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Master's Thesis of International Studies

Japan's Changing Middle Power Identity

- Security Reforms under PM Shinzo Abe -

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- Security Reforms under PM Shinzo Abe -

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Abstract

This thesis aims to analyze Japan's reconstruction of its unique middle power identity, which it had identified with since the 70s until PM Abe returned to political leadership in December 2012. Subsequently, it answers why this change is happening, how it is happening, and the implications of these modifications. For this thesis, we applied qualitative research with an in-depth analysis of government documents and publications, the Japanese Constitution, and timely articles by relevant experts.

To figure out whether Japan's securitization under Abe is a radical or rational shift, we first defined what a typical middle power is and what has been Japan's middle power identity. This question led to the understanding that Japan's middle power identity is uniquely different from the rest because of Article 9, limiting Japan's military and defense capacities. Endogenously, the declining birth-rate with higher life expectancy that required a reallocation of the government budget, the end of Japanese checkbook diplomacy because of the 1991 Gulf War, complemented by LDP (Liberal Democratic Party) dominance on the one hand, and the exogenous persisting threats from North Korea (abduction issue and nuclear missile) and China (military budget and Japan's diplomatic defeat) on the other hand rationalized Japan's security reforms. The principles of "*Nihon wo torimodosu*" and "*proactive contribution to peace*" became the basis for Abe's securitization. It includes creating the National Security Council in 2013 and implementing the National Security Strategy, the modification of the National Defense Program Guidelines, the reinterpretation of Article 9 in 2014, and the 2015 security bills, which expanded Japan's SDF (Self-Defense Forces).

We found a varying degree of support and opposition amongst the Japanese public about Constitutional revision. Those who support it highlight the importance of resolving the gap between Article 9, which mentions the "non-holding of military force," and the current situation with the existence of SDF. Those who are against the revision argue that Japan may lose the credibility it has built as a peaceful nation if it removes its self-imposed restrictions, and they fear that Japan may become more involved in American wars abroad.

Among international scholars of Japanese security, Adam Liff disputes the notion that Japan under Abe has suddenly become militaristic. He argues that Japan's preparation to be more militarily self-sufficient predates Abe, and despite the security reforms, the persisting self-imposed restraints prevent Japan from becoming a real threat to its neighbors. Another is Christopher Hughes, who insists that Abe's reforms are revolutionary, and the constitutional constraints are not enough anymore. Measures that are now allowed because of the security bills that legalized collective self-defense in 2015 makes everything but the right to initiating war possible, a clear difference from the unique middle power Japan it has been known until 2012 to the current we assert. The contents of the security bill divided into two categories: matters concerning Japan and its people and matters concerning the international community has immensely expanded the role and capacities of the Japanese SDF, including the regulated use of force to protect Japanese abroad, which was impossible before and the broadening of missions it can participate.

We argue that the restructuring of Japan's middle power identity, from an economically superior but severely restricted military to Abe's Japan that is still similar on the economic front but allows more flexibility in military and defense, has made hedging a preferable option for Japan than ever before. Despite the end of Abe's political leadership, we expect to see a continuity of his security reforms under his successor.

Keywords: Shinzo Abe, Middle Power, Article 9, collective self-defense, self-defense forces, hedging

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I. Introduction

When Japan lost the war, the occupying America-led Allied forces aimed for Japan's demilitarization and democratization; as such, they heavily influenced the creation of Japan's new Constitution. A constitution that will prevent Japan from becoming another war belligerent and serve as an example for other countries. The Peace Constitution was imposed on Japan through Article 9 of the 1947 Japanese Constitution. Article 9 specifies Japan's renunciation of war and lists its efforts to ensure that this is followed. Namely, forever renouncing war as a sovereign right, renouncing the use of threat or force to settle disputes, and never maintaining capabilities with war potential. This renouncement resulted in a Japan that was heavily reliant on the Pacific-based American troops for its protection. However, knowing that a more concrete partnership is necessary with the dawn of the Cold War, the Japan-US Security Treaty was signed in 1951. It officially announced to the world of Japan and America's alliance. This measure was a part of the tight bilateralism,¹ and Japan served as the first of America's spokes in Asia, followed by the Philippines, South Korea, and Taiwan. This bilateralism also encouraged the development of appropriate military forces, development of low-cost military material in volume to use in Japan, Japan's membership to the U.N., and participation in regional security arrangements with U.S. recommendation and psychological programs to further orient Japan to the free world and away from Communism (Cha, 2017). This kind of mutual partnership has been maintained even today. Despite Japan's economic miracles in the seventies through the nineties, which made it fiscally capable of asserting military competence, Article 9 only allowed some rooms for interpretation, and establishing the Japanese SDF (self-defense forces) in 1954 was testing its limits (自衛隊法). To put it simply, Article 9 is the backbone of the unique middle power identity of Japan.

However, since Shinzo Abe's return to power, many Japanese politics experts, and diplomats of allies and neighboring states have been trying to understand what is happening in Japan, particularly at the forefront of security. The popular narrative is that Japan is becoming more securitized with the

¹ Tight bilateralism operates when there are several arrays of deep and robust partnerships between a Great power (the US) and the ally (Japan) that allows and sustains an informal hierarchical relationship deemed domestically legitimate in both countries.

security measures before Abe cannot keep up with the security demands of ongoing domestic and international developments. We identify several realities that strongly influenced Abe's decision to advance Japan's securitization: the fiscal constraints, the lessons from two decades of SDF experience, the perceived threats from North Korea, and China complemented by the U.S.'s increasing demands for more contribution to America's global security missions. All these have rationalized Abe's decision to adopt the security changes we will see in the latter half of this thesis.

More specifically, this thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 introduces readers to the origin of Japan's post-WWII middle power identity, identifying Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution as the foundation of Japan's long-held unique middle power identity. In the same chapter, the readers will find the purpose and the main research question of this thesis and the limitations of relevant past scholarly works. Frankly, there was minimal research on middle power identity because most scholarly work focuses on great or major powers. In cases when Japan's middle power capacity is addressed, not one has addressed the implications of the security changes under Prime Minister Abe to Japan's unique middle power identity. The methodology used by the author, that is, qualitative research on government publications and other relevant scholarly is also in this chapter.

Chapter 2 engages the literary works on power and state strategies. The three levels of power capacity a nation can become depending on their military and economic influence—Great, Middle, and Small power and the diverse strategic options on power dynamics—balancing, bandwagoning, and hedging are discussed in this chapter. Hedging strategy is what we believe to be the most suitable option for a changed Japan. Furthermore, the readers can find why Japan is often quoted as an “Abnormal State,” owing to the limitations imposed by its Constitution. Additionally, the diverging strategic debates for Japanese defense as discussed in Richard Samuel's book—Pacifist, Middle Power Internationalists, Normal Nationalists, and New Autonomists. We subscribe to the concept of Middle Power Internationalists and Normal Nationalists. This chapter ends with the shift in Japan's middle power identity from an economically superior but militarily vulnerable Japan to Abe's Japan that is still economically capable but simultaneously militarily competent and not wholly dependent on the U.S.

Chapter 3 explains both the endogenous and exogenous factors that happened or influenced the Abe Cabinet and inadvertently changed Japan's middle power identity. For the former, the declining birth-rate complemented with better life expectancy demands reprioritization of budget caused concern. The Gulf shock in 1991 happened decades before Abe's return to power in 2012. Still, it was critical to making the government realize that checkbook diplomacy is not enough, and Abe realized the necessary changes. Abe's ruling party, the LDP's (Liberal Democratic Party of Japan) political dominance, also ensured that his policy changes are executed. For the latter, the persisting and imminent threat posed by North Korea with the unresolved abduction and nuclear missile issue and China's expanding military budget augmented by the critical juncture when Japan experienced what can be interpreted as diplomatic defeat heavily influenced Abe's security decisions. Moreover, the chapter looks at the basis of Japanese securitization, the ideals of "*Nihon wo Torimodosu*," and the "*Proactive Contribution to Peace*," which summarizes and categorizes the elements of Chapter 3.

In Chapter 4, the readers will find what we believe are either overlooked or scrutinized security reforms such as the establishment of the National Security Council and modification of the National Defense Program Guidelines, the infamous reinterpretation of Article 9, and the thoroughly debated Security Bills that expanded the role and capacities of the Japanese SDF.

Chapter 5 analyses the implications of the introduced successive security changes by the Abe Cabinet by looking at the domestic and international reactions. Domestic uses newspaper polls questioning the public's views on Article 9 and its reinterpretation. International referred to experts and their interpretation on the changes commanded by the security developments. Additionally, this chapter also addresses the significant transformations due to the Security bills introduced in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 will prove how Japan's unique middle power changed, and therefore, this is also where we argue that the strategic shift to hedging matches Japan's current capacities.

Chapter 6 closes the paper with a brief follow-up on Abe's successor, Yoshihide Suga, what to expect from his policy priorities, whether we will see a diversion or continuation of Abe's security priorities, and what would it mean to Japan's middle power identity which has realigned to be more

militarily independent yet still economically capable. We also consider some prospective studies for future researchers.

To sum, we address how Japan is reconstructing the unique middle power identity it had identified with since the seventies until before Prime Minister Abe returned in 2012 and why this is happening. To figure out whether Japan's securitization under Abe is a radical or rational shift, we first define a typical middle power and what Japan's middle power identity has been. We then looked at Japan's security reform's underlying reasons from domestic and international security-related transformations. After, the two main guiding principles for all security changes will be briefly discussed. We subsequently looked at some of the critical security changes under Abe's leadership and their significance to Japan's security. This part also clarifies how these changes result in Japan's reconstructed middle power identity, diverging from its unique identity for decades. We also suggest that Japan must practice hedging over bandwagoning or balancing given its new middle power identity. The paper ends with our expectations from Abe's successor, Yoshihide Suga, and other feasible future studies.

1. Research Purpose

Research focusing on the role of middle power is minuscule compared to great powers. Articles and books published tend to highlight the importance and influence of great powers. This situation is understandable because, ever since the beginning, great powers have determined history. During the Age of Discovery, European superpowers dominated global exploration and established colonies in Africa, the Americas, and Asia from the 15th century. When the Westphalian sovereignty came into effect in the 17th century, the basis and conceptualization of non-interference in other states' domestic affairs were mostly negotiated by the great powers of that time. The outcome of World War I and II was also decided by the great powers of the 20th century.

Moreover, even after the Cold War, analyzing the two great powers—the U.S. and the USSR—roles were the focus of writings. With this origin and impacts on important moments of history, it is no wonder why great power has been the dominant theme of most literature. We fully understand the

lasting influence and importance of great powers. However, the world is changing, and with many developing and developed economies, which includes former great powers demoted to middle power status and former small powers developing to middle power influence, the number of middle powers is rapidly increasing. It has become important more than ever to understand the roles and capacities of middle powers.

Scholarly works on Japan's middle power identity is lacking. Admittedly, there is still some confusion about what Japan is. Why would one categorize the third-largest economy as a middle power when countries like Algeria, Bangladesh, and Peru are also considered middle power. Why would one categorize a country that cannot initiate wars as a middle power when countries like Russia, France, and the U.K. are again middle powers. The irony of these statements makes Japan's position as a middle power a peculiarity because while it is economically dominant and spends plenty on military defense, it could not assist in global wars where its allies were participating. However, this confusion is no more with the several security measures introduced during Prime Minister Abe's Cabinet. Previous research has separately identified the security changes under Abe and what it means, how it would change Japan's relations with its neighbors but not yet, contextualized the security changes in a middle power framework. How does the revolutionizing security measures mean to Japan's long-held identity of an "abnormal state," an atypical middle power that is economically superior but militarily restricted to a "normal state," one that remains economically significant but now more militarily flexible. To put it simply, the introduction of several security measures during Abe's time has made it necessary to re-evaluate Japan's roles and capacities as a middle power.

2. Research Question

This thesis addresses the question of "How is Abe's Japan reconstructing its unique middle power identity that it has been known as since the 70s?" To further understand this phenomenon, the thesis additionally addresses the why questions—"why Abe's Japan is doing this?" and the what questions—"what does this change mean to Japan and the international community?".

3. Methodology

This thesis heavily relies on qualitative research for an in-depth analysis of Japan's changes and their implications. Primary research materials such as the official Japanese government documents and publications, the Japanese Constitution, and bills & legislation to secondary materials, including timely online news articles and papers by Japanese security experts for more objective points of view. Additionally, data collected by international organizations were cited for providing numerical evidence and consistency.

A thorough background of middle power concepts and the distinguishing factors of Japanese middle power was provided through older government statements. Moreover, because the thesis focuses on the security changes during Abe's time as Prime Minister, readings predominantly published from 2012-2020 were used.

The qualitative research method was the most effective to complete the thesis purpose: to show how Abe successfully reconstructed Japan's middle power identity and how it will change Japan's strategies to complement this identity transformation.

II. Literature Review

1. Power and Strategies

Power is the typical measurement in the world of realists. Traditionally, power measures nations' strength, precisely their military capacity, and follows the simple formula justifying the strong states' belligerence and the consequence of the weaker state's obedience. Power can also be a goal that states wish to acquire for security and stability. In contemporary times, power refers to both military and economic power. States of today utilize two types of power: hard power and soft power.

Hard power is how we understand traditional capacities through strength and, in some cases, economic influence. While soft power, a more recent concept, can influence another state's behavior through non-hard power means—encompassing culture, values, and ideology as conceived by Joseph Nye (Gomichon, 2013).

