Japan’s Pivot to Normalcy: Interpreting Tokyo’s Security Policy Revolution

Ilai Z. Saltzman
Government Department
Claremont McKenna College

Prepared to be delivered at the FLACSO-ISA Joint International Conference, Buenos Aires, July 23-25 2014.
JAPAN’S PIVOT TO NORMALCY: 
INTERPRETING TOKYO’S SECURITY POLICY REVOLUTION

The issue of China’s rise has occupied considerable scholarly attention since the early 1990s. Recent domestic political developments in Japan suggest, however, that we should also pay close attention to Tokyo’s changing foreign and security policy. Rather than continuing a ten-year cut in the budget, this year the decision was made to actually increase it. Furthermore, Shinzō Abe’s government approved a new interpretation of Article 9 that facilitates the shift from basic self-defense to collective self-defense. The objective of this paper is to identify the causes and features of this dramatic and significant security policy reorientation.

INTRODUCTION

It has become a cliché to argue that China is rising. There seems to be no scholar or practitioner who can deny the fact that, given this development, a tectonic geopolitical and geostrategic change is taking place in East Asia. The only open question revolves around China’s ultimate objectives. In a dramatic decision, the Japanese government approved on July 1, 2014, the country’s right for collective self-defense, a reinterpretation of the Constitution that would allow Japan’s armed forces to provide military assistance to allies under attack even if Japan is not under direct attack.

Defined by The Japan Times as “a landmark shift in the postwar defense posture”, by the Yomiuri Shimbun as “an indispensible step” or by the Asahi Shimbun as a “controversial policy shift” and the Mainichi Shimbun as “impermissible”, this revision, once approved in the Japanese parliament will revolutionize the way Tokyo conducts its foreign and security policy vis-à-vis its

---


allies and adversaries alike. While a considerable number of studies understandably addressed the “rise of China”, we must also pay closer attention to Japan’s attempts to redefine, and some would say normalize, its role in the emerging East Asian order since Tokyo’s policies will have a decisive impact on regional stability for a number of reasons.

First, Japan’s imperialistic record across the Asia-Pacific since the early twentieth-century amplifies the standard effects of the security dilemma among its neighboring countries. Countries are always attentive to shifts in the balance of power, especially when adversarial relations exist or used to exist. In the case of Japan, however, the security dilemma is acute and omnipresent. Every visit of a Japanese leader to the Yasukuni War Shrine or an attempt to revise official history textbooks dealing with WWII exacerbates existing tensions and fears of a resurgent, nationalistic and imperialistic Japan.

Second, Japan and China are currently embroiled in an ongoing and volatile conflict over a number of disputed islands known as the Senkaku islands in Japanese and the Diaoyu islands in Chinese, located in the East China Sea (ECS). These islands have critical strategic importance for both countries since their location is invaluable for defense-related deployments including missile and radar systems. Furthermore, the islands can benefit their holder by granting it access

---


to natural resources such as oil and natural gas.\(^6\) Any upgrade in Japan’s capacity to use military force—combined with the government’s desire to diversify the country’s energy portfolio in the foreseeable future after the nuclear disaster in Fukushima in 2011—can harden Tokyo’s position vis-à-vis Beijing.\(^7\)

Third, Tokyo’s shifting security policy has direct influence on American policies and interests in the region given Japan’s strategic association with the United States (US). On the one hand, revision of Article 9 may prompt a redrawing of the mutual responsibilities and contribution of Japan as part of the alliance’s division of labor as American policymakers were demanding for a long time.\(^8\) On the other hand, with the evolving Sino-Japanese islands dispute in the ECS, the US may find itself part of crisis because it is diplomatically and militarily committed to defend Japan. In a recent visit to Japan, for example, US President Barak Obama declared that American “commitment to Japan’s security is absolute and article five [of the security treaty] covers all territories under Japan’s administration, including the Senkaku islands.”\(^9\)

Lastly, the case of Japan’s security policy presents an intriguing puzzle for International Relations (IR) scholars, especially in the post-Cold War era. As discussed in greater details below, Japan’s continuous refusal to leverage its economic and military might to gain the status of a great power or to assume a more proactive and involved role in international affairs


\(^{7}\) While the idea of abandoning nuclear energy altogether was rejected recently, in the short to medium term Japan will have to rely fossil fuels, coal and natural gas in order to compensate for the lack of access to nuclear energy and for the costs of upgrading its atomic industry to meet new safety guidelines. See Reiji Yoshida, “Cabinet OKs New Energy Policy, Kills No-nuclear Goal,” *Japan Times*, April 11, 2014.


seemingly defies almost everything we learned from history and a number of theoretical predictions.¹⁰

Consequently, the objective of this paper is twofold. First, it will define the idiosyncrasy of Japan’s foreign and security policy and explain it with key IR theories. Since these theories provide only a partial answer, I argue that neoclassical realism can provide a more nuanced and accurate answer to this puzzle. Secondly, the paper will apply the neoclassical realist framework in order to explain the recent shifts in Japan’s foreign and security policy by addressing both international and domestic variables.

The paper concludes that, while attempts to revise Article 9 of the Japanese constitution are not new, it appears that the Japanese government under Prime Minister Shinzō Abe is more serious, committed and optimistic about the prospects of actually relaxing the constitutional restrictions on Japan’s capacity to pursue collective self-defense. As the paper will demonstrate, the decision to move to collective self-defense is a result of significant external changes in Japan’s security environment such as the decline of the US in Asia and the rise of China. Yet the shift in Japan’s security policy also resulted from domestic changes in policymaker’s threat perception and Japan’s resource extraction potential in line with the neoclassical realist prediction.

JAPAN’S FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY AND IR THEORIES

Notable sociologist and economist Max Weber wrote in his seminal essay Politics as a Vocation that “one can define the modern state sociologically only in terms of the specific means peculiar

to it, as to every political association, namely, the use of physical force... a state is a human community that (successfully) claims the *monopoly* of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory.\textsuperscript{11}

Japan reclaimed and, in fact, effectively reinstated its monopoly over violence in the post-WWII period as the American occupation ended. Yet, as part of this political rehabilitation process in the late 1940s, it has voluntarily assumed a crippled notion of modern statehood that deprived Japan of the possibility to wage war or erect an army. According to Douglas McArthur’s recollections, the “no-war” clause of the new constitution was not imposed upon the Japanese government by the American occupation. Rather, it was Japanese Prime Minister Kijūrō Shidehara who insisted on incorporating Japan’s denunciation of war as a legitimate political tool of statecraft. Furthermore, according to McArthur’s account, it was Shidehara who also “wanted it [the constitution] to prohibit any military establishment for Japan—any military establishment whatsoever.”\textsuperscript{12} Article 9 of the postwar Japanese constitution—enacted in early May 1947—declared that

Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes.

In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.\textsuperscript{13}

This policy was not a case of pacifism but rather an expression of sheer political of pragmatism vis-à-vis the Allied Powers and neighboring East Asian countries who suffered extensively from Japan’s imperialism since the early twentieth-century. As former Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida noted in his memoirs, “since it was an accepted idea among the Allied Powers that Japan was a militaristic nation, it was most necessary to take steps indicating that it was not, for which purpose the insertion of the renunciation-of-war clause in the new constitution seemed to me one of the most effective.”

The constitutional principles were converted to policy in the early 1950s with the materialization of the Yoshida Doctrine that entailed a three-tier approach to Japan’s external affairs: (a) reliance on American security guarantee and military presence to ensure Japan’s security; (b) focus on restoring and expanding economic relations with the international community in order expedite domestic economic reconstruction; and (c) maintaining an inconspicuous foreign policy.

The first challenge to Article 9 surfaced as the Korean War broke in late June 1950. McArthur, who had to divert American forces to the Korean Peninsula, demanded that the Japanese government establishes a National Police Reserve (NPR) force of 75,000 men and expand the existing Maritime Safety Force (MSF), the Japanese coast guard, by adding 8,000 men. But it was not only the creation of the NPR and the strengthening of the MSF that the Korean War prompted but also Japan’s participation in the military campaign. While its involvement was limited to supporting the American forces, and it was not conducted formally through either the NPR or the MSF, Tokyo dispatched a number of minesweeping naval ships to Wonsan Bay and the joint American-United Nations (UN) extensively used Japanese railroad

---

engineers and shipping experts with prior experience in Korea to facilitate the mobilization of military personnel and supply to and across the Peninsula.\textsuperscript{16}

Nevertheless, Yoshida resisted continued American demands for Japanese remilitarization and rearmament but he did approve of an extensive organizational reform of the Japanese security forces as part of the negotiations with the US that culminated in the signing of the Security Treaty in September 1951. In order to comply with the requirements of the Mutual Security Act (MSA), Yoshida pushed forward legislation in the Japanese parliament that formed a centralized Defense Agency that administered the three branches of Japan’s Self-Defense Forces (SDF), the Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF), the Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) and the Air Self-Defense Force (ASDF). The general public was critical of these modifications at the time arguing that this can be a slippery slope that may revive Japanese militarism. But the reforms were also criticized by former senior Imperial Army and Navy officers who argued that were insufficient given the looming Soviet-Chinese communist threat. In any case, Yoshida remained convinced that rearmament is economically unwise and psychologically unfeasible. “If rearmament was to be undertaken,” Yoshida noted, “it would have to be achieved with the acquiescence of the Japanese people.”\textsuperscript{17}

Over the years, as Japan’s strategic environment changed with the ending of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the fervent upholding of Article 9 and the ongoing commitment to the Yoshida Doctrine’s principles became very difficult to explain. Particularly, despite the economic and military power it has accumulated since the early 1950s Japan showed little motivation to translate these resources into a more assertive foreign and security policy or


\textsuperscript{17} Yoshida, \textit{The Yoshida Memoirs}, p. 194.
considering becoming a great power. The Gulf War, the first armed conflict of the post-Cold War era, revealed the discrepancy between Japan’s potential and its actual willingness to play a major role in international politics.\textsuperscript{18}

Japanese policymakers debated how to respond to Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 that threatened Japan’s access to Persian Gulf oil (70\% of its oil consumption originated from that region) while avoiding any revision of Article 9. This dilemma intensified as American policymakers formed an UN-sponsored international coalition that included 34 countries and adamantly demanded the Japanese government to chip in too. After much internal political strife, the Japanese government adopted a form of checkbook diplomacy that entailed contributing $13 billion to finance the multinational military operations. Yet Tokyo refused to deploy any Japanese soldiers, and only after the war ended Japan dispatched a number of minesweepers to the Persian Gulf as part of a UN-sponsored multinational peacekeeping force.\textsuperscript{19} Still, facing domestic opposition, Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu declared that “our intention is that we will not change our philosophy as that of a peaceful state. So please don't worry that this principle will be broken.”\textsuperscript{20}

Unsurprisingly, Japan’s reserved approach to the Gulf War, and its largely passive foreign and security policy since, generated much theoretical debate, and scholars began addressing the anomalous tendency it represents. From this extensive body of literature three schools can be identified, a taxonomy that overlaps with the classical triangular division in IR of


realism, liberalism and constructivism. Realists saw Japan’s reluctance to fundamentally revamp its foreign and security policy as a simple case of buck-passing. Given the American security guarantee during the Cold War, and the lack of an economic incentive in assuming greater responsibilities and costs associated with a proactive foreign and security policy, Japanese policymakers preferred to continue delegating the maintenance of their national security to the US. In the post-Cold War era, Japan has increased its military profile amid growing American demands and threats stemming from North Korea’s missile program. Yet these upgrades do not reflect the full material potential of Japan that still relies heavily on American security guarantees and physical presence in the region.

