

# Is Nationalism Intensifying in Japan?

## – Focus on Recent Changes in Security Policy –

By Kitaoka Shin'ichi

Asked if nationalism is on the increase in Japan, one would have to ask, in turn, how nationalism should be defined. A number of answers to the first question are plausible depending on the specific sense in which the word nationalism is used. It is not impossible, for example, to hold that demilitarized neutrality and similar concepts are in themselves forms of nationalism in that they emphasize unique characteristics particular to Japan. In general, however, mounting nationalism is accompanied by a beefing up of security policy (or military preparedness in its broadest sense). It is also difficult to imagine the converse; that a military buildup would occur without nationalism coming to the fore. Simply put, it is usual for mounting nationalism and a military buildup to be closely interrelated. Since this is the case, a look at the shift in security policy is a valid method for determining the extent to which nationalism has emerged. Based on this perspective, this article will analyze the changes in Japanese security policy taking place in recent years to outline the current security situation and its future prospects in answer to this question.

### Post-Cold War Changes

The most salient characteristic of post-war Japanese security policy is that it has been formed under the restriction set down in Article 9, Item 2 of the Constitution of Japan, which forbids the maintenance of "war potential."

Amidst calls by the Social Party, a powerful opposition party in Japan, for demilitarized neutrality, and despite many shifts in interpretation, the following government interpretation of Article 9 in December 1954 still holds today. The government determined that Article 9, Item 2 does not deny the

right to self-defense, an inherent right of a sovereign nation, thereby leaving minimal self-defense forces constitutional. This interpretation, which at first glance contradicts the text of Article 9, was widely criticized. In order to sidestep criticism, the government limited the scope of self-defense under the fundamental principle that defense capabilities would be exercised only to the minimum extent required and only in cases of sudden and unjust invasion in which the government was left with no other course of action. While not prohibited outright, activities beyond the nation's borders, airspace and territorial waters, were significantly restricted.

Security policy is not, however, limited solely to the defense of one's own nation; it also deals with issues of stabilization in the surrounding region and shared responsibility for maintaining international order. Of these three aspects of security policy, Japan had focused exclusively on the issue of self-defense within its borders. During the Cold War, no significant contradictions were obvious in this stance.

The Soviet military force posed the

ultimate threat during this period, and Japanese security policy was designed to cope with this. The defense of Japan also formed an essential part of Western anti-Soviet strategy. Japan prepared itself against the Soviet Union by focusing on strengthening anti-submarine military capability to undermine the Soviet capacity for secondary attacks, as well as maintaining a large number of high-performance fighter planes and selectively positioning land troops in Hokkaido. The Cold War unified these three aspects of security policy.

With the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty becoming less crucial as the Cold War ended, the argument that a multilateral security framework in East Asia should be formed to take its place came to the fore. Soon after this, however, it became evident that the end of the Cold War did not mean the dawn of peace, and the importance of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty was again recognized.

Post-Cold War changes in security policy have transpired as the result of three events.

The first of these, the Gulf War, came in 1990. Unable to play a major

### *The Constitution of Japan*

#### Chapter II : Renunciation of War

##### Article 9

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



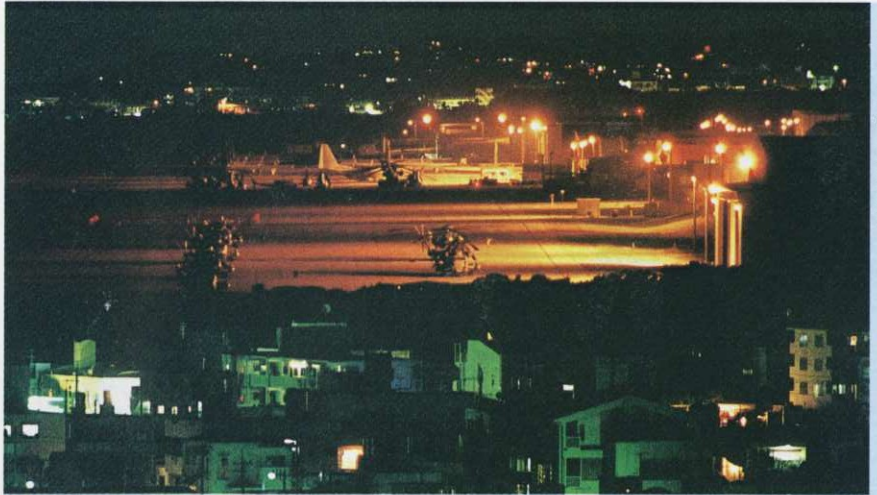
role despite the region's extreme importance to Japan and the flagrant challenge to world order, Japan merely supplied funding for the military effort, only barely managing to dispatch minesweepers after the war had ended.