Power is also categorized based on the country's status who wields them- Great Power: a nation with strong military and economic capabilities and can influence nations near and afar. Middle Power: a nation that has a capable military and economy and can influence some states². Bernard Wood defines a Middle Power as quantitatively middle-ranked in terms of GDP and military expenditures, ranging from 6th to 36th out of all countries worldwide (Wood, 1987). Small Power: a nation that generally possesses a small military and economy and is influenced or exploited by stronger states most of the time.

Lastly, there are different strategies to deal with power. These strategies depend on the influencing nation's status and influence. First, the balance of power (hereafter BOP) is the outcome at the systematic or sub-systematic level due to the power equilibrium among critical states (Paul, 2004). Skeptics argue that BOP theory has become irrelevant due to the growing social forces that encourage other methods of showing power relationships. Realists, meanwhile, perceive BOP as operating in a more active form of different intensities. There are also two commonly practiced strategies under BOP;

² As this thesis focus on Middle Power, this definition will be discussed more thoroughly in later sections.

one is *Balancing*, whose primary purpose is to prevent hegemony and, if ineffective, will inevitably lead to BOP, and the other is *Bandwagoning*, a state behavior commonly applied by weaker states, wherein through aligning with stronger powers, countries ensure their survival. Bandwagoning also happens when forming a balancing coalition, or geographical location hinders states from balancing. Aggregate power, proximity, offensive capability, and powerful states' offensive intentions are factors that determine balancing or bandwagoning (Paul, 2004). Stephen Walt argues that balancing is more common than bandwagoning because preserving freedom is preferable to subordination. Finally, the author thinks hedging is the most suitable for Japan, which has undergone dramatic security reforms introduced by the Abe Cabinet. By definition, *hedging* is the “*state behavior that attempts to maintain strategic ambiguity to reduce or avoid the risks and uncertainties of negative consequences produced by balancing or bandwagoning.*” (Koga, 2014) The latter part of this thesis discusses the feasibility of hedging from Abe’s Japan and onwards.

2. Japan as an Abnormal State: Post-WWII until Abe’s Return in 2012

After the Allied Powers victory in 1945, the occupying America-led Allied Occupational forces aimed for Japan’s democratization and democratization; thus, they heavily influenced Japan’s new Constitution (Smith, 2019). This Constitution intended to hinder Japan from becoming another war belligerent and serve as an example for other countries that may scheme to be. The Peace Constitution was imposed on Japan through Article 9 of the 1947 Japanese constitution. Article 9 specifies Japan’s renunciation of war and lists its efforts to ensure that this is followed. Namely, forever renouncing war as a sovereign right, renouncing the use of threat or force to settle disputes, and never maintaining capabilities with war potential. Japan became heavily reliant on the Pacific-based American troops for its protection and survival because of this renouncement.

However, this state of abnormality was immediately challenged by the onset of the Korean War and the decade-long Cold War. The American troops who imposed the Peace Constitution encouraged Japan to possess some military facilities for state security. This suggestion became official when the Japan-US. Mutual Defense Treaty was signed in 1960 despite strong domestic opposition in Japan. It

became legal for the U.S. to set base in Japan as part of its first defense line in the Pacific and required Japan's financial support to maintain the American bases.

In 1972 Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka³ reiterated the constitutional prohibitions on collective self-defense to imminent unlawful situations, limiting Japan to individual self-defense (Hughes, 2017). This restatement means that Japan can exercise defense only to defend Japanese territories and nothing else. In 1981, Prime Minister Zenko Suzuki⁴ allowed the MSDF (Maritime Self Defense Forces) to take responsibility for sea communication lines outside Japan's territory but in the name of Japan's sole interests. After, Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone⁵ allowed for JSDF (Japanese Self Defense Forces) to build-up its capabilities (Hughes, 2017). All these actions taken under three different premierships were all justified in the name of individual self-defense. Moreover, while they were politically and legally justified, they are also constitutionally contradictory because Article 9 prohibits the maintenance of materials with war potentials. Technically, defensive war is still war.

3. Strategic Debates on Contemporary Japan

There are four strategic debates on contemporary Japanese defense, as described by Richard Samuels (Samuels, 2008), and they are the following.

- 1) Pacifists—are led by the left-wing political parties like the JSP (Japan Socialist Party)⁶, the JCP (Japan Communist Party), and other Progressive groups. In particular, the JCP has been vocally against the military, and they were the people who were vehemently against Japan's imperialism during WWII. After the war, the freed JCP members were hailed as heroes for their bravery in opposing the “bad” militarist. Therefore, these groups of pacifists prefer no American military presence, if possible. At most, they would agree on possessing defensive defense but still opposed to JSDF, and of course, to their participation in peacekeeping operations abroad. In short, they support a reduced military role in Japan.

³ 66th Prime Minister of Japan.

⁴ 70th Prime Minister of Japan.

⁵ 71st Prime Minister of Japan

⁶ Japan Socialist Party was dissolved in 1996.

- 2) Middle Power Internationalists—proponents are those who support Japan’s global civilian role. They are the Asianists and Mercantilists faction who prefer Japanese presence centered in the Asian region and focus on trade and economic prosperity. Yoshihide Soeya⁷, a proponent of this theory, understands the importance of a strong alliance with the U.S. but is fully aware that overextension will hinder Japan’s potential. As such, supporters argue on focusing on the economic aspect and other specific fields, but not rivaling China or the U.S.
- 3) Normal Nationalists—is based on Ichiro Ozawa’s Blueprint for a New Japan. This strategy supports constitutional revision and political reforms for a more competitive conservatism. They are similar to Middle Power Internationalist as to what role Japan should play, but on the topic of the alliance, argues for a relatively equal standing to that of the U.S. Supporters of this contemporary identity includes hawkish neoconservatives like Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Moreover, we can see how the Abe Cabinet endeavored to achieve a Normal country status.
- 4) New Autonomists—are offensive realist those who seek a complete constitutional revision to allow Japanese possession of offensive capabilities. They are the group who may seek beyond what a typical Normal state has and may overhaul the Three Non-Nuclear Principles of not possessing, not producing, and not permitting the entry of nuclear weapons into Japanese territory (MOFA, Japan). As they are bothered by limitations imposed by the American designed 1947 Japanese constitution, they do not favorably look at American military base presence in Japan.

From the strategies mentioned above, it is not surprising that today’s Japan subscribes to the second and third debate of Middle Power Internationalist combined with Normal Country Nationalists. We will see why and how in the later chapters of this thesis.

4. Japan’s Middle Power Identity: Post-WWII until Abe’s Return in 2012

First, we must identify what a middle power is and how it is different from Japan’s definition. This understanding will clarify why we argue that Japan’s middle power being reconstructed under Abe.

⁷ Professor of Political Science at the Faculty of Law, Keio University. Well-known for his middle power Japan argument which we also referred to in this thesis.

Many experts describe Japan as a middle power, a state that can protect its core interests and initiate or lead change in specific aspects of the existing international framework (Wallis & Carr, 2016). For example, since the ADB (Asian Development Bank)'s initiation in 1966, it has had 10 Presidents, but despite its name, the President of the institution has always been Japanese. One key aspect of a middle power is its capability to build and start institutions, uphold, enforce regional and international order, and pursue its national interests even when contravening with the existing order. For instance, Japan can be considered a revisionist state from its persistent lobbying and urging other nations to vote for its inclusion in the U.N. Security Council.

Historically speaking, Japan's middle power identity that we are familiar with arguably originated in the seventies. In response to the growing and widespread anti-Japanese in the seventies due to Japan's increasing economic influence, Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda⁸ promised Asian powers that Japan renounces its role as a military power in his 1977 speech in Manila. This position is later known as the Fukuda Doctrine of 1977. The Fukuda Doctrine disavowed military power to establish partnerships with Southeast Asian countries, which simultaneously initiated Japan's identity as the middle power we know it. In the eighties, Prime Minister Nakasone used his friendly relations with the U.S. President Ronald Reagan and successfully convinced the latter to push for the total elimination of INF (intermediate-range nuclear forces) in Asia during Reagan's negotiation with the USSR's Mikhail Gorbachev in 1986. The following year, the U.S. and USSR signed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (The World News, 2018). This further cemented Japan's identity as a middle power in favor of minimum weaponry in its proximity. The 1990s Gulf War additionally secured Japan's position as a non-militaristic middle power by avoiding major commitment areas such as sending the JSDF to participate in the war. Instead, Japan opened its vast monetary reserves and sent a check of roughly \$13 billion in support of the coalition against Iraq (Nakanishi, 2011). However, later known as the "Gulf Shock" among Japanese commentators, this same event also became the trigger for Japan to change its

⁸ 67th Prime Minister of Japan.

non-militaristic middle power identity and augmented by the more realistic North Korean missile and perceived Chinese threats in the later nineties.

More recently, Yoshihide Soeya has argued that Japan should adopt middle power as its grand strategy. Soeya describes middle power as influential economically or in specific strategic aspects but has no aspiration to major rival powers like the U.S. and China for global and major regional power, respectively (Soeya, 2009). He argues that Japan's critical task now and in the future is to match its strategy explicitly with typical 'middle-power internationalism,' insisting that this is the most rational strategy for Japan then and for Japan of the future. According to Soeya, one of its most critical benefits is that the middle power strategy will ensure the Japan-U.S. security relationship's continuity. In his presentation in 2009, Soeya clarifies that Japan is already acting as what one would expect from a middle power nation. However, he insists that Japan still needs to adopt middle power policies to be more productive explicitly. Soeya asserts the necessity for a more balanced or a narrowed gap between economic and security policies, which will support Japan's autonomy, which will be independent yet still deeply connected with the U.S.

III. Changes under the Abe Cabinet

This section shifts our focus to the factors and events that lead to the transformative security measures introduced during Abe's premiership. The first half deals with what the author calls endogenous factors or the domestic changes that occurred, while the latter half focuses on the exogenous or external experiences that made it necessary from Abe's perspective to introduce reforms. The final parts mention the principles that guided the reforms in chapter 4.

1. Endogenous Factors

The author identifies three endogenous realities that strongly influenced Abe's decision to advance Japan's securitization: the fiscal constraints, the lessons from two decades of SDF experience, and the aspirations of LDP (Liberal Democratic Politicians) politicians under Abe.

1.1 Demographic and Fiscal Constraints

First and foremost, Japan is currently the third-largest economy recording 5.08 trillion dollars in 2019, its third-year consecutive growth, but still a big difference from 2012's 6.2 trillion dollars (World Bank, 2020), which also coincided with the restart of Abe's first year in the premiership after leaving the position in 2007. Japan's continuously declining population since reaching its peak in 2010 and decreasing to approximately 126 million in 2019 (World Bank, 2020). Of course, one may argue that Japan is overpopulated, given that its land size is the 62nd biggest out of 234 countries despite ranking 11th in terms of population (Worldometer, 2020). However, one critical issue here is that this declining population is also connected to Japan's low fertility rate of 1.42 for 2018 and a high life expectancy, which has been continuously increasing since 2011 (World Bank, 2020). This phenomenon then increases public debt wherein the tax revenue cannot keep up with government expenses, despite budget reallocation and twice increasing consumption tax in April 2014 and October 2019 from 5% to 8% and 8% to 10% (nippon.com), respectively. In other words, the continuously shrinking and aging Japanese population had contributed to the stagnant Japanese economy. Simultaneously, initial slowed growth resulted from poor economic policy decisions and international factors like wars in the Middle East.

The recent dullness of the Japanese economy can be attributed to the precedented outcomes that the government failed to address appropriately. This slowing economy also means that the Japanese government may eventually need to raise taxes again, an unpopular option. However, it guarantees government income to cover the ever-increasing expense involved if other policies (e.g., women empowerment, youth employment, work-life balance, and others) do not work. At the same time, this also means that the military may be the least of the public's priorities. Securitizing under Abe's leadership while still fiscally possible (stretched) and assisted by dominantly seated LDP politicians was a rational decision.

1.2 The Gulf Shock

For the second factor, the negative experience from passive military contribution, particularly during the Gulf War in 1991, has traumatized Japan and has served as a stark reminder that financial contribution is not enough. Japan infamously contributed thirteen billion dollars to America's efforts to vanquish Iraqis from Kuwait's territory but did not deploy the SDF (Kelly & Kubo, 2015). Tetsuya Nishimoto, a former senior Ground SDF General, commented from that experience, "We learned from the Gulf War that just sending money and not people would not earn us international respect" (Kelly & Kubo, 2015) and has persistently been a severe source of shame for Japanese SDF leadership. The time has come for Japanese boots on the ground. It does not necessarily mean they will start waging aggressive and offensive wars, but not having Japan's actual presence can significantly worsen Japan's image as uncooperative and selfish, which was how Japanese policymakers imagined Japan was viewed as the Gulf Shock. In short, this experience has called for the end of Japan's checkbook diplomacy and the beginning of a comparatively more equal partnership with Japanese forces included in contribution to foreign missions.