Second, liberals emphasize the economic dimension and stress Japanese economic interdependence as a determinant of its approach to both international and regional politics. As a “trading state”, to use Richard Rosecrance’s terminology, Japan is an exemplary case of choosing economic interdependence over military force as the key policy instrument. According to this logic of commercial liberalism, the use of military force is both costly and counterproductive and Japan’s long-term quest for economic growth and prosperity will be better served by further integrating into the global and regional financial markets. Economic integration and liberalization is less threatening to others and thus will lead to more stability and peace.

---


Consequently, Japan’s foreign and security policy is primarily dominated by economic interests and corresponding fiscal constraints.24

Constructivists, on the other hand, highlight the normative foundations of Japanese pacifism or anti-militarism. For such scholars, the Americans, first as occupiers and then as allies and patrons, were effectively able to reprogram the Japanese people into rejecting the legitimacy of war and be extremely wary of the military. Moreover, the Japanese collective experiences during WWII, and especially at the final phase of their defeat, led them to deeply deplore militarism, nationalism and territorial expansionism. Japanese antiwar sentiments were so strong and influential that a new norm emerged and gradually institutionalized into public opinion and the postwar political and judicial institutions, especially Article 9 that addressed Japan’s security policy.25

These mainstream approaches provided partial results that do not account for the dramatic shifts in Japan’s foreign and security policy in recent years. Liberalism overstated the influence of domestic economic interests over geostrategic concerns, realism overlooked the growing assertiveness and self-reliance of Japan’s security policy, and constructivists found it difficult to explain how Japan’s pacifism changes over time or account for the timing of these transformations. Therefore, recent studies began questioning and criticizing the seemingly


artificial distinction between the material and the ideational, and the domestic and external, components of these explanations.26

One innovative conceptual bridge between these contradictory approaches is neoclassical realism that, by definition, is designed to explain variations in states’ foreign and security policy given certain external and domestic changes, material and ideational alike, exactly what Japan is currently undergoing. A similar attempt was made in the past by Tsuyoshi Kawasaki, who used Stephen Brook’s postclassical realism framework, in order to explain Japan’s security policy since the mid-1970s. However, Brook’s analytical framework is actually defensive realism with a different title and what he calls neorealism is, in fact, offensive realism.27 Thus, contrary to Kawasaki’s hopes, his analysis does not break away from Waltz’s structural theory of international politics and it certainly does not constitute a theory of foreign policy that integrates systemic and unit-level variables.28 The following section briefly describes the main tenets of neoclassical realism.

**NEOCLASSICAL REALISM AND FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY**

Neoclassical realism is a hybrid analytical framework that incorporates system and domestic-level variables in order to explain a particular state’s foreign and security policy. In the words of Gideon Rose, who first coined the term neoclassical realism,

---


Its adherents argue that the scope and ambition of a country's foreign policy is driven first and foremost by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative material power capabilities. This is why they are realist. They argue further, however, that the impact of such power capabilities on foreign policy is indirect and complex, because systemic pressures must be translated through intervening variables at the unit level. This is why they are neoclassical.\(^{29}\)

Neoclassical realists acknowledge the constraining effect of the global or regional balance of power on a state’s security needs and available options, thus they are theoretically committed to Kenneth Waltz’s system-first analysis. However, they reject his ultra-parsimonious and superficial analysis that intentionally ignores unit-level variables under the assumption that neorealism is not a theory of foreign policy but rather a theory of international politics.\(^{30}\) Instead, neoclassical realists revive and integrate into their analytic frame the richness and detail found in the writings of classical and political realists who emphasized the role of leaders and their practice of statesmanship at home and abroad.\(^{31}\)

This leads us to another key feature of neoclassical realists; it focuses on the role individual policymakers play as intermestic figures located in the seam between international and domestic politics. The term intermestic was first introduced in the late 1970s by Bayless Manning and was originally used to describe policies that were simultaneously domestic and international in nature.\(^{32}\) Neoclassical realists use the term to ascribe the quality of what they call

---

\(^{29}\) Rose, “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy;” p. 146.


the foreign policy executive (FPE), or pivotal individuals who “occupy critical positions in the administration, and are responsible for long-term grand strategic planning, including the identification of changes in the global or regional balance of power.” 33 The FPE is critical for neoclassical analysis because he/she constitutes the actual prism through which external and domestic inputs are perceived and infused into the policymaking process. As Daniel Byman and Kenneth Pollack argued,

[T]he goals, abilities, and foibles of individuals are crucial to the intentions, capabilities, and strategies of a state. Indeed individuals not only affect the actions of their own states but also shape the reactions of other nations, which must respond to the aspirations, abilities, and aggressiveness of foreign leaders. 34

As noted, understanding the overwhelming effect of the international and/or regional system on state action, a neoclassical realist analysis always begins with surveying the strategic environment, identifying the great powers and changes in the relative balance of power. 35 The structure of the system determines the broad contours of a state’s foreign policy needs and possibilities. Different forms of polarity generate different dynamics among the great powers and the other actors inhabiting the regional or global system. Unipolarity, for example, entails the provision of collective goods such as security or economic order on behalf of the hegemon. But unipolarity also encourages dissatisfied powers to challenge the hegemon, increasing the risk of

---

33 Lobell, “Threat Assessment, the State, and Foreign Policy: A Neoclassical Realist Model,” in Lobell, Ripsman and Taliaferro (eds.), Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy, p. 45.
armed conflict. Bipolarity, on the other hand, is systemically less violent since the two superpowers have a vested interest in preventing and avoiding inter-bloc confrontation or its escalation. Minor powers, on either side of the political divide, have very limited room for maneuvering given the tight control of each pole on its sphere of influence. Lastly, multipolarity provides great and minor power limitless alignment possibilities and thus leaders are presumably more liberated to explore their national interests. As Morgenthau noted, “the greater the number of active players, the greater the number of possible combinations and the greater also the uncertainty as to the combinations that will actually oppose each other and as to the role the individual players will actually perform them.”

Gauging the distribution of capabilities and the state’s relative position in that setting is indeed necessary but insufficient to explain a particular policy or its change. Waltz’s deterministic approach totally disregards the process by which leaders perceive, analyze and make decisions thus neorealism becomes incapable of explaining the formulation of particular policies. As Waltz admitted,

> The third image describes the framework of world politics, but without the first and second images there can be no knowledge of the forces that determine policy; the first and second images describe the forces in world politics, but without the third image it is impossible to assess their importance or predict their results.

---

Consequently, neoclassical realists identify two unit-level intervening variables that act as a transmission belt between systemic attributes, pressures and incentives and states’ foreign and security policies. What is important to stress at this point is that both intervening variables denote a subjective understanding or reading of material and nonmaterial evidence that policymakers confront. This is not to suggest there is no objective reality, but rather to argue that this information is always translated into policy by decision-makers whose perceptions determine its meaning.42

The first intervening variable is policymakers’ threat perception, because, as Raymond Cohen noted, “When threat is not perceived, even in the face of objective evidence, there can be no mobilization of defensive resources.”43 According to Waltz’s balance of power theory, states balance against growing accumulations of power, defined in terms of military capabilities, either independently (internal balancing) or in cooperation with others (external balancing). Notwithstanding the fact that Waltz told us that neorealism is a theory of international politics and not a theory of foreign policy, and balancing is certainly a foreign policy, the major problem is that he equates power with threat.44

According to Stephen Walt, the historical record actually shows that the accumulation of military power in itself does not constitute threat and that neorealism “ignores other factors that statesmen will consider when identifying potential threats.”45 Instead, Walt argues, threat is a

---

function of aggregate power, geographic proximity, offensive capabilities and offensive intentions. Furthermore, some ideologies or political systems of belief can produce significantly more anxiety than others, especially if these are expansionist or irredentist in nature. In the early stages of the Cold War, for example, George Kennan warned American policymakers of the Soviet Union’s Marxist zeal emphasizing that

> Basically this is only the steady advance of uneasy Russian nationalism, a centuries old movement in which conceptions of offense and defense are inextricably confused. But in new guise of international Marxism, with its honeyed promises to a desperate and war torn outside world, it is more dangerous and insidious than ever before.  

Neoclassical realism further posits that threats can originate from the systemic-level but also from the regional-level and, as a result, we have to talk about multilayered and possibly simultaneous external threats to the state. But in any case, there is a critical role for policymakers’ perception of the threat since, as Janice Stein rightly concluded, “threats do no unambiguously speak for themselves. Understanding the meaning of threats is mediated by the perception of the target.”

The second intervening variable is policymakers’ perceived resource extraction potential. Again, neorealism errs in equating the mere existence of material resources—primarily military, economic and industrial potency, geographic size and population—with the actual capacity to

49 Lobell, “ Threat Assessment, the State, and Foreign Policy.”
extract and mobilize them, treating states as “bordered resource containers”. The availability of material and nonmaterial assets, however, does not guarantee the state’s ability to convert them into influence abroad as realists such as Hans Morgentahu correctly observed. In addition to material resources, for example, Morgenthau attributed great importance to nonmaterial elements of state power such as national character, national morale and the quality of government and diplomacy. Practitioners were clearly aware of this too. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, for example, remarked in 1984 that

National power has many components, some tangible, like economic wealth, technical pre-eminence. Other components are intangible -- such as moral force, or strong national will. Military forces, when they are strong and ready and modern, are a credible—and tangible—addition to a nation's power. When both the intangible national will and those forces are forged into one instrument, national power becomes effective.

