

The Myth of Pacifism: Domestic Politics and Contradictory Ambitions in Japan's Security Policy

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By explaining how political manipulation and Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution have helped perpetuate a self-made myth of Japanese pacifism, this scholarly note complements the three articles on security issues in contemporary Asia (pp. 90–136) and provides a useful supplement to Daniel A. Métraux's article (pp. 157–72) on religion, politics, and Japanese constitutional reform.

Japan & the Myth of Pacifism

Japan's foreign-policy makers are trapped in self-made myths of pacifism. The pacifist myth takes from Japan's defeat in World War II the lesson that the nation should promote peace globally by renouncing the right to wage war. The idea of Japan as a pacifist nation is rooted in Article 9 of the nation's constitution, which reads as follows:

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.

The first paragraph in this article renounces the right to wage war, and the second forbids the maintenance of a military. During the U.S.-led Occupation (1945–52), General Douglas MacArthur promised Emperor Hirohito (1901–89, r. 1926–89) that in a hundred years the whole world would revere Japan for its renunciation of war.

However, fifty-five years since the end of the Occupation, unexpected consequences of Japan's constitution restrain its ability to develop a coher-

ent policy regarding the use of force. Politicians who seek to include their nation's troops in international peacekeeping operations, for example, have to negotiate with popular demands that Japan's contributions to the international system must exclude force while maintaining the popular idea that Japan is first and foremost a peace-loving nation. Opinion polls suggest that most Japanese endorse the prohibition against the use of force to settle disputes and seem to take pride in the image of their nation as one imbued with anti-militarist norms. However, this image hides a contradiction. Beneath the U.S. defense umbrella, Japan has built up one of the world's most formidable national military forces, known as Japan's Self-Defense Forces (SDF). What some observers identify as Japan's so-called antimilitarist norm is really an idea that has been utilized by different groups to advance their own ends, albeit in the name of the collective interest. Arguments about Japan's security policies revolve around Article 9 not because its principles represent a norm but precisely because it is rooted in the nation's constitution. Those who do believe in the pacifist principles enshrined in the article have the power of appeals to constitutionality on their side. Those who have armed Japan have successfully deflected criticisms from pacifists by interpreting their policies as within the letter of the law—while publicly pledging support for the anti-militarism inherent in the spirit of the law.

Elites may sell parochial policies under the guise of national security. In *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition*, Jack Snyder defines a *myth* as an ideology that interest groups, bureaucrats, or politicians use to justify a foreign policy strategy and from which they aim to obtain a particular benefit.¹ Through a process of “logrolling,” actors with different values but similar policy preferences craft a policy that will simultaneously serve all of their ends. A myth about national security forms through the successful promulgation of a national security strategy by elites who seek concentrated gains but diffused costs by convincing the public that this strategy is in the state's best interest. However, should members of the myth-making coalition wish to retreat from the strategy, they become trapped by their own rhetoric in the form of ideological “blowback”—a public belief that their actions now violate a vital security interest. Elites either begin to internalize their own rhetoric or become trapped in it. In either case, the possibility of a single group retreating from the strategy is low, because the costs of doing so are far too high. Snyder demonstrates that, throughout the 1930s, a coalition of industrialists, as well as the Imperial Army and Navy, propagated a myth that justified the need for Japan's expansion on the Asian continent. A myth of empire took root among the coalition and spread among educators and the public, leading to a fatal overextension of Japanese power. To my knowledge, no one has yet recognized that Snyder's argument can be used to explain other foreign policy

goals besides expansion. In the remainder of this essay, I emphasize the origins of the pacifist myth and summarize how party politicians have utilized it.

