



## Will the Real Japan Please Stand Up

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Contemporary Japan presents something of a “black box”: although changes are clearly afoot in this economically powerful but politically diffident island nation, their nature and direction are enigmatic. Most observers see Japan moving, albeit reluctantly, toward “realism”—reengagement with international politics and acceptance of collective security responsibilities within the framework of a stronger alliance with the United States. But some discern an ominous revival of militarism and ultranationalism, claiming that the Japanese are “programmed” by their history and culture to move in this direction. Others maintain that their postwar conversion to democracy and pacifism fundamentally altered their national character, making them even today a nation of pacifists. Still others insist that Japan remains what it became during the Cold War, a mercantilist trading state bent on amassing national wealth and insulating itself from international conflicts and rivalries.<sup>1</sup>

It is useful to review where Japan is coming from. For the purposes of this essay, the story can be picked up in 1945, when the emperor’s August 15 surrender triggered a metamorphosis more sudden and profound than any in Japan’s history.<sup>2</sup> Almost overnight, the Japanese turned their backs on values they had held sacrosanct for 70 years, including the martial ethos of the feudal samurai and self-sacrificing loyalty to the emperor as the personification of the nation-state. The trauma of defeat partly explains this volte-face, but something more was involved. Surrender was not in the Japanese vocabulary. Few had ever capitulated; they

were expected to die rather than accept disgrace. When their emperor called on them to “endure the unendurable,” they obeyed, but his authority was shattered. It was as if the head of a church had told believers that violating a central tenet of their faith was permissible and indeed, required.

American occupiers set about filling the spiritual void created by the collapse of emperor-centered nationalism with “peace and democracy.” Gen. Douglas MacArthur, entrusted by Washington with rehabilitating the Japanese, conceived of his mission as turning them into a nation of democrats and pacifists who would never again threaten their neighbors. His crowning achievement was rewriting Japan’s constitution in 1947 to enshrine this goal as its new national faith. Article Nine, which he borrowed from the 1928 Kellogg-Briand Peace Pact “outlawing” war, forbade Japan to maintain a military or employ force to resolve international disputes. In MacArthur’s vision, Japan was to become the “Switzerland of the Far East,” an exemplary “peace state” which would make its way in the world—under the benevolent guidance of the United States—by holding to pacifist ideals and relying on the goodwill of its neighbors and the newly established United Nations.

Most Japanese embraced MacArthur’s peace-state ideal with an enthusiasm that took the Americans aback. It was baffling that a martial people prepared to die en masse for the emperor only a few months earlier could have become pacifists. But this conversion was less extraordinary than it appeared. The rise of a large and vocal left

whose leaders denounced the “emperor system” and championed pacifism and democracy reflected the reemergence of trends suppressed since the 1920s. For many, the acceptance of ultranationalism and militarism during the 1930s was more a matter of outward conformity than inner conviction. There was, moreover, a certain resonance between pacifists’ idealization of Japan as a beacon of peace and disarmament, and militarists’ depiction of it as the paladin of national liberation and “co-prosperity.” Even in the humiliation of defeat, Japan remained the “light of Asia,” set apart by its unique national virtues.

With the onset of the Cold War, the Americans regretted their hasty demilitarization of Japan and pressed it to rearm and join in containing the Sino-Soviet threat. Conservative nationalists were glad to oblige. Fervent anticommunists, they felt that the Peace Constitution reduced Japan to an international supplicant. They also deplored Japan’s repudiation of patriotism and the military, which they viewed as an “abnormal” situation, unparalleled elsewhere. They sought to revive patriotism, rebuild the military, and pull Japan into an anti-communist alliance with the United States. But the Left strongly opposed this agenda, seeing it as a plot to restore militarism, and insisted that the Peace Constitution required Japan to adopt “unarmed neutrality” in the Cold War. In the 1950s, leftists and nationalists squared off in bitter parliamentary confrontations that spilled into violent street demonstrations. Many wondered if the “fragile blossom” of Japanese democracy would survive.

