

Japan's Security Renaissance: Evolution or Revolution?

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Change has been the dominant theme in Japan for the last decade, and none is more profound than the transformation in Japan's security policy. The seemingly immovable Yoshida doctrine is crumbling under the Koizumi administration's efforts to beef up the nation's security in response to the North Korean threat. Within the last few years, Japan saw the first post-1945 overseas deployment of the Self-Defense Forces and the launching of its first spy satellite. To many, this represents a revolutionary change in Japanese security posture, but in reality they are the culmination of a long-drawn evolutionary process that began since the end of the Cold War. This paper argues that the current security renaissance is a sign of the emerging Koizumi Doctrine grand strategy, in which Japan aims to eradicate the "economic giant, political pygmy" moniker by expanding its global influence through limited global security cooperation.

Keywords: *Yoshida doctrine, Koizumi doctrine, Japanese security, Structural power*

1. INTRODUCTION

Security is a thorny issue for Japan. Its militaristic past continues to loom large in its foreign and security policy. Anti-Japanese demonstrations and protests across China and South Korea in the past years over Japan's historical revisionism is proof that more than sixty years after the end of the Pacific War, the wounds of war have not healed and continue to animate Japan's relations with its East Asian neighbors. Simmering fears and distrust of Japan were evident as far back as the 1970s. Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei's visit to Indonesia and Thailand in 1974 was marred by anti-Japanese riots. This led to the enunciation of the Fukuda Doctrine that committed Japan to "heart-to-heart" relations with Southeast Asia while eschewing a military role. Recognizing that Asian countries (and even perhaps Japanese society itself) were wary of the expansion of Japanese military power, the government astutely moved to adopt a low international profile and kept the Japan Self-Defense Forces (SDF) firmly grounded within its territorial waters. However, these self-imposed restrictions were challenged in the wake of the 1991 Gulf War when calls for Japan to shoulder more responsibilities for international peace and security were frustrated by political cleavages in a divided nation. Japan's last hurdles toward a meaningful contribution to global causes — the pacifist agenda and Article IX — are giving way to a more realistic reading of the regional and global strategic environment. The paper explores the dynamics of the "freeing" of the SDF from the constraints of the Yoshida Doctrine and argues that the heightened profile and expansion of the SDF roles are the result of an evolutionary process to "normalize" Japan and not a knee-jerk reaction against the Korean threat. It also postulates that the normalization of the SDF is an important component of the emerging Koizumi doctrine's grand strategy of achieving structural power. This paper is divided into three sections. First, I lay out the foundation of the Japanese grand strategy — the Yoshida Doctrine — in the post-war period that shaped and gave form to the debate on Japan's security policy. Second, I examine the notion of the Japanese security renaissance and identify the explanations for the purported "rebirth" of Japanese military power. Lastly, I put

forth the argument that the expansion of the SDF's missions is tied to Japan's quest for structural power and represents an attempt by Tokyo to shed its "economic giant, political pygmy" moniker.

2. FOUNDATION OF JAPAN'S GRAND STRATEGY: THE YOSHIDA DOCTRINE

The "Yoshida Doctrine" was named after Yoshida Shigeru who was prime minister from 1946-7 and 1948-54. It gained wide currency and support in post-war Japan. The three tenets of the Yoshida doctrine are:

- (a) Japan's economic rehabilitation must be the prime national goal. Political-economic cooperation with the United States was necessary for this purpose.
- (b) Japan should remain lightly armed and avoid involvement in international political-strategic issues. Not only would this low posture free the energies of its people for productive industrial development, but it would avoid divisive internal struggles.
- (c) To gain a long-term guarantee for its own security, Japan would provide bases for the U.S. army, navy and air force (Pyle 1996: 235).

The Yoshida Doctrine's grand design to focus the nation's energies on economic rebuilding and development, while minimizing defense expenditures, were aided by constitutional constraints for large scale rearmament. Article IX enshrined in the constitution bans the threat or use of force as an element of statecraft and forbids Japan from possessing war-fighting capabilities. The article reads:

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 a means of settling international disputes.