In the same vein, neoclassical realists pay close attention to policymakers’ assessments of state power as opposed to national power that is the mere availability of resources. Fareed Zakaria, for example, argued that the former is the most important for foreign policy analysis and defined it as “that portion of national power the government can extract for its purposes and reflects the ease with which central decision-makers can achieve their ends.” Neoclassical realism primarily refers to three main components of state power convertibility when it comes to foreign and security policy: military, economics and public opinion.

Like all realists, a state’s military is the basic instrument of foreign and security policy but neoclassical realists examine the armed forces’ quantitative and qualitative nature. The

---

51 Ashley J. Tellis et al., *Measuring National power in the Postindustrial Age* (Santa Monica: Rand, 2000), xii.

Second, a state’s national economy holds a critical role in financing and sustaining all foreign and security policies. As Kalus Knorr, the prominent scholar of state power concluded, “in peace or war, the economic strength of nations, i.e. their capacity to produce, depends on the magnitude, composition, and quality of their economic resources.”\footnote{Klaus Knorr, \textit{The War potential of Nations} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956), p. 163.} Gross Domestic Production (GDP), growth rates, Research and Development (R&D), industrial and technological innovation and invention and monetary stability provide the financial and technical infrastructure for all foreign and security policy, in times of peace but especially in times of war.\footnote{Knut, “Military Strength: Economic and Non-Economic Bases,” in Knorr and Frank N. Trager (eds.), \textit{Economic Issues and National Security} (Lawrence: National Security Education Program, 1977), pp. 183-184.} As with military power, economic mobilization has a clear material basis, but is also requires robust administrative skill and political leadership, particularly during the transition phase from peacetime to wartime economy.\footnote{Knorr, \textit{Military Power and Potential} (Lexington: Heath Lexington Books, 1970), p.26-27. See also Knorr, \textit{The War potential of Nations}, p. 271.}

Lastly, favorable public opinion support matters and, in fact, can facilitate or preclude the adoption of certain policies. Thomas Christensen suggested that “domestic political support
behind national security policy constitutes a power resource as essential to national survival as other commonly weighed by realists... Simply, without a healthy degree of consensus behind security strategies, no state can harness its population and project national power abroad.\textsuperscript{59}

While it is true that public opinion matters more in democratic regimes that are inherently reliant on and sensitive to public legitimacy, non-democratic regimes are also sensitive to popular sentiments. Despots are deeply concerned with regime survivability and, consequently, with the need to prevent popular unrest and widespread discontent that may generate a revolution or coup d’état. This is why, alongside the extensive use of secret police, authoritarian regimes invest considerable assets in indoctrination and propaganda designed to “manufacture consent”, in the words of Walter Lippmann, i.e. preemptively create a more receptive and sympathetic citizenry, and some even toy with fixed elections to artificially construct their political authority.\textsuperscript{60}

\textbf{COMING FULL CIRCLE: THE REALIZATION OF “COLLECTIVE SELF-DEFENSE”}

After Shinzō Abe was reelected Prime Minister in December 2012 he was, in fact, merely continuing formulating and implementing security policies that he was advocating during his first term between September 2006 and September 2007. Abe was a crusader for a change in Japanese security policy during his first term in office and he remained adamant regarding this endeavor since his return to the Prime Minister’s office.


Abe clearly benefited from the trailblazing reforms of his predecessor, Junichiro Koizumi, who shared his worldview concerning the need to reform Japan’s security policy. However, Abe’s initiatives had more institutional impact and thus were critical in transforming the logic of Koizumi’s reforms into actual policy and bureaucratic reconstruction. In December 2006, for example, the Japanese government upgraded the status of the Japan Defense Agency (JDA) to a full ministry thus establishing for the first time since 1945 a Ministry of Defense. This was more than just a case of mere symbolism; it was a clear opening shot for a revision of Japanese security policy and the reconstruction of the defense establishment as a whole. In an interview to the *Washington Post* in April 2007, Abe noted that Japan’s security policy must change given the fact that “the security environment surrounding Japan and the entire world has undergone major change.” When asked about the constitutional constraints on such modifications, Abe remarked that

> It has been more than 60 years since the constitution was put in place. There are provisions in the constitution that no longer suit the times… This constitution was drafted while Japan was under occupation. I believe it is important that we Japanese write a constitution for ourselves that would reflect the shape of the country we consider desirable in the 21st century.

Consequently, Abe appointed an Advisory Panel for Reconstruction of the Legal Basis for Security arguing that “in light of the changing security environment surrounding Japan, it is necessary to reconstruct the legal basis for security so as to make it more effective and consistent with these changes.” The Advisory Panel held several meetings to discuss ways to reinterpret Article 9, but since Abe resigned amid plunging public support before the report was completed.

---

and submitted, its recommendations were shelved by his successor Yasuo Fukuda. Three months after his reelection, however, Abe revived the activity of the Advisory Panel with most of the previous members remaining. In the letter of appointment of February 2013, Abe now defined the rationale of the Advisory Panel’s role in a slightly different yet important fashion: “in light of the increasingly severe security environment surrounding Japan, it is necessary to reconstruct the legal basis for security so that Japan can take appropriate responses to these changes.”

The question the following neoclassical realist account seeks to answer is what motivated Abe to push forward such a dramatic and controversial policy change that, for the first time in 60 years, allowed Japan to move from national self-defense to a collective self-defense security model. According to the newly approved interpretation of Article 9 of the Japanese constitution from July 2014, that was unmistakably based on the reports of both Advisory Panels, Japan’s armed forces will be permitted to: (a) protect American warships being attacked by a third party near Japanese waters even before an attack on Japan; (b) stop and inspect ships suspected of carrying weapons to a third party attacking US vessels; (c) intercept ballistic missiles fired over Japanese territory towards US territory at the request of the Americans; (d) provide military cover for peacekeeping forces abroad that are under attack; and (e) participate in multinational minesweeping operations under United Nations (UN) authorization designed to secure sea lines in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf.

---

66 The following analysis follows the superb works of Richard Samuels, but extends its temporal scope to address the more recent changes in Japan’s security policy. See Richard J. Samuels, Security Japan: Tokyo’s Grand Strategy and the Future of East Asia (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).
The Systemic Contexts

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, Japan has to juggle between the comforting and protective effect of its alliance with the US and the more reserved American approach to international politics as exemplified in word and deed by President Barack Obama. On the other hand, China’s staggering military and economic growth offsets the East Asian balance of power, undermines US’ regional predominance and, by extension, influences Japan’s policy options. Since Abe’s reforms of 2014 are profoundly connected to his first term, the following analysis will also address the systemic conditions Japan encountered at the time.

WHITHER AMERICAN HEGEMONY.

After the end of the Cold War, and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US was in an exceptional situation. As National Security Advisor at the time Brent Scowcroft mused, “We were suddenly in a unique position, without experience, without precedent, and standing alone at the height of power. It was, it is, an unparalleled situation in history, one which presents us with the rarest opportunity to shape the world.”68

Despite cutting defense expenditures by nearly 40% throughout the 1990s, the US remained a global hegemon—clearly maintaining its economic, technological and military predominance.69 Furthermore, as a result of the conflicts in the Balkans, by November 1999 Secretary of Defense William Cohen asked Congress to approve a $17 billion increase in

---

military spending, which singlehandedly overturned a decade-long cut in the defense budget on account of the so-called “peace dividend”.  

Throughout the presidential campaign George W. Bush repeatedly promised to increase military spending by $45 billion over 10 years and in his victory speech of December 2000, he declared again that during his presidency “we will have a military equal to every challenge, and superior to every adversary.” In his confirmation hearing Secretary of Defense-designate Donald Rumsfeld announced that the new administration will insist on a massive increase in military spending commenting that “we need to ensure that we will be able to develop and deploy and operate and support a highly effective force capable of deterring and defending against new threats.” Indeed, a month later, President Bush introduced his first budget to Congress where he aimed to increase the defense budget by nearly 5% to $310.5 billion.

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Bush’s original expenditure ceiling was breached and US military expenditures skyrocketed from $356 billion in 2002 to $668 billion in 2009. In addition, the Bush Administration quickly moved to translate American military primacy into policy and invaded Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) as part of the “global war on terror”. Three key features of the Bush Doctrine are noteworthy for our purposes. First, acting unilaterally is sometimes necessary, especially when international institutions are ineffective and American national security is under threat. Second, the US can, and should, under certain condition, act preemptively against incipient threats. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the

---

71 “We Must Seize this Moment and Deliver,” The Guardian, 14 December 2000.
74 The figures are extracted from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) online Military Expenditures Database. Available online www.sipri.org (accessed May 18, 2014).
US can guarantee its national security and the security of its allies, along with global peace and stability, only by imposing its primacy.\textsuperscript{75}

Bush’s policies ultimately generated a global backlash and turned the initial sympathy to the US in the immediate post-9/11 period into resentment and anti-Americanism among allies and adversaries alike. The war in Afghanistan was perceived as a logical and reasonable response since the Taliban regime was openly hosting Osama Bin-Laden and his al-Qaeda associates. NATO’s collective security clause was invoked and a UN resolution further legitimized US military response. Yet the attempt to tie the terrorist attacks to Saddam Hussein appeared unpersuasive and only illustrative of the malevolent nature of American hegemony and the danger of its persistence. As the Administration was looking for UN authorization to invade Iraq under the pretext that Saddam Hussein was violating Security Council resolutions by amassing weapons of mass destruction (WMD), longtime partners of the US such as Germany and France, with the support of Russia and China, strenuously objected to the war and foiled the initiative.\textsuperscript{76} German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, for example, critically asserted that

\begin{quote}
A world with six billion people will not be led into a peaceful future by the mightiest power alone. I do not support anti-Americanism at all, but even with all the differences in size and weight, alliances between free democracies should not be reduced to following. Alliance partners are not satellites.\textsuperscript{77}
\end{quote}

As opposed to the wide US-led coalition of the Gulf War, the fact that Bush launched the war against Iraq without UN authorization, and with a relatively small number of allies contributing militarily, was an indication of the limits of American hegemony rather than its

omnipotence. Still, in 2008 the US had spent almost $700 billion on defense, more than twice as much as the next five militaries in the world combined. And in his last budget submitted to Congress, Bush requested to increase the “base defense” budget to nearly $700 billion in fiscal year 2009, a level unseen since WWII.78