In reaction to this situation, the number of calls for Japanese troops to be sent at least on peacekeeping operations (PKO) increased dramatically. In 1992, Japan enacted the International Peace Cooperation Law to cooperate with United Nations peacekeeping operations, and Japanese troops participated in the Cambodia PKO in the autumn of that year. Although inadequate, this step set a precedent in Japan for security policy addressing the rest of the world, the third of the above-mentioned aspects.

Following on the heels of the Gulf War, the second event with repercussions on security policy was the North Korean crisis in 1994. North Korea was suspected of possessing nuclear capabilities, which increased the possibility of economic sanctions. The situation grew tense as North Korea suggested that it would respond to such sanctions by waging war. Japan was largely unprepared to deal with any threat closer to home than the Gulf War.

At that time, both the U.S. and Japan were struggling to form post-Cold War security policies. In Japan, the Hosokawa Cabinet established round-table discussions in February 1994 on the subject of defense, and a report (the Higuchi Report) was issued in August. Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Dr. Joseph Nye headed the U.S. effort, and the East Asia Strategy Report (the Nye Report) issued in February 1995 stated, in effect, that the presence of 100,000 troops should continue to be maintained in East Asia.

In 1995, the Spratly Island issue began heating up again. In June of that year, China threatened Taiwan over President Lee Tung-hui's visit to the U.S., staging a military demonstration in the waters off Taiwan in March 1996. The U.S. responded by dispatching two aircraft carriers that March.



The return of the Futenma Air Base was agreed in the Japan-U.S. Joint Declaration on Security on April 17, 1996

Photo : Ishigaki Kuniki

Within Japan, U.S. soldiers raped a young girl in Okinawa in September 1995, heightening criticism of the U.S. military bases on the island. Just as the need for the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty was hitting home once more, the foundation on which this treaty was built had begun to shake.

These were the conditions under which Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryutaro and President Bill Clinton issued the Japan-U.S. Joint Declaration on Security on April 17, 1996. This declaration addressed the transfer and downsizing of bases. It also affirmed the increasingly important role played by the Japan-U.S. security alliance in post-Cold War East Asia and called for even closer Japan-U.S. cooperation, reaffirming and redefining the security alliance between these two nations.

Around the time that this joint declaration was issued, an agreement was reached on the return of the Futenma Air Base and other issues, and an Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA), the normal agreement forged between any two allies, was signed. In September 1997, the New Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Security Cooperation were agreed upon, and the relevant legislation was drawn up in May 1999. In this way, the main factors inciting regional tension had brought changes to Japanese security policy, with the agreement reached in April 1996 coming to a tentative conclusion in May 1999.

Progress in interregional cooperation was also made on other fronts during this period. One example is Japan's relationship with Russia. In July 1996, a Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force vessel docked in Vladivostok for the first time, and the first conference between bureaus of the Japanese and Russian defense agencies was held in December that year. Russia responded with goodwill when a suspicious North Korean vessel was discovered in Japanese waters in March 1999, as well.

The most remarkable turn of events, however, is the development of security cooperation between Japan and Korea. Significant progress has been made in the cooperation between these two nations through the provision of cooperation in response to the economic crisis in Korea since autumn 1997 and President Kim Dae Jung's visit to Japan in October 1998, among other steps. We are beginning to see the achievement of real cooperation between Japan and Korea, which stands in stark contrast to the two countries' major preoccupation up to 1996 of how to increase mutual understanding.

