

Japan's Postwar Foreign Policy: From Free-Riding to Self-Determination

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INTRODUCTION

Since the end of World War II, Japan has pursued a remarkably pacifistic foreign policy. After the devastation of the war, Japan sought to benefit from its enforced disarmament by free-riding on U.S. security guarantees. However, the waning and end of the Cold War ushered in a changed security landscape, and the U.S. has steadily pressured Japan to assume more responsibility for its own defense. From a game theory perspective, Japan's long-standing positive-sum game of relying on U.S. military protection is giving way to a more complex game, one in which Japan is beginning to assume responsibility for its own security.

FREE-RIDING ON DEFENSE: THE YOSHIDA DOCTRINE

Since 1945, Japan's foreign policy has largely been defined in terms of its relationship with the United States. World War II left Japan a vanquished and shattered nation, and the Japanese people became, by and large, profoundly pacifistic as a result. For its part, the United States was determined to ensure that Japanese militarism never returned. Americans wrote a new constitution for Japan, which the Japanese signed in 1947. Under Article 9 of this constitution, "The Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as a means of settling international disputes" (Mizokami, 2012). Accordingly, Japan is forbidden a military, although it does maintain the so-called Self-Defense Force (SDF). By law, the budget for the SDF cannot exceed one percent of GDP (Cooney, 2015).

Since Japan was not allowed to have a military, the United States had to be prepared to defend it. Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida soon discovered that this could be turned to Japan's favor. The fact that Japan could not defend itself meant that the United States was tasked with the burden of defending it—which meant that Japan did not have to defend itself, which meant Japan could spare itself the cost of doing so. Free of any obligation to spend on a costly military, Japan could focus its efforts on recovering from the ravages of World War II, again aided substantially by America (Cooney, 2015). Intriguingly, it has even been suggested that Article 9 is of Japanese origins, and reflects an authentic desire on the part of Japanese policymakers to renounce war. In essence, Japan could free-ride on American military power, in

return for allowing the United States access to Japanese soil, territorial waters, and airspace. Since the United States did not want a resurgent Japan in any case, the aims of the two countries were rather neatly aligned (Cooney, 2015).

Following this so-called Yoshida Doctrine, Japan signed the United States-Japan Security Treaty in 1952, and later revised it in 1960. To this day, the United States-Japan Security Treaty is Japan's only formal military alliance (Cooney, 2015). The two versions are very different: under the 1952 version, the United States was granted *carte blanche* military access to Japan, in exchange for the responsibility of defending Japan, chiefly from communists. The 1960 version is more balanced, and requires consultation between the two nations. While the two versions of the treaty are very different, as a whole the treaty is unique among all bilateral treaties in that it assigns very different responsibilities to each signatory. Under the terms of the treaty, Japan's responsibilities consist chiefly of providing the U.S. with access to its territory, so that the U.S. can provide for "maintenance of the peace and security of the Far East" (Mizokami, 2012). The United States is obligated to defend Japan, but Japan is not obligated to defend the U.S. or any of its possessions (Mizokami, 2012).

In the Pacific Rim, the United States-Japan Security Treaty has a significance arguably comparable to NATO. By design, the Treaty functions to alleviate fears that Japan will rearm itself. Many of the countries in the surrounding area, including South Korea, China, Taiwan, and much of Southeast Asia, were at least partially occupied by Japan during or even before World War II, and the specter of Japanese militarism and imperialism in the Asia-Pacific region has cast a very long shadow (Cooney, 2015). Of course, as seen, the experience of World War II also made Japan an extremely pacifistic nation, averse to militarism and imperialism.

No discussion of the postwar U.S.-Japan relationship would be complete without some consideration of the profoundly important economic angle. While Japan had modernized to a considerable degree since the Meiji Restoration of 1868, World War II devastated the Japanese economy. The United States played an important role in facilitating Japanese recovery, cultivating bilateral economic relationships and reconstruction by allowing Japan access to its markets (Hook, Gilson, Hughes, & Dobson, 2005).

While the U.S. never intended for Japan to be anything more than a second-rate economic power, the goal was to make it a bulwark against communism. The United States absorbed Japanese exports, facilitating a precipitous economic recovery (Hook et al., 2005). Over time this would lead to a tremendous trade surplus for Japan, which in 2003 totaled \$7 billion. Thanks to the economic interdependence promoted by this relationship, a number of Japanese corporations joined the American business landscape. This relationship has been such an economic success that it has turned Japan into something of a competitor with the United States, leading to periodic strains in the U.S.-Japan relationship (Hook et al., 2005).

