

# **JAPAN FOREIGN POLICY IN COUNTERING THE ISIS TERRORISM**

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## **Abstract**

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) currently become the central of attention of the global community. As a terrorist group, ISIS had done several brutal actions which threaten the global security. As the result, several areas in Iraq and Syria had occupied by ISIS as their base. The threat which ISIS gave was not only in Iraq and Syria. Some international communities had felt the ISIS's brutality including Japan losing the two of its Japanese journalists which were beheaded by this terrorist group. As the result, Japan responded this incident by releasing "three-pillar foreign policy" as the response in countering the ISIS terrorism. However, when the other states responded the ISIS by military forces by implementing the foreign policy, Japan just participated in countering the ISIS by doing soft way. This research aims at examining the considerations of Japan in deciding its foreign policy in countering the ISIS terrorism. As it is foreign policy had released, Japan responded the ISIS by doing soft way as it is mentioned in its "three-pillars foreign policy". However, the other states which involved in the battlefield in fighting against ISIS used their military forces. Therefore, it is interesting to analyze Japan's considerations by doing so, while the other states directly attacked ISIS by military means. The method of writing in this thesis is using qualitative method. Therefore, in this writing, the writer uses several ways to collect the data in order to discuss the problem. The first is media research, the second is library research, the third is data analysis, and the last is proving hypothesis. By completing the process of this research, the writer found that the consideration of Japanese domestic politics and the international situation at the mean time becomes the reasons why Japan took the policy in countering the ISIS terrorism by that way.

Keywords: Japan, Foreign Policy, ISIS, Terrorism

## **Introduction**

The emergence of Islamic extremist movement or well-known as Islamic State of Syria and Iraq had already been become an issue to be concerned by countries over the world these past years. Its brutality of this group took the international attention to focus on this issue.

At first, the appearance of ISIS as a terrorist-group, was only desired to participate in Syria civil war gathered with another terrorist-group al-Qaeda. Moreover, they just wanted to expand its power in the regional of Iraq and Syria. Therefore, the international citizens might consider this issue as regional matters.

Since the years passed, ISIS already becomes more powerful than before. Consequently, several incidents of killing foreign people were done. They officially published it in order to make the world see what they had done as a terrorist-group. Since ISIS clearly showed their actions, the world started to see this as a global issue, not a regional issue any longer.

## **Analysis**

As a terrorist group, ISIS has spread its threat toward any states which committed to fight against them. All the countries which are involved in the battlefield against ISIS have felt the brutality of this terrorist group, including Japan of which the two of the Japanese journalists were killed and virally published in the internet by ISIS.

Japan, as a country which felt the brutality of ISIS also took part in responding this terrorist group. The government had published the foreign policy regarding the incident of beheading the two of Japanese journalists. However, the response that Japan took was different. From the foreign policy which was named “*three-pillars foreign policy*”, none of the points mentioning the use of military power in countering the ISIS terrorism. Even though Japan decided to take part in countering the ISIS terrorism, the response was indirectly involved in the battlefield like other states.

### **The Limitation of Japan’s Options on Doing Hard Responds toward ISIS Terrorism**

The action which was done by ISIS on beheading two Japanese hostages was definitely bad for Japan itself. Since the postwar era, Japan tended to be more careful in playing its role in international politics. Along with that, Japan always tried to rebuild a good image through countries to reduce the bad memories of what they had done in the World War II. However, the Prime Minister Shinzo Abe seemed not to be calm in responding the incident. Right after the ISIS beheaded the two journalist of Japan, Shinzo Abe quickly responded to it by initiating to enable self defense force in order to actively involve in the international operation to save the Japanese in danger.

Meanwhile, the issue of enabling self defense force has been discussed since long years ago. Therefore, this might not be a new controversial issue in Japan itself. Moreover, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) as the

party where Shinzo Abe came from had intensely tried to change the Constitution which ruled the operation the Japan's SDF. Hence, the incident of the two Japanese journalists beheaded by ISIS just became another motive of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and LDP on retrying to change the Constitution which discussed about SDF operation's scope (The Economist, 1 June 2013).

