

Bled Strategic Forum Panel C: Global Preponderance  
26-27 August 2007, Bled, Slovenia

A Geriatric Peace and a New Multilateralism:  
Democracy and Demography in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Kuniko INOBUCHI, Ph.D.

Member, House of Representatives of Japan

Member, Science Council of Japan

Former Minister of State on Gender and Social Affairs

Former Ambassador to Geneva on Disarmament Affairs

It is my great pleasure and honor to participate in the Bled Strategic Forum. Japan and the Republic of Slovenia enjoy splendid bilateral relations and growing civil society exchanges. As a parliamentarian, former Minister of State, and ambassador to Geneva, I represent my people's sincere interest and enthusiasm in our shared values of peace, democracy and growth, and in the common future of Asia and the EU. Japan and many EU countries also share social phenomena such as aging of the population, a declining birthrate and the challenges of better work-life balance.

(Japan Update)

Allow me, first of all, to roughly put Japan and Asia in the global context, and provide an update on Japan.

The Asia-Pacific region accounts for nearly 30% of global trade, and excluding trade within the European Union, more than half of the top 10 global trading economies are in Asia. Japan is the leading trader in this region, and Japan's economic development is a textbook case of how a resource-poor small country can grow and prosper to become the 2<sup>nd</sup> biggest economy in the world not only by hard work but also by having prudent trade strategies and proactive investment synergies.

Since Japan is resource-poor, education to spur technological innovation and reforms to maximize efficiency have always been important. Former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi was a bold reformer who revitalized Japan by pursuing sweeping changes within the ruling party, the LDP, and Japan at large. Mr. Shinzo Abe

succeeded Koizumi's administration and Koizumi's reformist policies. In the July Upper House election, he suffered a severe loss partly due to the slowing down of reform efforts. The Upper House does not have law making power comparable to the House of Representatives, but the electoral outcome signals a sense of voter insecurity concerning the future of Japan. Now, Mr. Abe is determined to take a stronger grip of reform initiatives, including the pension systems and social insurance. In foreign policy, Prime Minister Abe has been a courageous reformer and initiative taker, mending fences with China and South Korea, and reaching out to India and beyond.

Another fundamental feature of Japan is the aging of its population. At present, more than 20% of our population is over 65 years old. Japan ranks first in the speed of graying of the population. By 2045, nearly 40% of us will be over 65 years old. Since Japanese men and women enjoy the longest longevity in the world, there is a social campaign to encourage work-force participation at a senior age to offset labor shortages. But on the other hand, Japan must take initiatives to provide better work-life balance and child care services to working parents so that both men and women can enjoy both work and family.

In October 2005, Mr. Koizumi appointed me as the first Minister of State to deal exclusively with gender equality and demographic issues. I took strong initiatives including the introduction of infant allowances and the redoubling of child-care support services. To my great surprise, the total fertility rate, which has been decreasing in recent years, took a sharp upward turn last year with a percentage rise never experienced in the last four decades in our country. It is evident that Japan's young generation welcomed the mainstreaming of gender equality issues and family support policies.

(A Geriatric Peace?)

Such efforts may slow population decline, but in the long run, Japan will face the challenges of an aging society together with most EU member states.

The impact of aging of the population is multifaceted. Let us explore how it could affect peace and the security environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

First, labor shortages will provide opportunities to import labor which, if managed with prudence, could lead to a new stage of people's interdependence and cross-cultural knowledge. It should provide citizens with a wide range of

opportunities to look beyond borders and learn the diversity and complexity of the international community. There could be difficulties and instabilities associated with labor interdependence, but in the long-run it should enhance people's global knowledge and cultural sensitivities.

Second, the aging democracies are most likely to experience an unprecedented rise of social welfare expenditures, and this could restrain them from resorting to excessive increases of their defense budgets. In the long-run, aging democracies are most likely to favor diplomatic solutions over war options not only because of their maturity but also because of the high cost of social insurance. It would no longer be a choice between butter and guns—the title of a 1997 book on international diplomacy—but between medicines and guns.

This has come to be known as a “Geriatric Peace.” Both Japan and the EU could be the pioneers of this political and social dynamic for peace. The concept of geriatric peace might not hold in countries which are not democratic, since in non-democracies, states may not be pressured to sustain social insurance for aging citizens. Also the concept may not hold in democracies that welcome unlimited immigration, since they will not face graying of the population so soon.

Third, with the graying of the population, we will be compelled to revisit our modern growth paradigms which focused on a male labor force that constituted the mainstream. Women with children, senior citizens, handicapped persons, for example, were not given due attention as an integral part of modern economic development dynamics. Unfortunately, Japan is a case in point. Nearly 70% of working women are driven out of the labor force once they assume burdensome family responsibilities. Being forced to choose between family and work, many Japanese women postpone the decision, resulting in late marriages and fewer children. Thus to discuss a declining and aging population is to deconstruct modern growth paradigms of linear progression with uniform values and a homogeneous labor force, and pursue a new social philosophy of inclusion and balance. These efforts should correlate well with, for example, environmental and ecology concerns, but less with military aggrandizement.

(Leadership Deficit or a New Multilateralism?)

However, these ideas would be muted once we observe unpredictable regional instability, such as nuclear proliferation or threats of terrorism. I come from East Asia where such threats are real.

It is my sincere hope that multilateral diplomacy including civil society and the international business community will help activate political will to resolve regional security issues.

Today we are in need of strong political leadership and political will to provide solutions for emerging and persistent regional and global challenges. Given the magnitude and the speed of regional and global challenges, including new security threats, climatic change, poverty, and concerns over division and alienation, the international community is likely to suffer from a leadership deficit. Political leadership at all levels—international, regional, national, and local—needs to be enhanced and supported by the expertise and knowledge of civil society and business communities. Governments today have come under increasing pressure to address and respond to a wide-range of complex global issues that cannot be simply solved by raw power or only by its traditional institutions. The power of knowledge has become increasingly more important, and this is why civil society, including scholars, researchers, think tanks, non-profit organizations, media and all interested citizens are important partners in the international decision making process. The military power rests with states. The economic power belongs to states and corporations. But knowledge can belong only to each human existence. Thus governments, in order to be effective and powerful, will find a greater incentive to reach out to civil society to make use of knowledge, including local knowledge that belongs to the people.

These dynamics could serve as the basis of a new paradigm in international decision making. I call it New Multilateralism. The hallmark of New Multilateralism is the power of knowledge and a sense of ownership over multilateral issues by a wide range of stakeholders. New Multilateralism needs to be implemented with a result-oriented mindset, but not compromising on priorities on humanitarian progress. It is my hope that Japan and EU together with others represented at the Bled Strategic Forum will consolidate our commitment to pioneer the era of the knowledge-intensive and solution-oriented synergies of New Multilateralism. I thank you.