### *The Conservative Compromise*

Moderate conservatives in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) devised a shaky compromise.<sup>3</sup> Under its terms, they accepted a U.S. security guarantee and agreed to provide bases for forward-deployed American forces. But this arrangement—formalized in the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty of

1952—was as far as they were willing to go. They interpreted Japan’s Peace Constitution as ruling out rebuilding the military or participating in collective security, including even U.N. peacekeeping. They construed Article Nine as permitting the right of self-defense and the maintenance of a “self-defense force” (SDF). However, they viewed the SDF as essentially a “paramilitary” force that had only one mission: repelling an attack on Japanese territory. They consequently limited it to defensive weaponry, prohibited its overseas deployment, and restricted its cooperation with U.S. forces. They also forbade use of military titles and ranks, and put the force on a par with the national police, placing it under the supervision of a government agency rather than a full-fledged ministry.

Selling this compromise proved difficult. Nationalists in the LDP balked at Japan’s lopsided dependence on the United States and regarded the SDF as a pale imitation of a true military. But moderates convinced them it was the best that could be achieved, and they reluctantly fell into line. The Left, spearheaded by the Japan Socialist Party (JSP), did not. It denounced the SDF and the Security Treaty as unconstitutional and continued to press for unarmed neutrality in the Diet and through mass demonstrations. The problem for the LDP’s moderate leadership thus became deflating the Left’s popular appeal. One tack was to co-opt its pacifist agenda. In the 1960s and 1970s, LDP prime ministers presented themselves as champions of world peace and disarmament by banning arms exports, capping Japan’s defense spending at 1 percent of GNP, and forswearing nuclear weapons. Under the rubric of “U.N.-centered diplomacy,” they also made Japan a major financial contributor to, and ardent backer of, the United Nations.

A second tactic employed by the LDP to undercut the Left was diverting attention from divisive security issues to the benefits of economic growth. This campaign got

underway in the early 1960s with the LDP's "income doubling" plan, and proved highly successful. The Japanese immersed themselves in American-style consumerism, underwritten by a booming economy and LDP policies that ensured the equitable distribution of national wealth. The hot-button issues of the 1950s—upholding peace and democracy, and preventing the revival of militarism and ultranationalism—faded from public consciousness. The horizons of newly affluent Japanese narrowed to home, family, workplace, and local community. What now mattered was getting ahead in company hierarchies, enhancing a rising standard of living, and addressing such quality-of-life concerns as environmental pollution, social welfare, and overcrowding.

Another pillar of the LDP's strategy was insulating Japan from international politics. Under the LDP, Japan sat out the Cold War as a "conscientious objector," leaving the heavy lifting to the Americans and their allies. Few Japanese were aware of an "alliance" with the United States, and the term itself was avoided. (When a prime minister used it in 1981, the ensuing uproar led to the resignation of his foreign minister.) In the 1960s and 1970s, the idea that Japan might be obliged to provide more than diplomatic support to U.S. policies was not seriously considered. Rather, debate centered on whether even this level of support was consistent with Japan's pacifist and neutralist ideals. The LDP equivocated. While assuring Washington of its loyalty and deferring to the United States on matters of Cold War strategy, it pursued "omnidirectional diplomacy" which involved courting any and all regimes willing to do business with Japan on a mutually profitable basis.

A fourth element of the LDP's Cold War system was mercantilism—the amassing of national wealth through protectionism at home and the aggressive pursuit of markets and raw materials abroad. Postwar Japan's evolution into a mercantilist trading state was a natural development, requiring

merely the reprogramming of its bureaucratically guided war economy for peacetime production. Under the salubrious conditions afforded by a Pax Americana, and U.S. military procurement during the Korean and Vietnam wars, Japan underwent a high-growth "economic miracle," becoming in the 1970s an economic superpower. The Japanese had double cause for celebration: not only had MacArthur's peace-state vision largely been realized, but Japan had arisen, phoenix-like, from the ashes of defeat to reestablish itself as "Asia's economic giant." They consequently began to see themselves both as leaders in the cause of peace and disarmament, and as mentors of Asia's economic development.