Actually, not only the incident of ISIS beheaded the two of Japanese journalists which made the government of Japan wanted to respond it by Japan's SDF, but also, this exertion to normalize Japan into a normal country which can easily mobilize its military in international arena had been tried in some cases. However, this seemed unsuccessful to change the Article 9 of the Constitution which control the operation scope of Japan's SDF. This matter, of course, become the lack of Japan as a state in participating in international disputes.

Right after the video of the two Japanese journalist beheaded by ISIS was posted virally in the internet, the Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was angry with the incident. Of course, as the most responsible one regarding the incident, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe directly stated his interest in using the SDF to counter the ISIS. However, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe should face the reality of Japan which was a pacifist state. This condition obviously limited the options which Japan could choose to counter the ISIS terrorism. When the other states could easily mobilize its military forces to combat the ISIS in the battlefield, Japan could not do it. It is normal for the other states because they had no condition as a pacifist state. However, Japan is different. By

having the condition as a pacifist state, Japan lacks of options in countering the ISIS terrorism by military means.

The exertion to change the Constitution, then, was realized by proposing the Bill which was named “Collective Self Defense”. This Bill aimed at expanding the scope of Japan’s SDF operation. Hopefully, by legalizing this Bill, Japan’s SDF could be easily mobilized in international operation. However, the problem has just started now. The idea to enable SDF by proposing the Bill was rejected by the citizens. Moreover, this initiative by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe got obstacles from the opposite parties.

The exertion of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to reinterpret the Article 9 of the Constitution was difficult due to the unstable condition of domestic political situation in Japan at the mean time. Therefore, the security Bill which was the reflection of Shinzo Abe’s effort in reinterpreting the Article 9 was just approved on September 2015 (WW4, 20 September 2015). It means, Japan just got its capability to normally mobilize its military force in international disputes after the government published the three-pillars foreign policy on February 2015. Therefore, the reason why Japan did not put its military means in countering the ISIS terrorism is, of course, because the lack of options which Japan could choose at the mean time due to an unfinished efforts of approving the security Bill in the Diet. Hence, to explain the debate about Article 9 of the Constitution reinterpretation, the writer divided it into two main discussions discussing about Japanese and opposition party’s criticism toward the reinterpretation.

## **Japanese Critics toward the “Collective SDF” Bill**

The exertion to reinterpret the Constitution on Article 9 by the Liberal Democratic Party has started since this party was established in 1955. It is because the one of their mission as a party is to bring Japan back as pre postwar era, in which Japan was easily involved in international arena.

Before the incident of the two Japanese journalists beheaded by the ISIS occurred in the early 2015, the exertion to enable the Japan’s SDF was already started in 2014. It was initiated by the Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to create an Ad Hoc consisting of some experts. This team name is the Yanai Committee. They are responsible to make recommendations of Article 9 reinterpretation. As the result, the recommendations have been given to the Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Then, controversially, the Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced the initiative to reinterpret the Constitution on Article 9 in the public on 1 July 2014.

As reported by CNN, 2 July 2014, along with the celebration of SDF as having its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary on 1 July 2014, the Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced the idea to reinterpret the Constitution on Article 9 (CNN, 2 July 2014). The reinterpretation aimed at enabling the Japan’s SDF to easily mobilize in international arena in conducting its operation. Another motive might counter the new challenges in 21<sup>st</sup> century faced by Japan.

The idea of reinterpretation the Constitution seemed not to be smoothly conducted. Since the issue of reinterpreting the Constitution has become a

controversial topic in Japan since the Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced his initiative regarding the reinterpretation. The Japanese were massively going down to the street to criticize the idea. PRI's The World reported on 4 August 2014, a big number of demonstrators had gathered outside of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's office to reject and push him resigned regarding the initiative of Article 9 reinterpretation. (pri.org, 4 August 2014).

Even though the Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and the ruling party seemed ignoring the public's criticism on conducting this reinterpretation on Article 9, in fact, this kind of action which was done by the citizens had actively contributed in previous Article 9 reinterpretation. Therefore, this would be difficult for Shinzo Abe and LDP to realize the Article 9 reinterpretation.

