

Japan's post Fukushima diplomacy

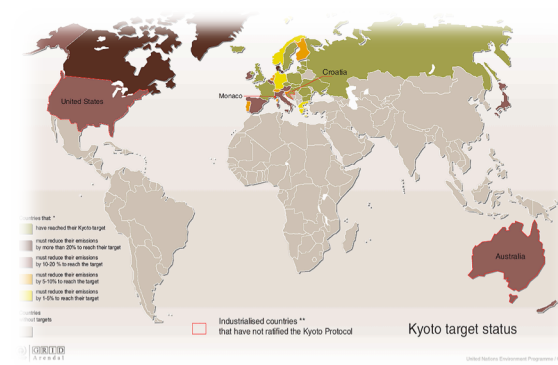
By Purnendra Jain, Professor in Asian Studies at the University of Adelaide and President of the Asian Studies Association of Australia

Over the years Japan has been an active player, and in some areas, a leader in global environmental and climate change policy, particularly through international organizations. Japan has been active in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) treaty since established in 1992 and in the UNFCCC's Conference of the Parties (COP) meetings that provide updates (called 'protocols') for setting mandatory emission limits. The principal update, the 1997 COP3's Kyoto Protocol, established legally binding obligations for developed countries to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and has become much better known than the UNFCCC itself. Japan's role in the UNFCCC, the COP meetings, and the Kyoto Protocol that effectively projected Japan's international leadership in climate change, has been well recognized and acknowledged.



Japan has played an important strategic role in international institution-building, mediating between a more active European

Union (EU) and a reluctant United States – Japan's key ally and partner. At many turns it has tried to bring and keep the US on board with multilateral initiatives, from 1990 when Japan joined with Canada, New Zealand, Australia and the EU, to the Second World Climate Conference in Geneva. The Kyoto Protocol is a particularly significant example. Although the US signed the Protocol during the Clinton administration, the Bush administration withdrew from the Protocol in 2001, refusing to be bound to any regulations such as emission targets. The US withdrawal particularly disappointed Japan. Tokyo pleaded with Washington to the last minute because it recognised that a global mechanism on climate change without the US would be largely ineffective.



The US withdrawal inflicted two costs in particular. One was borne by Japan's international reputation since its inability to sway its own most important security and strategic partner, made Japan look like a weak player on the global stage. The other was borne by the Protocol's supporters since withdrawal of the US (as a hugely influential international player) gave the appearance of invalidating the Protocol's process. The US withdrawal also had significant consequences for Japan's domestic policy front since it gave the Ministry of Economic Trade and Industry (METI) and corporate

Japan, a valuable precedent for bargaining in energy policy. The American refusal to sign up to any emissions target, bolstered METI's bargaining position at a time when METI's 'no targets' camp had been losing ground in the energy/climate change policy nexus to bureaucratic rivals – the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Environment.

How others regard Japan's international actions and domestic performance on climate change matters to Japan. It strived to be seen as both a lead player and a model performer for other nations to copy in this field. In 2007 Japan was ranked six on the table of carbon emitters in absolute terms, following the US, China, EU, India and Russia. But on a per capita basis that picture changes significantly. The US becomes 11th, Japan 35th, China 80th and India 145th. Here Japan ranks much higher than China and India but well below most industrialized nations, making Japan a relatively 'low' carbon emitter.

Other nations are learning from Japan's experience of the nuclear alternative through the Fukushima Daiichi disaster. Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Israel and other critical players have joined Japan in announcing they will build no more reactors. Some will start shutting the ones they have. Switzerland's cabinet has voted to phase out atomic energy by 2034, and Germany has declared to close all its nuclear power plants by 2022. Reciprocally, Japan may take lessons from these nations as they move away from nuclear energy and its risks. German policies promoting science and research, technological development and entrepreneurship towards new business models for a sustainable economy, have



given Germany alternatives for generating electricity through natural sources including sun, wind and water. In May 2011 G8 leaders also took lessons from the Fukushima reactor to seek more stringent international rules on nuclear safety. Japan's nuclear disaster registered as a wakeup call by indicating the importance of a national regulatory body's independence from both government and the corporate sector. It seems likely that lessons will still be gleaned from the Japanese experience at the COP 17 meeting to be held in South Africa in late 2011.

While Japan was enthusiastically in 'Kyoto' mode till about a year before 'the triple disaster' (i.e., the 2011 Tohoku earthquake, tsunami, and Fukushima reactor meltdown) some in Japan had strongly urged forming links with other nations sharing Japan's disposition towards climate change mitigation. Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama's statement at the 2009 UN Climate Change Summit in New York reflected this view. Yet the Japanese government has shifted the national disposition away from commitment to the Kyoto spirit towards the US position resisting targets and therefore any binding international regime. The message from Japan through its new 'no more targets post-Kyoto' declaration at the Cancun Summit, signals to the international community that Japan has, for now, left behind its will to lead the climate change movement through international institutions, and that the dominant corporate interests opposing emissions targets in other countries have gained the upper hand in Japan's policy landscape.

Global Civilian Nuclear Network

Forming international linkages with partners that share interests, concerns or positions, is an approach to managing international relations discernible in Japan's foreign policy for some years. Japan has learned from its experience of the triple disaster about prevention of nuclear accidents through new technology and robust safety standards enforced by an independent regulator. Japan is a leading nation in civilian nuclear technology; it is home to the world's third largest number of nuclear power plants; it has no ambition to become a nuclear weapons state, and it is willing to pass on the lessons that have come at such great loss and destruction – by human hands in 1945 and by the hand of nature in 2011. This unique status positions Japan well to form a network with appropriate nations to promote safer and better nuclear energy facilities, especially when nations across Asia plan to expand their nuclear energy capacity.

China and India in particular have ambitious plans to expand their nuclear facilities to meet burgeoning energy demands. Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member countries such as Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam also find the nuclear option attractive to meet the growing power demands accompanying



their economic growth. Nuclear knowledge sharing will help to foster goodwill between these nations and Japan, and there are indications

such cooperation is likely. At the fourth trilateral summit between leaders of Japan, China and South Korea in May 2011, the

three countries agreed to cooperate on disaster management and nuclear safety, including between nuclear regulators. Only time will tell the real meaning of this 'disaster diplomacy'.

Views expressed in this article are not necessarily those of SAGE International

COP image:

http://farm4.static.flickr.com/3015/3074682040_4c1afd9431.jpg

Kyoto target map:

http://maps.grida.no/go/graphic/kyoto_protocol_2002_target_status

Fukushima reactor explosion image:

http://isrovation.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/fukushima_01.jpg

Nuclear reactor image: <http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-OWFd8ZEXLfY/TZLWvB3w6nI/AAAAAAAAAB4k/qN1ul3Ox8Pk/s1600/Nuclear-Power-Plant.jpg>

(Accessed: 24/07/2011)