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Abstract

The 3/11 triple disaster, comprising the powerful earthquake, devastating tsunami, and nuclear meltdowns at the Fukushima nuclear power complex, has drawn worldwide attention to Japan's crisis management capabilities. This article lays out key concepts used in analyzing crises and addresses major trends in contemporary crisis management endeavors. It then turns to the Japanese case, identifying six key themes in the debates about the country's crisis management capabilities. In tracing and exploring past reform efforts, the article assesses characteristics and highlights perceived deficiencies in Japan's approach. The final part provides a brief overview of the case studies presented in this special issue, pinpointing recurrent themes and enduring problems observed in recent crisis management efforts.

Japan's crisis management capabilities have been put to the test numerous times in recent years. Drawing worldwide attention, the powerful earthquake and resulting Tsunami of 11 March 2011 caused extensive damage to the Tōhoku coastal region and triggered the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima reactor complex. The disaster stirred domestic and international interest in the country's response and ability to handle complex and hazardous situations. Other events, such as the ongoing financial crisis, the growing tensions surrounding North Korea's nuclear and missile developments,

and the 2010 collision between a Chinese fishing trawler and a Japanese Coast Guard's ship near the Senkaku islands have also stimulated debates about the country's crisis management.

Presenting a variety of case studies, this special issue of the *Japanese Journal of Political Science* explores and analyzes key debates, problems, and reform efforts in Japan's crisis management approach. The contributions illustrate the complexities inherent in crisis management and the need for continuous attention to Japan's reform efforts of governmental institutions as well as the roles played by the various actors involved in crisis response. The issue is based on an expert workshop held at the University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany, in October 2011. The workshop was made possible by generous grants from the German Research Foundation's 'Risk and East Asia' Research Training Group, the Alfried Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach-Stiftung, as well as the University of Duisburg-Essen's 'Change of Contemporary Societies' Main Research Area. We are very grateful for their support. We furthermore thank the anonymous reviewers for valuable feedback on all the papers.

The introduction has three objectives. In the first part, we provide a general definition of the terms 'crisis' and 'crisis management' and survey important international trends relevant to the topic. We argue that the challenges in crisis management are growing, as the world is becoming more interdependent, technological systems are increasingly complex, and the media is relying more on real-time reporting. The article's second part identifies six key themes in the Japanese debates on crisis management. We demonstrate that the country has carried out notable reforms and improvements in its crisis management approach over the past three decades. As some aspects nevertheless continue to attract criticism, Japan is bound to keep exploring changes in its system. By surveying recurrent themes in the debate, our article seeks to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the strengths, weaknesses, and reform efforts in Japanese crisis management, a topic that remains understudied. The third part provides an overview of the special issue, drawing some general conclusions about Japanese crisis management and highlighting areas for future investigation.

Crisis management and contemporary challenges

Crises confront organizations, communities, and governments with extraordinary challenges to their operation, competence, responsiveness, and resilience. In general, a crisis can be defined as a situation in which a community of people perceives 'a serious threat to the basic structures or the fundamental values and norms of a system, which under time pressure and highly uncertain circumstances necessitates making vital decisions' (Boin *et al.*, 2005: 2). Typical features of crises thus include the occurrence of surprising and unanticipated events, a threat to something valuable (like people, assets, or reputation), a disruption of routine decision-making, as well as trade-offs and dilemmas being faced under time pressure and insufficient information. Crises can be classified as either natural (such as an earthquake or hurricane) or man-made, with a further distinction made between intentional man-made crises (such as an act of

terrorism) and those that are unintentional (such as a nuclear plant accident) (Schoff, 2004: 29).

The term 'crisis management' is commonly associated with the organizational and political response during the most critical and precarious phase following the onset of a crisis. However, specialists agree that crisis management goes beyond the immediate response to include prior risk management and preparation as well as recovery and reflection afterwards (Rosenthal *et al.*, 2001: 15). Hideyo Kurata for example defines crisis management as a 'system by which one prepares for the worst, exerts all possible efforts to prevent it from happening, and – when it does occur – by which one seeks to minimize damage and move forward with recovery' (Kurata, 2001: 12). In line with this definition, four phases constituting a crisis management cycle can be distinguished: (1) prevention and mitigation, (2) preparedness, (3) response, and (4) recovery and learning (Tanifuji, 2000; Haddow *et al.*, 2011).

Each of the four phases of crisis management involves different tasks and challenges. The first phase (prevention and mitigation) implies a risk management strategy involving the recognition and evaluation of threatening signals and the avoidance or reduction of vulnerabilities faced by the organization or community of people. It includes, for example, such measures as building houses on higher ground if there is a risk of floods, or introducing special construction codes for earthquake-prone areas. The challenge for political or societal leaders in this phase is to remain alert to new developments and to engage in continuous discussions with various specialists.

Secondly, preparedness implies the prior clarification of various actors' responsibilities and the development of plans and resources that can be utilized in case a crisis occurs. For example, a community may establish an emergency operations plan, including evacuation procedures, that take into consideration special needs populations such as the elderly. Having such plans in place saves valuable response time during a crisis, even if some adaptation and improvisation may be required to fit the particular circumstances. For both the first and second phase, case studies on various countries demonstrate that public leaders tend to settle for suboptimal efforts, as crisis prevention and preparedness measures not only compete for budget allocations with seemingly more urgent policy tasks but they are also 'non-events' that draw little media attention (Boin and Hart, 2003: 546).