However, financing US hegemony nearly exhausted American resources and left the country on the verge of economic ruin. The first decade of combat in Afghanistan, Iraq and other locations across the globe as part of the Global War on Terror, for example, had cost the American taxpayer almost $1.3 trillion.79 Moreover, the colossal failure to stabilize Afghanistan and Iraq eclipsed America’s decisive material superiority and the 2008 Global Financial Crisis dramatically intensified the perception of America’s decline. With the recession heating global markets, and the American economy spiraling into an economic abyss unseen since the Great Depression, observers began talking about the end of American hegemony.80 Inasmuch as the post-9/11 military campaigns had devastating effects on US national economy, the fact that the defense costs were funded by borrowing during a recession was utterly fatal. Writing when the Global Financial Crisis was just starting to take its toll, Joseph Stiglitz and Linda Bilmes asserted that “the question is not whether the economy had been weakened by the war. The question is only by how much.”81

---

In July the White House estimated that by the end of his second term, the Bush administration will leave a record $482 billion deficit in the federal budget.\textsuperscript{82} By September, however, it was clear that the entire American financial system was on the verge of collapse to the extent that President Bush asked Congress to approve a $700 billion bailout plan to stabilize the housing and banking sector since, in his opinion, “our entire economy is in danger.”\textsuperscript{83} After the bailout plan was introduced, German Finance Minister Peer Steinbrück told the German Parliament that “The US will lose its status as the superpower of the world financial system. This world will become multipolar… The world will never be the same again.”\textsuperscript{84}

When Barack Obama took office, his two major and highly interdependent tasks were to rehabilitate American economy and scale down US military footprint in Afghanistan and Iraq. In an article published in \textit{Foreign Affairs} during the presidential campaign, Obama criticized Bush’s detrimental legacy: “Iraq was a diversion from the fight against the terrorists who struck us on 9/11, and incompetent prosecution of the war by America’s civilian leaders compounded the strategic blunder of choosing to wage it in the first place.”\textsuperscript{85} Still, in part constrained by preexisting defense-related obligations and in part by the need to increase the size of the Army and the Navy in the short-term in order to address the persisting security challenges in Iraq and Afghanistan, Obama’s first budget as president called for a moderate increase in US defense expenditures.\textsuperscript{86}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{84} Bertrand Benoit, “US ‘Will Lose Financial Superpower Status’,” \textit{Financial Times}, September 25, 2008.
\item \textsuperscript{85} Barack Obama, “Renewing American Leadership,” Vol. 86, No. 4 (July/August 2007), pp. 4-5.
\item \textsuperscript{86} Office of Management and Budget, \textit{A New Era of Responsibility: Renewing America’s Promise} (Washington, D.C.: Office of Management and Budget, 2009), p. 54.
\end{itemize}
Obama perfectly understood that the divisive policies introduce by the Bush administration had harmful effects on US global leadership and American capacity to preserve strategically important relations with key allies from Europe to Asia: “too often we have sent the opposite signal to our international partners,” he lamented.\(^{87}\) Acknowledging the political and economic vulnerability of the US at the time, Obama turned to engage China and Russia in an attempt to “reset” the relations with Beijing and Moscow. Unlike Bush, who considered China to be a “strategic competitor”, Obama was in favor of defining China as a “strategic partner” much like the Clinton administration did during most of the 1990s.\(^{88}\) While in Japan, and prior to his first visit to China, Obama asserted in November 2009 that “The United States does not seek to contain China. On the contrary, the rise of a strong, prosperous China can be a source of strength for the community of nations.”\(^{89}\)

As the US was reducing its military presence in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Obama administration announced in the fall of 2011 that it intends to move its center of attention to East Asia. The pivot to Asia, as the initiative was dubbed, was designed to boost American economic and diplomatic presence in East Asia, and strategically to redeploy 60% of US air and sea power to Asia by 2020 (as opposed to 50%). According to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, “One of the most important tasks of American statecraft over the next decade will therefore be to lock in a substantially increased investment—diplomatic, economic, strategic, and otherwise—in the Asia-Pacific region.”\(^{90}\) National Security Advisor Tom Donilon noted that the President “has pursued a rebalancing of our foreign policy priorities... the centerpiece of this strategy includes

---

\(^{87}\) Obama, “Renewing American Leadership,” 11.


an intensified American role in this vital region [Asia-Pacific]."\(^91\) But at a time when the US was reducing its international presence and responsibilities for political and economic reasons, the pivot appeared more of a rhetorical exercise than a practical policy. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, for example, argued that this development “demands that the U.S. government get better at what is called "building partner capacity": helping other countries defend themselves or, if necessary, fight alongside U.S. forces.”\(^92\)

Unforeseen and dramatic developments in the Middle East and Eastern Europe drew the Obama administration’s attention away from the pivot to more traditional crisis management role the US has been playing in the past. The successful execution of the military campaign in Libya was quickly replaced with hesitance mixed with idealism as the Egyptian regime of Hosni Mubarak crumbled amid Washington’s renunciation of his rule. In the Syrian civil war, despite the massive violence, displacement of millions or the use of chemical weapons, the Obama administration faltered and refused to intervene as it promised. Academics and pundits saw this as another indication of American decline. The fact that the Obama administration announced in early 2014 its plan to drastically cut the defense budget, reduce the number of personnel in the Army and freeze salaries and social benefits only corroborated this impression.\(^93\) A former Chinese diplomat, for example, expressed the following critical observation in the *People’s Daily*:

> Bogged down by its wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the peak of the United State hegemony is past. The U.S. economy crashed during the 2008 financial crisis, triggering further domestic issues. Coupled with the rise of emerging economies,

\(^{91}\) Tom Donilon, “America is back in the Pacific and will uphold the rules,” *Financial Times*, November 27.


\(^{93}\) Thom Shanker and Helene Cooper, “Pentagon Plans to Shrink Army to Pre-World War II Level,” *New York Times*, February 23, 2014
it is an indisputable fact that the dominance of the U.S.A. is in decline. Increasingly powerless to halt its decline, the United States is at a loss.94

While scholars and pundits debated whether the US was in decline or not after Bush’s two consecutive terms in office, or after Obama’s hesitance, it was less contentious to argue that other powers are persistently rising and thus challenging American preeminence.95

TOWARDS A CHINESE CENTURY.

The rise of China is not a new phenomenon and, in fact, one can convincingly argue that the People’s Republic of China (PRC) was rising from day it was established in October 1949.96 However, when we currently refer to the rise of China from a systemic perspective, either global or regional, we are primarily concerned with its military and economic growth over the past three decades since Deng Xiaping’s reforms in the late 1970s.97 China’s booming economy, enjoying an annual 10% growth rate in average, appears to be a rather unique phenomenon in global economic history. Between 1989 and 1991 China’s economy “suffered” a slowdown that resulted in 4%-7% annual growth rate but by 1992 the Chinese economy rebounded and grew by 12.8%.98

Supported by its remarkable economic performance, China embarked on a comprehensive and far-reaching military build-up in the 1990s. In 1989 Beijing allocated approximately $18 billion for military expenditures, but a decade later this figure was nearly

---

doubled to reach almost $35 billion. The trend of continued military build-up greatly benefited from China’s economic growth and, in fact, only intensified throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century as Chinese military expenditures nearly quadrupled from $45 billion in 2001 to $171 billion in 2013.

Some observers such as Gerald Segal are correct to argue that China was relatively weaker in comparison to the US throughout the 1990s, only accounting for 4.5% of global military spending whereas the US accounted for nearly 34%. However, considering its continuous economic military growth, China created a number of fundamental problems for the US and its allies in East Asia. First, China became more hostile when responding to crises that involved the US such as in the Third Taiwan Crisis (1995-1996) or the Hainan Island Incident (2001). Second, China attempted—even if with mixed results—to translate its growing military and economic power into an anti-American network of alliances that included (re)emerging regional powers such as Russia and India, but also longtime clients such as North Korea. Moreover, the controversial American decision to attack Iraq in 2003 proved to be an excellent opportunity for China to drive a wedge between the US and its European allies. Third, Beijing adopted a more assertive and confrontational stance in a number of territorial disputes involving

---

100 The figures are extracted from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) online Military Expenditures Database. Available online www.sipri.org (accessed July 7, 2014).
India, Japan, Myanmar, Taiwan, Vietnam and the Philippines over natural resources, naval routes and geostrategic interests.  

Between 2000 and 2007, prior to the Global Financial Crisis of 2008, Chinese average growth rate was 10.3%.  

Indicative of its growing integration to the world economy, China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in December 2001. This development, according to researchers from the World Bank, further boosted Chinese economic potency and dramatically improved its capacity to trade with and invest in a growing number of regional and global markets critical for the development of its economic performance.  

The 2008 Global Financial Crisis had a sharp yet short negative impact on the Chinese economy. In fact, Beijing was able to leverage this worldwide economic predicament to enhance its relative growth. By the end of 2008, China became the US government’s largest foreign creditor bypassing Japan for the first time in history, making the American economy deeply dependent on and sensitive to Chinese monetary policy. The *New York Times* noted, for example, that “The growing dependence on Chinese cash is granting Beijing extraordinary sway over the U.S. economy.”  

By 2010 China took Japan’s place to become the second-largest economy after the US, and in 2013 American trade deficit with China reached an all-time record of $318 billion.  

---

With Washington’s declared intention to pivot to Asia as a countermeasure designed to contain the rise of China, Beijing moved to implement its own counter-pivot strategy. For example, in addition to its involvement in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Beijing revived the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), a regional political-security forum whose member states include 24 countries from Asia, the Middle East and the Caucasus but excludes the US, Japan and the Philippines (status of observers). China recently assumed the chairmanship of CICA during a Summit in Shanghai where, trying to reject what he believed is American interference in East Asian politics, President Xi Jinping spoke about the need to adopt an “Asian security concept” and declared that “Asian problems must be resolved by Asian people, and Asian security must be protected by Asian people.”

Another anti-American Chinese preventive initiative involves the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) that would, in effect, compete with the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank perceived by Beijing as predominantly representing American and western interests. As a Chinese official involved in the creation of the new bank noted, “China feels it can’t get anything done in the World Bank or the IMF so it wants to set up its own World Bank that it can control itself.” Hence, from a pure quantitative perspective, China was rising militarily and economically and the US was in decline, opening the doors to East Asian multipolarity—a development that puts Japan in a most precarious spot.

---

Having realized that the general systemic variables had a defining influence on Japan’s security environment in the past fifteen years it is time to move to the unite-level in order to examine how Japanese policymakers translated these inputs and reevaluated their country’s security policy. Corresponding to our neoclassical realist framework, the following section highlights the nature of Japanese policymakers’ threat perception and their anticipated capacity to extract and mobilize resources to address these threats.

