

Role of Japan in Peacebuilding in Asia with Special Reference to Sri Lanka

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Introduction

Asia has experienced horrible international wars until the end of World War II, and thereafter terrible intra-state civil wars in many countries including Sri Lanka. Experience of war is common to people in all countries in Asia. Conflicts within countries and between countries still exist in different forms in Asia. Conflict is the “common” that exists in Asia and peace is the “common” that is in danger in Asia. Conflicts divide societies and countries, but peace is the common that brings societies and countries together. Not only inter-state conflicts, but also intra-state conflicts become threat to peace in Asia. Not only armed conflicts, but also non-armed conflicts become threat to peace in Asia. Countries are more concerned about national security than human security of their own people. The best way to ensure national security of a country is not the preparation for war, but the preparation for prevention of war.

Effects of Conflicts in Asia

The intra- and inter-state conflicts lead to fear, suspicion, and mistrust among societies and countries, and become threat to sustainable peace in Asia. Conflicts within countries lead to structural violence and generate challenges to security of the people. A conflict within a country may also create tension in the region as well. For example, the Sri Lankan armed conflict created tension in the region by bringing India and China into the country.

The inter-state conflicts lead to tension and arms-race in Asia, and the countries make large defense budgets for accumulation of arms and weaponries. Large percentage of budgetary allocations for arms and weaponries affect people in the countries, as the money that could be otherwise used for poverty alleviation, social benefits, and social security of the people in the countries is used for preparation for war. Thus, warfare affects welfare of the people in the countries.

ALFP Program in Japan

The Asia Leadership Fellow Program (ALFP) organized jointly by the International House of Japan and the Japan Foundation Asia Center provides an opportunity to the participants (hereafter referred to as Fellows) to enhance their knowledge and skills in different areas relating to promotion of peace. The ALFP also contributes to attitudinal change of the Fellows in promotion of peace. During the program, seminars relating to different regions of Asia and the discussion papers prepared and presented by the Fellows explained the different forms of intra- and inter-state conflicts that create tension in Asia. The characteristics of these

conflicts alarm the importance of prevention of escalation of such conflicts, and the need for peaceful settlement of such conflicts.

The seminars and visits the Fellows participated in also introduced the opportunities available for peacebuilding in Asia. The exchange of views during the seminars made the Fellows to better understand what connect countries, such as culture, economy, information technology, space technology, satellites, climate change, and natural disasters. These trans-boundary connectors make the countries in Asia inter-dependent and bring them to a common platform to work together.

The discussion that followed the seminar on Islam reflected the emerging conflicts and the failure of the rest of the world to understand the conflicts in the Islamic world. The discussion after the seminar on nuclear energy policy issues reminded the availability of nuclear weapon materials and technology to many countries, and the potential danger to humanity. The seminar on war memories helped to understand the horrible experience of war, as well as the importance of protection of war documents/evidence—not to re-open the wounds of wars, but to remind the importance of prevention of wars.

In peacebuilding, many actors contribute in different ways according to their objectives. The visit to the Japan NGO Center for International Cooperation (JANIC) helped to understand the role nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Japan play in societies and countries in peacebuilding. Media also plays an important role in shaping the opinions of the people and mobilizing them for peacebuilding. Visits to NHK World and Asahi Shimbun were helpful in understanding the role media plays in promotion of culture of peace in Japan and in Asia. Another important feature noticed in the visits to many organizations in Tokyo, Tokushima, and Okayama was that the people working together with a spirit of cooperation in their organizations. The working culture is an indicator of culture of peace in the organizations.

Through the participation in the ALFP, I was able to see the commitment people in Japan make to prevent intra- and inter-state conflicts. The nature of Article 9 in the Japanese Constitution and the rejection of “militarism” and the promotion of “pacifism” explain that the people in Japan reject international conflicts and they want international peace. The non-aggressive and non-violent behavior of people in Japan also prevents the emergence of intra-state conflicts and helps the Japanese society to evolve as a non-violent peaceful society. Peaceful societies make peaceful countries, and peaceful countries make peaceful regions and finally peaceful world. The “culture of peace” in Japan may be the most important thing that the Asian leaders, including the ALFP Fellows, can take back to their country from Japan, and by sharing their experience in Japan, they can spread the culture of peace in their countries.