Thirdly, the response phase following the onset of a crisis involves assessing the situation, prioritizing, considering trade-offs, managing lines of communication and command, and coordinating the response to minimize damage. It is commonly assumed that this phase necessitates a decisive leader who takes quick, top-down decisions and oversees the implementation by various actors (Katō and Ōta, 2010: 19). While leadership is certainly important as people look for direction and guidance during a crisis, decision-making should not be too exclusive. As Arjen Boin *et al.* remark, those in leading positions are 'not necessarily the most competent persons to deal with a crisis' (Boin *et al.*, 2005: 54). Moreover, the implementation of response measures may be complicated by a lack of prior consultation with relevant actors. Apart from balancing

top-down decision-making and consultation, one of the most significant challenges for leaders in this phase is the dissemination of timely and accurate information to the media amid prevailing confusion and uncertainty. If leaders are hesitant to release information, they risk public criticism about being secretive and concealing uncomfortable truths. On the other hand, quickly releasing information that turns out to be inaccurate will cast doubts about the leadership's ability to take charge and keep track of events.

Fourthly, the recovery and learning phase involves restoring a sense of normalcy among affected community members, dealing with questions of accountability and responsibility, and drawing lessons to reduce future vulnerability through mitigation and preparedness measures. It is commonly assumed that crises catalyze innovation and reform, for example in policy content and in institutions. According to this view, crises function as inflection points or punctuated equilibria that loosen up constraints and enable critical re-examinations of habits and assumptions (Samuels, 2012). However, a number of crisis management specialists challenge this argument. An incumbent leader's primary goal is to resolve the immediate crisis situation and shift back to a sense of normalcy, a goal often at odds with sweeping reform efforts (Boin *et al.*, 2005: 131). Moreover, the process of learning and self-reflection is impeded by organizational inertia, bureaucratic and societal veto players, and the tendency by involved actors to blame others when facing questions of responsibility and accountability. In that sense, Richard Samuels maintains that 'crisis management is normal politics by other means', with actors continuing to pursue their self-interests despite the extraordinary circumstances (Samuels, 2012).[1]

The challenges for crisis management inherent in these four phases are compounded by a number of contemporary international trends. As sociologist Ulrich Beck famously pointed out, scientific and technological progress has paradoxically been accompanied by new vulnerability and risk to contemporary society (Beck, 1999).[2] Crises have thus emerged that combine elements of old threats, such as natural disasters, with new risks stemming from complex technical systems. The Fukushima nuclear crisis is a case in point, as the earthquake and resulting Tsunami caused the loss of electricity and hence cooling for the reactor blocs.

Furthermore, global interdependencies in economic, political, and societal spheres mean that crises increasingly transcend borders (Lagadec, 2006: 489). For example, the recent economic crisis demonstrates that financial problems in one part of the world reverberate around the globe and entail the risk of contagion. At the same time, globalization may complicate individual countries' crisis responses. As Ulrich Beck stresses, the growing interconnectedness challenges the territoriality and sovereignty of states, reducing their ability to act unilaterally or independently (Jarvis, 2007: 26).

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[1] This argument is further developed in Samuels (forthcoming).
[2] Risk can be defined as society's vulnerability to hazards and insecurities. A crisis emerges when a certain risk materializes.

Finally, with the advances in information technology, real-time reporting is becoming more common in the news media and among individuals using internet text messaging services such as 'Twitter'. As a result, governmental and societal leaders are under severe time pressure to communicate their account of the crisis and announce measures to minimize damage. The demand for swift communication thus implies leaders have less time to formulate a crisis response, even whilst the complexities resulting from globalization and technological progress have grown.

To summarize, the challenges and dilemmas inherent in crisis management are amplified by international trends in modern society. As crises by definition contain elements of surprise and uncertainty, it is difficult for leaders to emerge from a crisis unscathed. Given the many trade-offs faced by those in leadership positions, crisis management clearly has no 'gold standard', even if certain policy measures or institutional setups may help leaders respond more quickly and effectively. Case studies on numerous countries have identified failures and inadequacies in crisis management (Farazmand, 2009: 399). The goal of this special issue is therefore to utilize case studies as a way to analyze and trace characteristics in Japan's crisis management approach.

Japan's crisis management: debate and reform efforts

Located in the so-called typhoon belt and on the Pacific 'ring of fire' with a consistently high level of seismic and volcanic activity, Japan has been subject to many natural disasters throughout its history. The country has taken various measures in the mitigation, preparedness, and management of such disasters, passing the Disaster Countermeasures Basic Act in 1961, for example.[3] The act clarifies the roles and responsibilities of the municipalities, prefectures, and the national government when faced with a natural disaster and defines measures on prevention and emergency planning (Nakabayashi, 2010: 76).

At the governmental level, a more comprehensive notion of crisis management comprising both natural and man-made risks and threats only emerged in the 1980s, following the 1983 shoot down of a Korean Airline's flight by a Soviet interceptor, as discussed below. In the following part, we analyze the debates on Japan's crisis management and reform efforts since then. Rather than providing a comprehensive overview of all developments, we highlight prominent themes and trace reform efforts. Our main – though not exclusive – focus is on the central government's response system, as national crises first and foremost fix the spotlight on elected representatives and governmental institutions. We argue that six partially overlapping themes can be identified in the Japanese debate on crisis management: (1) the issue of political leadership and sectionalism in the bureaucracy, the most prominent theme; (2) the need for an information and communication strategy; (3) the flexible integration of volunteer efforts; (4) the use of the Self Defense Forces (SDF) in domestic and international crises; (5) the importance of local government- and community-led contributions; and (6)

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[3] For a comprehensive overview, see Cabinet Office Japan (2006).

the risks of delayed or inept decision-making caused by Japan's fluid political party system. We demonstrate that Japan appears to have successfully addressed some of these issues (such as the incorporation of volunteers), while other themes continue to be controversial (such as the issue of political leadership). The analysis furthermore illustrates that Japan's debate and reform efforts comprise aspects related to all four phases of the crisis management cycle introduced above.