#### *Stirrings of Change*

By 1980, the LDP had succeeded in selling its blend of pacifism, consumerism, isolationism, and mercantilism to the Japanese people. This became Japan's "new orthodoxy" and was supported by a broad national consensus. The Left's influence waned as most Japanese came to see its continued opposition to the SDF and the Security Treaty as quixotic and anachronistic. The Socialists ceased to be a serious contender, shifting to the role of "watchdog" and de facto collaborator of the LDP, which seemed destined to the permanent ruling party. Conservative nationalists, on the other hand, remained unreconciled. They chafed at what they saw as Japan's "abnormal" rejection of patriotism, low-profile diplomatic posture, and overdependence on the United States for its security. But they were a minority, overshadowed by moderates who formed the party's mainstream and who were determined to maintain the policies that had brought Japan unity, affluence, respect, and influence.

Still, even as Japan's new orthodoxy became established, it began to fray at the edges.<sup>4</sup> In the 1980s, a new mood of national pride and assertiveness manifested itself in the popular celebration of "Japan as

Number One,” the title of a 1979 American book that became a runaway best-seller in Japan. This genre of literature argued that Japan’s economic success stemmed from unique values and institutions, such as business-government collaboration and “lifetime employment,” that were superior to Western values, including those of its erstwhile American patron. The popularity of these ideas mirrored generational change. The Japanese who had personally experienced war, defeat, and occupation were giving way to a younger generation reared in the increasingly prosperous and confident postwar setting. While this new generation was disinclined to abandon pacifism, it was less willing to defer to foreign criticism, and more receptive to the notion of a “strong Japan.”

The rightward tilt provided an opening for long-sidelined nationalist politicians. The most important of these was Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone (1982–87), the first avowedly conservative nationalist leader since 1960. His goal was to nudge Japan toward “normalcy” in the framework of a stronger partnership with the United States. His agenda included promoting patriotism, bolstering U.S.-Japan military cooperation, and strengthening the SDF. In addition to publicly affirming the American “alliance,” he called for raising Japan’s cap on defense spending, modifying its arms export ban to permit sharing military technology with the United States, and reinterpreting the “self-defense only” doctrine to enable the SDF to assume expanded patrol responsibilities around Japan. As part of his campaign to revive patriotism, Nakasone became in 1985 the first postwar prime minister to officially pay his respects at Yasukuni Shrine, the national memorial to Japan’s war dead, on the August 15 anniversary of the end of the Pacific War. Nakasone was a favorite of the Reagan administration as well as the Japanese people. He played to heightened fears of a Soviet threat, augmented by the invasion of Afghanistan, the buildup of the Soviet

Pacific Fleet, and the 1983 Soviet shoot-down of an off-course South Korean airliner near Sakhalin Island. A onetime officer in the Imperial Navy, Nakasone cut a dashing figure and had a flair for public relations that set him apart from most of his bland, self-effacing predecessors. Even Japanese who disagreed with his policies admired him as a leader who stood tall and seemed to be respected as an equal by the U.S. president and other world leaders. But Nakasone encountered resistance from the LDP mainstream and the Socialists, which combined to water down his program. His push to make Japan a “normal country” and strengthen the American alliance consequently made little headway. The Japanese were no more willing to shoulder collective security burdens at the end of his tenure than at its beginning.

Other nationalists inspired more alarm than Nakasone among those wary of a possible revival of Japanese militarism. Right-wing extremists, typified by the flamboyant writer Shintaro Ishihara, gained notoriety by extolling Japan’s “liberationist” war aims and denying atrocities such as the infamous 1937 Rape of Nanking. Japan, they proclaimed, had no need to apologize for its past and much to be proud of. Rightists also benefited from a popular backlash against American criticism of Japan’s “free riding” on defense and “unfair trading practices.” Ishihara, for example, coauthored a best-selling 1989 tract, *The Japan That Can Say No*, in which he called on Japan to use its prowess to bring the United States to heel. Public support for the historical revisionism and the “Gaullism” of rightists like Ishihara was limited, but widespread media coverage of their pronouncements magnified their influence.