Role of Japan in Peacebuilding in Asia

Peacebuilding could be summarized as multi-faceted activities by multiple-players with a vision to achieve sustainable peace. It includes peacekeeping operations, humanitarian operations, rehabilitation, reconstruction, reconciliation, support for the promotion of transitional justice, and conflict resolution. Japan, as a “nation of peace” and a country that has emerged as a developed country from the destruction of World War II, can offer more from its experience to peacebuilding, reconstruction and nation-building in Asia.

The election of Japan as a non-permanent member to the UN Security Council for the 11th time to represent Asia-Pacific region also strengthens Japan's engagement in peacebuilding in the region. If Japan becomes a permanent member in the Security Council, it can play even more effective role for peace in Asia and in the world. The funds provided by Japan to the UN agencies for the promotion of peace and Japan's role in UN peacekeeping operations and humanitarian operations promote peacebuilding in different parts of the world including Asia. Japan has already played a role in peacebuilding in countries such as Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Timor-Leste, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Philippines, Nepal, and Republic of Iraq. The lessons learned from the peacebuilding experience in these countries could be used by Japan in peacebuilding in other parts of Asia.

Governmental agencies such as Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and many NGOs also play an important role in peacebuilding in Asia and in the world. Japan's Official Development Assistance (ODA) is also based on the progress made in peacebuilding in the countries they assist. The importance given to pacifism in Article 9 of the Constitution, and the culture of peace in Japan qualify Japan as a neutral player in peacebuilding in Asia.

Role of Japan in Peacebuilding in Sri Lanka

In Sri Lanka, the protracted ethnic conflict escalated into an armed conflict and caused loss of life of many thousands of people. The conflict also created tension in the region and led to the direct intervention of India into the conflict. The Indian intervention made the government of Sri Lanka to introduce the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1987 to devolve powers and resolve the conflict. However, the Amendment has failed to address the root cause of the conflict.

In October 2002, the Japanese government appointed Mr. Akashi Yasushi as the representative of its government for peacebuilding, rehabilitation, and reconstruction in Sri Lanka. He played an important role in facilitating peace talks between the government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) during the period of 2002–2003. Japan hosted the sixth round of peace talks between the GOSL and the LTTE from March 18–21, 2003, in Hakone. Unfortunately, it was the last round of peace talks between the GOSL and the LTTE. One of the main reasons for the failure of the peace talk in 2003 was

the lack of confidence building between the parties. In addition, mistrust and suspicion also existed among the communities. In the same year, 2003, Japan convened the Tokyo Conference on Reconstruction and Development of Sri Lanka from June 9–11 with the participation of over 50 countries.

The Sri Lankan armed conflict ended in May 2009 when the military defeated the LTTE. Although the armed conflict has ended, the ethnic conflict continues, and the reconciliation process has only a limited success to date. After the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2015, the government of Sri Lanka and the communities became committed to reconciliation and sustainable peace. The Sri Lankan government also intends to adopt a new constitution. Hence, the time is ripe for reconciliation and negotiated settlement of the ethnic conflict. However, the political settlement of the conflict should be a consensus-oriented one, and the communities need to be prepared for it. It requires not only confidence building, trust-building, and reconciliation among communities but also awareness of the need for the devolution of powers and power sharing. The majority community has a fear that devolution of power or power sharing will lead to the separation of the country. The fear should be allayed by giving empirical evidence from the countries where powers have been devolved or shared with provinces/regions.

In October 2015, Japan announced in the UN Human Rights Council that it will assist Sri Lanka to achieve true reconciliation in Sri Lanka. As the time is ripe for reconciliation, Japan should revive its role in peacebuilding for the reconciliation and the negotiated settlement of the conflict in Sri Lanka. Negotiated settlement is a pre-requisite for the country's sustainable peace. Sri Lanka's neighboring country, India, can play only a limited role in promoting a negotiated settlement in Sri Lanka as India has already intervened in the conflict. But, Japan as a neutral player in Asia can play an active role in fostering reconciliation and facilitating negotiated settlement in Sri Lanka. The cultural relationship between the two countries also will support the role of Japan in Sri Lanka.