Meanwhile, a poll which was conducted by the Nikkei Business newspaper on 7 July 2014 showed an unexpected result for the Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. The poll found, 50% of the voters were against the initiative to reinterpret the Article 9, and 34% of the voters supported the change (The Guardian, 30 June 2014). This poll showed that the obstacle of reinterpreting the Article 9 is real. However, the Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and the ruling party LDP remained in continuing the idea.

The way to legalize the collective self-defense force bill is by discussing it in the parliament and should get 2/3 votes of the Diet both in the Lower House or in the Upper House. That is the condition to legally reinterpret the Article 9 and implement the policy. However, this might be another obstacle for Prime Minister Shinzo Abe

and the ruling party along with its coalition to pass the bill. In fact, they have to face the opposition parties such as Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), Socialist Democratic Party (SDP), and Japan Communist Party (JCP) in the Diet to debate the proposal of collective self-defense force.

### **Opposition Party's Critics toward the "Collection SDF" Bill**

Soon after the incident of the two Japanese journalists beheaded by the ISIS, the response which was shown by the Prime Minister was great. He said, *"I want to discuss ways to enable the rescue of Japanese citizens overseas."* (The Japan Times, February 02, 2015). By stating this statement, Shinzo Abe tried to make the terrorist pay the price for what they have done to the Japanese journalists in the video.

As a non-pacifist state, it might be easier for the other states to decide their action in international arena by military means. However, Japan is different. Besides directly responding the incident by using the military means, Japan should face the Constitution on Article 9 which controls the scope of its SDF's operation scope.

Since the reinterpretation of Article 9 was announced by the Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on 1 July 2014, the demonstrators massively came to the streets to criticize the idea. Yet, the demonstrators seemed to not only came from the citizens, but also from the opposition parties which also gave their stance in criticizing the Article 9 reinterpretation by the Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and the ruling party's coalition. The opposition parties which opposed the idea were Democratic Party of



Japan (DPJ), Socialist Democratic Party (SDP), and Japan Communist Party (JCP). DPJ is the biggest power of the opposition party in refusing the Article 9 reinterpretation.

The criticisms and rejections were successful to stop the exertion of reinterpreting Article 9 at the mean time. Since its first announcement on July 2014, the Bill which aimed at reinterpreting the Constitution article 9 was not approved until the early 2015. The facts, the Bill was approved in July 2015 by passing the Lower House of the Diet and being completely approved in September 2015 which then allowed the Collective SDF overseas (ww4report.com, 20 September 2015).

The idea of decision making process by Coplin concerns about the issues before the foreign policy was decided. These issues then, become the considerations of a state in deciding its foreign policy. In this case, the domestic politics of Japan were unstable, which rather affected the process of decision making for its foreign policy. In fact, a poll which was conducted by the Nikkei Business Newspaper found that 50% of voters were against, while the number of voters whom agreed the change was just 34% (The Guardian, 30 June 2014). If we look at the date of the government's exertions to approve the Bill, they just approved it legally from the Diet in September 2015. It means that, even though the responds that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe wanted to take in responding the ISIS terrorism was hard, unfortunately, the government still faced Article 9 of the Constitution which forbid the use any military power to solve international disputes.

The consideration also goes to the Japanese criticism. The majority of the Japanese did not agree or rejected the idea of reinterpreting the article 9 of the Constitution. Most of them did not want to see Japan returning to its prewar era. They tended to keep Japan to be pacifist. These criticism supportively contributed in stopping the reinterpretation of Article 9.

### **Japan-Oil-Dependency in the Area Around ISIS Territory**

Since postwar era, Japan tends to focus on its economic sector to play its role in international arena. By focusing on its economic, Japan has become an industrialized country and one of developed countries in the Asia-Pacific.

Unfortunately, the condition as an industrialized country is not balance with the capability of Japan to produce its natural resources. Therefore, despite of becoming one of developed countries in the region, Japan is also one of the biggest natural resources importer in the world, especially, oil and gas.