In order to accomplish the aim in 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 (Asahi Shimbun 2002: 293).

To assuage fears of Japanese militarism among its neighbors, the SDF's doctrine was limited to the defense of the nation. The SDF's operational radius — as an added measure to highlight its defensive posture — is legally confined to Japanese territorial waters through the "Resolution Prohibiting the Dispatch of Self-Defense Forces Overseas [...] adopted by the House of Councilors on June 2 immediately in advance of the Defense Agency Establishment Law and the Self-Defense Forces Law legislation enacted on June 9, 1954" (Council on Defense-Strategic Studies 2003: 32). Similarly, "offensive" weapons such as Inter-Continental Ballistic Missiles (ICBM), long range bombers and aircraft carriers were banned. In the 1960s, owing to opposition parties' criticism in the Diet, the bombsights and in-flight refueling devices on Japan's F-4EJ *Phantoms* were regarded as 'offensive' and removed despite the fact that to do so required extra cost (Stares 1998: 179). These restrictions were a manifestation of the "exclusively defensive defense" (*senshu bōei*) concept that is the core philosophy which informs Japan's defense policy. To reinforce Japan's commitment to a defensive force structure, in January 1968, Prime Minister Satō

enunciated the famous three non-nuclear principles (*hikaku sangensoku*) that effectively ruled out Japan being a nuclear power. The rearming process was also curtailed by the Miki administration, which in 1976, limited Japan's defense expenditure to not more than one percent of its GNP.¹ This barrier instituted to control the military buildup reflected the government's preference in favor of productive sectors such as manufacturing, education and health over defense.

Japan was able to keep its defense spending low — at or around 1% of GNP — because it could rely on the U.S. to underwrite its security. Studies show that Japan received substantive economic benefits from its close security relations with the U.S. Robert Dekle suggests that if Japan had spent 6.5% of GNP on defense between 1961-71,

Japan's annual growth rate would "have declined from an average annual rate of 9.29 percent to 8.76 percent" (Makin & Hellman 1989: 142). Wong Kar-Yiu, in another study that focuses on the fifteen year period from 1970 to 1985, postulated a decline in Japan's GNP if defense expenditure was substantially increased. In one scenario, where Japan matched the U.S. ratio of defense expenditure to GNP, the Japanese GNP would have declined about 7.2% over the fifteen year period. The effect, however, is reduced to about 2.8% if Japan had devoted 3% of its GNP to defense (Makin & Hellman 1989: 107-109). The Dekle and Wong studies clearly show a positive correlation between low defense spending and economic growth. If Japan had spent more on its defense, the Japanese economic miracle would have been less successful. Wong calculates that Japan's capital stock would have decreased by more than one-third (37%) in 1985 had Tokyo matched Washington's defense spending pattern for the preceding fifteen years (Makin & Hellman 1989: 108). Instead, Japan's year end capital stock recorded a compounded annual growth rate of 7.68% from 1970 to 1985. The value of capital stock increased an impressive three-fold from ¥221,697 billion in 1970 to ¥672,574 billion in 1985 (Makin & Hellman 1989: 102). The savings accrued meant that more resources were channeled to fund Japan's economic growth.

Table 1. Ratio of Defense Budget to GNP and General Account (Selected Years)

Financial Year	Ratio of Defense Budget to GNP (%)	Ratio of Defense Budget to General Account (%)
1955	1.78	13.61
1965	1.07	8.24
1975	0.84	6.23
1980	0.90	5.24
1985	0.997	5.98
1989	1.006	6.49

Source: Japan Defense Agency (1990: 291)

Japan's security policy "was a strategy that continued to rely on the U.S.-Japan security treaty and did not attempt to build up the SDF in response to the force size of Japan's potential enemies" (Hook *et al.* 2001: 133). This has enabled Japan to keep its defense expenditure low. From a high of 13.61% in 1955, the ratio of defense budget to general