From a game theory standpoint, then, Japan under the Yoshida Doctrine played a positive-sum game with the United States—at least up to a point. By adopting a bandwagon strategy with regard to the American occupation, Japan was able to take advantage of the United States' willingness to guarantee its security. This was a positive-sum game because it also gave the United States access to Japanese territory, allowing it to anchor itself to the far side of the Pacific and preserve a vital gateway to Asia. The U.S. could, and did, use its military access to Japan as a forward base of operations during both the Korean and Vietnam wars. The Japanese willingness to allow the U.S. to utilize Japan as a springboard gave the U.S. offensive capabilities it would probably not have had otherwise (Ahr, 2014; Mizokami, 2012).

CONTESTING YOSHIDA: AMERICAN PRESSURE AND JAPANESE REARMAMENT

The positive-sum game between the United States and Japan was, for a time, a signal feat of postwar diplomacy. The United States and the world did not want a rearmed Japan; Japan offered them a pacifistic Japan. In return, Japan gained the freedom to rebuild itself with minimal investment in its own defense. However, the asymmetry of this relationship between the U.S. and Japan gradually created tensions that have grown over the course of decades, tensions that are more relevant than ever before for making sense of the contemporary relationship between the two countries.

Ironically, the United States, post-war occupier and guarantor of Japan's security during the Cold War, also drove Japan to undertake limited, but still significant, rearmament during the Cold War. As the worldwide rivalry with the Soviet Union and its many proxies continued to impose an increasing strain on the resources of the United States, American policymakers expected Japan to shoulder more of the burden of defending itself. There is even a term for this phenomenon, *gaiatsu*,

meaning “pressure from the outside” (Cooney, 2015). By 1990, Japan had the world's third-largest defense budget, coming in behind only the Soviet Union and of course the United States. While the country was still bound by law to spend no more than one percent of GDP on defense, the combination of precipitous economic growth and *gaiatsu* meant that Japan had a great deal of money to spend on its SDF, and—thanks to outside, American pressure—the incentives to do so (Cooney, 2015).

Japan's first major post-Cold War security test was the Gulf War of 1990-1991, a conflict for which Japan was ill-prepared. Japan was not able to react in time with a credible response, either financial or military. Overall, Japan ended up contributing \$1.4 billion in financial assistance to the war effort, but this contribution was little recognized or appreciated by the other nations engaged in the Gulf War (Togo, 2010). The result was a profound sense of bitterness and defeat in Japan. Indeed, in Japan the war is still seen as a Japanese defeat.

As a result of the events of 1991, in 1992-1993 reformist politicians broke with the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to create new parties, notably the Japan New Party, the Sakigake (Harbinger) Party, and the Japan Renewal Party (Togo, 2010). The LDP briefly lost power from 1993-1994, only reclaiming power by forming a coalition with the Japan Socialist Party under new Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama. Over the course of the 1990s, these electoral shifts helped to trigger the creation of a new approach toward security, one in which Japan would play a more active role in its own security. But while traditional passive pacifism was losing ground, Japan was still pacifist enough for these proposals to include a strong emphasis on multilateral cooperation (Togo, 2010).

Overall progress has been slow, however. While the 1990s saw a revisiting of the Japan U.S. security relationship, with a larger role recognized for the SDF, there is a wide-ranging consensus that contemporary Japan needs to assume more responsibility for its own defense. The argument has been made that the United States-Japan Security Treaty has had the effect of capping Japan's political maturation by separating the domain of its responsibilities from its interests (Mizokami, 2012). In essence, Japan is still not truly responsible for its own defense. While it finances many of the American forces based on its soil, Japan can still rely on the U.S. as the guarantor and architect of its security (Mizokami, 2012).

In December of 2013, Japan took a significant step forward in the direction of assuming more responsibility for its own security, with the passage of a wide-ranging package of defense and security reforms (Miller, 2014). Japan now has its own National

Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG), a national security council built on U.S. lines, and more progress on defining the role of the SDF in Japanese security. The ramifications for Japan's neighbors vary, but some of their reactions point to continued tensions in the Asia-Pacific region. More broadly, however, the new directions in Japanese foreign policy signal a new phase in Japan's long post-Cold War turn toward greater engagement with its Asian neighbors.