1.3 LDP Political Dominance

The third factor can be traced back to the 1994 electoral reform and political elites who favor constitutional reform (Cho & Shin, 2017). The former talks about how the 1994 electoral changes made a favorable platform for revisionist views instead of weakening the dominant LDP and how it only

further weakened declining opposing parties like the Socialist Party, resulting in pro-constitutional reform as the mainstream position in the Diet. The following notes how elites are exploiting domestic and international changes to push their priorities. The more recent change is shaped by the shift of power from the DPJ (Democratic Party of Japan), who wanted to build better relationships with its closest neighbors like China and South Korea, to the LDP, who desired freedom from accountability resulting from WWII. Under Abe, the government has taken a stricter position of moving away from psychological passivity or apology syndromes (Park, 2019).⁹ The Japanese elites and public were also reminded by how Japan's extension of an olive branch to China through first, on May 7th, 2008, when then-President Jintao Hu of China and then Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda signed a joint statement on the comprehensive promotion of "Mutually Beneficial Relationship Based on Common Strategic Interests. "This also recognized that Japan-China bilateral relationships are one of the most important for both parties(MOFA Japan, 2020). However, on December 8th of the same year, two Chinese government vessels intruded into the Senkaku Islands' sea. The incident clarified China's position concerning the Senkaku Islands, which for Japan, is a clear violation of its sovereignty, and China's bold attempt to change the status quo through force or coercion. Moving from failed attempt under LDP, the DPJ also made another approach through the East Asian community during Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama and again President Hu (Kantei, 2009) but was brushed away by the Senkaku incident in 2010, and Japan suffered what can be considered its first diplomatic defeat against China in more recent memories. This sentiment has only strengthened the desire to improve Japan's securitization. Another critical factor in the political sphere was LDP's complete dominance under Abe's 8-year consecutive reign as Prime Minister. For example, when Abe returned to power in 2012, out of 480 House of Representatives seats, 294 went to LDP, clearing 50%, and Komeito, its coalition partner, garnered thirty-one, to a total of 325 seats and completely overwhelming possible opposition (nippont.com)—not mentioning other parties who were not in strict partnership with LDP but had similar policy priorities. It is no surprise that the Abe Cabinet could introduce controversial security changes (e.g., the

⁹ Apology syndrome is the repeated apologies for the pains caused by Imperial Japan in the 20th century, most particularly, during WWII.

reinterpretation of Article 9) that were unpopular amongst the public, but with the LDP number in power, was possible.

2. Exogenous Factors

The perceived threats from North Korea comes from the unresolved abduction issue and its ongoing nuclear missile program. Meanwhile, identified threats from China come from its expanding military expenditure, unrelenting sovereignty claims in the East and South China sea, including a territorial dispute with Japan, complemented by America's increasing demands for more active Japanese contribution (i.e., boots on the ground) to America's global security missions. All these have rationalized Abe's decision to adopt the security changes we will see in the next chapter.

2.1 North Korea

The beginning of Japan and North Korea relations after WWII has been calm in some way. The interaction was limited for one. Trade and communication were discouraged, and travel was, of course, prohibited even after the end of the Korean War in 1953. This situation was the case despite North Korea's Foreign Minister Nam Il stating that North Korea is open to establishing trade and cultural relations with Japan (日本大百科全書). While the relationship on the political level was slow, thanks to the public's efforts, there were some exchanges between civilian citizens. In August 1959, people of North Korean ancestry who were initially brought as laborers during the war and were stranded in Japan post-WWII were finally allowed to return to their own countries. As a result, between 1960-1961, approximately 70,000 Koreans returned to North Korea (日本大百科全書). From 1971-1974, there were changes easing travel restrictions between the two countries and allowed travel depending on the situation. Finally, in January 1986, METI (Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry)'s predecessor provided 300 billion yen worth of export insurance to 30 Japanese companies trading with North Korea to foster Japan-North Korean trade. This agreement ended right after the Korean Air Flight 858 incident wherein two North Korean agents used a forged Japanese passport and bombed the plane resulting in 115 casualties (Yonhap News Agency, 2019). Since then, the bilateral relationship has been a

tumultuous one, especially with the unresolved abduction issue and North Korea's unrelenting nuclear program.

2.1.1 Japanese Abduction Issue

Between the 1970s to 1980s, 17 Japanese were abducted by North Korean agents, with one as young as 13 years old.¹⁰ After decades of denial, during the first Japan-North Korea summit meeting on September 17th, 2002, Chairman of the National Defense Commission of North Korea, Kim Jong-Il, acknowledged the incident and officially apologized. He also promised his government's commitment to return the remaining Japanese to normalize their relationship with Prime Minister Koizumi's Japan. On October 15th of the same year, five abductees returned to Japan,¹¹ while others' situations are still unclear.

This October 2020, Japanese and North Korean delegates again discussed the abduction issue during the U.N. General Assembly Third Committee (Kyodo News, 2020). The North Korean government insists that the issue is solved with five Japanese repatriated in 2002, eight deceased, and the other four not entering North Korea (MOFA Japan, 2020). Japan vehemently denies this and believes that the others are still alive and demand their return to Japan. It is noteworthy that Prime Minister Abe's successor, Prime Minister Suga, actively seeks the remaining Japanese's return, whom the government firmly believes are still under North Korean custody.

The Japanese are actively using different forums for the return of abductees like the U.N., the Six-Party Talks, multilateral frameworks such as the G7 and ASEAN summit meetings, and bilateral consultations.¹² For the Japanese government only when a. the abductees are safely returned, b. full truth on the dealings with the abduction, and c. the transfer of personnel involved in the abduction to Japan are cleared can the issue be deemed solved. Without resolving this issue, achieving normalization between Japan and North Korea is impossible from the Japanese side. However, given that more than 40 years have passed since most were abducted, the remaining 12 Japanese safety return seems next to

¹⁰ Megumi Yokota was a junior high student at the time of her abduction. Five of the 17 abductees were abducted outside Japan. Kyodo News, "Japan Extends Olive Branch to North Korea over Abduction Issue,".

¹¹ Yasushi and Fukie Chimura, Kaoru and Yukiko Hasuike, and Hitomi Soga were the five abductees who returned after 24 years in North Korea.

¹² Bilateral consultations with US, China, and South Korea for cooperation.

impossible. Thus, if the Japanese government does not change its demands, then normalizing diplomatic relations with North Korea is doomed never to happen. To quote the official government statement, “The abduction of Japanese citizens by North Korea is a grave concern which affects the national sovereignty of Japan...” (MOFA Japan, 2020), making this issue a critical factor that makes North Korea a threat to Japan.

2.1.2 Missile Tests

One core element that makes North Korea a threat to Japan is its ongoing nuclear missile program. Despite multiple repeated calls from neighboring countries and from the international community, topped by multiple sanctions, to immediately end the program. North Korea has its reasons for continuously conducting missile tests, but what matters to Japan is that Japan does not know when it will directly be targeted or accidentally hit by the missiles.

The North Korean nuclear program started in the late seventies and has been ongoing ever since. Japan has been adhering to the international community’s decision against North Korea but was not as active as South Korea and the U.S. in the initial stage when the North Korean threat was deemed minuscule. However, in 1998, the Taepodong-1 missile flew over Japan for the very first time. This experience has made North Korea a clear and verified threat to Japanese security (Gittings, 1998). Before this, Japan mostly left North Korea to itself and disregarded its capabilities, but the reality of a North Korean missile that overflowed Japanese territory has made the latter acknowledge the former posing a threat. Since then, similar to South Korea and the U.S., Japan has been a vocal opposer to North Korea’s nuclear program.

Date	Model
1998, August 31 st	Taepodong-1
2009, April 5 th	Taepodong-2
2012, December 12 th	Taepodong-3
2016, February 7 th	Taepodong-3
2017, August 29 th	Hwasong-12
2017, September 15 th	Hwasong-12

Table 1: The following chart lists the North Korean Ballistic Missiles that flew over Japan from the Ministry of Defense, Japan¹³

Four out of the six ballistic missiles that flew over Japan since the first one in 1998 were during the Abe Cabinet. It is no wonder why the North Korean threat was a critical exogenous factor or justification for the security reforms introduced by Prime Minister Abe.

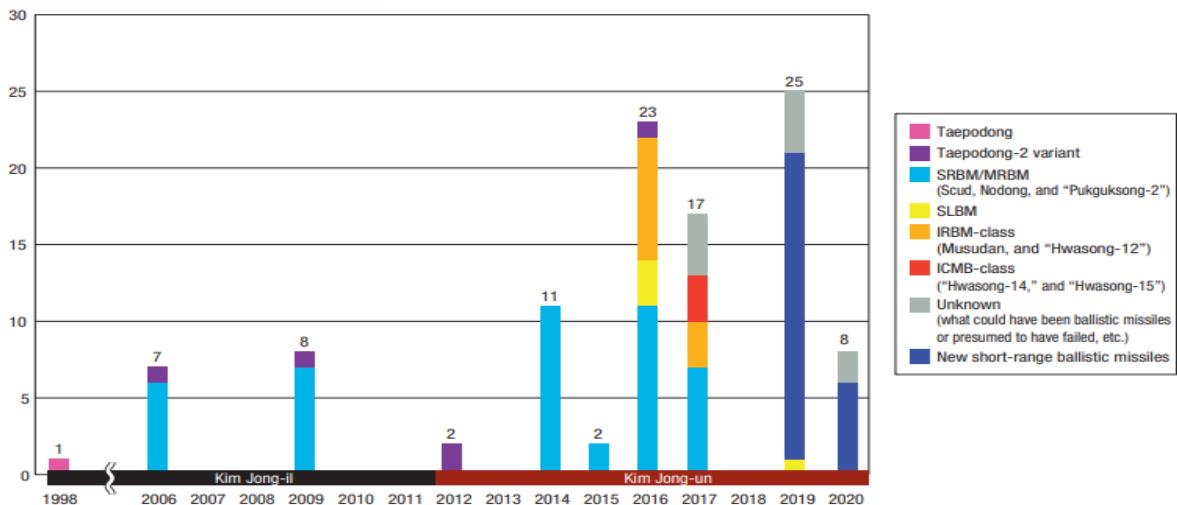


Figure 1: Number of Ballistic Missile Launched by North Korea (as of March 2020) from the Ministry of Defense, Japan¹⁴

Furthermore, since Kim Jong-un rose to leadership, North Korea has launched 88 ballistic missiles. In other words, Abe saw 88 launches by North Korea during his leadership. It is no surprise that Japan would impose drastic security measures to securitize itself against North Korean missiles.

To summarize this section, the failed diplomatic negotiations with North Korea during Junichiro Koizumi's premiership and the subsequent lies regarding the abducted Japanese have made not only politicians but also the Japanese public wary of North Korea. More recently, Kim Jong-un's rise to

¹³ Chapter 2 Defense Policies of Countries, Section 3 Korea,” Chapter 2 Defense Policies of Countries, Section 3 Korea (2020). P. 97

¹⁴ Ibid. P. 96

power in December 2011 and the several nuclear missile developments and tests North Korea has conducted ever since has reaffirmed the North Korean threat.

2.2 China

It cannot be more emphasized how critical history is in Japan-China relations. A nation's unique historical experience shapes and determines their actions, primarily when their identity was formed through interaction with another. As recent as the 17th century under the Ming Empire, Japan was a tributary state of China. In exchange for accepting China's superiority, Japan sent scholars to China to learn the language, culture, and customs and brought them back to Japan. As a result, a significant part of the Japanese language, mainly writing, is imported from China.

The geographical proximity between the two has naturally led to an intimate relationship since ancient times. The first recorded interaction happening in 57 A.D. when the Emperor Guangwu of Han gave a golden seal to the envoy of Wa (Japan). Contemporary Japan-China relations are best explained from a constructivist perspective. Their shared historical experiences, particularly from World War II, have persistently impacted relations even today. The historical animosity reflects this in Japan-China relations, which can exacerbate tensions when the two are unamicable and is a significant determinant of China's response to the Japanese defense posture.

Japan's past identity has made it difficult for China and its people to acknowledge the positive changes Japan experienced post-WWII. From Japan's side, it seems that despite resolutions to distinguish itself from the past, their efforts are not appreciated. However, the contradictions from Japan cannot also be ignored. For instance,

- 1) Japanese leaders are reluctant to reflect and portray Japan's aggression as they must.¹⁵
- 2) Right-wing politicians speak mindlessly of past transgressions.
- 3) Japan's economic rise in the 70s and experience of being the second-largest economy for 42 years, and becoming a source of envy,¹⁶ filled it with self-confidence and boosted nationalism.

¹⁵ To the next generation for fear of repudiation and destroying social cohesion.

¹⁶ Anti-Japanese protests in the 70s due to Japan's sudden emergence as an economic powerhouse was a cause of disdain from immediate neighbors and as far as the US.

All of these make it even harder for some Japanese to sympathize with their Chinese counterparts.¹⁷

2.1.2 Expanding Military Budget

In reflection of the atrocities Japan committed against China during World War II, Japan was one of the most considerable overseas development aid and source of investment for China, which started in 1979 and officially ended in 2018. To be more precise, Japan's ODA to China started in 1979 and general grant aid¹⁸ ended in 2006, while international yen loan¹⁹ ended in 2007 (MOFA Japan, 2018). Only projects that will affect Japanese livelihood if left alone (e.g., environmental degradation and infectious diseases) continued receiving grants until 2018. To put it into perspective, from 1979 until 2016, China received loan aid amounting to 3.3 trillion yen, a grant worth 157.6 billion yen, and technical cooperation²⁰ of 184.5 billion. In short, the Japanese ODA to China from 1979-2016 totaled three trillion yen (MOFA Japan, 2018). Combined with appropriate economic policies, China underwent rapid economic development. Japan also greatly benefitted from improved Chinese infrastructure and technical skills with Japanese companies outsourcing in China or building factories in the country during Japan's high economic growth and until the early 2000s. In this period, when economic prosperity was most valued, the overall relationship between the two countries was more or less stable. However, things started to change when the Japanese bubble economy burst in February 1991, and Japan's economic stagnation lasted for two decades, while China continuously grew (iFinance). From Japan's perspective, China's rapid economic development eventually became a source of threat as it coincided with China's attempt to reform the region's status quo in its image, which for Japan was destabilizing.