I suggest that current democratic Japan's professed pacifism is a myth that imperils Japan's sovereignty and has led to an under-extension of Japanese power. This myth was formed by a similar process as the imperial myth that preceded it, but it has been led by a different type of coalition. Since the administration of Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru 吉田茂 (1878–1967, in office 1946–47 and 1948–54), a coalition including politicians from different parties, citizens' movements, and educators has promoted the idea of constitutionally mandated pacifism for various ends—from holding up Japan as a beacon for a global peace movement to avoiding the costs of re-militarization and risks inherent in collective security arrangements. Now the popularity of the anti-militarist ideal among the electorate hinders the ability of Japan to contribute to global security and peacekeeping operations and even risks the nation's sovereignty in two ways. First, inherent in the very principle of pacifism itself is a denial of sovereignty. Official pacifism—under a strict interpretation of the constitution—would require the Japanese to rely on the consciences of other nations for their defense. Second, however, under the umbrella of protection by other national powers, Japan must rely on another sovereign state for final decisions related to its own defense. Regardless, Japan remains among the top two or three nations in total defense spending: second (behind the United States) when measured at market exchange rates, and third (behind the United States and Russia) when measured using price purchasing power parity.² Japan has developed the largest destroyer force in the Pacific as well as the region's most advanced submarine force, and its F-2 strike fighters are the “most capable fighters” in East Asia after the American planes.³

The Pacifist Myth in Action

The United States arguably planted the seeds for the myth of Japanese pacifism both before the end of World War II and during the Occupation. By spring 1945, the United States had already decided that it would rebuild its enemy into a liberal democratic state. To do so would require clear condemnation of Japanese expansionism and the military's harsh treatment of POWs and of Asian populations that had fallen under Japanese control. Americans took the public view that average Japanese were obeying authorities they had been reared to follow unflinchingly. During the Occupation, Americans emphasized that the militarists had betrayed even the emperor. Although the Americans tried and executed selected members of the militarist clique, their decision to exonerate the emperor and his subjects allowed Japanese to consider themselves victims of the War.

In *The Victim as Hero: Ideologies of Peace and National Identity in Postwar Japan*, James J. Orr locates postwar Japanese national identity in “victim consciousness” (*higaisha-ishiki* 被害者意識).⁴ If the Americans made it possible for the Japanese to see themselves as victims, many Japanese nurtured the concept of *higaisha-ishiki* to create a claim for the Japanese people’s unique status as victims based on the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. I propose that victim consciousness is embedded in the foundation of the pacifist myth. Only a small step is required to move from the concept of *higaisha-ishiki* to that of pacifism as a unique, forward-looking purpose for many Japanese to embrace and incorporate into official policy.

Since the early days of Japan’s ban-the-bomb movement, politicians of all parties have frequently proclaimed that Japan is the “only country to have suffered an atomic bombing” (*sekai yuiitsu no hibakukoku* 世界唯一の被爆国).⁵ Socialist politicians, in particular, used this claim to criticize the Liberal Democratic Party’s (hereafter LDP) reliance on the U.S. nuclear umbrella. The Japanese peace movement, together with anti-nuclear activism, became the centerpiece of left-wing groups, which, by the 1950s, stood in firm opposition to the Yoshida administration’s decision to make Japan a center for America’s East Asia security arrangements. The left often referred to the atomic bombings to condemn the government for its agreements to host U.S. military bases, and it equated the U.S.–Japan relationship with a resurgence of militarism.

Since the implementation of the postwar constitution, pacifism has been a key plank in the platforms of the Socialist and Communist parties. However, if it had remained a left-wing issue, it is conceivable that anti-militarism would not have developed into a strategic myth. Orr reveals how one man refashioned the message of the peace movement into a broad-based campaign that transcended traditional political allegiances. In 1954, Yasui Kaoru 安井郁 (1907–80) organized a national petition, known as the Sugunami Appeal, which called on all states to ban nuclear weapons. He avoided discussing potentially divisive issues such as wartime Japanese aggression or the morality of U.S. bases in Japan. Furthermore, Yasui used language that emphasized the civic, popular, and Japanese nature of peace activism. He used the terms *kokumin* 国民 (“the people” as the civic nation) and *minshu* 民主 (“the people” as the popular masses), and he referred to the Japanese ethnic nation’s (*Nihon kokumin* 日本国民) earnest desire for peace.