JAPAN’S MULTILAYERED SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

The twenty-first century did not bring much comfort to Japanese decision-makers. When they evaluated their security environment, and attempted to map emanating threats to Japan’s national security, they encountered a number of challenges with varying features and scope. In his first policy statement delivered in September 2006, newly elected Prime Minister Shinzō Abe declared that “new threats to international peace and security have arisen” but he failed to specify or describe their nature.113 This vague reference to “new threats” must be interpreted, however, as part of an ongoing reassessment in the highest levels of the Japanese government regarding China and North Korea but also in light of the US-Japan alliance.114

From Nemesis to Nemesis: North Korea

For most of the 1990s Japanese leaders pursued a cautious, reserved and uncompromising policy towards North Korea. In 2000, the two countries held three rounds of normalization talks, which

---

were frozen since 1992, but Tokyo and Pyongyang reached an impasse over the North Korean demand that Japan provides it with “compensation” for the colonization of the Korean peninsula rather than economic “aid”. Japan refused and the tension between the two countries mounted. In December 2001 a Japanese Coast Guard ship intercepted a suspected North Korean spy boat near the island of Amami-Ōshima in the ECS. The Japanese patrol boat pursued the North Korean vessel, ordering it to stop and firing warning shots. However, the suspicious boat continued to escape and attacked the patrol boat with massive machine gun fire and what appeared to be a rocket launcher. Consequently, the Japanese patrol boat opened fire and then the espionage boat sank, possibly as result of a self-destruction device set off by the North Korean crew. Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi remarked a few hours after the incident that the North Korean gunboat “had made considerable preparations and armed itself for an attack, so the Japanese side must also think of ways to deal with such incidents in normal times, given that such reckless unidentified ships exist.”

In September 2002, attempting to avoid further escalation, Koizumi and North Korean leader Kim Jong-il held a summit in Pyongyang that called for the resumption of normalization talks between the two countries. However, after North Korea admitted to the Americans that its nuclear program was still actively enriching uranium, and following Kim’s acknowledgment that 13 Japanese nationals were kidnapped, the talks lingered. As both issues remained unresolved, Pyongyang declared its intention to withdraw from the NPT and fully resume the operation of its nuclear program.

---

Alarmed by the prospects that North Korean will launch a ballistic missile towards Japan, Shigeru Ishiba, the Defense Agency’s Director General, openly warned Pyongyang that “Our nation will use military force as a self-defence measure if North Korea starts to resort to arms against Japan.”117 Despite the controversy that Ishiba’s comments generated, he remained convinced regarding the degree of threat the regime in Pyongyang poses for Japan. “They [North Korea] are not obtaining missiles just for a joke, just for play,” Ishiba noted, “We have to say it is a serious threat to our country.”118

In December 2004, after its successful involvement in the Iraq War, the Japanese government declared its intention to conduct a far-reaching revision of its security policy. In addition to reiterating the challenge posed by global terrorism, the National Defense Program Guidelines, FY 2005 (NDPG) identified North Korea and China as major threats to Japan’s security and interests in East Asia. Pyongyang was charged with possessing destabilizing weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and the maintenance of special operations forces violating Japanese sovereignty. According to another official document, the 2005 Defense White Paper, “Although North Korea is faced with serious economic difficulties to this day, the country seems to be maintaining and enhancing its military capabilities and combat readiness by preferentially allocating resources to its military forces.”119

In July 2006, North Korean launched a number of missiles into the Sea of Japan and tested its long-range Taepodong-2 missile. Abe, serving as Koizumi’s chief cabinet secretary at the time, said that “The fact that North Korea launched these missiles despite warnings from the

international community is a grave issue not only regarding Japan's security but peace and stability for the international community and non-proliferation, and we will make a stern protest and express our regret to North Korea.”

Three months later, while Abe was visiting South Korea as prime minister for the first time, one of Japan’s greatest fears had materialized as North Korea conducted an underground nuclear test. Upon his return, Abe declared in a press conference that “possession of nuclear weapons by North Korea will in a major way transform the security environment in the Northeast Asian region and we shall be entering a more dangerous "new nuclear age".” As a response to the nuclear test, the Japanese government imposed strong unilateral sanctions against North Korea, and Shoichi Nakagawa, chairman of the Liberal Democratic Party's policy research council, even called the Japanese government to reevaluate its position on developing nuclear weapons.

Abe rejected Nakagawa’s suggestion, but by early November he openly called for the revision of Article 9: “I believe we should revise Article 9 from the point of view that we should protect Japan, and that the country should make a global contribution (to security). I want to aim at a revision of the Constitution during my tenure.” In a speech to the Japanese parliament in early 2007, Abe repeated the claim that North Korea’s nuclear program is a key destabilizing factor and that “North Korea's nuclear development is something Japan cannot possibly tolerate.” In another policy speech to the Japanese parliament on September, just before his

---

121 “Press Conference by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe Following His Visit to the Republic of Korea, October 9, 2006.” Available at http://japan.kantei.go.jp/abespeech/2006/10/09koreapress_e.html (accessed July 2, 2014).
resignation, Abe warned from the looming North Korean threat and its effect on Japan’s national security: “I do not believe anyone has forgotten the shocks of the North Korean missile launches and its announcement of a nuclear test. The security environment surrounding Japan continues to be harsh.”  

As Abe was about to return to power in Japan, North Korea was flexing its military missiles once more. Primarily for domestic political consumption as a way to bolster support, but five days before the December 2012 elections to the Lower House, North Korea launched a long-range missile across the Yellow Sea that reached the Philippines. Abe demanded immediate response and called to harshly punish the rogue regime: “Japan should work together with the international community to adopt a new resolution at the United Nations to strongly condemn North Korea. The rocket launch was outrageous. The international community needs to impose harsh sanctions.”

In February 2013, in complete defiance of the sanctions imposed by the UN, North Korea conducted yet another nuclear test. What was especially alarming about the test, from Japan’s perspective, was the fact that analysts concluded that it brought Pyongyang closer to the point where it will be able to mount a small nuclear warhead on one of its ballistic missiles. In response, the Japanese government declared that it will toughen the sanctions on North Korea and blacklist its Foreign Trade Bank, believed to have played a key role in financing the North’s nuclear program. Unsurprisingly, the Japanese 2013 National Security Strategy approved in December entrenched the already existing notion that North Korean is a strategic threat to

---

Japan’s national security. While mentioning the abduction of Japanese nationals as a matter that undermines Japan’s sovereignty, the more critical aspect of North Korea’s actions is its nuclear program and ballistic missiles:

North Korea has enhanced the capability of WMDs including nuclear weapons and that of ballistic missiles. At the same time, North Korea has repeatedly taken provocative military actions in the Korean Peninsula including the use of provocative rhetoric, some of which are directed at Japan, thereby increasing the tension in the region.¹²⁹

Red Dragon Rising

Benjamin Self once remarked that “China and Japan are balanced on razor’s edge between closer cooperation and dangerous rivalry.”¹³⁰ Indeed, one should differentiate between the growing economic interdependence and the mounting political enmity between the two countries. As one Japanese diplomat observed, this established dualistic pattern received the term *seirei keinetsu* (“politically cold, economically hot”).¹³¹ In early 2014, Abe compared the extant relations between Japan and China to the rivalry between Germany and Britain prior to the First World War.¹³² What is interesting about this analogy is that it also implies that extensive and deep economic interdependence between the European belligerents did not prevent the war a hundred years ago. Thus, Abe may have concluded that economic interdependence between China and

---

Japan is no guarantee for peace either, especially if Japanese exports to China are in decline and becoming one-sided because of the political and social hostility between the two countries.\footnote{Mitsuru Obe, “Japan Exports to China at 4-Year Low,” \textit{Wall Street Journal}, August 14, 2013.}

From a strategic perspective, there are two main issues that generate threat and peril among the Japanese leadership: the pace and opacity of Chinese military build-up and Beijing’s territorial expansionism. Since the Chinese military build-up was extensively discussed earlier, the following discussion will primarily focus on the territorial disputes between Japan and China as a source of threat and enmity.

One of the first indications for the threat China posed for Japan in the twentieth-century actually did not involve the latter directly. It was a Sino-American crisis, on a rather limited scope, but its strategic impact should not be underestimated. On April 1, 2001, US Navy EP-3 reconnaissance plane collided with a Chinese J-8 fighter jet. One Chinese pilot died and the Navy plane had to conduct an emergency landing in Hainan Island. The American crew was detained and interrogated by the Chinese authorities until the White House issued an apology for the incident. The crew was released ten days after the incident, but the plane’s advanced technology was thoroughly inspected by the Chinese and parts of the plane were dissected and returned in pieces in March.\footnote{For a comprehensive analysis of the incident, see Shirley A. Kan et al., \textit{China-U.S. Aircraft Collision Incident of April 2001: Assessments and Policy Implications} (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2001).} The uncompromising position taken by the Chinese government illustrated Beijing’s willingness to raise the ante, thus the Japanese Foreign Ministry’s spokesperson told reporters that “Our basic position is that we do not want to see any escalation of tension because of this incident. We have expressed that we strongly hope that this case will be settled in a smooth and quick manner, and we are watching carefully the situation.”\footnote{Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Press Conference 6 April 2001.” Available at http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/press/2001/4/406.html#4 (accessed July 1, 2014).}
By mid-2001, primarily as a result of its economic difficulties, but also given China’s booming economy and comprehensive military build-up, the Japanese government began reevaluating its Official Development Assistance (ODA) program to China that by the end of 1999 amounted to $24 billion in loans, grant aid and technical cooperation. Japanese policymakers began realizing that they are aiding an economic competitor and a rising security threat, hence Tokyo moved from supporting Chinese infrastructure modernization to support environmental and civil society causes on a stricter case-to-case basis.

As we noted earlier, while there are tangible aspects to the rising Japanese threat perception, there were also strong ideational forces intensifying the drift between Tokyo and Beijing. One of these powerful centrifugal forces was Koizumi’s repeated visits to the Yasukuni Shrine in spite of China’s denunciation of the act. Throughout his premiership, Koizumi made it a tradition to visit the shrine once a year, in varying dates depending on political circumstances and the nature of the political message he was trying to convey. However, the Chinese also contributed to the tension between both countries. For example, on May 2002, the Chinese police stormed into the Japanese consulate in the northeastern city of Shenyang. They used force and captured five North Korean asylum-seekers. The Japanese government vigorously criticized Beijing for violating basic diplomatic practices.