With more budget at hand, China could spend on sectors and industries more than ever before. One of which was the sudden influx of the Renminbi into the military-industrial complex and defense budget. In comparison to China, although Japan makes four times the amount of China's GDP per capita, Japan has barely increased its military budget, a mere 24% from 1996 to 2018 (Heginbotham & Samuels,

¹⁷ This also applies to other former colonies in Asia, including South Korea.

¹⁸ Financial assistance without obligation of repayment.

¹⁹ Loans under relaxed conditions. Such as low interest and long repayment period.

²⁰ Technologies to improve technical level and spread the use of technology among citizens.

2018). China, however, has increased its spending by 724% within the same period. The following charts detail the military spending percentage per GDP.

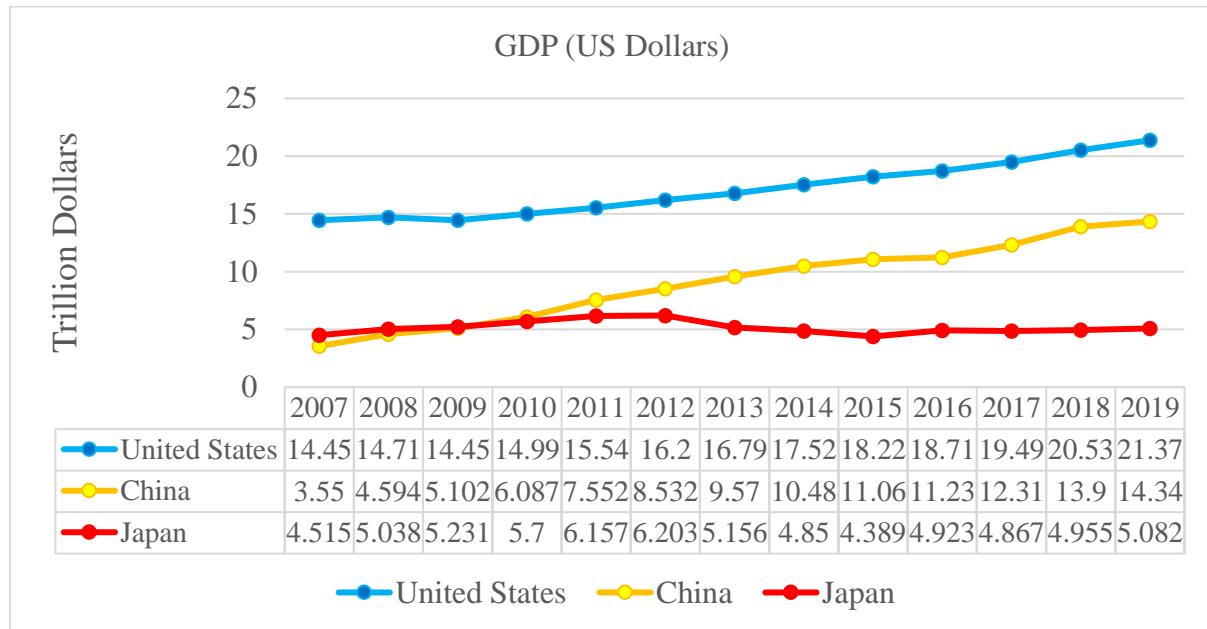


Figure 2: GDP for the U.S., China, and Japan from the World Bank²¹

The graph shows data from 2007, the second year of Abe's first term as Prime Minister, and when the first Quadrilateral Security Dialogue was conducted. The gap between Japan and China's GDP was narrowing, and finally, in 2010, China overcame the Japanese, becoming the second-largest economy in the world.

²¹ “GDP (Current US\$),” Data (World Bank), accessed November 6, 2020.

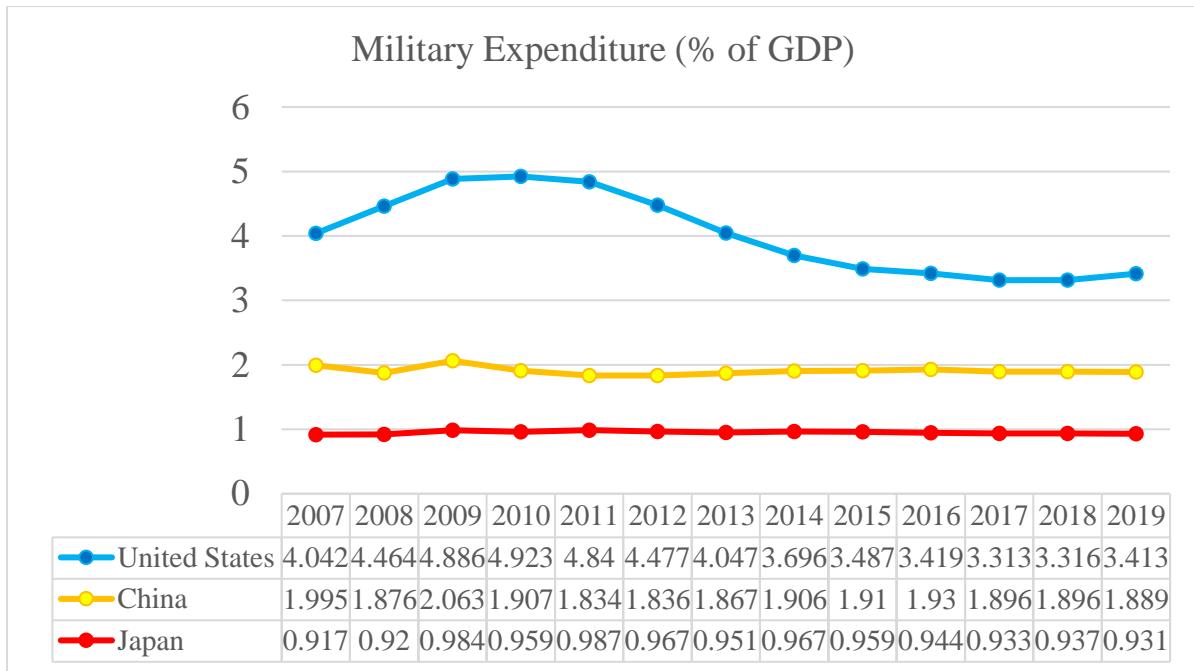


Figure 3: Percentage of GDP for Military Expenditure from the World Bank²²

This increased defense budget in China has led to increased military capabilities by investing more in advanced military technology development such as air defense, intelligence, cyber (i.e., defensive and offensive), carriers, and ballistic missile submarines. The Lowy Institute ranks China first in the number of ground-based missile launchers for 2020,²³ the most in Asia.

2.2.1 Diplomatic Defeat

When Japan was under the DPJ leadership, and the Japanese government attempted to improve relations between Japan, China, and South Korea, the 2010 trawler collision or the Senkaku incident occurred (Green & Hicks et al., 2017). The fishing trawler from China hit the Japanese coast guards and dented the latter's ship. Japan then captured the “fishermen” of the Chinese boat, but China actively lobbied against Japan’s action. Eventually, all the fishermen were returned to China. Nevertheless, it was a stark reminder and remains fresh in Japanese memory of what they thought was betrayal from China. China pressured and intimated Japan verbally and imposed sanctions by ceasing exports of

²² “Military Expenditure (% of GDP),” Data (World Bank), accessed November 7, 2020.

The military expenditure definition used by World Bank is derived from SIPRI’s, that is all expenditures including peacekeeping forces, defense ministries and other government agencies involved in defense.

²³ Launching platforms for ICBM (intercontinental ballistic missiles), IRBM (intermediate-range ballistic missile), MRBM (medium-range ballistic missile), SRBM (short-ranged ballistic missile), and GLCM (ground-launched cruise missile).

precious materials necessary to make microchips and others. It politically damaged Japan's ego. After, there were strong claims from China of the Senkaku islands under Japanese jurisdiction, and the 2012 nationalization of the islands led to strong anti-Japanese sentiment and a national boycott of Japanese goods. While DPJ may have, to some extent, succumbed to Chinese intimidation in 2010, the 2012 incident—which was the same year when Abe and the LDP aggressively campaigned for election to regain party leadership —was not overlooked, reasserting Chinese threat to Japan's security.

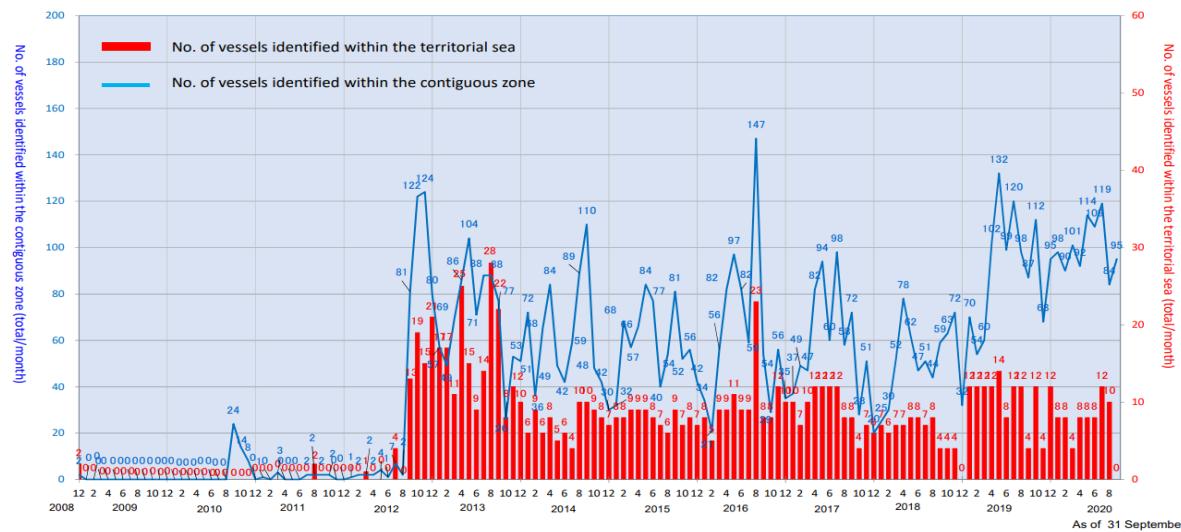


Figure 4: Trends in Chinese Government and Other Vessels in the Waters Surrounding the Senkaku Islands from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan²⁴

This graph demonstrates the increasing incidents of Chinese vessels entering the Japanese domain with a spike since 2012. On April 15th, 2012, Tokyo Governor Shintaro Ishihara publicly stated his intention to purchase Senkaku islands through Tokyo's budget during his speech in Washington D.C. (Jackson, 2012). To prevent this from happening, the Japanese government bought the Senkaku Islands from private citizens on September 11th, 2012,²⁵ and ever since there has been the constant entry of Chinese vessels into Japan's territorial waters.

On another note, there was intense pressure from the U.S. for equal cooperation from Japan in maintaining the international liberal order. America's insistence was an excellent justification for Abe

²⁴ “Trends in Chinese Government and Other Vessels in the Waters Surrounding the Senkaku Islands

²⁵ Three Senkaku Islands of Uotsuri, Kitakojima, and Minamikojima Islands.

as the LDP and even opposition parties in Japan know Japan-US Security Defense Treaty's significance. Using North Korea and the Chinese threat in addition to staunch support and encouragement from the U.S., as justifications, Japan successfully introduced security reforms and passed bills that expand SDF's role in the fight against global terrorism.

We now move on to the ongoing reconstruction of Japan's middle power identity different from its decade's old predecessor. To answer the domestic and international demand for a reformed Japan, Abe changed the country. The author believes that there are two main guiding principles for Japan's securitization. First is *Nihon wo Torimodosu*, and the other is its goal of Proactive Contribution to Peace.

3. Principles for Securitization

3.1 Nihon wo Torimodosu

This slogan was one of the most prominent rallying cries used by Shinzo Abe and the LDP in 2012. It was most heard during the 46th Lower House election in 2012 and the following year's 23rd Upper House election (Weblio, 2020).

When translated directly, the phrase means "take back Japan." However, the question is from whom or what. While there is no consensus on what it means, some people think it pertains to returning Japan to the strong independent nation it used to be. If not to that extent, at least provide Japan the capacity to defend itself from possible aggressors that current security measures are incapable of doing. Others think it means to take Japan back from the DPJ, which has been leading the country for approximately three years. The author is leaning to the former, defining the slogan as one that argues for a more autonomous Japan with sufficient security infrastructures to secure its sovereignty from probable threats. In short, the central concept is to take Japan back from an Abnormal status to a Normal state by overcoming its sense of defeatism that has lingered since the end of WWII, simultaneously maintaining the condition of economic prominence on top of a freer JSDF. As such, the *Nihon wo Torimodosu* mindset is a firm principle that guided Abe's decision.