As many as twenty million people signed the Sugunami Appeal, so Japan’s conservative governments could not ignore it. In fact, Yasui’s “ethno-pacifism” was co-opted by the LDP. Yoshida’s successor, Hatoyama Ichirō 鳩山一郎 (1883–1959, in office 1954–56), privately promised the anti-nuclear movement he would promote their aims. His foreign minister, Shigemitsu Mamoru 重光葵 (1887–1957), spoke of Japan’s duty to reduce the risk of nuclear war around the world. The Hatoyama administration was

the first to make use of anti-nuclear rhetoric that had originated on the left and to link it to claims about Japan's mission to promote world peace.

Once the LDP could stake a claim to the peace movement's message, it could begin to promote its security policy under a pacifist banner. From the mid-1950s onward, the LDP could both justify the creation and maintenance of the SDF and pledge support for the principles of the peace movement that appealed to many voters. After the LDP convinced enough voters that it shared the same pacifist mission as its opponents, the left became trapped in the logic of the pacifist myth. The Japan Socialist Party (JSP) and Japan Communist Party (JCP) could not dislodge themselves from the ethnocentrism of the pacifist message without the risk of taking away the perceived unique role for all Japanese in promoting world peace, which would surely be a losing proposition.

Throughout the fast-growth years of the 1960s and into the bubble years of the late 1980s, election results indicate that voters tended to rank a preference for anti-militarism below other policy values; most seem to have ranked it alongside or just below a preference for a spot under the U.S. umbrella. The pacifist myth enabled the LDP to deflect criticisms from the JSP and JCP in two ways. First, LDP legislators argued that their defense policies were producing a peaceful, prosperous, and secure Japan, all within the limits of Article 9. Second, LDP governments could point to American requests they declined as proof of the sincerity of their belief in Article 9. In this light, Prime Minister Sato Eisaku's 佐藤榮作 (1901–75, in office 1963–72) three non-nuclear principles (nonproduction, nonpossession, and nonintroduction of nuclear weapons), the LDP's refusal to directly support American forces in Vietnam, and even the qualitative upgrade of the SDF in response to the Soviet's Northeast Asia build-up in the 1970s were all presented as examples of the LDP remaining true to the spirit of Article 9. Even if the LDP did not convince the constituencies of the JSP and JCP, their rationalizations did not dissuade enough other voters to cost them the reins of government. Thanks to the U.S. presence and the LDP's insistence to the Americans that it was prohibited from doing more militarily to help the U.S. defend Japan, the LDP achieved security on the cheap.

However, the storm that erupted over Japan's perceived slow and insufficient response to the Persian Gulf Crisis of 1990–91 proves that the myth exacted significant costs for the LDP as well. When the government initially balked at joining the UN-sanctioned coalition to liberate Kuwait, it came under scathing international criticism. Even Japan's contribution of US\$13 billion to the effort was dismissed as checkbook diplomacy. Since then, Japan has dispatched SDF personnel to missions in eight nations on three continents, yet the government remains unable to develop a new security strategy devoted to joining international uses of force on a regular basis.

Now the myth hinders Japan's security interests. First, it allows those who oppose either the LDP's or Democratic Party of Japan's (hereafter DPJ) vision of Japanese internationalism a great amount of leverage in resisting fulfillment of their plans. Constitutional revisionists, not the pacifist left, are trapped by ideological blowback. Second, for as long as the issue remains unresolved—i.e., for as long as Article 9 remains unrevised—Japan's security policy will be burdened with a constitutional debate that could hinder Japan's ability to contribute to international uses of force in a manner reflective of its economic power. Such lack of burden-sharing will likely frustrate not only its American ally but also other democratic powers, especially if they believe Japan is unable or unwilling to join future international coalitions.