(1) Political leadership and bureaucratic sectionalism

Critics have persistently argued that Japan's policy-making process does not match the requirements of a crisis, in which quick, decisive, and centralized coordination is necessary. Traditionally, Japanese policy initiatives are developed by bureaucrats in individual ministries through a bottom-up decision-making process that seeks consensus between relevant bureaus and divisions (Purrington and Kato, 1991: 314). However, crises leave little or no time for consensus-building. Japan's policy-making is furthermore characterized by intense competition and rivalry between different ministries, with lifetime employment policies fostering a strong sense of loyalty among bureaucrats to their respective ministry (Furukawa, 2000: 12). At the same time, the prime minister's position is considered relatively weak, lacking significant integrative power and the ability to take decisive actions without seeking consensus among relevant actors first (Hook *et al.*, 2005: 54). While Japan's bureaucracy-centered policy-making system was lauded for its success in promoting economic growth into the 1980s, doubts have since emerged about the country's ability to revise policies flexibly. (Krauss, 1989: 51) Moreover, criticism has been raised about the democratic legitimacy of non-elected bureaucrats exercising so much power.

In the context of crisis management, debates about bureaucratic sectionalism and the need for overall policy leadership surfaced in the aftermath of the September 1983 shoot down by a Soviet jet fighter of a Korean Airline's passenger flight that had accidentally entered Russian airspace. The incident revealed poor coordination and information exchange between related Japanese ministries and agencies (*Asahi Shimbun*, 1985b). Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone and Chief Cabinet Secretary Masaharu Gotoda thus reorganized the Cabinet Secretariat, the prime minister's main support body, with the aim of strengthening its advisory functions and overcoming interagency rivalries through 'top-down leadership' (*Asahi Shimbun*, 1985a). Lengthy discussions and consultations ensued, with bureaucrats cautiously seeking to protect their respective jurisdictional turf and limit the Cabinet Secretariat's authority (Farrell, 1999: 75). In 1986, Tokyo finally introduced three policy offices within the Cabinet Secretariat: one for internal affairs, one for external affairs, and one for security affairs (Shinoda, 2007: 33). As such, the issue of interministerial disputes was not fully resolved, because the members of the policy offices consisted of officials on temporary loan from the main ministries and agencies (Finance, Foreign Affairs, Defense) with respective loyalties and interests. Furthermore, the National Land Agency, unwilling to give up its responsibility for handling earthquakes, thwarted Gotoda's plan to let the Security Affairs Office lead Japan's response to both man-made and natural crises (Shinoda,

2007: 35). Despite the Security Affairs Office's limited role, Naoki Katō and Fumio Ōta see its establishment as a first important step towards a centralized system of crisis management (Katō and Ōta, 2010: 175).

In the 1990s, a series of developments including the Gulf Crisis of 1990–91, the devastating Kobe earthquake of January 1995, and the terrorist Sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway in March 1995 reignited discussions about the lack of effective leadership in times of crises. The renewed interest in crisis management was reflected in the 1995 National Defense Program Guidelines calling for better preparation for both large-scale natural disasters and 'for disasters caused by acts of terrorism or other events which require the protection of lives or assets' (Soeya, 1998: 225). Prime Minister Ryūtarō Hashimoto initiated a series of government reforms in the late 1990s, centralizing and strengthening the role of the prime minister and cabinet secretariat (Shinoda, 2011: 105). The most important change concerning crisis management was the establishment of the position of Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary for Crisis Management in April 1998. Katō and Ōta see the introduction of this specialized central coordinator position as a 'turning point' (Katō and Ōta, 2010: 176). The position was supplemented by the establishment of the Office for Crisis Management in the Cabinet Secretariat to support policy planning (Pangi, 2002: 430). Subsequently, the Japanese government's resources were further integrated in the 2001 administrative reforms by merging the National Land Agency's Disaster Management Bureau and the crisis management functions of the Cabinet Secretariat and the Prime Minister's Office (Oros and Tatsumi, 2010: 34). The 2001 reforms also included the introduction of a Minister of State for Disaster Management. This new post is meant to promote the smooth integration and coordination of disaster management policies carried out by numerous ministries and agencies (OECD, 2009: 62), and thus aims at overcoming bureaucratic sectionalism when managing (natural) disasters.

Since the reforms to strengthen the prime minister's and Cabinet Secretariat's roles, evaluations of Japan's crisis response have been mixed. On the one hand, Prime Minister Junichirō Koizumi was lauded for decisively reacting to international crises, for example quickly passing both the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States and the Special Measures Law on Iraq in July 2003. Without the previous years' institutional changes and reforms in the Cabinet Secretariat, such top-down decision-making and legislative initiatives would have been difficult (Shinoda, 2003). On the other hand, Prime Minister Naoto Kan's attempt to exercise top-down leadership in the Fukushima nuclear crisis backfired. He was widely criticized as incapable of delegating responsibility and causing confusion by micromanaging, for example by visiting the nuclear complex personally by helicopter (*Asahi Shimbun*, 2012e; Curtis, 2012: 28). Relying on his own circle of advisors, Kan was seen as sidelining cabinet members and disregarding bureaucratic expertise (Lukner and Sakaki, 2011). At the same time, critics also pointed out enduring deficiencies in the cooperation between different ministries and agencies. For example, data on radiation levels generated by Japan's System for Prediction of Environmental Emergency Dose Information (SPEEDI) were not used for planning evacuations around Fukushima, because the Office of Emergency Planning and Environmental Radioactivity of the

Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) failed to inform Prime Minister Kan and his office of the system's existence. The Foreign Ministry, which began forwarding SPEEDI data to the US starting 14 March 2011 also failed to alert the prime minister (Kimura, 2012).

