

Japanese Alliance Policy in the 20th Century

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Introduction

There were ten alliance pacts which Japan signed in the 20th Century. In chronological order, these ten pacts were the Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902, the Russo-Japanese Alliance of 1916 (also called the 4th Japan-Russia Treaty), the Sino-Japanese Mutual Defense Agreement of 1918, the Japan-Manchukuo Protocol of 1932, the Tripartite Pact of 1940, the Japan-Thailand Alliance of 1941, the Japan-Burma Alliance, the Japan-Philippines Alliance, the Sino-Japanese Alliance (alliance with the Wang Jingwei Government) of 1943, and the Japan-US Alliance of 1951, signed after the Pacific War. Among these alliance pacts, the Japan-Manchukuo Protocol is not often referred to as an alliance; however, both countries promised a mutual collaborative defense regarding threats to either of the countries¹ which can be regarded as an alliance, even though it was one sided. As a matter of fact, the title "Japan-Manchukuo Alliance" was used in the Privy Council, which was asked to provide advice concerning the Japan-Manchukuo Protocol².

Among these ten alliances, only the Japan-U.S. Alliance was signed after World War Two, and the remaining nine alliances were created before or during the war. However, a comparison of such numbers is almost meaningless. This is because most of the alliances created before or during the war were in existence for only extremely short periods. Therefore, short-term alliances created during the war are excluded from consideration in this paper. In the following, the only remaining four alliances, Japan-Britain, Japan-Manchukuo, Japan-Germany-Italy, and Japan-U.S, will be considered. The Anglo-Japanese Alliance continued for about 20 years, and the Japan-US Alliance has continued for nearly 60 years, and still continues today. In contrast to these two, the Japan-Manchukuo Alliance lasted only 13 years, and the Tripartite Pact only lasted for 5 years. Although there are such large differences in the duration of these four alliances, the differences will be disregarded for the time being.

The Japan-US Alliance celebrated its 50th Anniversary this year since the revision of the

¹ The Japan-Manchukuo Protocol, Article 2; "Japan and Manchukuo, recognizing that any threat to the territory, or to the security of the Contracting Parties, constitutes at the same time, a threat to the safety and existence of the other, agree to cooperate in the maintenance of their national security", *Nihon Gaikonenpyo narabini Shuyobunsho* (Chronological Table and Important Documents of Japanese Diplomatic History), (Part 2 of 2, Hara Shobo, 1966), p. 215.

² "Nichimangiteisho ni kansuru Sumitsuin Honkaigi Gijiroku Sho (Extracts from Minutes of the Plenary Session of the Privy Council regarding the Japan-Manchukuo Protocol)", in *Ibid.*, pp. 212-214.

U.S. - Japan Security Treaty, and it has already been examined from various aspects at a number of symposiums, so I will not refer to this alliance in detail. I would like to leave this to a brief description from the point of view of a comparison with the other three alliances.

Now, when examining the alliance policy, it is important to focus on these three points or stages in the life of the alliance: (1) the creation of the alliance (or conclusion of the alliance treaty), (2) its maintenance and management, and (3) its termination³. Among these three points, most of the interest in existing research has focused on the signing of the alliance treaty and establishment of the alliance. It can be said that the motives and purposes for the signing of an alliance treaty, and the reasons and process for establishing an alliance, are the issues which have drawn the most attention as a target of research in diplomatic history and the study of international politics.

As is already known, the purpose of signing an alliance and the various conditions for its establishment change with the progression of time. How should an alliance be maintained and managed to accommodate such changes? This is the focus of the second point listed above. Although the interest by historians in this issue has lagged somewhat compared to their interest in the creation of alliances, this is regarded now as the greatest issue when considering any alliance policy. In particular, regarding the Japan-U.S. Alliance, the issue of maintaining and managing the alliance has become an important policy issue today.

There is not much interest in the third point, regarding the termination of alliances, in other words, the issue of how to terminate an alliance. The reasons for and the timing for the termination of an alliance are also important aspects which need to be examined. This issue will also become an important theme, on an equal level as the creation and maintenance of an alliance. Generally speaking, an alliance should be terminated when it is no longer required. One has to wonder, however, if there are no other reasons which would justify the termination of an alliance. It seems that alliances are also terminated when they can no longer be maintained or managed, rather than only when the alliance is no longer required. I will provide a hint for consideration of this issue.