Today the positions of the two major parties, the LDP and the DPJ, differ only over the circumstances in which each would commit Japanese troops. The LDP aims for Japan to remain a reliable ally of the United States. Japan is one of three Pacific region states, along with South Korea and Australia, to send troops to both Afghanistan and Iraq to support the U.S.-led missions in both states. The DPJ, under the leadership of Ozawa Ichirō 小沢一郎 (b. 1942), promotes the leadership of Japan in the creation of a more powerful United Nations military force.

It is unlikely that either of the two major political parties will bring home the SDF from its current overseas missions to resume its Cold War posture of no international deployments. So the left must decide whether it will tolerate revision of Article 9 and adopt its own position on how best to utilize the SDF—or whether it will continue to use appeals to the constitution to try to limit the application of Japanese force. On the one hand, politicians opposed to revision have a majority of the public on their side. On the other hand, the LDP and the DPJ continue to capture nearly 80 percent of the national vote between them. The LDP, under Koizumi Junichirō 小泉純一郎 (b. 1942, in office 2001–6), even dispatched troops to Iraq—when 70 percent of Japanese opposed the U.S.-led war—without his party losing office in subsequent elections.

Is the time ripe for Japan to become a “normal country,” to use the expression made popular by Ozawa Ichirō? Poll results published on September 4, 2006, by the *Yomiuri Shimbun* (Tokyo) reveal that more Asians may support the deployment of Japanese troops abroad than Japanese themselves do.⁶ Only 50 percent of Japanese respondents answered that they support SDF dispatches to areas of conflict. Yet, among six other East and Southeast Asian nations, majorities in four nations supported the deployment of the SDF for humanitarian missions. In Indonesia, for example, 80 percent of respondents supported SDF participation in such dispatches, compared to just under 80 percent in Thailand and India.

The debate over Japan's defense policy takes place against a backdrop of a fluid security environment in East Asia that includes a rising Chinese military and a nuclear-capable North Korea. Even if the DPJ captures office, it is unlikely to ask the United States to leave Japan anytime soon. In the meantime, Prime Minister Abe Shinzō's 安倍晋三 (b. 1954, in office from September 2006 to September 2007) foreign minister, Aso Tarō 麻生太郎 (b. 1940), spoke often of "new values" for foreign policy, such as freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, promoting a quadrilateral security dialog comprised of Japan, the United States, Australia, and India. The values professed by Aso arguably transcend the LDP and would be embraced, in principle, by a DPJ administration. Japan is neither a resurgent militarist power nor a committed pacifist one. At issue is when and how Japan will overcome fully the pacifist myth of the Cold War era.

Notes

¹Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 1–2.

²Jennifer Lind, "Pacifism or Passing the Buck? Testing Theories of Japanese Security Policy," *International Security* 29, no. 1 (2004): 92–121, 95.

³Christopher P. Twomey, "Japan, a 'Circumscribed Balancer': Building on Defensive Realism to Make Predictions about East Asian Security," *Security Studies* 9, no. 4 (2004). See pp. 23–24 of the draft of this paper available at <http://www.nps.navy.mil/Faculty/ctwomey/SecStudies.pdf> (accessed July 19, 2007).

⁴James J. Orr, *The Victim as Hero: Ideologies of Peace and National Identity in Postwar Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001).

⁵Such rhetoric has existed in Japan since the 1950s. See Ichiba Junko 市場淳子, "'Yuiitsu no hibakukoku' kara 'hirakareta hibakukoku' e" 「唯一の被爆国」から「開かれた被爆国」へ [From "the only atomically bombed country" to "bombed-open country"], *Sekai* 世界 692 (2001): 89–95, 89–91.

⁶"Aija 7-ka koku seron-chōsa" アジア7ヵ国世論調査 [Seven-country Asian public opinion survey], *Yomiuri Shimbun* (Tokyo), September 4, 2006.