¹ The 1% cap has been maintained every year since except in the last three years of the Shōwa period: 1987 (1.004%), 1988 (1.013%) and 1989 (1.006%). Expenditure fell below the 1% mark in 1990 and the ceiling had not been broken since.

account had been on a declining trend ever since. By the 1989 financial year, the ratio had more than halved (see Table 1). Japan could afford to take a relatively lackadaisical attitude toward defense issues because it held different threat perceptions from that of its allies. This view was held by, among others, Ushiba Nobuhiko. The distinguished diplomat “stated candidly in 1983 that the Japanese were far less concerned about the Soviet threat than the Americans or Europeans” (Curtis 1993: 249). Furthermore, “the threat of attack from abroad did not seem very credible to either the Japanese public or much of the political elite” (Berger 1993: 137).

Public opinion polls indicate that the Japanese had a high degree of confidence in the two-pronged defense strategy. Nearly two-thirds (61%) of the respondents in a poll conducted by the Prime Minister’s Office in 1978 indicated that the SDF and U.S.-Japan Security Treaty as the best defense arrangement for Japan, while only 5% registered their strong objections toward the strategy. The level of support for the SDF and the treaty remained high throughout the 1980s: 65% for 1981, 69% for 1984 and 67% for 1987 (Japan Defense Agency 1990: 320-321). Concomitantly, the majority of the Japanese expressed strong confidence in the U.S. coming to their aid if Japan comes under attack.

It is clear that Japan had benefited from the U.S. security protection, and Wong’s analysis provides empirical data to support the contention that Japan’s economic reconstruction and subsequent growth were supported, in part, by low defense expenditure. The two-pronged defense strategy which limited the SDF to defensive roles while relying on the U.S. to deter and counter large-scale military threats made important contributions to the Japanese economy by freeing up capital stock and resources. That the grand strategic economic goals of the Yoshida doctrine were fulfilled without jeopardizing the nation’s security is a testament to the political acumen and foresight of Yoshida and his successors. The key to the success of the two-pronged defense strategy is the realization that “[t]he real frontline of defense for Japan is not on any military perimeter. It is the maintenance and healthy growth of international cooperation” (Reischauer 1977: 378).

3. THE YOSHIDA DOCTRINE UNDER STRESS: IMPETUS FOR CHANGE

The Yoshida doctrine’s grand strategy succeeded beyond imagination and transformed Japan into an economic powerhouse. It was an effective blueprint to rebuild a war-torn nation and to ease Japan’s re-integration into the international system. The doctrine was, in sum, an optimal strategy for a weak and vulnerable nation trying to survive in an age where the threat of nuclear holocaust or great power conflict was a reality. A low-key foreign policy enabled Japan to stay above the fray of ideological squabbles. “Free from the uncertainties and challenges of political choices in foreign policy, Japan could more easily develop and sustain a policy consensus focused first on economic growth and then on welfare — both of which had immediate and favorable domestic payoffs” (Makin & Hellman 1989: 244). However, as the goals of recovery and rehabilitation were attained, the doctrine’s inadequacies and shortfalls became apparent. Japan was fixated within the relative comfort and security of the Cold War paradigm and had been slow in recalibrating its grand strategy to address the new complexities of the post-Cold War environment.

To postulate that post-war Japan is unconventional is an understatement. Japan successfully resisted pressure to “normalize,” and remained faithful to the twin tenets of its post-war grand strategy — economic development and minimal defense. In what some critics

have decried as Japan's self-bestowed "international military exemption," it abstained from overseas military activities and hardly contributed to international security. Protests of Tokyo's "free ride," pronounced in the 1980s, spilled over into the Heisei period, but did little to alter the fundamentals of the Yoshida doctrine. The U.S., it must be said, was not serious at pushing Japan to assume greater responsibilities and was more concerned about its trade deficit.² Tokyo's responded in its usual manner: checkbook diplomacy.³ The power of the *yen* was put to test when Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990.