#### *Strains in the Alliance*

As the Cold War waned, the LDP faced a more serious problem than domestic rightists: the possibility that the United States might no longer be willing to underwrite

Japan's security under the bases-for-protection formula that served as the cornerstone of the Security Treaty.<sup>5</sup> American frustration grew during the 1980s, inflamed by trade disputes. The LDP tolerated Nakasone's rhetorical support of the alliance in hopes of mollifying Washington. By the end of the decade, however, the efficacy of rhetoric and token initiatives was wearing thin. U.S.-Japan trade friction escalated over what Americans saw as Japan's "structural impediments" to their imports, its steamrolling of their high-tech industries, and its campaign to "buy up" America. As the collapse of the Soviet Union reduced the value of Japanese bases, American commentators warned that Japan was replacing it as a new peer competitor and threat to U.S. interests in East Asia.

The Japanese were slow to react to eroding American patience, in part because some hoped that the end of the Cold War might render the alliance superfluous. In the 1990–91 Persian Gulf crisis, they rebuffed U.S. requests for a token SDF contingent, citing their conscientious objector position. But this no longer placated Congress or the American public, irritated by the prospect of U.S. troops fighting to safeguard Japan's oil lifeline. (The Bush administration quashed a congressional threat to withdraw U.S. troops from Japan but used this threat to pressure Tokyo to ante up \$13 billion to help cover the costs of the Gulf conflict.) The alliance underwent a less publicized "near death" experience during the 1993–94 North Korean nuclear crisis, when Washington again found Japan unwilling to deploy the SDF. However, this crisis was resolved before it became a shooting conflict that might have exposed the alliance's essential hollowness.

In the mid-1990s, Japan's political elite reluctantly accepted the need to bolster the alliance by making a larger military contribution. Failing to do so could have forced Japan to fend for itself in what Japanese now saw as the "rough neighborhood" of

Northeast Asia. Few were willing to go it alone against an unfriendly China, a suspicious South Korea, an estranged Russia, and a belligerent North Korea. Nor was there much confidence in emerging multilateral security cooperation as represented by the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) Regional Forum (ARF). By the same token, there was scant domestic support for entering into the sort of alliance with the United States that could involve Japan in distant military conflicts or require it to engage in combat. The notion that the Japanese were "closet militarists"—a myth especially favored by Chinese and Koreans—was belied by the national furor provoked by the killing of several Japanese peacekeepers in Cambodia during Japan's first hesitant participation in U.N. peacekeeping operations in 1993.

Japan's pragmatic solution was to agree in 1996 to permit noncombatant logistical support to American forces in military contingencies "near Japan"—presumably including the Korean peninsula and the Taiwan Strait, although this was not spelled out. This move placated Americans who felt that Japan was not pulling its weight. Although critics noted that this kept the SDF out of harm's way, it was for Japan nevertheless a controversial shift away from pacifist orthodoxy. The LDP, back in power after a three-year hiatus, sold it domestically as a mere revision of the SDF's self-defense guidelines. In fact, it represented a step toward the assumption of collective security responsibilities. But presenting it as such would have posed nettlesome constitutional issues and vexed the pacifists. Despite the collapse of the Socialists, sentiment in favor of the status quo remained too strong in the LDP and in opposition parties to make acknowledgment of Japan's tilt away from pacifist isolationism politically feasible.