1. Creation of Alliances

First of all, it is important to consider the power relationships between the allies at the time the four alliances were created. The Tripartite Pact which was signed among the regional powers

³ For these three points, Jitsuo Tsuchiyama expresses the formation, continuation and end of alliances. Tsuchiyama, *Anzenhosho no Kokusaiseijigaku* (International Politics of National Security) (Yuhikaku, 2004), Chapters 9 and 10.

is the only alliance where the mutual power relationships were almost equal. The Anglo-Japanese Alliance was concluded between what was a world superpower at that time, and a newly emerging nation in East Asia. The relationship of the Japan-Manchukuo Alliance was in fact concluded between a protector and a protectorate. The Japan-U.S. Alliance was concluded between an occupying power and an occupied state, or the victor and the defeated, and it can be said that the power relationship of the alliance in the beginning was similar to the Japan-Manchukuo Alliance.

Why did Japan conclude these alliances? Undoubtedly, the reasons and motives differ for each alliance. Using the hypothesis of Stephen Walt⁴, it is assumed that alliances are concluded to promote a balance towards threats. In short, a state facing a threat cannot confront the threat only by reinforcing its own military force; therefore, an alliance is concluded with a third state which faces the same threat. This is what is meant by balancing towards a threat. The conclusion of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance can be explained to a large extent by this hypothesis. This involved balancing which opposed threats from Russia. The reason for the conclusion of the Japan-Manchukuo Alliance and the Japan-U.S. Alliance can also be explained to some extent by this concept of balancing. It is very interesting to note that those alliances were created to confront the same threat, i.e., the hypothetical enemy, Russia (or the Soviet Union).

As stated above, there was a large difference in the power relationships between England and Japan at the time of the creation of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Even so, England, the global power, evaluated favorably the military force of Japan, and took balancing actions in order to oppose threats from Russia. Munemitsu Mutsu, ex-Foreign Minister of Japan, stated as follows about five years before the alliance was concluded: "England is not like a Don Quixote who is concerned about the hardships of other people and helps them. While Japan will obtain its security through the alliance, England will also have to obtain a guarantee to maintain its security through the alliance, and if this guarantee could not be provided, England would never consider an alliance worthwhile"⁵. Japan diligently enhanced its military forces in the five years after Mutsu made this statement, and England acknowledged Japan's capability to guarantee the security of England.

In contrast to balancing are the actions of bandwagoning. This is to get close and live with the threatening power itself, in order to avoid the realization of the threat. A typical example can be observed in the Japan-Russia treaty, the proposals for which were under consideration at the

⁴ See Stephen W. Walt, *The Origins of Alliance*, Cornell University Press, 1987.

⁵ *Sekai no Nihon* (Japan of the World), (Vol. 2, August, 1896), quoted from Kiyoshi Kiyosawa, *Nihon Gaikoshi* (Diplomatic History of Japan) (Toyo Keizai Shinposha, 1942), p. 289.

same time as the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was negotiated. Needless to say, in those days, Japan chose the Anglo-Japanese Alliance over the Japan-Russia treaty.

The Anglo-Japanese Alliance was an alliance based on typical balancing, which aimed to balance the threat. What about the Japan-Manchukuo Alliance and the Japan-U.S. Alliance? As mentioned above, these two alliances can also be explained to some extent by the hypothesis of balancing. However, the reasons these two alliances were established cannot be explained sufficiently by this hypothesis alone.

Consider the case of the Japan-Manchukuo Alliance. Using the words of Mutsu, did Japan obtain a guarantee from the Japan-Manchukuo Alliance to secure the safety of its own country? Certainly, such a guarantee was not nonexistent. This is because the facilities and the convenience which Manchukuo supplied to Japan could have been a part of such a guarantee. However, the quantity and quality of such a guarantee were considerably different when compared to the guarantee which both Japan and England tried to obtain from the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Of course, in the case of Manchukuo, Japan did not take the bandwagon action, because Manchukuo was not a threat to Japan. However, it can be observed that Manchukuo may have perceived Japan as a threat and taken bandwagon actions with respect to Japan.

From the viewpoint of Japan's actions under the Japan-Manchukuo Alliance, there is a component other than balancing. Simply speaking, this was the function of the alliance as a means by the stronger side to control the weaker. That is to say, the Japan-Manchukuo Alliance can be regarded as a part of system Japan established to control Manchukuo. The power relationship between allies when an alliance is created is greatly related with this component.

The description of an alliance as a controlling device can actually be applied to most alliances concluded at a time of war, which are excluded from consideration in this paper. In other words, all the alliances Japan signed with Asian countries, including the Japan-Manchukuo Alliance, were alliances by Japan to control the partner state. Furthermore, the same aspects could be observed for the Japan-U.S. Alliance in the beginning, when viewed from the U.S. side.