3.2 Proactive Contribution to Peace

First of all, the term “Indo-Pacific” was used by Prime Minister Abe during his first prime ministership in 2007 when he initiated the first QUAD (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) in response to growing China, based on the concept of *Democratic Peace* (Hosoya, 2019). This QUAD was formed to establish an Asian Arc of Democracy, ultimately inviting other democratic nations in the Asia Pacific, excluding China. It did not do much, and Abe resigned from his prime minister role in the same year. Several years passed, and in December 2013, the first National Security Strategy announced Japan’s goal of a more proactive contribution to global peace (Fukushima, 2014). During the TICAD (Tokyo International Conference on African Development) VI in Kenya in August 2016, Prime Minister Abe presented FOIP to an international audience for the first time. He emphasized that FOIP aims to improve Asia and Africa’s security situations, promote more excellent development, and support the rule of law’s advancement (MOFA Japan, 2017), and this is one way of how Abe will realize its proactive contribution to global peace. As previously mentioned, a middle power can enforce and uphold the international order, which is a part of FOIP, allowing Japan to pursue its national interests and extend its influence beyond its geographical limit.

Japan’s FOIP strategy is a big nod to the classical geopolitics assumption that “relative location of a state... of security communities” (Schreer, 2017). As Japan is in an area where it is surrounded by “unfriendly” and militarily superior states suchlike China and Russia and currently, the worst diplomatic relations with South Korea have served as justification for the Abe administration to initiate a new security architecture it believes will be capable of ensuring Japan’s survival. Japan also uses FOIP as a diplomatically acceptable means of spreading its influence beyond Asia and Africa through foreign direct investments, technical training, and ability-sharing with African states.

The U.S. is currently advocating for the FOIP strategy to balance against China’s BRI (Belt and Road Initiative). As FOIP is inviting nations that are understood to be under China’s sphere of influence and courting ASEAN nations to commit themselves to FOIP, the strategy can pose a significant blow to China’s growing influence. However, there is also an argument saying the new FOIP or FOIP 2.0 is

more accommodating to China and seeks cooperation than confrontation. Regardless, the point is that Japan's goal of *Proactive Contribution to Peace* is a significant influencer for Japan's security transformation.

Having gone through the two significant thoughts, *Nihon wo Torimodosu* and *Proactive Contribution to Peace*, in Abe's security decisions, we now move on to the actual security development, modifications, and revisions under Abe's leadership.

IV. Security Developments under the Abe Cabinet

The author identifies two critical security modifications under Abe, which are pivotal to reconstructing Japan's unique middle power identity. As mentioned in previous chapters, the peculiarity of Japan's middle power status lies in Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, which forever renounces war as a sovereign right, renounces the use of threat or force to settle disputes. It also pledges never to maintain capabilities with war potential. It is unique because all sovereign states have the legal right to enjoy the previously listed restrictions, and Japan contradicts itself with the existence of JSDF.

Some of the identified security reforms are further divided into sub-categories. Each scheme plays importance for rebuilding Japan's identity, from a middle power with strong economic preference and highly restricted security capabilities to a more traditional middle power that is militarily self-sufficient. On the one hand, we have what we consider as the less scrutinized security reforms under Abe. They are the creation of the NSC (National Security Council) and the NSS (National Security Strategy) and modification of the NDPG (National Defense Program Guidelines). On the other hand, is the highly debated and divisive reinterpretation of Article 9, the core element that gave the Constitution's moniker of "*Peace Constitution*." The legalization of collective self-defense and the ensuing security bills provided the legal basis for the reinterpretation.

1. Overlooked Security Reforms

1.1 National Security Council and National Security Strategy

First, the NSC was established on December 4th, 2013 (MOFA, 2016), but originated from the 2007 bill proposed during Abe's first term (Liff, 2015). It aims to centralize national security policy decision-making, implementing the NSC and the NDPG. It can be remembered that during Abe's first term, he only served for only 11 months. The succeeding leadership did not prioritize the NSC, and it was not until the Abe and LDP's dominant return to power in 2012 that the topic was raised again. In January 2013, while Abe was visiting Vietnam, the In Amenas hostage crisis in Algeria occurred (BBC News, 2013). The Japanese government, which was not ready to deal with such an emergency crisis

and with no centralized security decision-makers faced difficulty gaining information and making prompt and correct decisions. In the end, 10 Japanese nationals were killed (mainichi, 2013). This incident became the trigger to establish the NSC. Currently, NSC has a biweekly “Four Minister Meeting,” which the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister, the Defense Minister, and the Chief Cabinet Secretary (Liff, 2015). Their frequent discussions have been critical in guiding which countries, events, and others can be perceived as a threat to Japan’s survival. In short, they act as the control center for all national and international security measures.

Next, the creation of the NSS was also critical in reforming Japan’s middle power identity. Before its first publication in December 2013, there were criticisms from foreign scholars and policymakers of NSS’s absence that make Japanese policies unpredictable and unaccountable (Fukushima, 2014). In other words, another normal state has it, but Japan never did, until Abe thought it must be a security priority. Now, allies can be more assured of Japan’s more concrete, strategized, and committed participation in ensuring global peace. Another critical importance of NSS lies in its new doctrine, “*Proactive Contribution to Peace*.” As explained in the previous chapter, this concept is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ ongoing mantra to spread Japan’s soft power and the Ministry of Defense when meeting with status quo security allies when the topic of maintaining the international liberal order, North Korea, China’s Rise, and other survival threats is discussed.

1.2 National Defense Program Guidelines

The modification to the NDPG was another significant development under Prime Minister Abe. NDPG was initially made under DPJ leadership in 2010 and changed Japan’s defense orientation towards “active defense.” This strategy includes reorienting SDF’s posture from Hokkaido in the North²⁶ to Okinawa, Kyushu, and the Senkaku Islands in the Southwest of Japan²⁷, but again saw amendments in 2015. In a nutshell, the modified NDPG shows the shift from active defense to dynamic defense as the preferred strategy. Pre-1990s, Japan’s preferred defense strategy was based on protecting the country by enduring enemy forces for a week or more until the main U.S. forces arrive, then pass

²⁶ Originally positioned to defend Japan from Russian invasion from the North.

²⁷ To now defend against Chinese invasion.

the buck to the U.S. on vanquishing the aggressor. However, from the 1990s until 2014, America's international involvement in wars abroad has made it clear that active denial is the more appropriate defense strategy.

Active denial aims to create a capable resistance for an extended period and "heighten risks to the aggressor," with the JSDF taking the primary position and the U.S. troops as a subsidiary force (Heginbotham & Samuels, 2018). However, due to China's substantial military technology build-up and improved organizations, and enhanced capacities, the preferred strategy has become obsolete. The dynamic defense was then adopted under Abe. This defensive strategy will enhance the ability to generate prolonged fighting, thus inducing deterrence and reducing the incentives for either side to strike during a crisis. In this way, Japan can also assume a substantial role in its defense and provide more options for Japan and its defenders. Most importantly, it allows Japan to adjust its defending capabilities based on potential aggressors' capacities. Thus, it will allow Japan to respond to any destabilizing events and contingencies appropriately and justifies Japan's improving defense potential if the perceived threats increase their military capacity.

Concerning the highly scrutinized Peace Constitution, the Japanese government's official stance has been that Japan has the right to collective self-defense granted by the U.N. Charter to all member states, and this right is also explicitly recognized by the Japan-US alliance. Regardless, the government also understood that its execution is unconstitutional. Abe is infamous for reinterpreting Article 9. Knowing that reinterpreting is not enough, Abe and the LDP produced two Major Security Bills criticized as a "threat to regional peace" or even called "war legislation" to provide a legal foundation for the 2014 Cabinet Resolution.

2. Scrutinized Security Reforms

Under international law, collective self-defense was established as a state right as part of the 1945 U.N. charter. This right is covered under Chapter VII Article 51, which states that member countries have an "inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a United

Nations member (U.N., 2016). Essentially, collective self-defense gives U.N. member states the ability to use military force to protect another member state from foreign attacks.

Going back a bit on the history of Japan's self-defense development can be explained in two dimensions, the external and internal developments. Externally, Japan began to see the international structure's degradation, beginning in the 1960s and 1970s. American involvement in the Vietnam War and the subsequent withdrawal from Asia as part of the Nixon Doctrine showed increasing American expectations that Japan would support collective self-defense. Then, the increasing Cold War tensions in the 1970s and 1980s resulted in further pressure from the U.S. for Japan to take a more proactive role in regional security. This happening led to the 1978 Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation, which outlined bilateral security obligations under the Japan-US Security Treaty (MOD, Japan). However, at that moment, Japan still rebuked the idea that collective self-defense was an option for Japan. The guidelines list Japan's security posture to deter foreign aggression and America's role in ensuring Japan succeeds in defending its territories. In short, individual self-defense with U.S. assistance.

Together with international pressures, internal changes were occurring in Japan. Historically, Japan had recognized its right to collective self-defense but had rejected using it, deeming it incompatible with Article 9. This refusal allowed Japan the political autonomy to stay out of potential American conflicts in Asia and avoid entrapment. In 1972 Prime Minister Kakuei reiterated constitutional prohibitions on collective self-defense to imminent unlawful situations, which limited Japan to individual self-defense. In May 1981, Prime Minister Zenko allowed the MSDF to take responsibility for sea communication lines outside Japan's territory (Hughes, 2017). Later still, Prime Minister Nakasone allowed for a build-up of JSDF capabilities. Even though these moves may represent a growing capability in Japan for collective self-defense, they were all justified under the umbrella of individual self-defense. In other words, the SDF revision stage was readied decades ago with the gradual normalizing and expansion of SDF's capacities, and Prime Minister Abe urged for a reinterpretation to legalize the use of collective self-defense.

2.1 Reinterpretation of Article 9 and the Collective Self-Defense

After decades of preparation and years of discussions, in 2014, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe pushed for a reinterpretation of Japan's right to use collective defense, which then came to fruition by a Cabinet decision on July 1st, 2014, and the passage of legislation by the National Diet in September 2015. These decisions meant that Japan could now exercise force even if not under direct attack if three new conditions were met.²⁸ Previously, Japan rejected collective self-defense as antithetical to its Constitution and instead insisted on individual defense.

Prime Minister Abe and his supporters argued that his policy did not represent a shift away from Japan's past standing on the issue of collective self-defense. Instead, his reinterpretation would enhance deterrence, offer legal and political brakes to the use of collective self-defense, and it was made through an open and democratic process. In short, Abe only wanted to move towards a more "Proactive Contribution to Peace." Others, though, argued that Abe's attempts to reinterpret the Constitution through the Cabinet rather than constitutional revision was undemocratic and that such a redefinition could become a slippery slope for Japan. The opposition also argued that the loosening restrictions on Japan's collective self-defense could get Japan embroiled in American missions and responses to security crises.

Abe infamously reinterpreted Article 9 by a Cabinet Decision on July 1st, 2014, and the passage of legislation by the National Diet in September 2015. This legislation means that constitutionally, the practice of collective self-defense is now legal. However, knowing that mere reinterpretation is not enough. His Cabinet produced two major Security Bills criticized as a "threat to regional peace" and sometimes was even called "war legislation" to provide a legal foundation for the 2014 Cabinet Resolution.

²⁸ 1. Japan's survival is threatened (存立危機), 2. no alternative means, and 3. if the former two are present, the minimum necessary amount of force is used.

2.2 Two Major Security Bills

The first is the “Act for the Improvement of the Peace and Safety Legislation,” introduced on September 30th, 2015. The Abe Cabinet justified the bill through the following statement: *“In light of the changes in the security environment surrounding Japan, it is necessary to establish measures to contribute to the peace and security of Japan and the international community, such as international peace cooperation activities to be implemented for international cooperation peace and security activities, such as defensive measures and other countermeasures to be implemented in situations where the existence of Japan is threatened, and the right to pursue freedom and happiness is undermined. This is the reason for submitting the bill.”* (House of Representatives Japan).

The Abe Cabinet argues that a more precise guideline for Japan will ensure better protection and defense of its sovereignty and its citizens. For example, if a Japanese was abducted and had to be rescued in the past, the Japanese government’s only option is to ask for allies and friendly states to rescue its citizens. While this was a good option in itself, there also the reality that if the allied country had to prioritize the rescue of a group of abductees, they would prioritize their citizens. Even though JSDF was deployed to other countries, they were only there for non-combatting peacekeeping operations, such as assisting in infrastructure building. If a situation occurs wherein some Japanese technical professionals were attacked in country A where the SDF is also present, they cannot use weapons to protect those non-combatants. That is why this Act was significant because it clarified and increased the scope of SDF’s contribution in peacekeeping missions and capacities to protect and rescue Japanese abroad.

The second is the “International Peace Support Act,” and was also introduced on September 30th, 2015. The Cabinet’s reasoning submitted to the Parliament was the following: *“When a situation poses a threat to the peace and security of the international community, and it is necessary for the international community to jointly respond to such threats per the objectives of the Charter of the United Nations, Japan as a member of the international community needs to contribute proactively and actively to such activities; it is necessary to contribute to ensuring the peace and security of the*

international community by providing cooperation and assistance to the armed forces of other countries that carry out such activities. This is the reason for submitting the bill.” (The House of Representatives Japan).