In December 2004, the Koizumi cabinet approved the NDPG where China was identified as a major factor in Japan’s security environment since it “continues to modernize its nuclear forces and missile capabilities as well as its naval and air forces. China is also expanding its area

---

of operation at sea. We will have to remain attentive to its future actions.”

The 2005 Defense White Paper also noted that,

China has been continuously achieving dramatic economic growth. The country has also improved its diplomatic image and achieved many results. On the military front, China has been making efforts to modernize its military power supported by the continuing expansion of its military expenditure. China has thus been steadily growing as a political and economic power in the Asia-Pacific region and the trend of its military development draws attention from countries in the region.

China deployed in September 2005, two days before the general elections in Japan, a flotilla of five warships in the East China Sea, nearby a gas field that is in the midst of an ownership dispute between Japan and China. The ships were detected by a MSDF patrol plane in a region where Chinese vessels never entered in the past. By October, China’s began operating two oil drilling platforms in that region intensifying concerns in Tokyo that Beijing is tapping into underwater oil and gas reservoirs that are located in the middle of a disputed territory in the ECS.

When Abe took office for the first time, he tried to contain the growing rift between China and Japan. His first visit abroad was to China in October 2006 and in a joint statement both sides expressed their intention to “operate the two wheels of politics and economy, and elevate the Japan-China relations to a higher dimension.” While the summit was celebrated as a major success, it did not resolve the fundamental issues from Tokyo’s perspective including the lack of transparency in the military build-up or any commitment pertaining to the territorial

---

Indeed, in December, Foreign Minister Taro Aso noted in a news conference that given the fact that China was building-up its armed forces without sufficient transparency, “it is starting to become a considerable threat.” Seiji Maehara, leader of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), which was in the opposition at the time, shared the Foreign Ministers observation and said that China’s military build-up is a “realist threat to Japan”. Still concerned with China’s lack of transparency in its military budget, Foreign Minister Aso noted in April 2006 that “It’s not clear what China is using the money for. This creates a sense of threat for surrounding countries.”

In order to consolidate its aerial and maritime control in the South China Sea, China declared the creation of its Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) in the ECS by November 2013. The Japanese government issued a statement saying that “unilaterally establishing such airspace and restricting flights in the area is extremely dangerous as it may lead to miscalculation in the area.” After holding a special meeting with his senior officials, the Defense Minister told reporters that “The unilateral declaration of the ADIZ without having any consultation with neighboring countries is an issue that we have to protest against. If an incident takes place in the ADIZ, it could trigger a dangerous situation.”

China’s rapid military build-up appeared to have been translated to unilateral policies that infringed upon what the Japanese government considered an integral part of Japan’s territory. A month after China declared the ADIZ, Abe’s cabinet approved a 2.6% increase in defense

---

147 “Aso says China a Threat; Shrine Overtures Rebuffed,” *Japan Times*, April 3, 2006.
spending for the next five years after a decade of defense cuts and the biggest rise in 18 years. What was remarkable about this decision was the nature of the military capabilities approved as part of this upgrade in the Japanese armed forces. Many items were specifically addressing the need to prepare for any contingency vis-à-vis China over the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands including F-35 fighter jets, destroyer, patrol aircrafts and the formation of a new amphibious unit modeled after the US Marines.\textsuperscript{150}

**Between Abandonment and Entrapment**

Obviously the US is not a threat to Japan, it has no aspirations to attack it nor is Washington interested in reoccupying Japan. However, some of the policies put forward by the American administration directly project on Japan’s security environment and its leadership’s threat perception.\textsuperscript{151} Given the fact that Tokyo has no genuine alternative alliance partners, and that the US is the pillar of Japanese national security, it is caught in an alliance dilemma. On the one hand, there is a fear of abandonment, “that the ally may leave the alliance, may not live up to explicit commitments, or may fail to provide support in contingencies where support is expected.” On the other hand there is a fear of entrapment, “when an alliance commitment turns detrimental to one's interests. It is the entanglement in a dispute over an ally's interests that one does not share, or values only partially.” \textsuperscript{152}

From Japan’s vantage point, entrapment resembles the experiences during the Gulf War (1991) and the Iraq War (2003) where American policymakers expected Tokyo to share the

\begin{flushright}

\textsuperscript{151} Samuels, *Security Japan*, p. 151.

\end{flushright}
burden, economically or militarily, as faithful and loyal allies do in time of need despite the controversy of these conflicts. In the preceding months of the Gulf War, for example, a Japanese professor of politics explained that national hesitance regarding Japan’s involvement in the conflict resulted from the fact that “Japanese are concerned that once we get into this arena in the far end of a world, we may never get out.” After the historical decision of the Japanese government to send 600 ground troops to southern Iraq by the end of 2003, Prime Minister Koizumi told reporters that “The US is Japan’s only ally, and it is striving very hard to build a stable and democratic government in Iraq. Japan must also be a trustworthy ally to the US.”

The need to avoid abandonment in the aftermath of the Iraq War and the Global Financial Crisis, either as a result of an American decision or simply because the US will no longer be in a position to provide Japan with the same level of security, led some Japanese leaders to reconsider the need to keep all options open. In his 2006 campaign book entitled *Toward A Beautiful Country*, Abe wrote that “by entrusting our national security to another country and putting a priority on economic development, we were indeed able to make material gains, but what we lost spiritually—that was also great.” More bluntly, Former Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama (2009-2010) argued that “as a result of the failure of the Iraq war and the financial crisis, the era of U.S.-led globalism is coming to an end and that we are moving toward an era of multipolarity.” Although he acknowledged the essential role of the US-Japan security

---

pact, Hatoyama called to diversify Japan’s regional options arguing that Asia “must be recognized as Japan’s basic sphere of being.”

Indeed, President Obama’s attempt to reset the relations with China at the beginning of his presidency generated fears in Tokyo that such overtures will be at Japan’s expense. In this respect, some Japanese policymakers cite the way the American administration responded to China’s declaration of the ADIZ in November 2013. Abe refused to cooperate with Beijing on the matter arguing that “We can never accept (the zone), which makes Japan’s airspace over the Senkaku Islands appear as if it was China’s.” Washington, on the other hand, was much more cooperative and the Federal Aviation Administration advised commercial airlines to follow the Chinese guidelines, something that perplexed the Japanese leadership. Yukio Okamoto, a former Foreign Ministry official expressed the general mood in the Japanese government when he said that “I can't think of any case like this in the past where the U.S. took a step that hurt Japan's interests over an issue related directly to Japan's national security in a way visible to the whole world.” In order to alleviate the fears and apprehension of the Japanese government, and to indicate that Washington is not siding with China in any way, two unarmed American strategic bombers were sent from an airbase in Guam to the ADIZ where they spent an hour before returning to their base.

Still, after Washington showed its reluctance to intervene in Crimea in response to Russian invasion and annexations of the peninsula in March 2014, Abe and other key officials

---

drew the conclusion that there is a gap between the declaratory and the practical aspects of US foreign and security policy. In order to assuage these fears, US Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel visited Japan the following month. He told reporters that there is no “weakness on the part of the United States as to our absolute commitment to the security of Japan.” Three weeks later, in another attempt to address Japanese doubts, Obama visited Japan and other East Asian countries. During a meeting with Abe, Obama declared that the US-Japan security treaty stronger than ever and that American security guarantee to Japan also applies to the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, but failed short of saying whether a Chinese attack will prompt American intervention. Abe, on his part, said that “the US-Japan alliance has been revived very strongly” and that the confidence in the US “became even stronger.”

But given the economic and political constraints imposed on the US as a result of the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the planned cuts in the American defense budget, it is not clear to Japanese strategic planners how can Washington sustain the same level of military commitment and preparedness over time. This feeling was not exclusive to Japanese policymakers. Admiral Jonathan Greenert, US Chief of Naval Operations, told the Senate Arms Services Committee that “we fall behind, and I'm very concerned at our ability to project power in an area against an advanced adversary [China] with those… advanced capabilities. We're slipping behind.”

Both aspects drove Abe to promote his constitutional reforms. On the one hand, it is the need to be able to contribute effectively and adequately to American overall military posture that

---

ultimately provides for Japan’s security. On the other hand, however, Abe wishes to have a more independent “voice” in international affairs, and particularly in regional security affairs. American abandonment of Japan is not impossible albeit very improbable. Indeed, the 2013 Defense White Paper clearly stated that

To ensure national security, Japan needs to first and foremost strengthen its own capabilities and the foundation for exercising those capabilities. Japan must also steadily fulfill the role it should play and adapt its capabilities to respond to future developments.166

A NEW STATE OF JAPAN

The following analysis examines the changes in the perceived resource extraction potential of Japan, in particular in military preparedness, economic performance and public opinion. All three factors had a profound impact on Abe’s motivation and capacity to move from basic self-defense to collective self-defense.

Military preparedness

Japanese defense expenditures remained constant throughout the 1990s, limited to 1% of the country’s GDP or approximately 2.8% of the government’s overall spending. However, given the size of Japan’s national economy, military expenditures increased from nearly $25 billion in 1990 to $43 billion in 1999. During Koizumi’s premiership the budgetary emphasis was put on economic growth, thus in real terms military expenditures were largely kept at an average level of $42.5 billion.167 During Abe’s first term in office the defense budget has decreased by 0.2% but, as noted earlier, in his second term in office the Japanese government increased military

expenditures by 0.8% after a decade of continuous cuts, and the government also declared its intention to increase the budget by 2.2% in FY2014-15.\textsuperscript{168}

One key feature in Japan’s increased techno-military potency involves missile defense systems. The reasons is that these systems provides improved defensive territorial coverage of Japan against Chinese or North Korean missiles, but it also allows better integration with the American systems deployed on Japanese territory and across the region. Japan has been developing and deploying its ballistic military defense (BMD) system since the early 2000s as a result of the August 1998 North Korean launch of a Daepodong-1 long-range ballistic missile across Japanese airspace. Noting the defensive nature of the system upon its introduction, the government declared in December 2003 that the “BMD system is the only and purely defensive measure, without alternatives, to protect life and property of the citizens of Japan against ballistic missile attacks.”\textsuperscript{169}

In the US-Japan Security Consultative Committee (SCC) meeting of October 2005 both sides expressed their intention to further increase their operational bilateral cooperation on BMD and the US agreed to position an X-Band radar that would provide information to the SDF that was already entrusted with operating Aegis destroyers and Patriot Advanced Capability-3 (PAC-3) missile systems as interceptors. The consistent American position on the BMD was that Japan should not only receive US technological and operational assistance but also reciprocate by proactively defending American assets in case of an attack. Abe’s 2007 Advisory Panel looked into this exact matter when it concluded that “it is not an option for Japan not to shoot down

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
ballistic missiles that might be flying towards the United States when Japan has the ability to do so… There seems to be no option other than to permit the exercise of the right of collective self-defense, which legally permits the shooting down of such missiles.”170

Since the 1998, Japan has invested $12 billion in developing and deploying its BMD systems and proponent of the system, Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda told reporters before a scheduled live-fire trial in late 2012 that “We will spare no effort in making preparations to deal with any launch in order to protect the Japanese people's assets and lives.”171 When Abe returned to power a few weeks later, the technological capacity to integrate the Japanese BMD systems as part of his collective self-defense vision became not only technologically feasible but, with the Advisory Panel’s recommendation, legally permissible.