How, then, should the signing of the Tripartite Pact be regarded? Since neither Germany nor Italy was necessarily threats to Japan, it cannot be considered bandwagoning. Was it, then, a case of balancing? Against what threat was the balancing being performed? According to the deliberations of the Privy Council which provided advice when the Tripartite Pact was proposed and being considered, the threat that was assumed was unquestionably the U.S., since a war against U.S. as a worst-case scenario was discussed⁶.

⁶ "Nichidokui Sangokujoyaku ni kansuru Sumitsuin Shinsa Inkai Giji Gaiyo (Sho)(Outline of Minutes of the Privy Council Examination Committee regarding the Tripartite Pact (extracted))", *Nihon Gaikonenpyo*

However, there are slight differences between the characters of the balancing in the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and the Tripartite Pact. In connection with this, it is noteworthy that Toshio Shiratori, former Ambassador to Italy who advocated the signing of the Tripartite Pact, called the proposed Tripartite alliance the "New World Order Pact"⁷. The Tripartite Pact states that the allies will cooperate mutually to build a new order. The building of a new order means overthrowing and changing the status quo. In short, in contrast to Japan's other three alliances which basically aimed at maintaining the status quo (I should say the recovery of the status quo ante in the case of the initial Anglo-Japanese Alliance), the Tripartite Pact aimed at changing the status quo. As long as Japan aimed for changes in the status quo, i.e., the building of a new order, the U.S. was the obstructing power which stood in Japan's face. At the time the alliance was established, the U.S. may not have been a realistic threat; it was, however, certainly a future threat. In order to take a balancing action towards the U.S., which was a future threat to Japan as it aimed to build a new order, Japan entered into an alliance with Germany and Italy.

The Anglo-Japanese Alliance, the Japan-Manchukuo Alliance, and the Japan-U.S. Alliance were concluded for the purpose of balancing to oppose actual threats. On the other hand, the Tripartite Pact was concluded for the purpose of balancing to oppose future threats. There are similarities in these four alliances in regards to their intended role of balancing. However, in contrast to the other three alliances which were intended to oppose threats from Russia, the Tripartite Pact was concluded to oppose threats from the U.S. As can be seen in the concept of the four power coalition treaty between Japan, Germany, Italy and the Soviet Union, Japan intended to include the Soviet Union in the alliance structure. This point gives additional weight to the argument that the signing of the Tripartite Pact may be regarded as a different kind of alliance, among the alliance policies of Japan.

2. Maintaining and Management of Alliances

One of the most outstanding treatises written in Japanese regarding the maintaining and management of alliances is the essay titled "Domei no Suibi suru Toki (When Alliances Decline)",

narabini Shuyobunnsho (Chronological Table and Important Documents of Japanese Diplomatic History), (Part 2 of 2), pp. 456-458.

⁷ Toshio Shiratori, "Nichidokui Sangokujoyaku no Igi: Doshi Kokka no Ketsumei (The Significance of the Tripartite Pact - Blood Pact of Comrade Nations)", *The Asahi*, September 29, 1940. For Shiratori, see Ryoichi Tobe, *Gaimusho Kakushinsha-Sekai Shinchitsujo no Gen'ei* (Renovationist Group in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan - Vision of a New World Order) (Chuokoron Shinsha, 2010).

which was published in the *Chuo Koron* in 1987 and written by Terumasa Nakanishi⁸. As mentioned above, alliances change with the trend of the times. The international environment surrounding the allies changes, and the power relationships between the allies also change. Following these changes, there are quite a few cases where the purpose of the alliance and the target threat or object of the alliance, also change. In the case of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, as Japan's power increased accordingly after the Russo-Japanese War, the power relationship between the allies (England and Japan) changed, which produced the "insensitive arrogance"⁹ of Japan towards the alliance relations. In the essay by Nakanishi, the "groans" of England, which faced difficulties in managing the alliance relationship, are clearly described. Regarding the Japan-U.S. Alliance, we can imagine that there were many cases where the U.S. also "groaned".

Ian Nish looks at the changes of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance from the viewpoint of England, and states that it changed from a positive alliance to a negative alliance¹⁰. According to Nish, the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was initially a positive alliance in the sense that the signatories had a common purpose of opposing the threats of Russia; however, it changed to a negative alliance later with the purpose of preventing the "unavoidable confrontation" which would occur between Japan and England if the alliance should be discontinued. Although there was a controversy after World War 1 in England about continuing the alliance, some of those who argued for its continuation pointed out the alliance's effect of acting as a brake on Japan which could control Japan's excessive policies¹¹. This "braking effect" seems to somewhat closely resemble the "cap in the bottle" effect which was once said about the Japan-U.S. Alliance.