It is still too early to tell how these recent experiences may affect new reform efforts in Japan's crisis management institutions. One change has been made in response to the criticism about Kan's role in the Fukushima crisis. In June 2012, the Diet passed a law limiting the prime minister's authority to issue instruction requiring technical expertise in the event of a nuclear plant emergency (*Yomiuri Shimbun*, 2012a). Besides this change, calls for further improvements in the collaboration across different ministries and agencies clearly persist. In this context, the idea raised by Prime Minister Shinzō Abe in 2007 of creating an American-style National Security Council within the Cabinet Secretariat has been reinvigorated by politicians from the DPJ and LDP as well as security experts (Takahashi, 2011; Matsuda, 2011).[4] According to former Foreign Minister Kōichirō Gemba, such a council would have comprehensive oversight as a command tower for foreign and security policy with the authority to coordinate other institutional actors in Japan. Thereby, the council would help 'to respond swiftly and flexibly in emergency situations' (Nakanishi and Gemba, 2012). Whether the council can be established, however, depends on the reaction of Japan's powerful bureaucracy.

(2) Information and communication strategy

The central compilation and publication of information by the government has been a focal point in the Japanese crisis management debate since at least the 1990s. During crises, a proactive, centralized communications strategy *vis-à-vis* both government agencies and the public facilitates the allocation of resources as well as the implementation of response and recovery plans. However, past crises revealed numerous deficiencies in the Japanese information and communication approach, triggering some reforms.

Both the Kobe earthquake and Sarin gas attack in Tokyo in 1995 exposed a lack of centralized information gathering by the Japanese government and the need for clearer chains of communication among various subnational and national actors (Sakamoto, 2001: 569). Especially after the Kobe earthquake, valuable resources at the prefectural and municipal level were tied by a flood of information requests on local conditions from various central government level actors (Nakabayashi, 2010: 77). To prevent similar problems in future crises, the Japanese government established in 1996 the Cabinet Information Collection Center as the central institution charged with collecting and evaluating information (Shikata, 2002: 87).

In 2004, the Fire and Disaster Management Agency of the Internal Affairs and Communications Ministry embarked on another milestone project related to crisis

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[4] The existing Security Council of Japan, established in 1986, has not overcome the problems of interministerial disputes (Matsuda, 2011).

information management by developing and subsequently introducing the 'J-Alert' system. This satellite-based system allows the central government to warn prefectural, city, town and village governments about impending threats, such as natural disasters or acts of terrorism, so that they can take appropriate measures, including evacuations. The system has been marred by problems, however. Many local governments were slow to adopt the system due to fiscal constraints and the high costs of installation (Shiomi and Izumi, 2008). Even though almost all municipalities had introduced the system by 2012, its application in a real crisis has proven more difficult than envisioned. For example, just before the North Korean test-launch of a missile in April 2009, the government issued a false alarm via J-Alert, caused by errors of a defense radar system and communication mistakes among officials (*Yomiuri Shimbun*, 2012b). In order to prevent a similar embarrassment, Tokyo decided to confirm the North Korean missile launch in April 2012 through two independent information sources before using J-Alert. This strategy backfired, however, because the missile, having failed shortly after launch, could not be picked up by ground-based radars in Japan. Tokyo was severely criticized for its failure to relay information to local governments, given the enormous financial investments into the J-Alert system (*Asahi Shimbun*, 2012c).

With regard to the Fukushima nuclear crisis in 2011, the government of Prime Minister Kan has been criticized for amateurish crisis communication both among key actors and *vis-à-vis* the domestic and international public. During a hearing by the Diet's Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission in May 2012, Yukio Edano, chief cabinet secretary during the crisis, blamed the Fukushima plant operator TEPCO and the Nuclear Industrial Safety Agency (NISA) for failing to keep the Prime Minister's Office informed about their efforts and assessments (*Asahi Shimbun*, 2012b). The exchange of information was complicated by the loss of electricity and damage to telephone equipment at the nuclear plant and at the local emergency center. While communication flows improved following Kan's decision to station his close adviser Gōshi Hosono at the TEPCO headquarters and to set up a comprehensive joint crisis response center with TEPCO, the government's release of information to the public continued to attract widespread criticism. While Kan was apparently fearful of triggering a panic, the vague press conferences and delays in providing explanations only served to lower the public's confidence and trigger speculations. MEXT's decision in late April 2011 to raise the maximum yearly radiation exposure limit for Fukushima school children by a factor of 20 – from 1 to 20 millisieverts – sparked outrage and undermined public trust in the government (*Asia-Pacific Journal*, 2011). Numerous citizens' groups, such as the Fukushima Network for Saving Children from Radiation, were consequently established to monitor radiation levels and disseminate information.

(3) Domestic and international volunteer efforts

An important task following a disaster with extensive damage and missing people is for the government to incorporate volunteer efforts into its response. Tokyo's failure to do so effectively after the Kobe earthquake in 1995 drew widespread criticism,

resulting in reforms and a new appreciation for civil society contributions. Shocked by the earthquake's terrible devastation and the government's slow response, 1.3 million volunteers went to the affected area and spontaneously organized themselves (Schwarz, 2002: 207). However, Japan's bureaucracy reacted inflexibly, obstructing volunteer groups by requiring their registration and authorization papers (Sakamoto, 2001: 570). Foreign doctors' emergency support was delayed because bureaucrats asked for their licenses to practice in Japan, while specially trained tracker-dogs were put into temporary quarantine at the airport in line with routine procedures. (Schoff, 2004: 38).