#### *External Threat Perceptions*

In the late 1990s, Japanese attitudes on defense and foreign policy hardened.<sup>6</sup> The

main driver was rising threat perceptions of North Korea and China. Pyongyang's launching of a missile over Japan in 1998 brought home to the Japanese for the first time since 1945 their vulnerability to external attack. Subsequent incursions into Japanese waters by North Korean "spy boats"—rumored to be running drugs and kidnapping unwary Japanese—intensified the sense of imminent threat. SDF air and sea units went into action against these boats, first firing warning shots, then sinking one ship in battle, killing the North Korean crew while sustaining Japanese casualties. People flocked to view the remains of this craft, which was put on public display in Tokyo. Pacifist taboos against combat seemed to have fallen, at least in the context of self-defense against egregiously aggressive actions by what most Japanese saw as a hostile "rogue state."

Japanese perceptions of China were more complex. In the 1980s, they had hoped to construct a "special relationship" of friendship and cooperation with the People's Republic based on willingness to support China's economic modernization with large infusions of official development assistance, mainly soft loans. They assumed that this aid would override lingering Chinese bitterness over Japan's pre-1945 aggression. Until the early 1990s, Deng Xiaoping's relatively cordial attitude suggested this might be the case. In the mid-1990s, however, Beijing launched a concerted campaign against what it claimed was the revival of Japanese militarism and ultranationalism. The Chinese found evidence for this claim in the provocative statements of rightists like Ishihara, visits to Yasukuni Shrine by senior officials, the "whitewashing" of prewar Japanese aggression in school textbooks together with Japan's reluctance to compensate its surviving wartime victims, and the steady enhancement of the SDF's capabilities.

Many Japanese were dismayed and angered by this campaign. They had been apologizing for the war for decades, and felt

that they had made amends through generous economic assistance. In light of their commitment to democracy and pacifism, moreover, they regarded China's depiction of them as revanchists as disingenuous. Beijing, it seemed, had ulterior motives in playing the "guilt card," including catering to domestic anti-Japanese sentiment, gaining leverage on bilateral issues, and isolating Japan in Asia—although South Korea was the only East Asian country in which the Chinese campaign had much resonance. Japanese "apology fatigue" set in. As in the earlier reaction against American hectoring on trade and defense issues, rightists put themselves in the forefront of demands that Japan stand firm in the face of foreign bullying. Support for apologies declined, as did willingness to accommodate Chinese and Korean protests against official visits to Yasukuni Shrine and offending textbooks.

By the mid-1990s, the Japanese were also apprehensive about China's expansive territorial claims. They were disconcerted by Chinese nuclear testing and the buildup of the People's Liberation Army's missile and naval projection capabilities. More worrisome was China's resort to demonstrations of military force in the 1996 Taiwan Strait crisis and to skirmishing in the disputed Spratly Islands in the South China Sea—areas that sit astride the vital sea lanes linking Japan to Southeast Asia and points west. Against this background, many Japanese were rattled by Beijing's revival of its long dormant claim to the Senkaku Islands and unwillingness to accept Japan's demarcation of its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the East China Sea. Their concerns grew as the Chinese stepped up naval intelligence-gathering probes around Japan and undertook exploratory oil and gas drilling operations within its claimed economic zone.

The 1997–98 East Asian financial crisis and the simultaneous deepening of Japan's recession administered the coup de grâce to hopes for a special relationship with China. These hopes were premised on an economi-

cally strong Japan mentoring a backward China. Now, however, Japan and China “traded places.” Japan’s confidence in its ability to lead Asia dimmed, while the Chinese began to see themselves in this role. China emerged a winner from the financial crisis. Its economy surged at double-digit growth rates, and Beijing earned accolades for not aggravating its neighbors by devaluing its currency. The Japanese, preoccupied by domestic reform, watched nervously as China put itself in the van of post-crisis moves to promote East Asian economic regionalism through the “ASEAN + 3 [China, Japan, and South Korea]” process. ASEAN shifted its focus from Japan to China by, for example, concluding an agreement with Beijing to form an ASEAN-China free trade area.