### Protecting Yourself

The third set of post-Cold War events impacting security policy were the North Korean TaepoDong missiles launched in August 1998 and the suspicious vessel discovered in the waters





Photo : Japan Defense Agency

Japanese troops engaging in minesweeping work in Cambodia under the International Peace Cooperation Law enacted in 1992

off the Noto Peninsula in March 1999. Although Nodong missiles had been launched prior to the TaepoDong missiles (in May 1993), it was the combination of the latter and the suspicious vessel that had a significant impact on the Japanese public.

The launching of the TaepoDong missiles did not, in fact, represent a serious violation of international law. However, the suspicious vessel did in fact misrepresent its nationality, unlawfully enter Japanese territorial waters, and engage in spy-like and other unlawful behavior. In light of these activities and the fact that it ignored orders to cease its hostile activity, Japan would have been justified in capturing or sinking this vessel. This is a nation's right; it is the government's obligation. In the same way that the failure to prevent major crimes or arrest criminals constitutes a serious blunder on the part of the police department, the government failed miserably in its inability to seize the vessel. Rather than placing blame on the present government, however, this failure should be attributed to the fact that no system for capturing or sinking a suspicious vessel exists.

As the 1999 Diet proceeded to deliberate security guidelines, the public came to understand, albeit belatedly, that an emergency situation in the surrounding region could quite possibly become a crisis in Japan. Since the U.S. Air Force stationed in Japan would represent the most serious threat to North Korea if military skirmishes

were to break out on the Korean peninsula, it is entirely conceivable that guerrilla action would be taken to render these forces powerless. It is highly probable that a Korean Peninsula crisis would then shift to Japan, and the issue is therefore not to what degree Japan should service the U.S. military. The effectively smooth enactment of guideline-related legislation can be attributed to the relatively clear understanding on this issue. Security policy most commonly deals with the situation within a nation's borders first, and then moves beyond this to the surrounding region and finally the world at large. The formation of Japanese policy, however, has proceeded in the opposite direction – dealing first with the world at large and moving on to the surrounding region and ultimately Japan itself.

### Evaluating the Guidelines

I would like now to briefly summarize the guideline-related legislation that has been enacted. This legislation specifies the non-military cooperation and support to be provided by Japan if the U.S. military takes the action outlined in the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty when conditions that would seriously impact Japan's security arise in the surrounding region.

The Japan-U.S. Security Treaty stipulates that the U.S. military may not only utilize U.S. military bases in Japan to defend the country at a time of invasion (state of emergency in Japan), but also to deal with security in the Far

East (state of emergency in the Far East). While the 1978 guidelines set down the type of cooperation to be serviced during a state of emergency in Japan, they do not touch upon what would happen in the case of a Far East crisis. These guidelines should have, in conjunction with the treaty, addressed this issue from the outset, and the most recent guidelines merely attempt to supplement standing insufficiencies.

From a specialist's point of view, Japan's guideline legislation is defective in a number of ways, a basically imperfect document. This legislation stipulates that cooperation will take place in non-combative arenas. Critics, however, ask whether it is possible to distinguish between combative and non-combative arenas; they maintain that prohibiting the financing and transport of weapons and ammunition is a harmful and meaningless restriction; and also point out the lack of crucial provisions regarding the inspection of vessels and other matters. The legislation of the type of cooperation to be provided by Japan, however, is a major step in and of itself. From the U.S. perspective, not knowing whether Japan will provide this cooperation should a situation grows tense is most problematic. Knowing that no cooperation would be provided, the U.S. military would be able to lessen the seriousness of the problem by preparing accordingly.

The most important aspect of establishing the 1999 guideline-related legislation is the fact that it was enacted without major opposition. Although the Democratic Party of Japan, the largest opposition party, did oppose the legislation, no all-out efforts were made to block its enactment. Members of the Diet would certainly have clashed had any changes been made to Japan's long-held post-war security policy. The Social Democratic Party adopted historical slow-down tactics with regard to the 1992 PKO legislation, but no such opposition was launched against the guideline-related legislation. The action taken in the Diet immediately before the Democratic Party drew up an compre-



hensive security policy in June 1999 was quite practical, which was a history-making departure for opposition parties in Japan.