The voices of progressive lawmakers like Ozawa, Nakanishi Keisuke, Nishioka Takeo and Watanabe Michio, that it was constitutional for Japan to participate in UN operations were drowned out by a society entrapped within the *kaigan no kasai* (conflagrations on distant shores) mentality. This expression denotes "an attitude of aloofness from foreign problems and a desire to abstain from getting involved" (Young & Grinter 1989: 136). Therefore, Japan did not send troops to Kuwait. A half-hearted attempt was made by the Kaifu cabinet to pass a law⁴ that would have permitted the Japanese to undertake peacekeeping functions in October 1990, but the bill died when the government failed to clarify the difference between "collective defense" and "collective security." Japan sought to compensate the absence of human contributions by doling out a US\$13 billion financial package. This figure represented 20 percent of the estimated cost of the war for a three-month period and a tax burden of approximately ¥10,000 per citizen (Purrington 1992: 163).

In what Courtney Purrington calls the "Iraqi shock," Japan was dismayed that its monetary contribution went either unnoticed or unappreciated. "What struck a particularly heavy symbolic chord was a full-page advertisement placed by Kuwaiti [*sic*] in the *New York Times* thanking the international community for its help in defeating Iraq [... and], Japan was not listed in the ad" (Zisk 2001: 26). Former U.S. Secretary of State, James Baker, while addressing the Japan Institute of International Affairs in Tokyo, did not mince words when he retorted, "your checkbook diplomacy like our dollar diplomacy of an earlier era is clearly too narrow" (Ishizuka 2002). The seasoned journalist, Sam Jameson, remarked: "It is interesting to know that in January 1991, at the moment American troops went into Kuwait to drive the Iraqis out, the Japanese troops were in Sapporo building snow statues for the Sapporo Snow Festival" (East Asian Views 1998: 62). The following oft-recounted anecdote highlights the Japanese worldview that all matters can be resolved through financial means:

Upon meeting an officer of the U.S. military, a key officer for the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) said, "Japan could not participate (with the multinational ground forces), but we donated what amounted to [US]\$100 for each citizen instead." The American officer took out a hundred

² For example, a bipartisan group of seventy members of the House of Representatives led by Rep. Charles D. Schumer called on the Bush Administration to pressure Japan to fulfill its commitment to defend its airspace and sea-lanes out to 1,000 nautical miles (see Press Release by the Center for Security Policy. Available at http://www.centerforpolicysecurity.org/index.jsp?section=papers&code=90-P_95). The hidden message was to press Tokyo to increase the purchase of American military equipment.

³ Japan took three measures to defuse the issue: purchase of arms, agreeing to the joint development of the FSX fighter and increasing Tokyo's "host nation support" for USFJ.

⁴ The said bill was the "Bill Concerning Cooperation to the UN Peace Effort." The Miyazawa cabinet succeeded in passing a watered down version of the bill in June 1992, now renamed "Law Concerning Cooperation for United Nations Peace-keeping Operations and Other Operations."

dollar bill from his wallet and replied, "I'll give you this money, so go fight for me instead" (Self & Thompson, 2002: 130).

Newsweek condemned Japan's passivity: "Japan, which is far more reliant on the Gulf than any other rich country, buys its energy security with the lives of young Americans" (Hook 1996: 83). Donald Hellmann wrote in the *Wall Street Journal* of Japan using "bogus constitutional excuses" (Woolley 1996: 806) as a pretext for shirking its international responsibilities.

The Gulf War evoked strong reaction from the Japanese. On the one hand, there was a degree of idealistic demagoguery and grand standing. According to Thomas Berger, "[a]lthough most Japanese condemn the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, many Japanese preferred to see the United States as a bully, overeager to resort to armed force in the Gulf in order to reaffirm its global hegemonic role" (Berger 1993: 129). The Japanese Consul General to New York, Hanabusa Masamichi, criticized the U.S. "mismanagement" of the Gulf conflict and retorted that "whoever controls oil will be disposed to sell it" (Curtis 1993: 253). The overwhelming reaction to the Gulf War was, however, one of shock and resentment. Tadokoro Masayuki notes that "[t]he lack of any respect paid by international society to the efforts of Japan was traumatic for the Japanese society" (Tadokoro 2002: 5). The damage wrought by the Gulf War was immeasurable. It undid nearly four decades of painstaking effort to regain an honorable place in the world. "The government was shocked by a *Washington Post*-ABC poll released on March 17 that showed 30 percent of Americans surveyed had lost respect for Japan because of its behavior during the crisis ..." (Purrington 1992: 169). "There was also the realization that 'one-nation pacifism' was viewed by other nations as 'selfishness'" (Purrington 1992: 170).