Confronted by a belligerent North Korea and an obstreperous China, Japan sought to bolster its ties with Russia and South Korea. Tokyo launched a diplomatic initiative to try to resolve its long-standing territorial dispute with Moscow over the southern Kurile Islands. Russian president Boris Yeltsin was interested, but the initiative foundered in 1998 on the intransigence of both Russian and Japanese nationalists. (The former refused any concession on Russian sovereignty, while the latter insisted on it as a precondition for a peace treaty and economic aid.) Japan had more success with South Korean president Kim Dae Jung, who sought Japanese support for his North Korean “Sunshine Policy” and was willing to offer a quid pro quo. Under his 1998 accord with Tokyo on “history issues,” Kim agreed to rein in criticism of Japan and lift the South Korean ban on Japanese cultural imports in return for a written apology. But Korean antipathy and suspicion toward Japan were too deep-rooted to make this gesture more than a temporary palliative.

### *Japan Changes Course*

The accession of Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi in 2001 brought to power a popu-

lar nationalist in the Nakasone mold, intent on picking up where the latter had left off in making Japan a normal country. He benefited from the fact that the Japanese were more receptive to this course than they had been ten, or even five, years earlier. The postwar generation was now firmly in charge and inclined toward change. Many saw Japan as adrift, beset by intractable economic problems, bullied on territorial and history issues, and menaced by missiles and spy boats. Despite burgeoning Sino-Japanese trade—which offered hope of salvaging some degree of cooperation with Beijing—economic diplomacy seemed to have reached a dead end. Japan had failed to forge a special relationship with China, maintain its partnership with ASEAN, break the Kuriles impasse with Russia, effect a genuine rapprochement with South Korea, prevent India and Pakistan from going nuclear, or achieve its goal of securing a U.N. Security Council seat.<sup>7</sup>

Koizumi’s prescription for Japan’s malaise involved a heavy dose of Nakasone-style normalcy—heightened patriotism, a closer American alliance, and a less constrained SDF—aimed at creating a “strong Japan.” He implemented this agenda more forcefully than any of his predecessors, including Nakasone himself. Koizumi refused, for example, to back down in the face of Chinese and Korean protests against official visits to Yasukuni Shrine and against objectionable textbooks. He thus made it clear that Japan, not they, would henceforth decide the contents of its textbooks and how Japan respects its war dead. Koizumi’s stand drew considerable support, especially among rightists. But those who backed him did so less because they agreed with right-wing war apologists than because he stood up against perceived foreign meddling. He also played to reviving state-centered patriotism as reflected in resolutions encouraging the singing of the national anthem and displaying the flag.

Koizumi's moves to bolster the American alliance—participation in U.S. missile defense plans, and SDF deployments in support of coalition operations in Afghanistan and Iraq—went beyond anything contemplated by his predecessors and would have been politically impossible only a few years earlier. Japan, it seemed, had “crossed the Rubicon” toward acceptance of collective security responsibilities.<sup>8</sup> It did so, moreover, on its own initiative rather than in response to Washington's prodding or fear of American abandonment. Koizumi became the first prime minister to preside over a national consensus that favored standing alongside the United States in facing down aggressors. The war on terrorism precipitated this shift. Japan, after all, had a brush in 1995 with homegrown terrorists bent on inflicting an apocalypse of mass murder. More fundamentally, however, the Japanese were reacting to their threatening environment, lack of reliable friends, and the bankruptcy of economic diplomacy.

The third front of Koizumi's drive toward normalcy—turning the SDF into a “real military”—entailed building its capabilities and lifting legal and political constraints on its deployment. During the Cold War, the SDF evolved into a formidable fighting force armed with state-of-the-art equipment. But it remained configured for homeland defense and saddled with restrictions unimaginable in a “normal” military, such as the need to seek parliamentary authorization for any use of force. Some of these restrictions were loosened in the 1990s as Japan began to participate in U.N. peacekeeping operations and revised its defense guidelines to permit logistical support to U.S. forces in regional military conflicts. But Koizumi stepped up the pace of reform, securing approval of legislation enabling the SDF to react in emergencies, increasing the authority of the cabinet to order it into action, and widening the range of circumstances in which it could employ force. Parliament also agreed to provide it

with aerial refueling and other force-projection capabilities.