In the meantime, Japan also realized that the nature of the alliance began to change. According to Kikujiro Ishii, a senior diplomat in the 1910s and 1920s, the alliance had already become a "*tokonoma no kazarimono*" (a respected but useless object) by the time of its second revision, which occurred in 1911. Ishii mentioned that the alliance was maintained and utilized, "in the sense that it was convenient to have it even though it was no longer necessary"¹².

Labeling the Anglo-Japanese Alliance "no longer necessary" may have been an overstatement. Ishii should have thought that the alliance was no longer necessary only to the

⁸ Later included in Nakanishi's, *Kuni Masani Horobin tosu* (Nation on the Brink of Ruin) (Shueisha, 1998) Chapter 7.

⁹ Words of British Ambassador to Japan, William C. Greene, quoted in Nakanishi, *Ibid.*, p. 223.

¹⁰ See Ian Nish, *Alliance in Decline: A Study in Anglo-Japanese Relations 1908-1933*, Athlone Press, 1972.

¹¹ Antony Best, "India, pan-Asianism and the Anglo-Japanese Alliance," in Phillips Payson O'Brien, ed., *The Anglo-Japanese Alliance, 1902-1922*, RoutledgeCurzon, 2004, pp.244-245; John Ferris, "Armaments and allies: The Anglo-Japanese strategic relationship, 1911-1921," in *Ibid.*, p.258.

¹² Kikujiro Ishii, *Gaiko Kaiso Danpen* (Diplomacy Retrospect in Fragments) (Kinseido, 1939), pp. 71-73. Ishii, *Gaiko Yoroku* (Diplomatic Commentaries) (Iwanami Shoten, 1930), p. 70.

extent of its role in opposing past common threats. He should have said that the alliance was still necessary for other purposes. That is why he used the word "convenient". For example, there were the advantage and sense of security of having an alliance with a Caucasian country, considering that a racist trend (fears of the "Yellow Peril") still raged in those days; Japan's pride in contributing to the maintenance of international order, through an alliance with a world power, and in receiving a positive evaluation of its international role by other countries; the financial and economical benefits provided by England as a world empire; the transfer and introduction of advanced technologies, were all benefits which England could confer and thus reasons why the continuation of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was still "necessary."

Regarding this point, we must note that advantages and necessities which did not exist, or were not considered to be necessary at the time of the initial signing of an alliance, often develop between the members of an alliance during the life of a long-term alliance relationship. In many cases, these advantages were supported by human networks which are cultivated within the alliance relationship. They can also be regarded as the product of the "institutionalization,"¹³ defined broadly, of an alliance. To put it simply, long-term alliance relationships tend to cultivate unique human networks and these networks support the alliance, even though the initial purpose for which the alliance was created may have weakened. There are also cases where the network prompts the allies' sharing of values, which then provides further support to the alliance itself. In the case of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, the alliance cultivated a pro-British group in Japan, and that pro-British group contributed to the supporting of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. The same phenomenon may also be found in the case of the Japan-U.S. Alliance.

However, no such human network was created in the case of the Tripartite Pact. The main reason was that its duration was too short, and there was not enough time to create such a network. Since the alliance was discontinued before it had time to mature, the difficulties of maintaining and managing the alliance never really became issues for consideration.

Upon further reflection, however, the Tripartite Pact was supposed to have been an alliance which promised the cooperation of the member nations in the building of their respective new orders. Although the adoption of totalitarianism was not declared in the treaty, the ideological aspects of the alliance were remarkably heavy, compared to Japan's other alliances. Interestingly the Japan-Germany Cultural Agreement, which was the first cultural agreement that Japan signed, was signed in November 1938, the second anniversary of the Anti-Comintern Pact¹⁴. This is an

¹³ See Tsuchiyama, *Anzenhosho no Kokusaiseijigaku* (International Politics of National Security), pp. 316-317 for the "institutionalization" of alliances.

¹⁴ For the Japan-Germany Cultural Agreement, see the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Information

indication that there were ideas to promote close cooperation and exchange in cultural and other areas between Japan and Germany, and not only in military affairs and diplomacy. However, no indication can be found that there were efforts to create a human network which could support the alliance, or to share values, either between Japan and Germany, or between Japan and Italy.

This was because the Tripartite alliance did not have enough time to mature as an alliance relationship. In addition, it must be pointed out that Germany had no intentions to create such human networks or to share values with the other member states. This may be because Germany may have been placing greater weight on the propaganda effect, rather than the actual, practical effects, of the alliance. If that is so, it is doubtful whether Germany even ever had the intention of maintaining and managing the alliance over a long term.