The disparity between the government's paralysis and civil society's spontaneity boosted public support for non-governmental organizations and their efforts. As a result, Tokyo passed the Law to Promote Specified Nonprofit Activities in March 1998, curtailing bureaucratic supervision and simplifying procedures to obtain legal status for such organizations (Kawato and Pekkanen, 2008). Furthermore, municipalities nationwide began to set up volunteer centers to collect information about disaster victims' needs and to organize aid manpower (Matsutani, 2012).

The Kobe experience and the subsequent changes seem to have made volunteer operations much smoother following the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami. The central government quickly set up a support structure for Japanese and international volunteers, with the Cabinet Secretariat tracking activities and needs through the Volunteer Coordination Office (Avenell, 2012: 61–2). Despite overall success, Tasukeai Japan, the information portal on reconstruction aid by the Cabinet Secretariat's Volunteers Coordination Office, described initial difficulties in bringing large numbers of volunteers into the affected areas due to a lack of fuel and accommodation (Tamura, 2011).

(4) SDF use in domestic and international crisis management

Because of enduring sensitivities about the country's militaristic past, Japan has only slowly and incrementally integrated the civilian and military sides of crisis planning and response. The Constitution with its famous war-renouncing Article 9 does not include special provisions for using the Self Defense Forces (SDF) in emergency and crisis situations inside or outside of Japan. According to the government's interpretation since the 1950s, Japan may employ military force only to exercise its right of individual self-defense, i.e. to repel an attack. However, the end of the Cold War triggered new debates about the role of the SDF in domestic and international crisis management and led to some important changes and reforms.

At the international level, the Gulf War in 1990–1 was a turning point in Japan's foreign policy, awakening the country to the new realities of the post-Cold War era and leading to the emergence of an international dimension in Japan's crisis management approach. Tokyo responded to the Gulf crisis by contributing $13 billion to the US-led military operation against Iraq, but failed to pass legislation authorizing the SDF to take part in logistic support. Despite Japan's financial generosity, the international community criticized Japan's decision to send money rather than SDF personnel as 'checkbook diplomacy'. This experience led to the realization in Japan about the need

to provide more active support to international efforts in tackling major post-Cold War security crises. As a result, Tokyo enacted the International Peace Cooperation Law (commonly known as PKO law) in June 1992, paving the way for the 1992 participation of SDF troops in a UN peacekeeping mission in Cambodia, their first operation on foreign soil since World War II (Soeya, 2011: 81; Lukner, 2006: 147). This mission was followed by numerous dispatches, such as to Zaire, Mozambique, and East Timor. Aside from PKO operations, Japan has also gradually expanded its international contributions, for example by dispatching naval vessels for refueling operations in the Indian Ocean in support of the US-led war on terror in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2010, or by participating in multinational anti-piracy patrols near the coast of Somalia since 2009.

The North Korean nuclear crisis of 1993–4 also had a fundamental impact on Japan's approach to international crisis management. When the Clinton administration contemplated surgical strikes against suspected North Korean nuclear facilities, it became clear that Tokyo was wholly unprepared for a possible request by its alliance partner to provide logistical and rear-area support in the event of a conflict or war. The crisis heightened concerns over regional instability and 'highlighted the need to prepare for situations short of an outright attack that nonetheless posed a real threat to Japan's security' (Yamaguchi, 2012). Tokyo and Washington consequently strengthened their security relations over the following years, specifying in the 1997 US–Japan Guidelines for Defense Cooperation the extent to which Japan would provide support to the US in the event of a regional contingency. Since then, the two countries have continued to enhance their relations and increase military interoperability, for example through joint research and development of a missile defense system (Sakaki, 2012).

At the domestic level, the post-Cold War era similarly witnessed a substantial shift in views about the role of the SDF in crisis management inside Japan. Following the devastating Kobe earthquake, the dispatch of SDF troops to the disaster area for search and rescue operations was significantly delayed. The governor of Hyōgo Prefecture requested SDF help only four hours after the earthquake struck and then it took another two days until troops arrived in significant numbers (Brosner, 2002: 18). Subsequent analyses found two reasons for the delay (Nakamura, 2000: 25ff). Firstly, the governor was cautious to seek help, fearing that the prefecture would have to bear all costs of the SDF dispatch as stipulated in the Disaster Aid and Rescue Act. Moreover, the prefectural request had to specify the vessels and forces to be deployed and the probable duration of the rescue campaign. Secondly, the SDF did not dispatch a large contingent to the area right away, fearing public anti-militarist sentiments and accusations about exploiting the crisis to expand the SDF's military role and scope of action. In the end however, the Kobe experience caused a shift in public perceptions about the need for SDF troops supporting police and fire department teams in large-scale disasters. According to the revised Disaster Aid and Rescue Act, the mobilization of SDF forces for rescue operations can be requested by the prime minister, the prefectural governor, or local mayors. Furthermore, the national government pledged to subsidize local governments with regard to the costs of SDF deployments (Nakamura, 2000: 28).