Today, a plausible case could be made that Japan has become a normal country, and one of Washington's staunchest allies. But it has not jettisoned its pacifist heritage. As much as Koizumi talked about the need to cast off pacifist constraints, he continued to respect them. His government at no point publicly acknowledged that it had embraced collective security responsibilities, or expressed a readiness to put the SDF in situations where it might have to engage in combat. Nor did it seriously challenge other pillars of pacifist orthodoxy, including the 1 percent of GNP cap on defense spending, the ban on arms exports, and Japan's non-nuclear principles. Moreover, Koizumi's push to make the SDF a normal military fell well short of this goal. The SDF remained paramilitary in form, still denied the status and legitimacy of a full-fledged military and subject to unusual restrictions, such as the prohibition of its participation in combat-related exercises with non-U.S. militaries.

### *Conflicting Interpretations*

Why should a “normalizing” Japan cling to pacifist ideals and taboos? Perhaps deception is involved. For those who believe that the Japanese are predisposed toward militarism and ultranationalism, their proclaimed pacifism is window dressing designed to conceal reviving aggressiveness. Apology fatigue, the SDF's buildup, and the menacing rhetoric of rightists seem to support this diagnosis. However, the continued attachment of many Japanese to the postwar peace-state ideal and Koizumi's inability to jettison pacifist constraints belie the “reviving militarism” interpretation. Considered in comparative perspective, the Japanese are unusual for their relative indifference to state-centered patriotism and their aversion to military force. Popular support for driving off North Korean spy boats and renewed respect for the national anthem and the flag may reflect a slow erosion of this mind-set, but the im-



age of contemporary Japan as a militarist Mr. Hyde reemerging from a pacifist Dr. Jekyll is clearly overdrawn.

Another, somewhat more plausible explanation holds that normalcy, not pacifism, is the real smokescreen. According to this view, Japanese elites are merely feigning willingness to step up to the plate on military burden sharing to placate Washington while they proceed with business as usual—pursuing mercantilist policies in the framework of omnidirectional diplomacy.<sup>9</sup> This interpretation accurately describes Japan's posture during the Cold War. Even today, many Japanese, especially the business community and economic bureaucracy, favor an economics-first approach and regard international politics as an unwelcome distraction. But the "business as usual" interpretation overlooks post-Cold War changes in the way Japanese see themselves in relation to the world. As noted above, they are less confident of the stability of the American alliance, the efficacy of economic diplomacy, and the goodwill of their neighbors. Moreover, the rise of a strong and unfriendly China confronts them for the first time in their modern history with the disconcerting prospect of being eclipsed by an Asian rival.

Considered from the "reluctant realism" perspective, the Japanese are in the throes of emerging from their Cold War pacifist-isolationist "cocoon" and confronting the realities of international power politics.<sup>10</sup> According to this interpretation, they are betwixt and between—loathe to leave the comfort and safety of pacifism, but impelled to do so by the logic of their less predictable and benign environment. This situation is, however, assumed to be temporary. Normalizers like Koizumi, aided by the fading of the postwar generation and the more assertive and nationalistic attitudes of younger Japanese, will soon dismantle the crumbling edifice of pacifism through de facto or de jure revision of Article Nine. Public opinion seems to favor this course and a pro-revision consensus is forming. But given a moribund

Left, the menacing environment, and enthusiastic cheerleading by Washington, one must ask why Japan has not moved faster and further toward normalcy than it has. Nor is it obvious that it will continue to move in this direction, absent compelling reasons to do so.

