

1. Inception – Long-term and Global Concerns of Takeo Fukuda

It was in early 1980s that Takeo Fukuda, former Prime Minister of Japan (1976-78), began contemplating the creation of the InterAction Council of Former Heads of State and Government. It was four years after he had resigned from the position of Prime Minister, and he had been contemplating on a meaningful forum to address long-term global problems mankind was facing.

The confrontation between the two super powers that had constructed the Cold War structure was at its peak then. The world lived in fears of nuclear exchanges and anti-nuclear protests were rampant throughout the world. No one, at the time, ever thought that the Cold War structure symbolized by nuclear arsenals would abruptly collapse within a decade.

Takeo Fukuda continued his international engagements very actively even after the departure from his office. This was quite unusual for Japanese former heads of government, most of who tended to confine themselves to affairs of their party factions. The more he exchanged his views with foreign leaders, the more he became convinced that the major task of any “graduated” political leader was to look at events from a global view and act in the interest of mankind as a whole.

The world was facing uncertainties also economically for nearly a decade. There had been two oil crises since the 1970s, which led to widespread inflation, followed by recessions and seemingly permanent high unemployment. And the collapse of the post-war Bretton Woods regime had caused volatility in exchange rates, which made economic management extremely difficult.

Indeed, during the 1980s, the world was facing the crises in a magnitude that mankind had not experienced since World War II. The two central themes that troubled Fukuda the most were the arms race between the East and West and the population explosion with all its implications on resources and environment. He was convinced, perhaps naively, that mankind may face the crisis of its own survival, if the world erred in measures and actions to tackle these issues.

Fukuda’s creed was that statesmen must always look at events from global and historical perspectives with eyes cast on a distant future. In exchanging views with his foreign friends, he felt encouraged that leaders from other parts of the world shared his concerns.

Fukuda shared his thoughts over the unprecedented danger the world was facing to Bradford Morse, the then Administrator of the United Nations Development Program, in June 1982 during the latter’s visit to Japan. He was particularly worried

about the nuclear stockpiles that had a destructive capacity of over million times of the bomb dropped on Hiroshima. He consulted with Morse whether some sort of a mechanism could not be structured, which could address these problems affecting the entire mankind.

The idea of congregating former heads of state and government, have them focus on global issues and act without being constrained by narrow national interests was born. It was to present the collective wisdom of those having held the highest office in order to avert the unprecedented economic, military, political and moral crises mankind was facing.

Takeo Fukuda and Bradford Morse energetically consulted with former leaders, Fukuda through his G-7 counterparts and Morse through his UN connections. Fukuda's idea was not to confine the membership only to the G-7 states, but rather broaden it to the countries in the North, South, East and West, if global issues were to be addressed seriously by the group to be created.

Leaders from the developing world and smaller countries responded more positively than those from the larger industrialized countries. Then a great fortune fell on Fukuda. Chancellor Helmut Schmidt of West Germany stepped down from the chancellorship in October 1982 after eight and a half years in office.

Fukuda and Schmidt had served as Finance Minister of the respective countries during the 1970s, when the world was struggling with adverse effects of the Nixon Shock, the collapse of the Bretton Woods system and the two oil crises. They later became counterparts as the head of respective governments.

Although Fukuda's term was much shorter, Schmidt continued to prefer him to any of his successors, considering his 14 years senior as a wise old man. Fukuda had always been deeply impressed by the fact that Schmidt not only quite accurately grasped the world's political and economic trends but also always analyzed with acute and objective eyes the strategic, fiscal and economic situations of the world and their ramifications. Fukuda also admired Schmidt's outstanding ability to explain any complicated geopolitical situations and possible solutions in a manner understandable to ordinary people. Naturally, Fukuda was euphoric with the basic endorsement by Helmut Schmidt of the idea of creating such a forum. It was easy then to persuade other former colleagues of G5 Finance Ministers and G-7 Summit.

Having obtained the endorsement of the idea by a dozen former leaders, Fukuda and Morse began to structure the group. Morse recruited Kurt Waldheim who had stepped down from the post of the United Nations Secretary General to chair the

group. A founding session was held in Vienna, Austria, where Waldheim resided, in March 1983. It was attended by Takeo Fukuda, Kurt Waldheim, Manea Manescu, Hedi Nouira, Misael Pastrana Borrero, Leopold Sedar Senghor and Bradford Morse. The scheduling and venue of the inaugural meeting, the structure of the group and most importantly the name of the group were decided.

Edward Heath, participated at the meeting in his quality as member of the Independent Commission on Questions of International Development, the Brandt Commission. Helmut Schmidt, who was not in a position to attend the meeting, had given his consent to be associated to this Initiative and to subscribe to the conclusions of the founding session. The group was named the InterAction Council of Former Heads of Government.

The name embodied Fukuda's conviction that former leaders, with the experience of the highest office in their respective nations, still had the duty and responsibility to think of solutions to unprecedented economic, military and political problems and to act jointly to avert these crises. No longer in office, they could and should consider transcending national interests all these difficulties affecting mankind.

The Austrian Parliament voted to give the status of an international organization to the InterAction Council. And it was agreed to convene the first meeting in the fall of 1983 again in Vienna

Mechanism

The founding session decided to set up three sub-bodies, a policy board, an information committee and an executive committee. The former was to consist of intellectuals who had never headed a government but could give expert advice to the Council. The latter was to make active publicity of the Council's thinking, its recommendations and actions. However, these first two sub-bodies were quickly dropped as being "superfluous."

Instead, the Council leadership decided to convene high-level expert group meetings on the agendas of each year's annual meeting beforehand to have meaningful inputs into deliberations in the plenary meetings. The agendas always fell on the three priority areas identified during the founding session: peace and disarmament, global economic vitalization and the nexus of population, development and environment (with universal ethics added later.)

Annual plenary meetings in diverse parts of the world are always held prior to G-7 meetings so that policy recommendations coming out of serious discussions and deliberations can be briefed to the Council members' incumbent successors. These

policy recommendations are also sent every year to other leaders of governments, international institutions, media, and academic institutions for policy considerations.