It is increasingly difficult for Japan to hide behind its constitutional veil or even to play the "militarism card." Its Asian neighbors are warming to the idea of Japan taking on international security responsibilities. For example, Singapore president Ong Teng Cheong told Prime Minister Murayama, [...] that Japan should seek a permanent Security Council seat to play its role as a global power. Malaysian prime minister Mahathir Mohamad told Murayama that Japan should stop its "redemptive diplomacy" and encouraged Japan to become a permanent council member and promote the peace and prosperity of Asia (Itoh 1998: 172).

China, while understandably cautious, did not object to the Japanese dispatch of minesweepers to the Gulf following the end of hostilities. Japan realizes that "[n]o amount of 'host-nation support' or checkbook diplomacy will satisfy the United States if American lives are being sacrificed in an East Asia contingency — e.g., in Korea or over Taiwan — that is critical to Japanese interests while Japan stands idly by because of its constitutional constraints" (Green & Mochizuki 1998: 29-30). More than anything, the Gulf War raises doubts if the "global civilian power" concept is an appropriate model for Japan. This model, expounded by Hanns W. Maull, more than one and a half decade ago entails among others the precept on "the concentration on non-military, primarily economic, means to secure national goals, with military power left as a residual instrument serving essentially to safeguard other means of international interaction" (Maull 1990: 92). The passage of the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations Cooperation Law (better known as the PKO Law) in 1992, followed by the "three emergency laws" in 2001 suggest that Japan is moving away from the "unidimensional" power mold, and signals the emergence of a responsible global citizen ready to bear its share of securing the peace. Japan's subtle moves to reintegrate

military power into its foreign policy mix signals its transformation to “normalcy” and away from the global civilian power model. A Japanese corporate leader succinctly points out Japan’s predicament: “It needs to be realistic living in the world, and cannot afford to be neutral” (Anonymous Respondent 2002). More importantly, these developments provide a clear indication that military power is no longer seen as a “residual instrument” and slowly, but gradually gaining credence as an instrument of foreign policy — albeit within the confines of Article IX.

4. JAPAN'S SECURITY RENAISSANCE

The SDF’s low profile was a major coup for Japanese diplomacy and a pivotal factor in stabilizing the precarious strategic balance of the region. However, the days of Japan operating “under the radar” are numbered. Its “one-country pacifism” and self-bestowed “international military exemption” were seriously challenged during the Gulf War. That bitter experience made Japan realize that burden sharing meant more than monetary contribution or the purchase of U.S. arms. To pacify international criticism, the Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) participated in the multinational minesweeping operation after the cessation of hostilities. More significantly, the Diet passed the PKO Law in 1992, providing the legal basis for Japanese participation in peacekeeping. On the surface, the enactment of the law was a classical case of *gaiatsu* but in reality, it was the result of two contending visions of Japan. One group led by Ozawa, who was then the Liberal Democratic Party’s (LDP) secretary-general, propositioned that Japan should participate in peacekeeping activities under the aegis of the UN. The second group was comprised of a coalition of constitutional purists intent on continuing the nation’s pacifist tradition. Among others, the late Gotōda Masaharu and Miyazawa held PKO as a form of collective defense and, thus, unconstitutional. The resulting law was a compromise between the two positions and included a moratorium (or freeze) on PKO core missions that effectively confined Japan’s contributions to logistics support and humanitarian relief operations. The enactment of the PKO law showed that constitutional barriers could be circumvented. The MSDF’s participation in *Operation Enduring Freedom* and the deployment of SDF troops to Iraq in 2004 suggest that these barriers are political and not constitutional in origin.