As reported by U.S. Energy Information Administration on 30 January 2015, Japan has become the world's largest natural gas importer, the second-largest coal importer, and the third-largest crude oil and oil products importer. Among these energy consumptions, Japan spends 44% on petroleum and other liquids, 27% on coal, and 22% on natural gas ([www.eia.gov](http://www.eia.gov), 30 January 2015). This showed that petroleum has become the biggest import of Japan besides other energy resources.

Unfortunately, the Tsunami that happened in Japan which broke two of Japan's nuclear-reactors in the Fukushima was really worse for Japan. Because of that incident, Japan lost about 10 gigawatts of nuclear electric generating capacity, as already knew, nuclear-reactors in Fukushima, is Japan's energy infrastructure which supply around 27% of the power generation. In order to fulfill the absence of these 27% of nuclear energy, the government of Japan quickly initiates to replace it with natural gas, low-sulfur crude oil, fuel oil, and coal. Thus, Japan was becoming more depend on natural gas and oil import to keep its domestic electricity power save (ww.eia.gov, 30 January 2015).

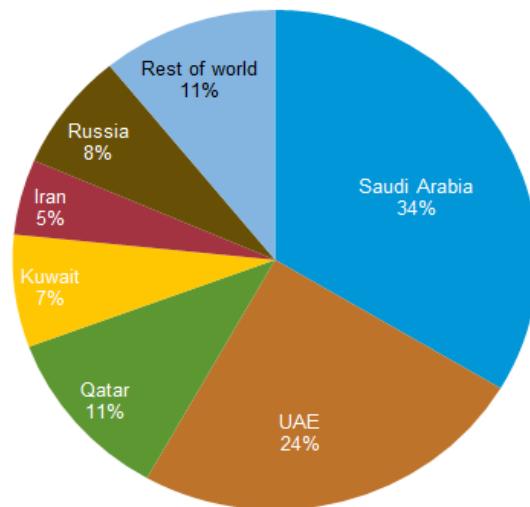
### **Countries and Statistics of Japan's Oil Import**


Either to support its industry operation or to support the need of its electricity power, those reasons just made Japan as a country with a high level of oil imports. Some countries which were becoming the importer of Japan's oil are Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, Iran, and Russia. From those countries, 5 out of 6 countries are located in the the Middle East which close to the area of ISIS's territorial occupation. Even more, one or some countries have experienced the brutality of ISIS's operation.

The data from U.S. Energy Information Administration claimed, Saudi Arabia is the biggest oil importer for Japan with the amount 34%, the United Arab Emirates came in the second place with 24%, then Qatar with 11%, Kuwait 7%, and Iran 5%.

As furtherly explained, with the amount of 34% as the biggest Japan's oil importer, Saudi Arabia supplied more than 1.1 million bbl/d of crude oil in 2014. Besides, Iran as the smallest Japan's oil importer from the Middle East countries which supplied 5%, contribute to give Japan more than 166,000 bbl/d in 2014 (ww.eia.gov, 30 January 2015). For further information, it is showed as follows..

Japan's crude oil imports by source, 2014 (11 months)



 Sources: Japan's Ministry of Finance, Global Trade Information Services

The graphic has showed the demand of Japan's oil imports in 2014 from all over the world. Some countries had become the important part of Japan's oil imports. From all the countries which mentioned, most of them were coming from the Middle East countries. Even the graphic found that the percentage of oil imports from the Middle East countries could cover up the Japan's oil imports from the rest of the world. Then, as the location which might be the closest area from the ISIS's territorial

occupation, the Middle East countries were the most possible one. But, to see which countries are geographically located around ISIS's territorial occupation, hereby, the writer attached the map of the Middle East countries below.

As already know that ISIS's territorial occupation was including Iraq and Syria, therefore, the countries which became Japan's oil importer which were located around ISIS's territorial occupation are Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Iran. From these countries, Saudi Arabia is the biggest oil importer for Japan with a percentage of 34%. This statistic showed that not only in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia has become the biggest supplier of Japan's oil import in the world. If the percentages of those three countries oil imports for Japan is calculated, it is approximately 46% of Japan's oil imports is coming from these countries.