The Cabinet argues that it is necessary for Japan to actively cooperate on instances when the world’s peace and security are threatened. We believe that Japan has plenty of room for translations after and when the bill is applied by presenting a vague situational threat concept. Because its target can be construed as a threat to the international community, it can be anything, for example, against China’s attempt to change the status quo with its neighbors in the South China sea and Japan, whose territorial integrity is challenged by China. The Act mentioned above also strengthens Japan’s FOIP strategy, the backbone, and the architect for Japan’s proactive contribution to peace and security. The last section, which specifies assistance to other countries’ armed forces, justifies the right to collective self-defense.

Other laws passed with scrutiny are the Act on the Protection of Specially Designated Secrets, or State Secrecy Law approved by the National Diet on December 10th, 2013, and went into effect a year later (Pollman, 2014). State secrets involve those about Japan’s defense and other secrets deemed as sensitive by the government. There was an intense public backlash during its deliberation, but the Abe government pushed to improve intelligence sharing with the U.S. The end of Three Principles on Arms Exports and Their Related Policy Guidelines on April 1st, 2014 (Fackler, 2014)²⁹ and its replacement to the Three Principles of Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology adopted on December 17th, 2013 (MOFA Japan, 2014). By acquiring better technology and equipment, Japan hopes to contribute to the international community’s peace and security proactively.

All these measures and changes have only made it clear that Japan is transforming from an Abnormal to a Normal state. Thus, reconstructing its unique middle power identity of a strong economy but dependent security we have known it for since the seventies, to a more rational middle power that

²⁹ Adopted in 1967.

is still economically powerful but at the same time, more independent on the front of security. The next chapter details the changes brought by the two security bills.

V. Implications of Security Reforms

In this chapter, we discuss the implications of the Abe Cabinet's successive security reforms. We incorporate debates and experts' analyses on Japanese security, Diet documents, and relevant references to engage in the vibrant discussion on Japan's identity deeply.

1. Middle Power Identity Shift

Historically, Japan had recognized its right to collective self-defense, a right that is allotted to all United Nations member states. However, Japan had rejected using it for its incompatibility with Article 9. There was also strong opposition amongst the public of any change or infringement to the sacred article, with the defeat from WWII fresh in some, particularly the older generation's memories. This vehement refusal allowed Japan the justification to dodge participation in American conflicts abroad.³⁰ Therefore, the constitution has been left as it is since enforcement in 1947.

ARTICLE 9

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

(2) *In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as another war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.* (Kantei).

1.1 Domestic

There was tremendous public opposition when Article 9 reinterpretation was under consideration. The Diet Commission officially began its work towards constitutional revision in the early 2000s, and the Japanese media has been interested in knowing the public's opinion towards the considered revision. On Constitution Day, May 3rd, the question on constitutional revision is always one of the poll topics. The following discusses the public positions on constitutional revision. As the only step after Article 9

³⁰ The Korean War (1950-1953), Vietnam War (1970-), and Gulf War (1990-1991).

reinterpretation is revision, it is important to see the Japanese public's position on Article 9 because if revision is to be, there will be a national referendum.

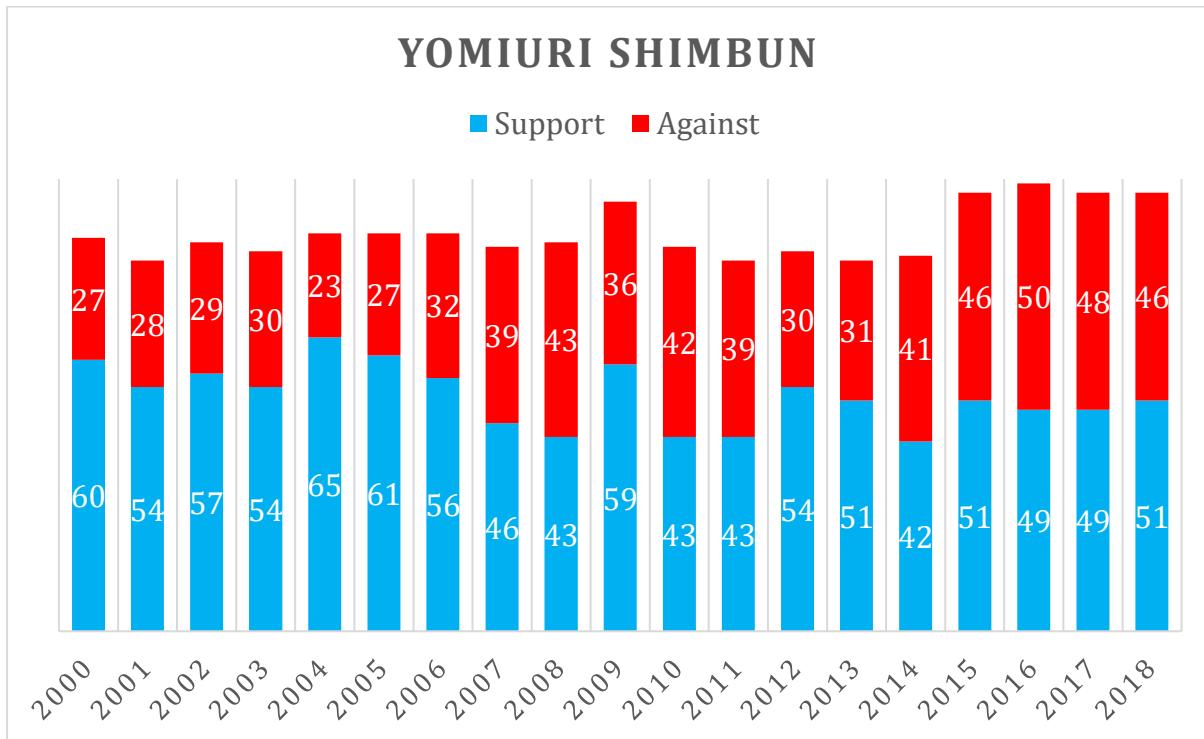


Figure 5: Yomiuri Shimbun readers opinion on Constitutional Revision from the data compiled by the Council on Foreign Relations³¹

Yomiuri Shimbun is one of the largest newspaper company by circulation in Japan. It is known as a leading conservative agency supportive of the Abe Cabinet. As a corporation, Yomiuri is vocal in its support with constitutional revision, having also published its version of revision proposals in 1994, 2000, and 2004 (Asaoka & Teraoka, 2016). Yomiuri readers, in general, are conservative and tend to support constitutional revision. In the early 2000s until 2006, revising the constitution was the popular opinion. It saw a 10-point decline in 2007 that is not surprising as this was when Prime Minister Abe introduced the National Referendum Law, and it continued the following year. When DPJ secured political leadership, the option of constitutional revision was unpopular. However, the 2012 nationwide

³¹ Asaoka, M., & Teraoka, A. (2016, August 1). Japanese Public Opinion on Constitutional Revision in 2016. <https://www.cfr.org/blog/japanese-public-opinion-constitutional-revision-2016>. 2017-2018 results is derived from other news articles.

anti-Japanese protests in China and their aftermaths have made the Japanese rethink the necessity of constitutional revision when dealing with China.³² When Article 9 was reinterpreted in 2014, there was a sudden 9-point down in support from the previous year. Since reinterpretation, there has been almost equal support and opposition towards constitutional revision among Yomiuri readers.

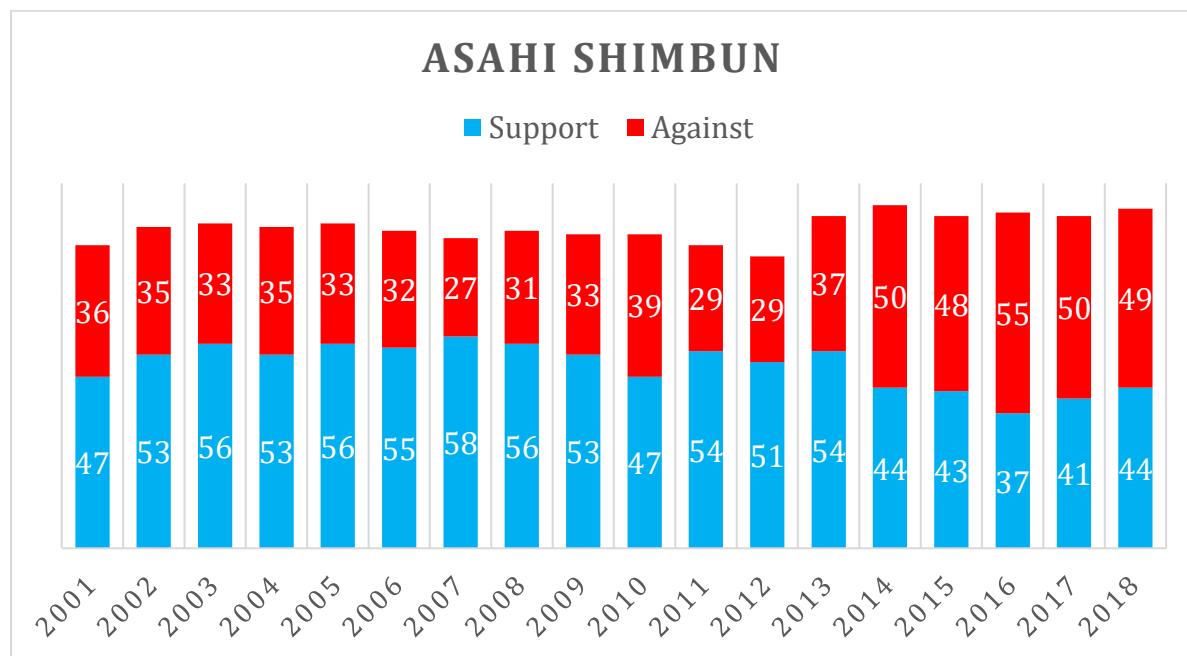


Figure 6: Asahi Shimbun readers opinion on Constitutional Revision from the data compiled by the Council on Foreign Relations³³

Asahi Shimbun readers are generally against constitutional revision. In the early 2000s until 2009, like conservative newspaper readers, a constitutional revision was the more popular opinion. Since 2014 opposing constitutional revision has been the favored position of Asahi readers. Surveys revealed that, in general, the Japanese public was supportive of constitutional revision in the early 2000s. However, more recently, such support has declined, especially in the last couple of years when Abe has more actively advocated for the necessity of constitutional revision. Reinterpreting Article 9 (collective self-defense) in 2014, the new security bills in 2015, and other security developments in Japan have made

³² Boycott of Japanese products, arson in Japanese factories based in China, and others.

³³ Asaoka, M., & Teraoka, A. (2016, August 1). Japanese Public Opinion on Constitutional Revision in 2016. <https://www.cfr.org/blog/japanese-public-opinion-constitutional-revision-2016>. 2017-2018 results is derived from other news articles.

the issue of constitutional revision closer and more realistic than ever before. With the possibility of war where the Japanese may participate after seven decades of peace, it is no surprise that opposing opinions are on the rise. Japanese who are politically apathetic most of the time went out to streets collecting signatures to oppose amending the constitution while others went to the government buildings and populated cities to protest. From here, we discuss the general justifications for support and opposition of constitutional revision, the logical next phase after reinterpretation.

Those who support argue that the gap between the current situation (reinterpretation) and the constitution will be resolved. Despite Article 9 emphasizes the abandonment of war and not possessing military force, Japan has the SDF. Even if politicians say that the JSDF cannot instigate wars, they can still exercise individual self-defense or self-defense war if attacked by another country. In other words, there is a contradiction with the ideals and practice of the constitution. Going on this is the reduction of burden on the JSDF. One of the tasks of the SDF is to oversee peacekeeping operations. It has participated in Cambodia, South Sudan, Iraq, etc. The SDF is now a respectable national defense organization and is necessary even in times of disaster and thus, reinterpretation and, eventually, the amendment is imperative.

On the other hand, those who are opposed argue that the Peace Constitution has become a part of Japan's identity and has been ingrained amongst Japanese, and therefore amending a fundamental part of Japanese identity is not necessary. If Japan loses all its self-restriction and achieves military power the same with other foreign countries, Japan will lose its credibility as a peaceful nation. Furthermore, if Japan amends Article 9 of the constitution, it may be requested to dispatch SDF to wars between the U.S. and other countries. Article 9 of the constitution should not be touched indiscreetly to comply with America's demand while keeping the bilateral relationship secure. Finally, the SDF is not specified in Article 9 of the constitution, but the world already recognizes its existence, and it is acceptable, at least to the Japanese people. Thus, it is not necessary to explicitly state amendment is imperative for SDF and take risks to make a constitutional amendment that may alienate neighboring states.

1.2 International

Many people, especially those of the neighboring countries, have accused Abe's Japan of expansionism and militarism due to successive bold defense reforms he accomplished since his second term in 2012. The establishment of the National Security Council and passing of Secrecy Law in December 2013, revising the arms export ban in April 2014, reinterpreting Article 9 of the Japanese constitution in July 2014, and updating the National Defense Program Guidelines in 2015 are some of the critical turning points in recent memories. It is no surprise that there was a huge ruckus when the sacred Article 9 was successfully reinterpreted in 2014 despite public opposition. Two beliefs arose from this change. On the one side is Liff, who argues that such criticisms fail to understand the groundwork done by previous leadership and the persisting self-imposed constraints despite these changes (Liff, 2015). In other words, the reforms' foundation predates Abe, and he only reaped from decades-old preparation for Japan to push these "revolutionary" security reforms. For instance, gradual changes have occurred on the scope of SDF and Japan-US alliance roles and capabilities since the end of the Cold War to adapt to regional and global security changes. Abe built on that and, fortunately for him, is widely supported by LDP politicians and moderates and considerably encouraged by Washington. On the other side is Hughes, who thinks that the reinterpretation is a "revolutionary" change. He argues that Japan will be more beholden to American security initiatives in the region and abroad, a drastic shift from before when Japan can easily refuse such commitment due to the self-restrictions from Article 9 (Hughes, 2017).

