

Whaling as Diplomacy 外交としての捕鯨

David McNeill

Between 2012 and 2014 we posted a number of articles on contemporary affairs without giving them volume and issue numbers or dates. Often the date can be determined from internal evidence in the article, but sometimes not. We have decided retrospectively to list all of them as Volume 10, Issue 54 with a date of 2012 with the understanding that all were published between 2012 and 2014.

David McNeill

In a ritual that has become as predictable as the tides, environmentalists have returned home after trading blows with Japan's whalers in freezing Antarctic waters. Sea Shepherd, the US-based anti-whaling group, says it has again successfully disrupted the Japanese fleet's bid to harpoon about 1,000 whales, sending it back to port with probably a third of that number.

The climax of the spat came in February 20 when the Sea Shepherd ship, the Bob Barker collided with the Japanese mother ship, the Nisshin Maru and a supply tanker. A video clip of the clash quickly went viral worldwide and was used to fuel rival claims by both sides, with Japan's Fisheries Agency calling the tactic "unforgivable" and a threat to the lives of crewmembers.

The annual ritual is costly for Japan. A report

released in January says Japan has effectively nationalized the whaling program, funding it to the tune of \$400 million since 1988.^[i] That figure doesn't include beefed-up security for the fleet, or the liberal use of overseas development aid in a fruitless bid to buy votes and end the decades-long stalemate at the International Whaling Commission. The International Fund for Animal Welfare, which compiled the report, says the whaling industry is so desperate for funds, the government siphoned off \$28 million from tsunami relief last year, triggering a public scandal.^[ii]

Japan's widely disparaged official line is that it hunts for scientific research. Pro-whaling politicians admit that Japan was forced to resort to that fig leaf after the 1986 moratorium, agreed by the International Whaling Commission, that ended commercial whaling. Meat from the hunts has long been used to subsidize the cost of the Antarctic campaign, but with dwindling returns: Over 5,000 tonnes now unsold sits in refrigerators around Japan, says the report, even after discounts to schools, hospitals and other public institutions. "Costs have consistently exceeded income from whale meat sales over the last five years," it estimates.

These findings come at a key moment in Japan's quarter-century bid to overturn the commercial ban. The whaling fleet badly needs a new mother ship, with a price tag that would almost certainly spark a debate about the point of Japan's campaign. The Japanese public is unlikely to be sympathetic and without that

boat the high seas campaign dies. The rising price of oil is adding to the costs of the operation. Among those demanding a fresh approach is Taniguchi Tomohiko, former deputy press secretary of Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The battle to defend high seas whaling is expensive, unwinnable and damages Japan's relations with allies, he says. The solution has been around for years: Pull out of the Antarctic and focus instead on nurturing the nation's struggling small coastal whalers.

That solution seems very unlikely to be entertained by the current government of Abe Shinzo. Abe is from the hardline pro-whaling district of Yamaguchi Prefecture, as is his fisheries minister Hayashi Yoshimasa. Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga Yoshihide and Deputy Prime Minister Aso Taro are both members of the parliamentary pro-whaling league, and Hayashi is a former chair. Several other members of the cabinet are current or former members. Still, it is sometimes the most conservative politicians who produce the most radical solutions, says Morikawa Jun, author of *Whaling in Japan: Politics, Power and Diplomacy*, citing US President Richard Nixon's overtures to China.

"It all depends on Abe's sense of judgment. I'm hoping that if he's a nationalist he will completely forget this nonsense. Judging by the objective conditions, it is very difficult to justify the maintenance of this operation," Morikawa says, citing the regular annual sabotage, diplomatic fallout, rising price of oil, falling catch of minke whales and stagnating consumption of whale meat. "If Abe says, 'OK terminate research whaling', there would be a big uproar. But he could also say, 'We will keep coastal whaling.' It's time to make a decision."

It remains to be seen if that solution, which is opposed by neonationalists in Japan and anti-whalers abroad, will float. Still, with Japan struggling to deal with an increasingly assertive China, Abe may decide to use the whaling card as what Morikawa, calls a cheap, safe and effective bargaining chip to win diplomatic points with allies including Australia and the US.

[i] The Economics of Japanese Whaling: A Collapsing Industry Burdens Taxpayers

<http://www.ifaw.org/sites/default/files/economic-s-of-japanese-whaling-japan-ifaw.pdf>

[ii] <http://www.motherjones.com/blue-marble/2011/12/japan-admits-tsunami-funds-used-safeguard-whaling-fleet>

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