.

It is at this stage that young democracies produce a tremendous amount of what we might call "growth hormones." Those can be channeled towards creating systems which settle the society down. But within these early years there is also the case that the impulse for destruction prevails.

By no means is this pointing the finger at anyone else. A year ago, during a speech I delivered on Asian diplomacy, I noted that both before and after the war Japan too went through many times in which the pendulum of events swung drastically, and it was a result of those experiences that she has arrived at the calm stability that she now enjoys.

From now I would like to make a public commitment regarding these countries, speaking as Japan's Foreign Minister.

I will work to ensure that in the future, in this sweeping arc stretching from Northeast Asia to Central Asia and the Caucasus, Turkey, Central and Eastern Europe and the Baltic states, Japan will serve as an "escort runner" to support these countries that have just started into this truly never-ending marathon.

Let it be such that within this broad area in which this arc is drawn, these countries find their freedom and democracy, market economies, the rule of law, and respect for human rights expanding bit by bit, growing in the same way that a mere reef over time becomes an island, and later even a mountain range.

In assisting countries as they take these steps forward, Japan aims to usher in a world order that is tranquil and peaceful.

Japan is one of the major powers whose vital interests are entrusted to the stability of the world system. As Japan pursues its three major points of national interest, namely her own survival, stability, and prosperity, what is clear is that for a country of Japan's size, no event occurring in the world can be ignored as being of no relation or interest.

With that in mind, I firmly believe that Japan must make its ties even firmer with friendly nations that share the common views and interests, namely of course the United States as well as Australia, India, and the member states of the EU and NATO, and at the same time work with these friends towards the expansion of this "arc of freedom and prosperity".

If you will allow me to add one small supplementary note here, it would be that Japan's relations with India certainly pale in comparison to, for example, her relations with China. If we look at the flow of people between our countries, we see that Japan and China have a flow of some 4.17 million people annually, whereas Japan and India have only 150,000. And whereas some 80,000 Chinese students are studying in Japan every year, the number of Indians studying here is only a small fraction of that, at about 400 students. Furthermore the number of direct flights between Japan and China now total 676 a week, whereas weekly direct flights between Japan and India number only 11. In light of this, I believe that we must take steps to improve the situation dramatically over the next few years.

I believe that you have come to understand what I mean by designing an "arc of freedom and prosperity", but I believe the natural question then becomes one of what exactly that effort entails.

None of this should be construed as Japan merely striking some sort of dramatic pose without any sort of achievements to back up its stance.

Ten years ago, at the Lyon Summit of 1996, Japan announced the Partnership for Democratic Development, or PDD for short, a name which was given to it by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the time. The PDD was a means for lending a hand to young democracies as they built their mechanisms for governance.

As one part of this, Japan has a history of various achievements, having provided concentrated assistance in the form of fundamental groundwork in nation-building, most notably the formulation of legal systems and judicial systems, for countries such as Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam in the CLV nations as well as Mongolia and Uzbekistan. All of these had experienced the difficulties of moving towards democratization and market economies. Yet such assistance constitutes only a fraction of what PDD entails. If you do not know what else it entails, that has implications for how poorly we have been getting our message out.

Allow me to mention one more thing here along those lines of not getting our message out sufficiently. In the closing months of the Cold War, Japan provided tremendous amounts of assistance to the countries of Eastern Europe, and I would like to tell you more about that today.

It was the summer of 1989, and the Berlin Wall had still not fallen, but predictions to that effect were getting stronger by the day. At that juncture, the Government of Japan took the opportunity of the Arch Summit to hammer out a proposal, saying that it was prepared to provide large-scale financial assistance to Poland and Hungary.

The following January, during a trip to Berlin, which had literally just experienced the fall of the Wall, then-Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu announced financial assistance measures to Poland and Hungary totaling 1.95 billion US dollars, which was more than 280 billion Japanese yen, thereby making good on that pledge.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the closing weeks of the conflict in 1995, Japan pledged to deliver 500 million dollars in financial assistance. That was the second-largest bilateral contribution after that of the United States, and the reaction at the time was largely one of “Why would Japan go to such lengths?” Yet today the understanding there seems to be that it was Japan that provided the most useful assistance of all.

If this was not a case of value oriented diplomacy, then tell me, what was it? Japan has a commendable track record demonstrating her commitment toward the formation of an “arc of freedom and prosperity”, and this commitment has existed since long before anyone expressed the concept of this arc explicitly in words.

Japan's accomplishments in Asia have also been particularly noteworthy, I would argue. From 1997 to 1998, Korea and the major countries of ASEAN all experienced a currency crisis simultaneously. At that time Japan was experiencing the very worst of its deflationary recession. Yet in October 1998, Japan provided financial assistance measures to these countries totaling 30 billion US dollars, that is, over 4 trillion Japanese yen, with Korea receiving 8.4 billion US dollars, Indonesia receiving 3.0 billion dollars, and so on. Roughly ten years have passed since that time, and what we find is that both Korea and ASEAN have become champions of the “arc of freedom and prosperity”.

In other words, this new axis for our diplomacy of which I am speaking today is really nothing new for Japan at all. It is in fact nothing more than giving a name to the diplomatic achievements that Japan has built up one by one in exactly this area over the last 16 or 17 years, as well as giving it a new positioning within our overall diplomacy.

That said, without such a name, you can hardly be aware of the deeper significance of what you yourself are doing. Policies lacking a name are soon forgotten by the public at large, whether the public at home or the public abroad. Therefore, having that label is crucial. Renewing our awareness of this fact and giving a clear label to this diplomacy are in fact what constitute the truly “new” part of this new diplomatic axis I have been describing today.