A passive security policy is no longer tenable. The Higuchi Report (1994) proposed that “Japan should extricate itself from its security policy of the past that was, if anything, passive, and henceforth play an active role in shaping a new order.”⁵ In a major departure, the report noted that ...

it is important to consider a major duty of the SDF, along with the primary duty of national defense, to participate as positively as possible in various forms of multilateral cooperation that

⁵ The Modality of the Security and Defense Capability of Japan: The Outlook for the 21st Century, English translation appended in Patrick M. Cronin and Michael J. Green, “Redefining the U.S.-Japan Alliance: Tokyo’s National Defense Program,” *McNair Paper 31* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University, 1994), p. 30. (This report is also called the Higuchi Report after the chairman of the advisory group, Higuchi Hirotarō who was also the chairman of the board of Asahi Breweries Ltd.)

are conducted within the framework of the United Nations for the purposes of international security, including peacekeeping operations (Cronin & Green 1994: 30).

These recommendations were broadly incorporated into the 1996 National Defense Program Outline (also known as the New *Taiko*) which sought to achieve the “creation of a more stable security environment including participation in international peacekeeping activities ...” (Soeya 1998). In his analysis of the Higuchi Report, Patrick Cronin opines that “peacekeeping is clearly the new SDF *raison d’être* (Cronin 1995: 21). Concomitantly, the revision of the PKO Law in 2001 lifted the “freeze” on core PKO missions, allowing the SDF to participate in “soft” enforcement activities such as monitoring cease-fires, disarming local forces and patrolling demilitarized zones. The 2005 New Defense Program Outline (NDPO) affirms Japan’s increasingly international outlook and willingness to participate in peacekeeping operations. In reference to the Iraqi deployment, Richard Samuels notes: “Putting ‘boots on the ground’ in Iraq is fundamentally different from anything they [Japan] have done in the past half century” (New Straits Times 2004).

The military establishment, however, remains anchored in a Cold War mindset. The present exclusive defense doctrine is inward looking and unsuitable for the missions and roles that the SDF has been asked to undertake. It was thus not surprising that the SDF was caught off-guard by the North Korean missile tests. Japan has more to fear from a single biological, chemical or nuclear-armed missile than a battalion of the Red Army as Japan is unprepared to counter such threats. Steps are being taken to remedy this situation. For example, the SDF is “dramatically [increasing] their expenditures on missile defense, requesting [US]\$2 billion for it in 2004, nine times more than the total spent from 1999 to 2003” (Matthews 2003: 76-77). The bulk of this allocation would go to the purchase of the *PAC-3* anti-missile system. At the same time, Japan is collaborating with the U.S. to develop new missile defense systems. Japan’s urgency is evident to the extent that former Chief Cabinet Secretary Hosoda Hiroyuki lifted the decades-long arms sales ban to permit the export of missile parts to the United States to enhance bilateral security ties.

The North Korean threat made Japan realize that its potential enemies can wreak serious damage without setting foot on Japanese soil. Recognizing this, former JDA chief, Shinjo Shigeru broached the idea of a pre-emptive attack if a North Korean missile launch against Japan was imminent. The nature of security threats has changed such that Japan does not have the luxury of waiting to confront the enemy at its shores. In this regard, the Koizumi Doctrine grand strategy⁶ requires the upgrading of Japanese defenses to handle new threats (missile, WMD, etc.) as well as developing offensive capabilities to take the “defensive” battle to the enemy. In addition, the government is taking remedial measures to streamline and improve Japan’s effectiveness in emergencies. The War Contingency Law (2003), for example, authorizes the government — under particularly “urgent” circumstances — to deploy the SDF without prior approval from the Diet. Concomitantly, the JDA chief is