Sustainable Peace in the Future

The culture of political leaders leading the people should change, and the culture of people leading the political leaders should emerge in Asia. People in societies and countries of Asia should be made to value the importance of peace, and be encouraged to work towards achieving peace. In this regard, common platforms should be made available to the people not only within the countries but also between the countries so that they can interact and exchange their views with their counterparts. It will remove fear, suspicion, and mistrust, and promote sustainable peace in societies, countries, and in Asia. While politics divide societies and countries, there are many things that can connect people within and between the countries and bring them to a common ground.

These connectors that bring people together regardless of political perceptions could be used in innovative ways to promote culture of peace in Asia, such as the establishment of an Asian university for peace studies to provide an opportunity to students, academics, and intellectuals, as well as of an Asian tribunal for peaceful settlement of inter-state conflicts. Japan as a peaceful, powerful, and resourceful country can play an important role with the support of all other countries in Asia for the establishment of these institutions.

Asian University for Peace Studies

Conflicts relating to security, politics, development, trade, investment, environment, climate change, resources, poverty, religion, gender, discrimination, multi-culturalism, and human rights exist in Asia. Understanding the nature and dynamics of these conflicts becomes important to prevent and settle such conflicts. It requires providing knowledge, enhancement of skills, and positive attitudinal change and also encouragement of research relating to such conflicts. It also becomes important that intellectuals in Asia work together in the field of research, policy making, and capacity building and interact with one another and exchange views and ideas relating to such conflicts. To achieve all these objectives, it is suggested that a university for peace studies should be established in Asia.

Furthermore, this university should be established in a country to which students and researchers have access without any prejudice. The university shall offer degrees and postgraduate degree programs relating to conflict and peace studies. It will produce students and researchers who would contribute to the promotion of peace in their countries, and that will then lead to peace in Asia and in the world. The establishment of a university of this nature will also be an important step towards the prevention and settlement of intra- and inter-state conflicts in Asia.

Asian Tribunal for Peaceful Settlement of Inter-State Conflicts

Asia has many inter-state conflicts such as boundary disputes, disputes relating to territorial waters, fishing rights, ownership of islands, occupation of places, exploitation of natural resources, sharing water, air pollution, trade agreements, investments, satellite coverage, terrorism, and ethnic conflicts. Peaceful settlement of these conflicts at their initial stage would prevent escalation of the conflicts. Prevention of escalation of these conflicts will also prevent arms-race and tension in the region. Therefore, there is a need to establish a tribunal for peaceful settlement of inter-state conflicts in Asia.

A regional tribunal could be more effective than an international tribunal in terms of accessibility and understanding the dynamics of the conflicts. It will also foster spirit of cooperation in the region. However, the establishment of the tribunal will have challenges in relation to location, structure, jurisdiction, composition of conciliators/mediators, procedures,

powers, and enforcement of settlement. Absence of an organization for Asia also may be an obstacle to establish such a tribunal.

Although we have these challenges, we have many opportunities because of the common culture and interests we share. Lessons learned from other regions of the world could also be used to establish a tribunal. It is suggested that the location of the tribunal could be Sri Lanka as Sri Lanka's foreign policy is based on non-alignment policy, and Sri Lanka has cultural relationship with most of the countries in the region. The establishment of this type of tribunal also requires confidence building and attitudinal change among the countries involved. The leaders and the people of these countries should cooperate and be committed to making Asia peaceful in the future.

Conclusion

Peace is the most important "common" to be instilled in the minds of individuals and inbuilt in societies to prevent intra- and inter-state conflicts. However, it is a multi-dimensional task involving funds, activities, and diplomacy. It requires attitudinal change of people and actions toward peacebuilding. Peace loving people in Japan contribute to the attitudinal change of the people in Asia, and the Japanese government and organizations contribute to peacebuilding activities in Asia. The two months experience in the ALFP and in Japan helped me to understand that "culture of peace" and "spirit of cooperation" have paved the way for Japan's economic reconstruction after World War II. Japan as a peace loving nation can continue to play an important role in peacebuilding in Asia. In addition to the role it plays in peacebuilding, it can also play a leading role in the establishment of a university for peace studies and a tribunal for peaceful settlement of inter-state conflicts in Asia.