The smooth formulation of guidelines to provide for security in the surrounding region directed the public's interest to security in their own country. The enactment of legislation on the national flag and national anthem, symbols that are closely tied to the security of a nation, is also an extension of these guidelines. The Democratic Party attempted to find consensus on this legislation within its ranks by taking a stance that was in favor of the national flag, but opposed to the national anthem. Ultimately, party members voted independently. This resulted in a 50-50 split of those in favor and those opposed, leaving the impression of a lack of unity within the party, but at least this legislation was not strongly opposed. Furthermore, this led to the formation of the Investigation Committee on Constitution (chronologically, an agreement on the formation of this committee was reached first) and open debates on amending the Constitution were taken up within the Democratic Party of Japan.

### Current Issues

What do we need at the present moment to directly ensure Japan's security?

Today's military tactics are advanced and can even be decentralized. Religious groups like Aum Shinrikyo are capable of enormous destruction, and the memory of indiscriminate terrorism targeting the general public on a subway train remains vivid. A flexible and effective force greater than that of the police department, but on a smaller scale than an army, is needed to cope with this situation.

In fact, moves in this direction are being already undertaken. The fiscal 2000 budget covers expenses for the formation of a new Maritime Self-Defense Force special unit that will be trained to board suspicious vessels and dismantle their weapons, as well as the expenses for Ground Self-Defense

Force simulation training designed for coping with guerrilla attacks and nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. As this illustrates, it is not too late for Japan to remedy obvious defects in its military "hardware."

The problem lies in the "software." First, we must regulate the nation's engagement in war. Take the example of a suspicious vessel being detected and a cessation of hostilities then successfully enforced. The next step would be to board the vessel and investigate. It is entirely possible that in this situation those on board the vessel would attack and casualties would ensue. Common sense around the world holds that one is justified in becoming aggressive if, for example, a command issued three times is ignored. Japan's forces, however, are purely for self-defense, which means that the armed forces may not attack unless first attacked. With the advances made in military strategy, the majority of weapons today are guided weapons, which do not leave enough time to strike back once launched. The entire exercise is rendered meaningless unless one attacks an opponent with obviously aggressive intentions first.

Next, we must look at emergency legislation. In a state of emergency, the basic rights of citizens must be restricted to a certain extent. After the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake struck, the roads were inundated by private cars, making it impossible for emergency vehicles to drive down blocked roads. At certain times, a system under which the rights of private citizens are temporarily suspended becomes necessary.

The Defense Agency has researched this matter. The large number of laws that are likely to be violated when a state of emergency arises include the Road Law, the Port and Harbor Law, the Air Law, the River Law and the Building Standard Law. The problem lies in deciding whether tanks in excess of weight limits will be allowed to pass and how a landlord's permission would be obtained when defensive positions must be built on his or her property. Nations around the world have regulations covering the situations in which

the basic human rights of private citizens, particularly property rights, are temporarily suspended under a state of emergency and reparations made later. In Japan, however, these regulations do not exist.

Even without specific laws dealing with these issues, Japanese people tend to transcend the legal realm to accomplish what needs to be done in these situations. A sports team, however, cannot win a game if it has not practiced enough beforehand. The responses to both the Aum emergency and the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake illustrate the lack of required training in Japan.

Quite a few of the laws actually on the books cannot be called effectively into play. As I mentioned previously, North Korea could conceivably engage in guerrilla tactics in Japan if the situation on the Korean Peninsula ever reached a critical level. It is highly probable, however, that these tactics would take a form that would make it impossible to determine whether they were in fact attacks or simply accidents. In this case, it is extremely doubtful whether Japan would be capable of immediately ascertaining the facts and responding to the situation. With respect to Aum, despite the highly unusual incidents that took place across the country – incidents that appeared to be cases of kidnapping and murder, as well as small-scale scattered incidents taking place in the Kamikuishiki Village of Yamanashi Prefecture – prefectural police headquarters made their moves too late, and the nation as a whole came to understand the crisis even later.