⁶ The usage of “Koizumi Doctrine grand strategy” needs to be qualified. This term is coined and used by the author to represent the structural and strategic changes Japan experienced since 1989. Similar to the Yoshida Doctrine, it has yet to be formalized in an official document nor formally adopted by the government. The author postulates that this doctrine, besides the quest for structural power, contains two other elements: (a) maintaining national tranquility and (b) maintaining economic “distance.” The formulation of this doctrine is the result of author’s research on Japanese grand strategy from 1868 to the present.

empowered to take appropriate action to defend Japan in the event of an external attack without prior approval from the prime minister and cabinet. Japan also launched its first spy satellite to provide independent and instantaneous surveillance on potential threats. The SDF Law was also amended, freeing the SDF from a range of peacetime legal constraints such as traffic codes during crisis situations. In the meantime, the JDA is upgrading its eight regional defense facilities administration bureaus into regional defense bureaus in the revised National Defense Program Outline to improve coordination with local authorities during emergencies. These laws form the “missing link” in Japanese security policy, giving the government and the SDF a clearer mandate and guidelines on the use of force.

The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001 (henceforth 9/11) had a “liberating” effect on the SDF. Although many in Japan recognize that “the military capabilities of the advanced democracies are not intended for attacking other countries but to maintain the international order,” (Sato 2000: 25) few were ready to support an international role for the SDF. That changed after 9/11. With uncanny speed, Koizumi announced that Japan would assist the U.S. in any form to apprehend the perpetrators — a pledge he made good on. After navigating the Anti-terrorism Bill through the Diet, the prime minister offered that “[t]he focus of the legislation was whether we [the Japanese] think of the terrorist incidents in New York and Washington on September 11th as other people’s business or as our own affair” (Ishizuka 2002). In the ensuing months, Japan dispatched a naval task force to the Indian Ocean as part of Japan’s contribution to *Operation Enduring Freedom*. Japan’s role was mainly logistics and refueling but it was significant in that it was Japan’s first *official* participation in an on-going conflict since 1952. Currently, all elements of the SDF — ground, air and naval — were involved in efforts to reconstruct Iraq. Japan’s response to 9/11 was, according to Imai Ryukichi of the Institute for International Policy Studies (IIPS), “a reaction to what Japan *has not* been doing for the last 50 years” (Imai 2001). In a *Reuters* interview in January 2004, Watanabe Akio remarked that “[m]y conclusion as to whether Japan has crossed the Rubicon (taken an irrevocable step) is ‘yes,’ but very cautiously” (New Straits Times 2004). There is a sea change in Japan today. In contrast to the timid responses to the Gulf War, Japan’s former senior vice-minister for foreign affairs, Sugiura Seiken, explains that there is now a realization that “international obligation is essential for the security of our country and the people” (Sugiura 2002).

In the wake of 9/11, the Koizumi Cabinet used the window of opportunity to undertake a role in international security affairs. Steps taken to ease the SDF into the country’s diplomatic framework were not accidental. Although the Korean threat proved a significant factor in giving security policy reforms a much needed push, it was only a proximate cause. The pressure for reforms had been mounting since the end of the Cold War and Pyongyang’s reckless sable-rattling provided the final push for the Japanese security renaissance. Change was also motivated by the Koizumi doctrine’s grand strategic goal of achieving structural power.

5. THE QUEST FOR STRUCTURAL POWER

Japan’s economic power is respected and feared. But Japan’s presence in the international system is muted as it behaves, in the words of Funabashi, “like an automatic teller machine (ATM).” A former high-ranking IMF official commented that he has “never seen Japan speak up before others do. Even when Japan did, it was simply in support of a

majority opinion” (Pyle 1996: 66). This observation is attributed, in part, to Japan’s “non-confrontational culture,” but closer examination would reveal an endemic weakness in *structural power*.⁷ Susan Strange defines this concept as “the power to decide how things shall be done, [and] the power to shape frameworks within which states relate to each other, [...]” (Strange 1994: 25). Structural power can be attained through several means. One way is to diversify Japan’s power base in light of Joseph Nye’s contention that “[t]he fragmented structure of world politics among different issues has made power resources less fungible” (Nye 1990: 189). Thus, it is important to possess an array of capabilities to respond effectively to any contingencies. In other words, it is imperative for Japan to transform from being a uni- to a multi-dimensional power.