JAPAN'S TURN TOWARD ASIA

Japan is geographically a part of East Asia, of course, but the fact that consists of a series of islands at a significant distance from the mainland has long served as something of a buffer from developments elsewhere in the region. Indeed, a grand theme in Japanese history would seem to be periods of greater isolation and divergence punctuated with periods of closer cultural contacts with foreign powers and civilizations. Much of the Cold War arguably constitutes such a period, as Japan had very limited contacts with its near neighbors in Northeast Asia, namely the People's Republic of China, the Soviet Union, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) (Grimes, 2004). Unlike previous such periods, Japan was relying on profound and deepening contacts with the United States.

Late in the Cold War, however, the tide began to turn. Japan once more engaged with its East Asian neighbors. Taiwan, the Republic of China, and the Republic of Korea, South Korea, were key early economic partners. Japan was not an important exporter of capital during the 1950s and 1960s, but the growth of the Japanese economy in the 1970s and 1980s led to a rise in foreign direct investment (FDI), and Taiwan and South Korea were significant early recipients. Like Japan, Taiwan and South Korea also underwent impressive economic booms in the context of strong diplomatic, security, and economic ties with the United States, ultimately graduating from the ranks of countries receiving Japanese aid (Grimes, 2004).

The 1980s also saw the rise of China, and a new phase in Japan-China relations. As in Taiwan and South Korea, Japan began to establish productive economic and diplomatic ties with China, providing foreign direct investment (Grimes, 2004). By this time, Japanese aid was focused on investment in a variety of economically productive projects, including harbors, power plants, telecommunications infrastructure, and the like. The relationship has not been without friction: Japan's own policies of protecting its exports have led it to block many imports from China, except for those coming from local branches of Japanese companies. Still despite the long-

standing animosity between Japan and China, their economies have become increasingly interdependent. China is now the single biggest recipient of Japanese development aid (Grimes, 2004).

At the same time, the rise of China has posed security challenges for Japan as well, and Tokyo's own efforts to establish an independent security policy have exacerbated frictions with Beijing. Japanese security and strategy planners are already criticizing China for its hawkishness in a variety of disputes over small islands and reefs in the East and South China Seas. Japan and China contest possession of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea, and China is locked in a number of disputes over other island groups with the Philippines, Vietnam, and other countries. The Senkaku Islands are now held by Japan, but China has displayed a willingness to engage in provocative brinkmanship (Miller, 2014; Smith, 2015).

Japanese engagement with Southeast Asia has followed somewhat similar lines to the earlier pattern of engagement with South Korea and Taiwan. After the war, Japan paid out reparations to a number of the Southeast Asian nations it had devastated, disbursing \$1,152 million (Sudo, 2002). This in turn became something of a beachhead for Japan to establish economic involvement in the region. Even the reparations payments themselves are widely agreed to have benefited Japan much more than they benefited the recipient nations, because most of them came in the form of commodity and service grants. This allowed Japan to develop strong export markets even as it technically made amends in the region. Japan also granted \$737 million in loans, and extended special quasi-reparations, economic and technical cooperation, to countries who had waived their right to demand reparations (Sudo, 2002).

Since the end of the Vietnam War, Japan's foreign policy in Southeast Asia has centered on engaging the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), particularly the six key members Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand (Sudo, 2002). Japan played an important role in multilateral initiatives to reconstruct Cambodia after the devastating 1978-1991 conflict. In 1992, Tokyo hosted an international conference on Cambodian reconstruction, which raised \$880 million and established an official committee to coordinate the reconstruction efforts. Later that year, the SDF was deployed to Cambodia as part of the UN peace process, the first time Japanese forces had participated in such an action since the end of World War II (Sudo, 2002).

CONCLUSION

Japan is beginning to assume responsibility for its own security once more, after decades of relying on the United States to protect it. The world in which the United States-Japan Security Treaty was signed no longer exists. The menace of communism is no more, and the U.S. has long pressured Japan to assume more responsibility for its own defense. Japan's long decades of free-riding on U.S. protection are waning. From a game theory standpoint, Japan is playing a more complex game, arming and preparing itself against brinkmanship with China even as it confronts a far more complex and ambiguous strategic landscape in the 21st century.

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