In response to continued North Korean launching of Musudan medium-range missiles and the Chinese repeated activities near the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, the Defense Ministry announced in November 2013 its intention to buy two more Aegis destroyers capable of intercepting ballistic missiles and thus increase the total number of Aegis destroyers the MSDF operates to eight.172 From a strategic perspective, Japan’s operational BMD system and its designed infusion into the US-Japan security architecture as a measure to further increase regional deterrence necessitated the shift from a self-defense to a collective self-defense posture.173 As the 2013 National Security Strategy stated, “Japan ensures its national security by enhancing deterrence through the strengthening of its own defense capability, as well as by the

---

deterrence of the Japan-U.S. Alliance, including the extended deterrence provided by the U.S.”

But as we noted in our theoretical section, military preparedness is not all necessarily about the quantitative features of a country’s armed forces. This is especially true for Japan that is so heavily reliant on the US to provide the overall security umbrella. Several developments are noteworthy in this respect. First, Abe was successful in establishing a US-inspired Japanese National Security Council (NSC). It has been a known criticism that Japan lacks any long-term national strategy and that the treatment of critical foreign and security concerns was far too decentralized. The attempt to establish a Japanese NSC failed during Abe’s first term in office due to insufficient political support or a sense of urgency. After his reelection, and empowered by his political success in the parliamentary elections and recent developments in Japan’s security environment, Abe was able to pass into law the necessary legislation in the Upper House by November 2013. In a speech to the Japanese parliament, Abe outlined the rationale for creating such an agency: “The establishment of a National Security Council is absolutely imperative to strengthen the command functions of the prime minister's office on foreign and security policies.”

While the NSC is still in its embryonic phase, the 2013 White Paper clearly emphasized its expected contributing to the enhancement of long-term planning and inter-agency and inter-departmental coordination: the NSC will “give fundamental direction for foreign and security policies from a strategic perspective, with a consciousness that it is necessary for the entire

Cabinet to work on the strengthening of foreign affairs and the security system of Japan.”\textsuperscript{176} For our discussion it is imperative to see this organizational development as a significant strengthening of the policymaking elements needed to organizationally support a shift towards collective self-defense.

The Defense Ministry also invested considerable amount of resources in order to upgrade the armed forces’ training, civilian authority and motivation. In November 2007, the Council for Reforming the Ministry of Defense was established under the Minister’s Office. The objective was not only to improve the functioning of the SDF and the cooperation between the various units comprising it. The Abe government wanted also to define and strengthen the civilian authority over the armed forces given the aim of moving from self-defense to collective self-defense. In anticipation of the revision of the interpretation of Article 9, after Abe’s reelection these reforms were accelerated.\textsuperscript{177}

As for training, the SDF conducts routine exercises in three main arrangements: each branch trains independently, branches conduct joint exercises and the SDF holds various bilateral exercises with foreign armies, especially with the US forces deployed in Japan and in the region. Such exercises, for example the biannual command and control exercise Keen Edge, are designed to increase combat readiness and interoperability. According to the 2014 National Defense Program Guidelines, “Through routine training and exercises, the SDF will ceaselessly review and examine various plans for dealing with situations, as well as strive to enhance and

\textsuperscript{177} Ministry of Defense, \textit{Defense of Japan 2013}, p. 298.
strengthen its training and exercises in order to improve the tactical skills in each of its branches.”

The motivation of the SDF is also a function of the legitimacy and support it receives from the general public. Consequently, the Minister of State for Defense (later the Defense Minister) argued that in the 2006 Defense White Paper that “defense forces that are not supported by the people’s strong confidence cannot fulfill their functions. A significant relationship of trust in which the SDF is always whit the people is more important than anything else.” The successful involvement in disaster relief operation after the Tsunami and the Great East Japan Earthquake or the assistance provided after the nuclear disaster in Fukushima (all in 2011) increased the level of trust in and support for the SDF. The magnitude and the proximity of these catastrophes highlighted the value and importance of the SDF. According to Ryoichi Oriki, Chief of Staff of the JSDF at the time, “This role received broad recognition from the Japanese people, and trust in the SDF increased among the public.”

In July 2013, the Defense Ministry launched a wide public relations campaign to win the hearts and minds of the Japanese people and make the members of the armed forces more popular and likable. The results exceeded expectations, according to some accounts, and SDF-related items such as DVDs, action figures, tank and airplane models and comic books let the sales charts. Colonel Yuji Otsuka, head of public relations at the Ground Staff Office, asserted that “Given the increasingly harsh security climate surrounding Japan, now is the time for the general public to learn more about the defense industry, the SDF's mainstay.”

---

Ministry official said that “The essential thing is to provide the general public with opportunities to see and learn what the SDF is doing. That helps the SDF to raise public interest in defense affairs and to recruit new officers.”\textsuperscript{181} The Defense Ministry announced that the number of students who visited SDF bases has increased from 30,000 in 2011 to 42,000 in 2013.\textsuperscript{182} In a policy speech delivered in the Japanese parliament in January 2014, Abe emphasized the importance of the SDF’s social legitimacy for their motivation and operational preparedness when he declared that “The Self-Defense Forces have earned the priceless trust of the Japanese people. They are a point of pride for me as they silently carry out their duties.”\textsuperscript{183}

\textbf{Abenomics}

As the defense establishment provided Abe the infrastructure to pursue a more proactive security policy, Japanese economic performance played an important role in convincing the leadership that the country will be able to sustain such reforms. This is not to suggest that Abenomics—the economic recovery plan Abe introduced during his second term in office—has successfully generated growth rates remotely similar to those Japan experienced during the 1980s. The argument is that Abe and his government felt confident enough to harness Japan’s awakening economy in favor of financing his ambitious security policy, and he personally felt that, given the promising economic indicators, his popularity can be effectively translated into public support for constitutional revision by extension. As one of his special economic advisor, Etsuro

\textsuperscript{182} Hotaka Tazawa, “SDF Bases Welcome Students on Field Trips,” Japan Times, July 8, 2014.
\textsuperscript{183} “Policy Speech by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to the 186th Session of the Diet, January 24, 2014.” Available at http://japan.kantei.go.jp/96_abe/statement/201401/24siseihousin_e.html (accessed June 25).
Honda, confided, Abe has a clear vision for his second term in office: “Tackle the economy, and then go on to deal with other issues.”

Despite repeated governmental attempts between the early 1990s and 2008 the Japanese government was unable to end a two-decade long recession that resulted in two-digit deflation and low growth rates. After his reelection in 2012, Abe introduced a three-pillar economic recovery program that included a massive fiscal stimulus, monetary easing from the Bank of Japan, and structural reforms to boost Japan's regional and global competitiveness. In January 2013 Abe introduced his government’s $100 billion stimulus plan. Akira Amari, the minister entrusted with economic rehabilitation later argued that “the package should not only shore up the economy… but will leave the economy on track for growth.”

Initial fiscal indicators were largely positive and it appeared that Abenomics works. In the first half of 2013 Japan’s economy grew by 3.5%, topping other members of the G-7. Yet optimism was replaced with more realistic and sober expectation as the Japanese economy showed lower growth rates than expected by the second half of the year. Japan’s tepid economic growth encouraged the Japanese government to seek reinforcement from the outside. In mid-March 2013 Abe announced his government’s intention to enter talk with the US regarding Japan’s entry to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a 12-nation Asia-Pacific free trade agreement, which is in the making for almost four years. While the TPP can provide access to Japanese goods and services and stimulate the national economy, it also encompasses major difficulties for local manufacturers and the agricultural sectors. Still, Abe was confident that joining the TPP is a key to Japan’s economic recovery: “This is the last chance. If we miss this

186 Ayako Mie and Reiji yoshida, “Abe Banking on ¥5 Trillion in Stimulus,” Japan Times, October 1, 2013.
opportunity, it would immediately mean that we would be left out of setting global regulations. If Japan becomes only inward-looking, there will no longer be a chance of economic growth.”

Lastly, while Japan has a proven record when it comes to technological innovation, the economic slowdown during the past 15 years crippled its capacity to effectively compete with other countries, especially with China. As part of Abe’s structural reforms of the national economy a special role is preserved to reinvigorating Japanese domestic R&D. As noted earlier, technological innovation and invention has clear economic benefits, but it also significantly contributes to the state’s security policy. The established symbiotic relationship between these spheres is encapsulated in Abe’s following comments in parliament:

We will boldly support aggressive research and development that will revolutionize the economy and society. We will make it possible to implement budgets that do not adhere to the fiscal year system and ensure an environment in which it is possible to conduct long-term research in a stable manner. We will make Japan "the most innovation-friendly country in the world."

But in order to speed things up until R&D investments in the Japanese private sector are actually executed, Abe was looking to other nearby markets. During the fifth Japan-Australia foreign and defense ministerial consultations held in June 2014, both governments decided to upgrade the technological defense cooperation between the two countries. The final agreement was to be signed during Abe’s official visit in Australia the following month. On the eve of the visit, Abe told an Australian newspaper that “When the agreement comes into force, it will create new opportunities for joint development of defence [sic.] equipment and technology, which involves their transfer between the two countries, including opportunities for the transfer and

188 “Policy Speech by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to the 186th Session of the Diet, January 24, 2014.”
joint development of defence equipment and technology.”

By that Abe was successfully providing the basis for Japan’s long-term capacity to shift to collective self-defense but also validate the underpinning constitutional transformation in practice.

Public Opinion

The general public’s attitude on Japan’s desired security policy is, in essence, a function of two sets of issues. First, the degree of effective civilian control over the defense establishment, and, secondly, what is the desirable role of military force. In both aspects, Abe’s sense of optimism about the possibility to promote dramatic reforms in Japan’s security policy results from the encouraging track record of the general public’s relative acceptance of the governmental authority over and the actual use of military power in recent years. More specifically, Abe is attempting to capitalize on Koizumi’s decision to deploy the SDF outside UN peacekeeping operations, something that became possible after 9/11 and the subsequent enactment of the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law enacted in October 2001.