Another important modification in the domestic realm was the passage in June 2003 of three laws regarding Japan's response to an armed attack. With the backing of Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda, the Defense Agency had already studied the need for such legislation in 1977, but the topic was considered too sensitive to submit to the Diet (Katō and Ōta, 2010: 175). Under the administration of Prime Minister Junichirō Koizumi, deliberations again intensified about establishing clear responsibilities and regulations to help Japan deal with an attack on the nation. Following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the US as well as numerous North Korean provocations, Prime Minister Koizumi stated before the Diet his goal to develop a legal system 'so as to advance building a nation that is strong in emergencies' (Ministry of Defense, 2006: 125). The three bills subsequently enacted contain provisions to facilitate SDF deployment and US–Japan cooperation in case of an armed attack. A well-known example is that the new legal framework enables SDF military vehicles, including tanks, to run red lights and disobey other civilian traffic rules with impunity during a crisis (Katō and Ōta, 2010: 175).

Reflecting the post-Cold War changes in Japan's crisis management, SDF troops were rapidly mobilized after the 11 March 2011 Tōhoku earthquake. Within an hour after the disaster struck, eight SDF fighter planes were in the air to assess damage while ground forces had been given marching orders to move to the scene of devastation. Four hours later, the SDF had put 300 aircraft and 40 ships into action (Mizokami, 2011). At the height of the operations, 107,000, SDF personnel were involved in the disaster response (Ministry of Defense, 2011). Furthermore, the United States armed forces provided extensive support through the first-ever joint disaster response by the two allies on Japanese soil. The Japanese public showed appreciation of the operations by the SDF and US forces, with a January 2012 cabinet office poll finding that 97.7% of respondents commended the SDF efforts (*Asahi Shimbun*, 2012a).

(5) Local government capabilities and roles

With their in-depth knowledge about local conditions and characteristics, prefectural and municipal governments play important roles in crisis management. In Japan, the local level has received growing attention since the Kobe earthquake. A persistent theme in this debate is the lack of financial resources to cover improvements in crisis management capabilities. Following the 1995 disaster, both prefectures and municipalities sought to enhance their preparedness for crises, by making emergency response plans, clarifying responsibilities, or conducting emergency drills and training. Yet as numerous studies and surveys demonstrate, desolate financial conditions soon forced local governments to cut down their programs (*Gaikō Fōramu*, 2003: 20; Tanifuji, 2000). While Hyōgo Prefecture, home of Kobe city, established the position of Director of Crisis Management in 1996, most localities have avoided spending their scarce budgetary resources on professional crisis management staff (Nakamura, 2001: 307).

Complaints about the insufficient resources at the local level persist following the Tōhoku earthquake of 2011. The central government's official policy envisions

municipal governments to play a central role in the reconstruction of the affected region. However, municipalities lack the necessary manpower, time, and expertise to develop blueprints for rebuilding infrastructure and to handle lengthy applications for subsidies from the central government. As a result, 40% of the 15 trillion yen reconstruction budget remained unused at end of fiscal year 2011, despite continuing suffering in affected regions (*Asahi Shimbun*, 2012d).

As a positive development, communities and cities in the late 1990s established a system to provide mutual support in case of a large-scale disaster. Agreements on support measures have been signed by two cities located in different regions that are unlikely to be affected by the same disaster (Nakabayashi, 2010: 77). Thereby, the municipalities pledge to supply emergency relief or help with the evacuation of the elderly or the disabled from the affected area to their own. This mutual support system helped communities respond to the Tōhoku earthquake disaster, with some municipalities sending several hundred employees to provide help and also to obtain first-hand experience in crisis management (Samuels, 2012).

(6) Shakeup in Japan's political party system

After more than 50 years of nearly uninterrupted rule by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), the inauguration in 2009 of a government led by the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) has sparked debates about how this political transformation may be affecting Japan's crisis management. Firstly, a number of observers argue that the DPJ's inexperience as governing party has resulted in poor management of recent crises. Hiroshi Nakanishi maintains that the DPJ-led government failed in handling the 2010 collision between a Chinese fishing trawler and a Japanese Coast Guards ship, pointing to the lack of cooperation between relevant actors (Nakanishi, 2010). For example, the local prosecutor's office in Naha announced the release of the detained Chinese ship's captain citing diplomatic reasons. Nakanishi maintains it should have been the prime minister or foreign minister taking and announcing such a decision given the diplomatic consideration involved (Nakanishi, 2010). Others have maintained that the DPJ maxim of 'seiji shudō' (political leadership) emphasized during the Yukio Hatoyama and Naoto Kan administrations was naïve for insisting on political leadership while failing to recognize bureaucratic expertise.

Secondly, a number of observers inside and outside of Japan raise concern about recent intra- and interparty rivalry and political feuding as causes for legislative gridlock and delays in the country's crisis management (*Zaikai*, 2010; Kingston, 2012: 189). In examining the government's response to the Tōhoku catastrophe, Jeffrey Kingston observes that the fiercely partisan politics 'slowed action on recovery and discredited politicians of all political stripes' (Kingston, 2011). In early June 2011, Prime Minister Kan was forced to devote his energies to surviving a no-confidence motion sponsored by the LDP and supported by some DPJ rivals, at a time when thousands of disaster victims were waiting for substantial emergency measures. Due to political maneuvering, the Diet took a full 102 days to enact the basic law for reconstruction of the devastated

Tōhoku region. By comparison, a similar bill was passed within a month after the Kobe earthquake in 1995 (*Japan Times*, 2011). Likewise, approving the supplementary budget to fund full-scale reconstruction work took about four months in the case of Kobe, while it took more than twice as long for Tōhoku (Hongo, 2012).

In the coming years, the Japanese political system seems poised to experience frequent coalition governments, the formation of new parties, and a divided legislature in which different parties hold majorities in the Diet's lower and upper houses. The resulting political bickering and delays in decision-making will thus likely continue to be focal issues in Japan's crisis management debates.