The fact that the police, with their wealth of on-the-job experience, responded ineffectively throws significant doubt on the question of whether the Self-Defense Forces are capable of responding in a mobilized fashion. These "soft" aspects are the most significant in terms of Japan's security.

Japan has also become involved in Theater Missile Defense (TMD) research. If the nation goes so far as to actually set this system up, which remains as yet unclear, it could not be utilized under the present Cabinet sys-



tem. When information is received that an attack has been launched, a decision must be made instantly as to how the nation will respond, an impossible scenario under Japan's traditional system of reaching a consensus in Cabinet meetings. This example, too, speaks more to the "soft" than "hard" aspects of this issue.

The next major step in dealing with the "soft" aspects of security is to reevaluate the opinion of the Cabinet Legislation Bureau that exercising the right of collective self-defense is not an option. (I personally disagree with this stance.) Article 9, Item 2, which leaves itself open to frequent misunderstanding, should if possible be struck from the Constitution, as well. I have, however, written often on this subject and will not go into the specifics here. For more on this issue, please refer to my book *Futsu no Kuni-e* (Toward a "Normal Country"). If I may, however, I would like to add one further comment on this matter. Rather than jumping immediately into a debate on whether to amend the Constitution, we should address this matter in the proper order: we should look first at enacting emergency legislation, then at recognizing the right of collective self-defense, before moving on to the actual issue of amending the Constitution.

### Conclusion

It is an undeniable fact that over the past several years Japan has, in a broad sense, strengthened its security policy. The steps taken, however, have been nothing more than enacting the legislation for which all "normal" nations make provision. Japanese legislation in this area, rather, remains woefully inadequate.

A military buildup by Japan, the argument goes, would cause anxiety among other nations. Is it really conceivable, though, that a Japan in possession of military force would try to forcibly take anything from, or force something onerous on, another nation? Pre-war Japan was poor, and the majority of people believed that territorial expansion would pave the road to secu-



Photo : Kyodo News

*The Self-Defense Forces could not be rapidly mobilized after the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake*

rity and wealth. It is inconceivable, however, that the wealthy Japan of today would use its military force for invasive purposes when it is assured of free trade.

Other nations are concerned about a military "hardware" buildup; they would be uneasy if Japan possessed powerful weapons. For Japan, however, the issue revolves around the "soft" aspect of military preparedness – the ability to effectively apply the "hardware" capabilities the country already has. This has little to do with aggression toward surrounding countries. There are three justifications for preparing ourselves militarily: every nation has enacted emergency legislation; no nation denies the right of collective self-defense, and no nation is denied a military by its Constitution.

At the beginning of this article, I stated that nationalism and a military buildup are closely related. I would like to end with a discussion of the relationship between these two elements in Japan today. Nationalism, in and of itself, is not wrong. The problem comes when narrow-minded nationalism ignores the positions of other nations. The recent mounting evidence of nationalism in Japan is merely a backlash against the excessive oppression of these feelings since the country's defeat in World War II. Whether or not a particular strain of nationalism is sound has to do with whether one argues that one's own nation is superior to others. While the

existence of a self-centered, narrow-minded nationalism in Japan cannot be denied, those holding this view are a small minority. Most nationalism in Japan lies in the realm of taking pride in one's country and respecting the fact that the citizens of other nations have pride in their own. This type of nationalism should not be feared.

The same may be said about a military buildup. Military preparedness is essential to maintaining order in the international community. When this escalates too far, however, it then becomes dangerous. Japan does not possess weapons of mass destruction; neither does it maintain long-range missiles, strategic bombers or aircraft carriers. Granted, Japan does participate in TMD technical development, but this is simply a matter of developing defensive weapons. Above all, the possibility that Japan would distance itself from the Japan-U.S. security alliance in the near future and act independently is almost non-existent. Considering these facts, the answer to the question of whether nationalism is intensifying in Japan would have to be this: while it is indeed increasing, the type of nationalism possessed by the Japanese people does not present a danger, nor has it risen to a perilous level.

**JJTI**

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