After Abe succeeded Koizumi in September 2006, he believed he could reenact this temporary shift in public opinion, solidify it and promote a more ambitious constitutional reform pertaining to Japan’s security policy. Yet, despite the initial shock generated by the terrorist attacks that eroded the public’s intolerance for the use of military force or its objection to SDF cooperation with the US, public support for SDF combat operations quickly faded away and

---

189 Greg Sheridan, “‘Special Relationship’ Between Australia and Japan Begins,” The Australian, July 8, 2014.
opinion polls reflected once again an overwhelming anti-war public sentiment. The elections to the upper house of July 2007 resulted in an overwhelming victory for the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) and a defeat for Abe’s Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), closing the door on any possible constitutional reform in general, and revision of Article 9 in particular. Voters, according to several political commentators, punished Abe for focusing on constitutional reforms rather than on economic issues.193

Still, in an attempt to change the long-term pacifist or anti-war discourse among the Japanese people, Abe introduced a controversial and radical reform in the educational system, designed to increase the level of patriotism in the country.194 The revised Fundamental Law of Education, enacted by the Upper House in December, called for the school system to increase students’ “love of country” and “public spirit”. The preamble of the Law calls for the development and encouragement of “an attitude that respects tradition and culture and loves the nation and homeland that have fostered them.”195

A survey conducted by the Defense Ministry in March 2012 found that the overall positive impression of the SDF has increased to 92% while only 5.3% expressed a negative attitude. Moreover, the poll found that while the majority of respondents said the current strength of the SDF is satisfactory, nearly 25% of the respondents believed that the SDF should be strengthened. When asked about the possible sources of threat to Japanese peace and safety, China and the situation in the Korean Peninsula were identified as the most pressing issues. Perhaps most importantly to the shift to collective self-defense was the fact that nearly 88% of

the respondents were satisfied with the SDF’s overseas activities as opposed to almost 8% who expressed negative positions.\textsuperscript{196}

Renewing his plans to reform the education system in order to promote patriotism and, according to his critics, Japanese nationalism, the government resumed the work of the Education Rebuilding Council entrusted with the reformulation of the laws and the structure of the education system in January 2013. In the Council’s first meeting, Abe told its members that “To re-create a strong Japan, it is essential to revive the education of the children who will be responsible for the country’s future. The revival of education is a top priority, just as much as economic revival.”\textsuperscript{197}

In May, the day Japan marked Constitutional Memorial Day, a number of public opinion polls found growing support for the idea of constitutional change. While not specifically addressing Article 9, between 56% and 60% of the respondents said the constitution should be modified according to polls conducted by \textit{Nikkei} and \textit{Mainichi Shimbun} respectively. According to the \textit{Nikkei} poll, nearly 40% actually agreed to revise Article 9.\textsuperscript{198} In an interview Abe gave to \textit{Foreign Affairs}, he acknowledged that most Japanese currently object to any revision of Article 9, yet he insisted that “once told the rationale in more detail, they turn in favor of amendment.”\textsuperscript{199}

As opposed to his previous term, however, Abe is considerably more popular and his government enjoys widespread public support, primarily due to his economic reforms, as illustrated by his party’s success in the parliamentary elections to the parliament. In fact, Abe


LDP party now controls both chambers that essentially putting him in an advantageous position to promote the constitutional reforms he wants.\textsuperscript{200} Still, a few days before the dramatic vote in the Japanese cabinet approving the reinterpretation of Article 9, a \textit{Mainichi Shimbun} public opinion poll found that nearly 60\% of the respondents opposed lifting the self-imposed ban on collective self-defense.\textsuperscript{201}

Abe’s cabinet, however, went ahead and approved the changes in the interpretation of Article 9, constitutional reform is still underway. Possibly, he chose to adopt Koizumi’s counsel to some of Abe’s aides:

\begin{quote}
You don’t need to pay attention to the ups and downs of Cabinet support ratings every single time. Be less sensitive to the effects of things just before your eyes. The capacity to be insensitive is important. It is natural that there are forces of resistance and there is no need to iron out differences with them. The most important thing is the prime minister holding onto his faith, and that has to be upheld.\textsuperscript{202}
\end{quote}

\textbf{CONCLUSIONS}

Japan’s postwar security policy was a logical political development given the objective conditions that existed at the time. On the one hand, the disastrous outcomes of Japanese, nationalism, militarism and imperialism necessitated a fundamental restructuring of the preexisting political order, especially robust demilitarization and democratization. On the other hand, the degree of physical destruction to Japan’s infrastructure led the Japanese leadership to allocate all available resources in favor of reconstruction. Furthermore, the US-Japan security guarantee, exemplified by the diplomatic arrangements between the two countries, and the

extensive American military presence, made Japanese remilitarization undesirable and impossible.

However, the persistence of this stagnated security policy in the post-Cold War era posed a major puzzle for IR theorists. Realists, liberals and constructivists tried to account for this anomaly from different vantage points. Realists focused on the free-riding aspect arguing that Japan is still delegating its security policy to the US primarily in order to remain focused on its economic growth. Liberals, rather similarly, emphasize the economic interests of domestic interest groups and their decision to remain committed to the principles of free trade as their key tool of statecraft. For these scholars, it is always better to trade than invade and the Japanese government can achieve its goals through foreign direct investment (FDI) and global/regional commercial interdependence. Lastly, constructivist highlighted the normative change in the Japanese society prompted by the US-led rapid democratization and demilitarization. It was a large-scale socialization project that eradicated previous Japanese fascist ideology in favor of a western-style democracy. These changes were so profoundly embedded into the Japanese people that these postwar ideational principles were institutionalized in the constitution, the political and legal system and as a strong antiwar public opinion.

These three explanations were limited in their ability to explain the gradual yet ongoing changes in Japan’s security policy. Constrained by its systemic characteristic, realism overlooked the domestic domain. Liberalism focused on domestic politics and underestimated the influence of the security environment. And, finally, constructivists were unable to explain how and why the normative framework of Japan’s security policy changed since the early-1990s. Neoclassical realism, I argued instead, can overcome these deficiencies since it effectively bridges the international-domestic and the material-ideational divides.
The theory begins with system-level variables such as the global or regional distribution of capabilities as states’ overarching strategic point of reference. The number and nature of existing powers in the system determines the boundaries and permissive condition for state action. Alliances influence states’ freedom of action and separate friends from adversaries. There is a strong interplay between the global and the regional levels, thus policymakers must address inputs coming from both. Unlike neorealism, however, neoclassical realism is not satisfied with identifying broad systemic attributes since that will not yield any specific insights regarding a state’s foreign policy. As Waltz admitted, neorealism cannot explain “why state X made a certain move last Tuesday.”

Consequently, in order to trace the way systemic attributes influence state behavior, neoclassical realists identified two unit-level variables, threat perception and resources extraction potential, that act as transmission belts. This expansive theoretical framework gives respects the role of statesmen and appreciates the influence of domestic politics. Moreover, by focusing on individuals’ perception of these unit-level variables, neoclassical realists integrate ideational and material factors.

As the neoclassical analysis demonstrated, Japan’s changing strategic environment generated a major dilemma for Japanese policymakers since the early-1990s with the ending of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. The shift to unipolarity encouraged China to seek more regional influence and expand its geostrategic interests. As Walter Russell Mead noted recently, “China has no intention of contenting itself with a secondary role in global

---

affairs, nor will it accept the current degree of U.S. influence in Asia and the territorial status quo there.”

The US was involved in a number of policy blunders, primarily in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Crimea that, coupled with the global economic crisis, led to a decline in its global and regional standing. Subsequently, Washington’s preponderance appeared waning and American security guarantee to Japan looked less credible than before. If one adds the destabilizing role of North Korea’s nuclear program and repeated missile tests, it becomes clear that Japan had a strong incentive to reassess its security policy on account of a growing sense of external threat or, alternatively, due to intra-alliance insecurity. As Abe told reporters after the July decision in the cabinet, “To make every possible preparation has significant power to prevent an attempt to wage war against Japan. This is deterrent force. I believe that the Cabinet decision would rather reduce the possibility that Japan would become involved in a war…. Our peace is not given by other people. We have no way but to establish it by ourselves.”

Yet realizing that there is a need to address shifting strategic realities, either global or regional, was not enough. The Japanese governments had to conduct extensive and complicated and sensitive preparations in order to be able and introduce collective self-defense in July 2014. While the Gulf War was the first indication that Japan’s security policy was out of synch with the new strategic environment, and SDF peacekeeping operations during the 1990s illustrated this trend, it was the groundbreaking decision by the Koizumi government to deploy forces in the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean that were critical in breaking a taboo over the use of Japanese armed forces outside UN authority.

---

When Abe first took office as Prime Minister in 2006 he tried to extend the policies of Koizumi and, to some extent, he was more than successful. He upgraded the status of the Defense Agency to a full Ministry of Defense, established the Advisory Panel for Reconstruction of the Legal Basis for Security and a panel to revise the Fundamental Law of Education. However, Japan’s continued economic decline prevented the completion of these initiatives as Abe resigned amid his growing unpopularity. When he returned to the Prime Minister’s Office, Japan’s security environment considerably deteriorated, from his vantage point, with China increasing its territorial claims in the region and North Korean continuing developing its ballistic missiles and nuclear program despite international sanctions. More importantly perhaps was the fact that the US—the cornerstone of Japan’s national defense—appeared less capable of providing the same level of security. After Obama’s blunders in Egypt, Syrian and Crimea, senior Japanese policymakers began doubting American credibility.

Capitalizing on the general public’s growing familiarity with, and trust for, the SDF, the early fruits of his economic reforms dubbed Abenomics and the dramatic improvement in the armed forces preparedness, Abe revived all of his major security policy reforms. He re-launched the Advisory Panel’s work on the reinterpretation of the Constitution Article 9, enacted a law promoting patriotic education in schools and increased the defense budget. With all these measure in place, and tilting in favor of Abe, the cabinet approved the historical shift from based self-defense to collective self-defense.

Yet this is not the end of the road for Japan’s security policy reorientation under Abe. As developments in the global and regional levels continue to challenge Japan’s historical reluctance to treat military force as a legitimate tool of international statecraft, and domestic conditions become more conducive by providing Japanese policymakers the necessary resources and
legitimacy, Japan will become growingly “normal” and shed off any remaining relics of its pacifism to become a state like any other state; generally reluctant to use military force, but clearly ready to use it when needed.