Hughes argues that Abe's decision is not in continuity with Japan's position. The author understands both sides of the aisles. Historically, there were discussions to reinterpret or test the limit of the restrictions imposed by Article 9. It was tested when the Japan-U.S. Defense Treaty was adopted (MOFA Japan) when the Self Defense Force was founded in 1954³⁴ and when the Japanese SDF was deployed abroad for the first time (Takahara, 2007). However, on the other hand, the extent to which Article 9 was reinterpreted and measures that are now allowed because of the security bills that legalized

³⁴ National Police Reserve (1950) is the predecessor.

collective self-defense in 2015 makes everything but the right to initiating war possible. This last aspect significantly contributed to Japan's reformed middle power identity.

Another reason why Liff was not worried is that despite all these policy shifts is because the Five Fundamentals of Japan's security policy remained intact:

1. Both the 2014 Cabinet Resolution and the 2015 Guidelines state that the **rights to collective self-defense would only apply when Japan's security is at risk** (only applies to an armed attack against Japanese territories but not that of the U.S.) as was specified in the 1960 Japan-US Mutual Security Treaty.
2. Strict self-prohibitions on the “use of force” remains and can only be allowed if conditions are met.
3. **“Exclusive Defense”** remains the fundamental policy.
4. The “Three Non-Nuclear Principles” of not possessing, producing, and introducing nuclear weapons into Japanese territories remain.
5. The 1% defense spending ceiling is still imposed.

Moreover, that, while Japan was consequently now allowed to practice collective self-defense (or use of force), severe constraints remain, and the three conditions must be met if it ever is exercised:

1. Japan's survival is threatened (存立危機),
2. No alternative means, and
3. If the former two are present, the minimum necessary amount of force is used.

Initially, it sounded that Hughes's fear was unfounded because of these strict restrictions and regulations that must be cleared before collective self-defense or use of force is executed. Additionally, Washington was greatly encouraged by Abe's Japan's aspiration to shoulder more of the burden. Hughes was mostly skeptical about how Japan will not be able to deny the U.S. if requested. For Washington, the 2014 constitutional reinterpretation and the 2015 NDPG mean Japan can help bolster deterrence by expanding the scope of bilateral and multilateral training and exercise. The newly established NSC allows Japan to formulate comprehensive national security strategies, intelligence-sharing, etc., independently. Nevertheless, the U.S. still needed to understand that there are three

significant constraints imposed on Japan's SDF because failure to do so produces gaps and misunderstandings:

1. Japan-US Security Treaty is **not a mutual defense pact**.
2. Japan's "global" alliance role will primarily be **limited to logistical support**.
3. Despite a more accelerated deployment of SDF, they **still require Diet approval**.

However, it became apparent that Hughes' fear was neither groundless nor illogical because roughly a year after Article 9 reinterpretation, two security bills were introduced in the National Diet, the Act for the Improvement of the Peace and Safety Legislation and the International Peace Support Act.

2. Peace and Security Legislation

Matters Concerning Japan and Its People	Matters Concerning the International Community
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<p>A. Transportation of Japanese nationals abroad</p> <p>→ Measures for the Protection of Japanese Residents in Japan</p> <p>B. Protection of SDF weapons and other →</p> <p>Protection of U.S. Military weapons and others</p> <p>C. Implementation of logistic support activities, etc. of Situations with Major Impact (Expansion)</p> <p>→ Implementation of foreign military support other than U.S. forces</p> <p>→ Expanding the support menu.</p> <p>4. Response to Armed Attack Situations, etc. →</p> <p>Response to the “存立危機事態.”</p> <p>Enables the “use of force” under the “<i>New Three Requirements</i>.”</p> <p>1) Armed attack on Japan or an armed attack on other countries close to Japan and that such attacks threaten Japan’s existence/ survival. Furthermore, there is an obvious danger that people’s rights to pursue life, freedom, and happiness will be fundamentally overturned.</p>	<p>A. International Peace Cooperation Activities (International Peace Cooperation Law) U.N. peacekeeping operations, etc. (expansion)</p> <p>→ Expanding so-called security operations.</p> <p>→ Enhancement of the authority to use weapons when necessary.</p> <p>2. Implementation of International Cooperation Peace and Safety Activities</p> <p>(Non-UN-led international peace cooperation mission. New)</p> <p>3. Ship inspection activities (expansion) [Act on Ship Inspection Activities]</p> <p>→ Enable to carry out missions for peace and security.</p> <p>4. In the event of an international peace Implementation of Cooperation and Support Activities, etc. (Newly</p>
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<p>2. There is no other appropriate means (besides the use of force) to eliminate this and fulfill our existence and protect our people.</p> <p>3. To be limited to the minimum necessitated use of force.</p>	<p>established) [International Peace Support Act (New Act)]</p>
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Table 2: Peace and Security Legislation Contents from the Peace and Security Legislation

Outline, Cabinet Secretariat³⁵

2.1 Matters Concerning Japan and its People

Firstly, the Japanese self-defense force now has a mandate and legal justification for using force to save and protect Japanese nationals abroad. In the past, the Japanese government had to request other countries for rescue operations. This request was difficult because one, the fact that the Japanese government must beg other countries to rescue its people, and there is also an unspoken understanding that if the other countries' citizens also need to be rescued, that country would prioritize their people over anybody else. With this introduction, SDF can help protect and rescue Japanese abroad, for example, during a hostage crisis.

Secondly, JSDF can now protect American military weapons, vehicles, and other materials. This permission means enhanced logistic support and cooperation between the SDF and U.S. military,

³⁵ 平和安全法の概要. The highlighted are significant changes for Collective Self-Defense.
<http://www.cas.go.jp/jp/gaiyou/jimu/pdf/gaiyou-heiwaanzenhousei.pdf>

opening more security cooperation and collaboration possibilities. Additionally, Japan can now ask to implement foreign military support—which used to be limited to the U.S.—for Japan and its people.

Thirdly, it is different from the old constraints because Japan can now use force when other countries close to Japan are attacked, and that attack threatens Japan's survival. This approval opens so many possibilities because depending on how the Cabinet justifies and how the Diet representatives judge it, Japan can be involved in global conflicts far from Japan's territory but can be justified as critical for Japan's survival.

Lastly, the additional legislation also differentiates degrees of contingencies. Before Abe, there was only peacetime or wartime, but after, situations surrounding Japan have also become a critical criterion, and there are now four degrees to when Japan can “use force.”

1. Peacetime,
2. The circumstance in Major Influences 重要影響事態³⁶,
3. The circumstance of Existential Threat 存率危機事態³⁷, and
4. Wartime

2.2 Matters Concerning the International Community

The legislation expands the types of international missions Japan can participate. This expansion means that the SDF can contribute to missions beyond infrastructure buildings but more traditional security. At the same time, it gives a more precise mandate on when the Japanese SDF can use their weapons that were not available before. Still, the priority is not to engage in combats as much as possible. Regardless, this provides clarity and specifications on when SDF can rightly use weapons when necessary.

3. Strategy Shift for Abe's Japan

The restructuring of Japan's middle power identity, from an economically superior but severely restricted military to Abe's Japan that is still similar on the economic front but allows more flexibility

³⁶ Conflicts in regional powers that can impact Japan through navigation, trade, security, and others.

³⁷ Conflicts that may end up involving Japan and jeopardize its survival.

in military and defense, has made hedging a preferable option for Japan than ever before. Koga argued before that Japan's limited military capabilities with its rigid military alliance with the U.S. and its strong ties with China require the country to adopt a hedging strategy against the U.S. and China (Koga, 2014). Nevertheless, we argue that hedging was not possible or limited in application in Koga's paper, given that there were an apparent power and relationship imbalance when he wrote his paper in 2014. Relationship with the U.S. and China before Abe's Japan was bandwagoning and balancing, respectively. However, with the successive security reforms introduced, Japan is not solely dependent on American troops for protection nor completely vulnerable against China. The Abe Cabinet's reinterpretation of Article 9 and the following security bills to legalize collective self-defense has made the relationship with the U.S. equal to some degree and sturdier against China's challenge to the status quo.

Before going into details, we must reiterate why hedging and not bandwagoning nor balancing is the most suitable option for Japan's reformed middle power identity. Some scholars would argue against hedging and still count Japan's strategy in the region against the U.S. and China as bandwagoning and balancing, respectively, despite Abe's security reforms. By definition, bandwagoning is a state behavior commonly applied by weaker states, wherein through aligning with stronger powers, countries can ensure their survival. Bandwagoning also happens when forming a balancing coalition is difficult, or geographical location hinders states from balancing. Meanwhile, balancing's primary purpose as a strategy is to prevent hegemony, and according to Stephen Walt, it is more common than bandwagoning because preserving freedom is preferable to subordination. Aggregate power, proximity, offensive capability, and powerful states' offensive intentions are factors that determine balancing or bandwagoning. Abe's Japan aims to be a typical middle power that can project its economic and military influence by removing restrictions of Article 9. Therefore, bandwagoning, which can be construed as subordination and mostly practice by weaker states, is not a strategy that Japan would now apply. Japan is also trying to rebuild its image as more capable, independent, yet supportive of the international liberal order. As for balancing, at its current status, Japan is merely incapable of individually balancing against China and with the US as an ally; taking a balanced posture against the US is not a wise decision.

Additionally, balancing is confrontational by nature and is unpopular unless Japan would want to be an enemy with the other state, so bandwagoning is not an option. For all these reasons, Japan is phasing out from the outdated bandwagoning and balancing strategies and transitioning to hedging.

Moving forward, several domestic and international pressures result in this situation. For instance, on the domestic front, the Japanese constitution forbids Japan from going to war, and as such, Japan's SDF only possessed defensive capabilities. While most weapons on the market are for defense, the fact remains that Japan does not have the option of purchasing, further limiting itself. Additionally, despite having the human resources and technology to utilize nuclear for dual usage (i.e., as an energy source and weapon), due to its 1967 *Three Non-Nuclear Principles* of not possessing, not producing, and not permitting the introduction of nuclear weapons, Japan cannot become a nuclear weapon state even though neighbors like China, North Korea, and Russia possess them. Furthermore, there is a substantial reluctance for the Japanese public to look aggressive and threatening, and as the only country to experience the horror of nuclear weapons, the Japanese strongly oppose anything nuclear weapon-related. Internationally, Japan's action is easily misconstrued as threatening due to its history, and from a security dilemma standpoint, defensive actions and capabilities are often misinterpreted as aggressive.

Post-WWII, Japan saw rapid economic growth and infrastructure developments. One of the most significant contributors to this success is the presence of the U.S. military. The 1952 San Francisco Peace Treaty acquiesced America's military presence in Japan, and America's protection allowed Japan to reconstruct itself. Despite strong opposition from the public, politicians, and even Russia, Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi's³⁸ government successfully revised the Japan-US Security Treaty, which allowed America to use some Japanese infrastructure and extended American jurisdiction to some Japanese lands defense. The point is that this firm Japan-US alliance is deeply ingrained with Japanese politics that it cannot be easily changed. Despite being the ninth-largest spender for military firepower (i.e., defense) in 2018 (Statista, 2019), Japan is still considered relatively vulnerable, and this alliance fills the gap. Japan's \$46.6 billion spending pales compared to the U.S. and China, which spent \$649

³⁸ 56th Prime Minister of Japan and Shinzo Abe's maternal grandfather.

billion and \$250 billion, respectively (Statista, 2019), and thus, the close relationship between Japan and the U.S. needs to remain stable. However, due to oppositions against U.S. bases in Okinawa, American bases are forced to relocate outside Japan. The Trump administration's continuous dealignment for U.S. commitment in Asia has forced Japan to internally (*Nihon wo Torimodosu*, the reinterpretation of Article 9, introducing security bills, and establishing the NSC), and externally (strengthening alliance and diplomacy through the *Proactive Contribution to Peace*) balance.

China is Japan's most significant trading partner in terms of economy, both for exported and imported goods. Next to this trading partnership is with the U.S., another important trade partner. Koga described Japan's strategy from 2010-2015 against the U.S. as military bandwagoning while economically balancing against China. He argues that this is because Japan's economic interaction with China is almost risk-free (diversified economic partners) (Koga, 2014). We feel that recently, because of more robust economic interaction with China, wherein the amount of goods Japan imports from China is almost twice that from the U.S. worth \$157 billion and \$66.9 billion, respectively, in 2017, it shows how significant it had become (Observatory of Economic Complexity). Japan-China economic interaction requires Japan to only hedge against China rather than outwardly balance against it anymore. The fact that China has vast natural resources and is geographically closer makes it wiser for Japan to foster better economic hedging.

We argue that Asia's dynamic transformation had made hedging the best strategy for Abe's Japan. To understand why that is the case, the author will refer to the 2019 key findings of the Lowy Institute Asia Power Index, Australia's leading foreign policy think tank founded in 2003, which measures eight criteria (economic resources, military capability, resilience, future resources, diplomatic influence, economic relationships, defense networks, and cultural influence) to observe actors in the Asia Pacific. According to the Lowy Institute, the U.S. claims the top position in military capability and cultural influence. However, its power differential with China is narrowing. At the same time, the former has become a net underachiever in 2019 (Lowy Institutite, 2019).