Overview of case studies

In light of the above introduction and historical survey of key issues, the five contributions in this special issue examine and assess a number of recent Japanese crisis management endeavors. The case studies have been chosen to cover a range of different crises, including for example the 3/11 triple disaster, the current financial crisis, the Okinawa base dispute, and crises in foreign countries requiring Japan to dispatch troops for support. The contributions expose challenges and shed light on the prevalent themes and reform efforts in Japan's crisis management approach. Furthermore, they examine the roles and contributions of different actors, such as political leaders, bureaucrats, civil society actors, or businesses. This section provides an overview of the contributions and summarizes key findings.

In his article, Ellis Krauss offers a systematic comparison of the LDP's and DPJ's crisis management approach by analyzing three sets of cases under LDP- and DPJ-led governments. The six crises under scrutiny are the Okinawa base issues in 1995 and 2009, the Senkaku/Diaoyutai islands dispute in 2008 and 2010, as well as the 1995 Kobe and 2011 Tōhoku earthquake disasters, with the DPJ replacing the LDP as ruling party in 2009. Krauss demonstrates that despite long-term governing experience, the LDP did not develop a sophisticated crisis management mode, handling only one crisis relatively well. The DPJ's record appears equally poor, although Krauss gives some credit to the party's immediate response to the Tōhoku earthquake (but not the nuclear disaster) thanks to institutional reforms implemented after the Kobe experience. The comparison reveals the LDP and the DPJ have different advantages and disadvantages when facing crises as the party in power. The LDP is well connected with all major actors and stakeholders (bureaucracy, local governments, business sector etc.) in the political arena, facilitating the quick exchange of information and expert opinion. However, these tight networks and linkages create strong dependencies that constrain the party's political leeway. LDP-style politics moreover has generated few prime ministers with strong leadership capabilities. The DPJ on the other hand lacks strong personal ties and networks, thus having fewer communication channels at its disposal but enjoying more freedom to pursue new policies. The party's move to centralize power in the cabinet at the expense of the distrusted bureaucracy has left it vulnerable, though. Having proclaimed the primacy of political leadership, the DPJ was unable to draw extensively

on bureaucratic expertise during crises and to deflect responsibility afterwards by blaming crisis management failures on others. Finally, Krauss identifies recurrent issues and general structural problems in Japan's crisis management mode, pointing for example to constant communication failures between the government, administrative bodies, and the public. He emphasizes the lack of an institution able to authoritatively navigate through crises, judging past reforms to strengthen the cabinet's and prime minister's roles as insufficient in this regard. To date, Japanese crisis management is dominated by informal communication and *ad-hoc* arrangements, irrespective of the party in power.

The second article by Katsumi Ishizuka analyzes the Self Defense Forces' (SDF) engagement in three types of international crisis management endeavors, namely United Nations (UN) peacekeeping, counter-terrorism, and disaster relief. Ishizuka examines Japan's capabilities for contributing to each type of mission by comparing the strengths and weaknesses of the SDF's engagement in each operational area. He furthermore explains why and how the country should expand its contributions to international crisis management efforts in the future. The article illustrates that of the three types of SDF operations, overseas disaster relief is the least controversial issue domestically due to the humanitarian, non-interventionist character of such missions. In terms of personnel numbers, the largest SDF dispatch abroad has in fact fallen into this category thus far, although domestic relief deployments have been even more extensive (in particular the responce to the Tōhoku earthquake). Given the non-combat character of international disaster relief operations, the SDF's engagement is comparable to the relief offered by other countries. By contrast, the constitutionality of Japan's participation in UN peacekeeping and counter-terrorism missions is more contentious to the Japanese public. Furthermore, the numerous legal strings attached to these operations pose challenges to their effectiveness. Whereas peacekeeping efforts have enjoyed a growing level of public backing over the past two decades, the SDF's engagement in the US-led 'war on terror' was politically disputed and accompanied by significant public opposition, leading to the mission's termination under the DPJ government in 2010. In his article, Ishizuka demonstrates that the SDF's ability to respond to any of the above-mentioned crisis situations is limited not by a lack of skills, expertise, or professionalism, but rather by constitutional constraints rooted in Article 9. He criticizes the missing political will to deal with the revision of the 'peace clause' as well as the lack of initiative to develop a grand vision of Japan's engagement in coping with international crises. Without facing up to these challenges, Japan will hardly be able to position itself as an important international crisis manager in the future.

Saori Katada's article analyzes Japan's response to the global financial crisis (GFC) following the Lehman Shock in 2008. According to Katada, 'financial crisis fatigue' – accrued through the experience of two decades of economic recession – impeded the effective management of the crisis at the domestic level. She demonstrates how Japan's fiscal policy responses to past financial crises left only limited leeway for policy-makers to effectively deal with the economic turmoil that followed the GFC. Furthermore,

disagreement about specific crisis management measures within the LDP as well as the change of government in 2009 resulted in an incoherent and piecemeal crisis management approach. In the midst of the crisis, the LDP and DPJ each pursued their own policy priorities, seeking to profit politically from specific measures. Whereas the LDP saw an opportunity to use fiscal stimulus packages to its political advantage, the DPJ was keen to make good on its election promise of increasing social and welfare benefits. Japan's economic crisis ridden banks, corporations, and consumers on the other hand hardly responded to the government's economic incentives (including the country's largest postwar economic stimulus package). Japan's effort to pursue a leadership role in financial crisis management on the regional and global levels by using extra-budgetary funds also failed to promote economic recovery at home. Katada's article finds that financial crisis fatigue had different effects on the political, economic, and psychological levels. While the government was restricted in its policy choices mainly by resource constraints, societal actors from banks and businesses to consumers did not respond to the fiscal stimulus measures. Based on their defensive learning from past crisis, they remained hesitant to borrow, invest, and spend money, and thereby further undermined Japan's economic recovery.