Many analysts, including Edward Newman, associate Japan’s weak international leadership with its inability to “readily mobilize a substantial military force with global reach ...” (Inoguchi & Jain 2000: 59). This, however, is changing. The Koizumi administration moved to improve Japan’s battered image in the wake of the Gulf War debacle by acting swiftly and unequivocally to “show the flag.” Heightening the SDF’s visibility is an indicator that Japan is moving away from its unidimensional mold. In this context, the “normalization” of military power constitutes a crucial step toward the quest for structural power. Recalling his experience in the Gulf War, Ambassador Hatano recounted that despite Japan’s substantial financial contribution to the war effort, he “was not permitted to attend *unofficial* [emphasis added] Security Council meetings on the war” (The Daily Yomiuri 2003). Similarly, Japan was often sidelined in G-7 summits in deliberations on international security. Japan was snubbed because of its self-declared “international military exemption.” Hence, allowing the SDF to undertake limited security roles would likely improve Japan’s standing and enhance its structural power. Yamamoto Takehiko of Waseda University also raises the specter of PKO as a “diplomatic card to get concessions from the U.S.” (Yamamoto 2001).

If Japan can sustain the momentum in pulling its weight to perform security functions, coupled with its traditional financial generosity, there is no reason why Japan should not aspire and indeed, be accorded structural power commensurate with its commitment and resources. The motivation for structural power is not for national aggrandizement but rather a means to secure the long-term security and future of the nation. Nations such as France and the UK continue to enjoy international recognition well into their twilight years owing to their success in having institutionalized their positions in the international structure (i.e., the UN and IMF). As such the Koizumi doctrine’s grand strategy of achieving structural power is a defensive measure against the imminent erosion of its *relative* economic power and to anchor Japan within the inner circle of global decision-making. The “freeing” of the SDF and the application of Japanese military power in provision of international peace and order is part of a larger goal of improving Japan’s international standing and prestige.

⁷ Structural power differs from “soft power.” The former refers to the institutionalization of one’s position within an organization to avoid being marginalized. Specifically, it is concerned with obtaining and securing one’s position to partake in decision-making. Soft power, on the other hand, refers to a non-coercive means of application power. Soft power is effective to the extent that the target is persuaded or willingly accepts the other’s leadership or policies.

6. CONCLUSION

The SDF has undergone some radical changes in the last few years. After decades of stalling and political maneuvering, the Abe administration successfully legislated the upgrading of the Japan Defense Agency to full ministerial status. The change in nomenclature to Ministry of Defense, effective from 9 January 2007, is a demonstration of Japan's increasing pragmatic approach to security issues. The force structure has been revamped to undertake "multifunctional roles and flexible operations," as per the directives of the 2005 New Defense Program Outline (NDPO). The new guideline legitimizes an external role for the SDF. This move has been on the national agenda since the early 1990s and the Koizumi administration took full advantage of the unique strategic situation in the aftermath of the September 11, 2002 terrorist attack on the U.S. It provided Japan the opportunity to "show the flag," in a way that it could not ten years ago. As such, the SDF's deployment to the Indian Ocean and to Iraq is best seen as the culmination of events dating back to the Gulf War. Other than seeing the post-September 11 politico-strategic environment as a chance for Japan to redeem its pride and honor in the face of the "Iraqi shock," the "freeing" of the SDF was a monumental step for Japan to shed its "economic giant, political pygmy" moniker. Japan's contributions to the war against terrorism marked its debut on the world stage that it is willing to play an active role in global security affairs. Concomitantly, Japan's willingness to commit personnel contributions goes a long way for Tokyo's case for a seat on the UN Security Council, which is a major goal toward the Koizumi doctrine's grand strategy of achieving structural power.

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