Actually, Japan has made an improvement to reduce its dependency on oil by diversifying the energy resources. Since the the Middle East oil embargos in 1970, Japan has made a thought to produce natural gas and nuclear energy (The Diplomat, 16 March 2016). As a result, Japan succeed on reducing its dependency on oil. However, the reliance on the Middle East countries is remain high. Moreover, since the incident of Japan's tsunami in 2011 which broke their nuclear reactors in the Fukushima. From this incident, Japan should import its oil supplies even bigger than before to cover up the energy power that could be produced by the nuclear reactors. That is why, it is important for Japan to keep the good relations with the Middle East countries and as possible as help the stability of politics in the region.

This oil-dependency from the Middle East countries is very important for Japan. Therefore, to support the stable politics in the Middle East, Japan has several ways to conduct. For instance, by giving financial aid, loan, and of course the cooperation of both side. For this cooperation, Japan has created its cooperation which is named the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) across the Middle East countries. This cooperation which was then, a proof of Japan's effort to promote the stability in the Middle East (defence.gov.au, 2012).

This consideration which then came out in Japan's "three-pillar foreign policy". In the one of three points within the foreign policy stated,

2. Enhancing Diplomacy Towards Stability and Prosperity in the Middle East
  - a. Deploying a proactive Middle East diplomacy high-level mutual visits (strengthening dialogue at the Leader/FM level). Building connections with multifarious communities (including business sectors). Reinforce cooperation regarding terrorism related information/intelligence).
  - b. Assistance of \$200 million (as PM Abe announced) + further expansion of humanitarian assistance.
  - c. Assistance for regional economic/social stability necessary for promotion of economic growth (MOFA, 17 February 2015).

Along with this point of foreign policy, Japan has given the financial aids to the Middle East countries as many as \$200 millions which was aimed for humanitarian assistance, besides following the interest of ISIS which demanded the money for releasing the hostages of the two Japanese journalists.

## **Conclusion**

Japan's domestic politics before the incident of Japanese journalists beheaded by ISIS was unstable. The decision to reinterpret the article 9 of the Constitution by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was controversial. It triggered a massive demonstrator to go down the street for criticizing the article 9 reinterpretation. Meanwhile, the opposition parties which were led by the Democratic Party of Japan also became another obstacle. As the result, the proposal which had been submitted to the Diet since 2014 had not been approved yet until in the early of 2015. Consequently, as the incident of the two Japanese journalists beheaded by ISIS happened, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe still could not respond the ISIS by military means. At the mean time, Japan still faced the Article 9 of the Constitution which forbid the use of military means in international disputes. Therefore, none of the points of Japan's three-pillar foreign policy mentioned the use of hard way in responding the ISIS terrorism as other states did.

In the international context, Japan has oil-dependency from the Middle East countries. Those are Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, and Iran. Even though Japan had decreased its oil-dependency since they had converted its energy consumption to natural gas and nuclear energy, Japan still highly depends on the Middle East countries. Moreover, the incident of tsunami in 2011 which broke their nuclear reactors in the Fukushima forced them to import more energy resources, including oil itself from the Middle East countries to cover up the lost of energy

power which was produced by the broken nuclear reactors.

This Japan oil-dependency from the Middle East countries has made them put its concern in the region. To keep its reliance with the Middle East countries regarding the oil-dependency, Japan made its good relations with those countries while supporting the political stability in the region. In the exertion to support the political stability in the Middle East, Japan has its cooperation named Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) which help them to give the financial aid, loan, and of course, the business matters itself.

Because of this consideration, one of three points of Japan's three-pillar foreign policy mentioned the humanitarian assistance which aimed at helping the refugees and reconstructing the damage got by the countries in the region due to the ISIS's attacks. Therefore, after analyzing both considerations from domestic politics and international context, those are the reasons why Japan responded differently in responding the ISIS terrorism. Japan did not choose the hard way which was taken by the countries that involved in the battlefield against ISIS.



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