The CLV-Japan Summit and the Foreign Ministers' Meeting of the CLV and Japan, Central

Asia + Japan Dialogue, and dialogues with the Visegrad Four, or “V4” group of four Central European nations, namely the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, are among the key meetings that have been convened to date. Japan considers it critical to build up dialogues with these groups, making them regular meetings, and working to fully realize the potential of those that already convene regularly, first and foremost ensuring that the meetings with the relevant countries are held with sufficient frequency. On a bilateral level, Japan has already begun this process with Afghanistan.

At such times, the wisest way for us to go about building these connections is to count on nearby countries with a deep understanding of Japan as a toehold, so to speak. Some examples that immediately spring to mind are Turkey, which is truly a treasure house of knowledge about the Middle East and Central Asia, and Poland, which is so very dependable in coming to understand Ukraine.

Poland I am afraid I have never had the good fortune to visit, but former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi paid a visit in August of 2003 and was delighted to find that Poland is much, much more than the land of Chopin.

Andrzej Wajda, world-renowned director of such movies as *Ashes and Diamonds*, used the money he received upon being awarded the Kyoto Prize by Dr. Kazuo Inamori of the Kyocera Corporation to create the Manggha Centre of Japanese Art and Technology in Krakow. The “manggha” in the Centre’s name refers to none other than the Hokusai Manga, and the Centre itself houses *Ukiyoe* works that the young Wajda had found moving, gathered from certain collector.

The degree to which modern Japanese manga has become popular in Poland today is truly amazing, and in my own manga collection I am honored to have a copy of the Polish version of *Inu Yasha*, a gift to me from the Polish Foreign Minister.

Now in Poland there is a university that has the name “Japan” in it, namely the Polish-Japanese Institute of Information Technology. This university, in cooperation with the UNDP, or United Nations Development Programme, has received financial assistance from Japan of some 350,000 US dollars in total, and using this financing as a base it has been undertaking the project “Transfer of IT Technology to Ukraine.” This project attempts to establish a distance learning system utilizing leading-edge technology.

In other words, we are looking to increase our cooperation with countries that have a deep understanding of Japan and that have advantages both geographically and culturally in providing assistance strategically to promising countries within the “arc of freedom and prosperity”. Cooperation with countries in just that position, such as Poland, proves to be tremendously worthwhile.

Many former socialist countries, such as Poland, Hungary, and the three Baltic states, joined the European Union in May of 2004. In so doing, they underwent a sudden transformation from

aid-receiving nations to aid-providing nations.

With the “arc of freedom and prosperity” extending all the way to the Baltic Sea, in order not to see gaps develop within this belt, it is essential to bring stability to the so-called “GUAM” nations—that is, Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova.

It was awareness of this that brought Ukraine, Georgia, Lithuania, and Romania together to form the Community of Democratic Choice, or CDC, a year ago. The objective of the Community is quite straightforwardly the formation of stronger roots for democracy in the Baltic-Black Sea region as well as in the Caspian Sea area—that is, in this very region where I have envisioned an “arc of freedom and prosperity”.

Japan is of the view that we should foster as many opportunities as possible for contact with the countries of the CDC as well as countries such as those in the GUAM nations. To reiterate a point I made earlier, we consider that in such cases it is best to pursue cooperation with countries that are capable of partnering with Japan.

Incidentally, Japan is now working to increase significantly its number of overseas establishments as well as its number of foreign service personnel as part of its efforts to strengthen Japan’s diplomatic effectiveness. Japan does not currently have what I would consider satisfactory diplomatic functions within the countries of the GUAM that I mentioned earlier or certain other regions, and it is imperative that we enhance the level at an early time.

In closing today, I would like to leave you with some final thoughts.

We all know the line from the English poet Kipling that “East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.” To tweak that line slightly, we can say that East and West don’t have many opportunities to meet up with each other.

Yet this past May, I was on a visit to NATO headquarters in Brussels, Belgium, and when I was there I delivered a rather in-depth speech. In brief, I stated that the Self-Defense Forces of Japan and NATO will surely have the opportunity to expand the scope of their cooperation with regard to conflict prevention and peacebuilding around the globe. I also proposed that in anticipation of this, we should have close interaction starting in the immediate future.

And so East heads West, and West heads East, and with wings thus spread to fly, it is no longer a rarity to see Japan and NATO working side by side, undertaking efforts in places from the Indian Ocean to Afghanistan.

Today I spoke to you about Japan’s enthusiasm for building an “arc of freedom and prosperity” around the outer rim of the Eurasian continent through diplomacy that emphasizes values.

Japan is second to none in holding dear the values of freedom, democracy, and respect for

human rights and the rule of law. I would be very pleased if Japan were to devote the first half of the 21st century to taking up appropriate issues together with other countries that share the same beliefs. This would of course include the United States, as well as Australia and most likely India to an increasing extent, as well as the member states of the EU, NATO, among others.

Now if you have come to this point thinking that Taro Aso is elaborating on nothing more than a pipe dream, let me leave you with two final thoughts. The first is that you may be thinking of this as a pipe dream, and yet almost every true vision starts out sounding like a pipe dream. And, my friends, what Japanese diplomacy needs is a vision.

The reason for this is also my second closing point, which is that Japan's diplomatic vision is also the vision of the people of Japan. That is, it is a vision which each individual Japanese can respect and be proud of.

One of the roles of diplomacy is to foster in citizens a well-grounded, realistic, tranquil sense of self-esteem. As the Foreign Minister, I seek ways to bring enthusiasm and confidence to the Japanese people, and for that reason I hope to continue to deliver remarks that will bring about such energy and confidence. Allow me to close here today on that thought.

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