3. Termination of Alliances

What is conspicuous regarding the termination of the alliances which Japan has signed is that all the partner states or governments of the alliances have disappeared. This applies for the Russo-Japanese Alliance, the Japan-Manchukuo Alliance, the Tripartite Pact, the Japan-Philippines Alliance, and the Sino-Japanese Alliance. The Japan-Thailand Alliance and the Japan-Burma Alliance lost all de facto effectiveness with the defeat of Japan. Only the Sino-Japanese Mutual Defense Agreement and the Anglo-Japanese Alliance were terminated by Japan according to clear decisions and procedures.

It should be noted that Japan did not desire the termination of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Japan did not even consider its termination, even though the alliance became a "*tokonoma no kazarimono*" (a respected but useless object). In fact, whether Japan ever thought about terminating an alliance in which it was a member state is an interesting question to ponder.

There seems to be no trace of a serious examination ever having been carried out regarding the possibility of terminating the Tripartite Pact. When Germany attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941 and broke its promise to broker the building of a cooperative relationship between Japan and the Soviet Union, Japan still did not take any action to terminate the alliance. It is most symbolic that Emperor Showa took action at last to make peace with the Allied nations near the end of the Pacific War only after Germany was defeated. It was only after Germany's defeat

Department, "Nichi Doku Bunkakyotei ni tsuite (On Japan-Germany Cultural Agreement)", *Shuho* (Weekly Report) (December 7, 1938); Saburo Minowa, " Nichi Doku Bunkakyotei no Teiketsu ni Chinamite (In Connection to the Conclusion of the Japan-Germany Cultural Agreement) ", *Kokusaichishiki oyobi Hyoron* (International Knowledge and Review), January 1939,.

that the Emperor finally thought that there was no necessity for Japan to be bound any further by its promises to Germany, including those of the Tripartite Pact and the Non-Separate Peace Agreement, now that the Hitler regime had disappeared. To put it another way, this means that until then, Japan, including the Emperor, had felt itself bound by the alliance¹⁵. It seems that this exemplifies the key characteristic of Japan's perspective of alliances.

Conclusion

In this paper, we used Stephen Walt's hypothesis and assumed that alliances are created to counter threats. However, there is another hypothesis which assumes that alliances are created to balance or counter a superior power.

I must say that this latter hypothesis may be more attractive to scholars. In this hypothesis, the balancing refers to the creating of an alliance with other states in order to promote a balance which can counter the superior power. Bandwagoning refers to the entering into of an alliance with a superior power, betting on a winning horse, so to speak, by getting close to a superior power and being protected by that power. Based on this hypothesis, Jitsuo Tsuchiyama regarded all of the alliances Japan has entered into, including the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, the Tripartite Pact and the Japan-U.S. Alliance as being based on bandwagoning, where Japan got close to a superior power¹⁶. The question of which hypothesis, the threat-oriented hypothesis or the power-oriented hypothesis, is more persuasive is an interesting one to reflect upon.

In conclusion, I will introduce the words of Kikujiro Ishii. In 1939, Ishii made the following statement in an essay in which he criticized the then-current Japan-Germany Alliance. "An alliance is no more than a union for a certain, finite period, which is different than the usual marital relationships, sibling relationships, or even kinships. If one of the allies becomes lenient the others will become presumptuous, and when one side is unguarded, the other side will take advantage of it, which means that there is no difference between an ally and an ordinary state. Therefore, Japan must regard as illusory its view of the fundamental nature of an alliance, in other words, that allies should treat each other as relatives with sufficient mutual trust"¹⁷. Further discussion is required, on whether Japan actually regarded alliances as akin to a marital

¹⁵ Hidenari Terasaki/Mariko Terasaki Miller, *Showa Tenno Dokuhakuroku* (Monologue of Emperor Showa), (Bungeishunju, 1991), pp. 102 and 114-115. For this point, see Ryoichi Tobe, "Waheiundo to Shusenkosaku (Peace Movements and Efforts to End the War)" in Shinji Kondo, ed., *Kindai Nihon Sensoshi* (Modern Japanese War History) Vol. 4, (Dodai Keizai Konwakai, 1995), p. 671.

¹⁶ Tsuchiyama, *Anzenhosho no Kokusaiseijigaku* (International Politics of National Security), pp. 307-309.

¹⁷ Kajima Institute of International Peace (ed.), *Ishii Kikujiro iko: Gaiko zuiso* (Posthumous work of Kikujiro Ishii: Diplomatic Essays), (Kajima Kenkyujo Shuppankai, 1967), p. 225.

relationship or a kinship. However, as observed in the attitude of Emperor Showa, there is no doubt that Japan was extremely "faithful" to its alliances and allies.