The last two articles deal with the Fukushima nuclear disaster, albeit from different angles. Tomohito Shinoda scrutinizes and evaluates the involvement of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) or *kantei* in managing the nuclear incident during the first days of the unfolding disaster. He begins with the observation that according to crisis management 'wisdom', crises should be dealt with at the level closest to which they occur and higher authorities should only be involved if this level fails to manage the situation. The article then examines to what extent the PMO's interference made a negative or positive contribution to managing the nuclear emergency on the ground. The analysis breaks down the first week of the crisis into seven separate management events and reveals a mixed record of the PMO's involvement. Only in two cases did the *kantei's* interference lead to a stabilization or improvement of the situation on the Fukushima plant's site. First, when members of the PMO and Kan rejected what appeared as a TEPCO request for total withdrawal of all workers from the nuclear facility, and, second, when a special assistant of Prime Minister Kan organized the water injection into unit 4 of the reactor by coordinating the work of the SDF, the Police Agency, and the Fire and Disaster Management Agency at the joint TEPCO-PMO headquarters. In all other cases, Kan's and the *kantei's* involvement either did not make a difference or even worsened the situation at the Fukushima facility. Shinoda concludes that the events confirm common wisdom: political decision-makers should leave crisis management to the level closest to crisis occurrence and only join in when that level cannot cope with particular issues and problems. This is an important lesson learned from the Fukushima nuclear disaster, and it has been listed among the recommendations on nuclear disaster countermeasures by the newly established Nuclear Regulatory Authority.

Daniel Aldrich in his article also deals with the Fukushima nuclear disaster but focuses on the local level, scrutinizing the response of nuclear power plant

host communities and their neighboring localities. Aldrich's study reveals that host communities continue to be supportive of nuclear energy and willing to accommodate facilities, while nearby localities are increasingly opposed to nuclear power generation. Although host communities and their neighbors are similarly exposed to the risk of a nuclear catastrophe, it is only the former localities that have benefited extensively from their hosting of power plants. The vast economic rewards (jobs, tax revenues, subsidies etc.) received by host communities serve as powerful incentives for the continuation of their pro-nuclear attitude. Aldrich observes that in debates within these communities, the Fukushima incident was framed as a normal accident based on engineering failures. By contrast, neighboring communities perceived the event as a profound wake-up call, exposing nuclear risks. Aldrich's research demonstrates that the process of learning from the nuclear crisis is heavily influenced by the political economy of local level entities. However, only the political leaders of host communities have a big say in the restarting of nuclear facilities. National-level decision-making and general civil society attitudes towards nuclear power are thus not the only factors determining the lessons drawn from the accident. In making these observations, Aldrich's article addresses problematic issues in the 'recovery and learning' phase of the crisis management cycle introduced above. Deep reflection and reform after crisis may be complicated by the presence of influential political actors and stakeholders who benefit from sticking to business as usual.

The case studies in this special issue illustrate the numerous, multifaceted challenges that Japan faces in its crisis management today. The contributors take up several of the points raised in the first part of this article, thereby revealing the persistence of certain themes in the current debate. Five particularly salient issues can be identified: Firstly, despite various reform efforts, Japan still faces a lack of political leadership during times of crises as well as a core institution or 'command and control tower' overseeing the response. Secondly, there seems to be a severe lack of institutionalized channels of communication and professional information exchange networks between key actors, impeding the effectiveness of crisis management operations. Japan's political leaders clearly need to address these two issues further during the 'recovery and learning' phase following crises. Thirdly, the change of governing party appears to impede consistent and uniform approaches to particular crisis management issues. Both LDP and DPJ seem to pursue short-sighted policies based on opportunism and each party's own narrow interests, rather than relying on a more comprehensive vision for crisis management. Fourthly, policy-makers have to recognize that implementing policy changes and reforms after a crisis may run counter to the interests of key stakeholders and thus face resistance. Fifthly, building a reputation as an effective domestic or international crisis manager comes at a price. Significant financial resources and political will is required to enhance capabilities for both domestic crises and international contributions and missions, including SDF deployment abroad. Given Japan's currently dire state of public finances and the range of policy challenges, such investments will not come easily.

While the contributions in this issue cover only a limited number of cases, they expose Japan's need to confront and adapt to the growing complexities of domestic and international crisis management. Perhaps the greatest challenges for Japan and its leaders is to ensure risk and crisis management discussions are held openly and without taboos. The collusive ties between politicians, bureaucrats and big businesses have bred blind spots in debates thus far. For instance, the 'nuclear safety myth' that had for decades proclaimed atomic energy production to be safe and reliable mitigated against a sober risk assessment, the enforcement of strict safety standards for power plants, and comprehensive accident preparation. On the first anniversary of the Tōhoku earthquake, Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda publicly admitted that the government, business, experts and academia had all been 'under the spell of the safety myth' and thus preparations for crisis scenarios had been 'inadequate' (Noda, 2012). In the financial area, similar collusive ties may explain Japan's ineffective and slow response to the banking crisis in the 1990s (Amyx, 2004). While the close network relations between business and political sector contributed to Japan's economic success story for decades after World War II, they now act as a restraint on the country's ability to implement long overdue reforms. Thus, Japan must find ways to encourage open debates that address risks and crisis scenarios regardless of current stakeholders and their interests.

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