A fourth, "conscientious objector" interpretation starts from the proposition that most Japanese are still fundamentally pacifists. Viewed from this angle, support for Koizumi's moves toward closer military and strategic cooperation with the United States stems less from a reluctant shift to a realist world view than from a desire to try to adapt pacifist ideals to a changing, less hospitable international environment. Passive onlookers of the Cold War, the Japanese are now the equivalent of rear echelon ambulance drivers in the American alliance. But the notion that they may soon take their place as America's "Britain of the Far East" is, in this view, improbable. The conscientious objector perspective highlights what the reluctant realism school fails to address—the apparent vitality and adaptability of Japanese pacifism. It also casts doubt on the assumption that Japan is moving in a realist trajectory, which will inevitably lead to its full acceptance of normal collective security responsibilities, including a willingness to deploy the SDF in overseas combat situations.

#### *"Change within Continuity"*

Where, then, is Japan headed? History offers possible clues. Viewed in long-term perspective, the Japanese reveal a seeming propensity for sudden course reversals. Examples include their embrace of all-out westernization in the 1870s, their lurch toward militarism and ultranationalism in the 1930s, and their abrupt postwar conversion to democracy and pacifism. However, these national volte-faces obscure an equally striking tendency toward incremental "change within continuity."<sup>11</sup> Japan's history is replete with instances in which obsolete and

even counterproductive institutions and policies survive intact or are only gradually modified. The Japanese are not unique in this respect but their conservatism is unusual, perhaps rooted in their insularity, respect for tradition, and preoccupation with consensus. When they have embraced radical change, as in the cases cited above, the drivers were external crises—their helplessness before the nineteenth-century West, the effects of the Great Depression and threatened loss of their Manchurian “lifeline,” and their decisive defeat in the Pacific War.

Considered from the latter standpoint, nothing short of a comparable external crisis is likely to shake the Japanese out of their historically ingrained preference for cautious and incremental change. One such crisis that might have this effect is the breakdown of the American alliance, which more than anything else—including Japan’s residual postwar pacifism—underpins its attachment to the status quo and reluctance to break with the past. The loss of their U.S. protector would force the Japanese to confront the military dimension of their external security, which they have not had to do in a serious way since 1945. If a Japan bereft of its American security guarantee were to see itself threatened by a hostile combination of neighbors centered on a resurgent and belligerent China, the reviving militarism hypothesis could become more plausible than it seems today. Indeed, one can easily imagine a scenario in which a rightward tilt of its electorate puts in power ultranationalists bent on playing the military card to reassert Japan’s regional dominance. Given Japanese economic and technological capabilities, this has to be China’s, and indeed all of East Asia’s, nightmare scenario.

If the American alliance remains strong—as seems probable in the near term—full-scale “remilitarization” and engagement in the rough-and-tumble of international power politics are unlikely to hold much appeal for the majority of Japanese. Whether or not they remain dyed-in-the-wool pacifists as

the conscientious objector hypothesis suggests, there is no compelling reason for them to embark on this course. Doing so, moreover, would mean assuming novel burdens and risks that run counter to their innate conservatism. Like the institutions of “Japan Inc.,” their Cold War pacifist isolationism is dysfunctional in the more fluid and unpredictable conditions of the post-Cold War world, including the higher expectations of their U.S. ally. Rather than abandon that link, however, their preferred approach is to gradually adapt it to changed conditions. Koizumi has had considerable success in pushing this process toward political-military normalcy, largely because he has been willing to accept compromises and half-measures. But the inevitable result is a high level of ambiguity regarding Japan’s intentions, not least among Japanese themselves. Although they have so far been spared the necessity to make hard choices, a regional military crisis, which is no longer unthinkable, could change this situation, forcing the real Japan to stand up. ●

## Notes

1. For a review of the literature, see Michael J. Green, “State of the Field Report: Research on Japanese Security Policy,” *AccessAsia Review*, vol. 2 (September 1998), pp. 5–39.
2. John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: Norton, 1999).
3. John W. Dower, “Peace and Democracy in Two Systems: External Policy and Internal Conflict,” in *Postwar Japan as History*, ed. Andrew Gordon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 3–33.
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