Furthermore, China achieved the highest gains in overall power in 2019 and ranked first in economic resources, future resources, diplomatic influence, and economic relationships. In other words,

China led in half of all the measures. The hedging country, Japan, is ahead of the U.S. for diplomatic influence but has dropped in terms of military capability. Indirectly, North Korea's growing threat for Japan saw a significant increase in its power score due to its nuclear capability and that same weapon, which allowed it to conduct its first-ever diplomatic meeting with the President of the United States to North Korea's increased diplomatic influence (Lowy Institute, 2019). Due to this reality, Japan must adapt to the region's changing situation and adopt measures to ensure its security and prosperity.

Japan's efforts as a transformed middle power can be observed by how it has arguably become one of the liberal institutional order leaders. With its pioneering of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy, Prime Minister Abe's successful resuscitation of the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement through TPP-11 and being one of the largest foreign direct investment sources in the region, to name a few. Japan's successful hedging can also be observed by the Lowy Institute, which gave it the highest point of efficient usage of its minimal resources. Despite its small size, Japan has been prosperous and outstanding in showing its "smart power."

VI. Conclusion

To sum, we address how Japan reconstructs the unique middle power identity it had identified with since the seventies until before Prime Minister Abe returned in 2012 and why this is happening. To determine whether Japan's securitization under Abe is a radical or rational shift, we first defined a typical middle power and what Japan's middle power identity has been. We then looked at Japan's security reform's underlying reasons from domestic and international security-related transformations. After, the two main guiding principles for all security changes will be briefly discussed. We subsequently looked at some of the critical security changes under Abe's leadership and their significance to Japan's security. This part also clarifies how these changes result in Japan's reconstructed middle power identity, diverging from its unique identity for decades. We also suggest that Japan must practice hedging over bandwagoning or balancing given its new middle power identity.

Japan's old yet unique middle power identity, which focused on its economic influence and limited military capacity, was the Japan we know from the seventies until Prime Minister Abe returned to power in 2012. However, Abe's return has drastically changed Japan's security capability, justified by domestic and global demand for more. *Nihon wo Torimodosu*, which was frequently spoken in 2012 and 2013, and the more recent *Proactive Contribution to Peace* serve as guiding principles for Japan's security reforms. By looking at them, one can surmise the scope to which Japan will continuously securitize. We believe that what happened during the Abe Cabinet was simply a precedent of what is more to come under an LDP leadership that is willing to risk the limit of what the Japanese public can tolerate politically with minor consideration to Japan's neighbors other than the U.S. would say. In short, the changes that happened under the Abe Cabinet: the establishment of the NSC and NSS in 2013, the controversial reinterpretation of Article 9 in 2014, and security bills in 2015 are just the beginning. These actions that paved the way for Japan to reconstruct its long-held unique middle power identity to a more traditional middle power that is exceptionally economically capable and more militarily secure will bring a regionally and globally involved hedging Japan.

1. After Shinzo Abe

During a press conference on August 28th, 2020, Prime Minister Abe officially announced his retirement from politics because of health complications. Afterward, two LDP faction leaders and one unaffiliated announced their candidacies for the next LDP head, and in essence, the new Prime Minister. There was Kochikai³⁹ leader and former Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida, Suigetsukai⁴⁰ head and former Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba, and the only unaffiliated,⁴¹ then Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga. The unsurprising winner, which we also predicted to win, was Yoshihide Suga, a long-time ally of Abe and served as the Chief Cabinet Secretary since Abe's return in December 2012. Suga dominated the election, gathering 70.5% of the votes (Japan Times, 2020).



Chief Cabinet

Secretary Suga is announcing the new imperial era, "Reiwa," on live television on April 1st, 2020.

Earning him the moniker, Reiwa Ojisan, or "Uncle Reiwa." Image Source: The Japan Times⁴²

³⁹ Kochikai 宏池会 is the LDP faction that supports white collared workers and encourages cooperation with China and South Korea.

⁴⁰ Suigetsukai 水月会 is the LDP faction who founding principle promises policy alignment with Abe, and thus, in general, works and supports the previous Abe Cabinet.

⁴¹ Yoshihide Suga is affiliated to several liaison groups and study groups to maintain connections with diet members who do not belong to any LDP factions which naturally expanded his influence. It was reported in 2018 that behind closed doors, the Suga Group was established.

⁴² Yoshihide Suga was a relatively unknown political figure as he did not have any scandals. He was also a reliable Chief Cabinet Secretary who had far and few gaffs in speeches. This was until he had to announce the new imperial era name whose popularity was equivalent to an international star within Japan. /

While Japanese politics is often characterized by frequent Cabinet reshuffling, it is worth noting that Suga was the only one who remained in the same position, which also made him the longest-serving Chief Cabinet Secretary in Japanese history. We do not expect Prime Minister Suga to diverge from his predecessor's policy priorities drastically.

The background and upbringing of the former and current prime minister are strikingly different as Shinzo Abe was born to an elite political dynasty while Yoshihide Suga hailed from rural Japan to a strawberry farmer's family. The fact remains that Suga, one of Abe's closest political allies, secured the leadership tells plenty of how the new Cabinet will bring more continuation rather than reformation. Regarding constitutional amendment and Article 9, many analysts are saying that Abe's passion did not translate to Suga, and even when asked about the latter's position on this issue vaguely answered, insisting on constructive discussions, which is starkly different from Abe's (jiji.com, 2020). However, on the economic front, Suga vowed to continue Abenomics, Abe's signature economic policy and emphasized the abductee issue with North Korea. Moreover, like Abe, it seems that Suga is trying to diversify diplomatic options by opting to visit Vietnam and Indonesia for his first official Prime Minister travel duties in October 2020.

How does this leadership change translate into the future of Japan's middle power identity? We do not see the change as impactful on Japan's middle power identify given that one, Suga sees geopolitics the way Abe did and identifies similar threats that Abe did, namely North Korea and China. While Suga is not an avid supporter of constitutional reform, he also understands that it makes no sense to change what had already been reinterpreted in 2014 (from individual self-defense to collective self-defense) or end the security reforms that were built. Like Abe, Suga understands the changing dynamics and climate in the region and actively pursues a more diversified alliance option through various channels as part of Japan's continued proactive contribution to peace.

Therefore, we will see the continuous transition of a changing middle power Japan⁴³ that bandwagon⁴⁴ to a middle power Japan that hedges. This transition is influenced by Japan's changing middle power identity that started under Abe but is expected to see continuity under Suga, amplified by Asia's dynamic transformation, which will force Japan to practice hedging like never before. Accordingly, Japan is now somewhat capable of proper hedging as, like before, it has extensive economic interdependence with China. However, other partners to mitigate economic risk exist, and because of the security reforms, it is now able to stand at the same stage with the U.S. because it is legally allowed to practice collective self-defense and its active security dialogue with other Asian nations like India and Australia to alleviate unilateral reliance on the U.S.

Japan's future is grim due to its decreasing population, its aging society, and on the verge of collapsing government social safety nets, to name a few. Therefore, the Suga Cabinet should focus on core areas that Japan can initiate and lead to secure Japan's position and announce that the relative economic decline and other social issues will not affect Japan. Suga's Japan should further raise its profile as the typical middle power it has become, an economically and militarily capable Japan that can function like any other prominent middle power countries.

2. Future Research

We used a qualitative research method to analyze the transformative security reforms which changed Japan's unique middle power identity under Abe. We heavily relied on official government publications and other Japanese security experts to understand how it changed Japan's middle power identity.

Future research may apply other methodologies in addressing the topic, for instance, conducting several one-on-one interviews with the actors directly involved for diverse interpretation. A politician and a JSDF personnel may have a similar or differing way of interpreting Abe's security reforms. A

⁴³ Japan that has fewer self-imposed military restrictions.

⁴⁴ Bandwagoning is one of the commonly practice balance of power strategies together with balancing. The former a state behaviour commonly applied by weaker states, wherein through aligning with stronger powers, countries ensure their survival.

relatively active correspondence with individuals and groups engaged in constitutional amendment may also lead to different views.

Another is an interpretation from an outsider's perspective, like Japan's neighbors supporting or against the changes. A focus group qualitative method is most suitable. For example, interviewing a group of students majoring in Japanese politics in South Korea, Japan, and the US. Alternatively, scholars, politicians, and organizations outside Japan are actively involved or will be directly affected by Japan's security reforms. A view from the outside may be a great source of comparative analysis.

Further, a quantitative research method focused on statistics may uphold or disprove the findings in this thesis. For instance, comparing the budget allocated and its growth for defensive and offensive measures. The number of military exercises conducted in a year and their frequency, and others.

Lastly, a research building upon this thesis by analyzing and comparing during Shinzo Abe's time and after. Such as figuring whether the security changes and middle power identity shift experienced its peak under Abe's leadership and is a one of a kind transformation. Alternatively, repetition and even going beyond (constitutional amendment) is within view.

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국문초록

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본 논문은 70년대부터 2012년 12월 아베 총리가 정치 지도부에 복귀할 때까지 알려진 일본의 독특한 중진국 정체성을 재구성한 것을 분석하기 위한 것이다. 그 후, 이러한 변화가 왜 일어나고 있는지, 어떻게 일어나고 있는지, 그리고 이러한 변화가 시사하는 바가 무엇인지에 대해 답한다. 본 논문은 정부 문서 및 간행물, 일본 헌법, 시기에 맞는 관련 전문가들의 기사를 심층적으로 분석해 질적 연구를 적용하였다.

아베 정권하에서 일본의 안보화가 급진적, 합리적 전환인지 파악하기 위해 우리는 먼저 전형적인 중진국이 무엇인지, 일본의 중진국 정체성이 무엇인지를 정의했다. 이 질문은 일본의 중진국 정체성이 일본의 군사력과 방위력을 제한하는 헌법 9조 때문에 나머지와 다르다는 이해를 이끌어내었다. 결국 정부 예산 재분배를 필요로 하는 높은 기대수명과 출산율 저하, 1991년 결프전 결과에 따른 일본의 수효책 외교만으로는 불충분하다는 인식, 그리고 자민당이 독주하는 동안 일어난 북한으로부터의 지속적인 외생적 위협(납치 문제 및 핵미사일 문제)과 중국(군사예산과 일본의 외교적 패배)은 아베가 원하는 일본의 안보 개혁을 합리화했다. 일본을 되찾자(日本を、取り戻す)와 평화에 대한 전향적 기여의 원칙이 아베의 안보화에 대한 기반이 되었다. 이것은 2013년 국가 안전보장 회의(NSC)를 만들고 국가 안전보장 전략(NSC) 이행, 2014년 국방계획지침(National Defense Program Guideline) 수정, 2014년 헌법 9조 재해석, 2015년 일본 자위대(SDF) 확대 안보 법안 등을 포함한다.

본 논문은 개헌에 대해 일본 국민들 사이에서 다양한 지지와 반대를 발견했다. 이를 지지하는 측은 '군사력 미보유'를 언급한 헌법 9조 격차 해소와 SDF의 존립이 결린 현 상황의 중요성을 강조하고 있다. 개정안에 반대하는 사람들은 일본이 자진한 규제를

철폐하면 평화국가로서 쌓아온 신뢰를 잃을 수 있다고 주장하며, 일본이 해외에서의 미국 전쟁에 더 많이 관여하게 될 것을 우려한다.

전 세계 일본 안보 학자들 중에서, 아담 리프는 아베 정권하의 일본이 갑자기 군국주의적이 되었다는 생각에 이의를 제기한다. 그는 일본이 군사적으로 더 자급자족하려는 준비가 아베 이전부터 일어났으며 안보 개혁에도 불구하고, 일본이 계속 자진하는 규제는 이웃 국가들에 대한 진정한 위협이 되는 것을 방지한다고 주장한다. 또 다른 하나는 크리스토퍼 휴즈인데, 그는 아베의 개혁은 혁명적이며, 헌법상의 구속은 더 이상 충분하지 않다고 주장한다. 2015년 집단적 자위권을 합법화한 안보 법안 때문에 이제 허용된 조치들은 전쟁 개시권 외에는 모든 것을 가능케 하는데, 이는 2012년까지 알려진 독특한 중진국 일본과 현재 우리가 주장하는 것과는 분명한 차이점이 있다. 안보 법안의 내용은 두 가지로 나누어진다: 일본과 일본 국민에 관한 사항, 이전에는 불가능했던 해외의 일본인들을 보호하기 위한 규제된 무력 사용과 SDF 가 참여할 수 있는 임무의 확대를 포함한 일본 SDF 의 역할과 능력을 대폭 확장시킨 국제 사회에 관한 사항.

본 논문은 경제적으로는 뛰어나지만 심각하게 제한된 군대부터 경제적인 면에서는 유사하지만 군사 및 국방에서는 더 많은 유연성을 허용하는 아베 시대의 일본까지 일본의 중진국 정체성의 구조조정이 그 어느 때보다 일본에 유리한 선택으로 만들어졌다고 주장한다. 아베의 정치적 리더십이 끝났음에도 불구하고, 우리는 그의 후임 아래 안보 개혁이 계속될 것이라고 예상한다.

주제어: 아베신조, 중진국, 헌법 제9조, 집단적 자기 희생, 자위대, 위험회피

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