

# Talking to Themselves

By Osamu Kaihara



The Japanese have finally begun to discuss defense issues. At the same time, on the other side of the Pacific, the United States has begun to call for greater Japanese defense spending as trade friction has heated up. However, even though both sides may seem to be discussing the same issue, the terms of the debate are undefined and the two sides are on different wavelengths. Not only is there no consensus on national security in Japan, the people are not even interested in this subject; and the United States and other foreign countries find it impossible to understand this about Japan.

Opinion in Japan is divided. The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which has held the reins of government for virtually the whole of the postwar period, has formulated a defense litany premised upon the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty. The largest opposition party, the Japan Socialist Party, has consistently opposed the Japan-U.S. security arrangements. In fact, the opposition parties—especially the Japan Communist Party, which has a distinctive stance all its own—are not even in a position to agree on the basic premises for meaningful debate with the United States on security. Outside of the politicians, there are large numbers of people who privately support the present Japan-U.S. security arrangements but cannot say so in public, and this is another factor blocking the formation of any national consensus.

## Muddling through

Even though the LDP advocates firmly maintaining the Japan-U.S. security arrangements, this does not mean that this position is based upon a clear concept of national defense. Most LDP politicians think that Japan is the only country in Asia that can serve as America's partner, that the United States therefore cannot possibly abandon Japan, that the Japan-U.S. security arrangements are a constant and that the U.S. forces will always be in

Japan, and that Japan thus has an ironclad security guarantee and will be able to muddle through even if it does not make much of an effort of its own. This, at the risk of oversimplification, is the dominant opinion within the LDP. Japan's defense efforts are seen as akin to an insurance premium—the price that has to be paid to be sure of having American military protection.

What about the Japanese people? The *Asahi Shimbun*, one of Japan's leading newspapers, has in the past claimed that the vast majority of the Japanese advocate neutrality and reject the Japan-U.S. security arrangements, and as far as I am aware the *Asahi* has not changed its position on this.

## Battle of words

Those who are familiar with Japan's wartime history know that the proud Imperial Army and Navy were utterly unable to defend the nation, and the people also have an aversion to the military because of guilt over Japan's wartime militarism. The movers of modern Japan, people in their 40s and early 50s, were just children at the time of Japan's defeat, and they grew up during the postwar turmoil with no education whatsoever on what kind of a state Japan should be as an independent nation.

Given all of these circumstances, there has been no effort made to form a national consensus on Japanese security, and people have developed the feeling that Japan's security can be taken for granted. There is, in short, not the least concern with or interest in defense issues.

In discussing security issues between Japan and the United States, how much do Americans know or understand of this situation in Japan?

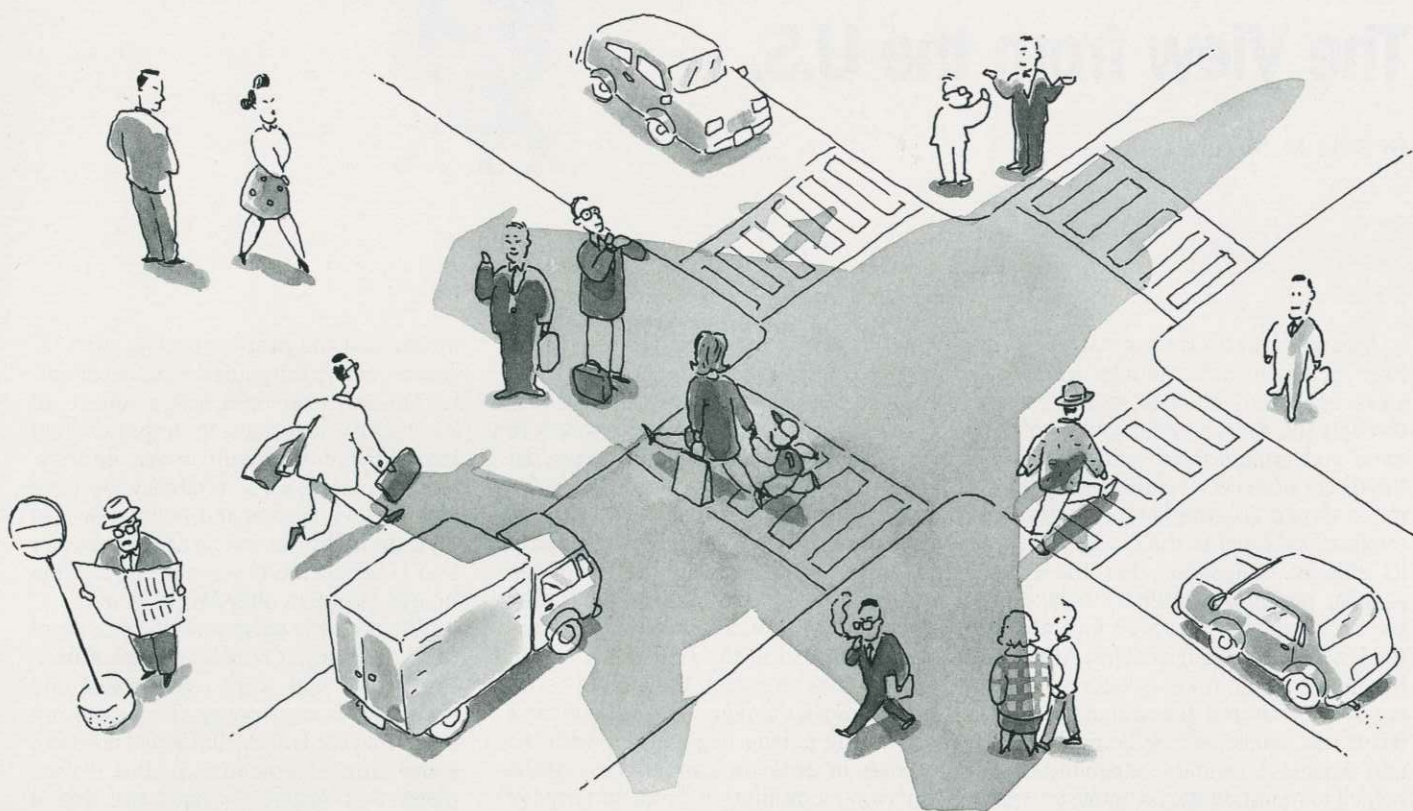
As I mentioned at the outset, there has just recently come to be open and vigorous debate about defense issues. Yet this has happened with no clarification of the basic premises that should underlie this

debate—the question of what Japan should do to defend itself against what kind of enemy—and the debate is simply a battle of words devoid of meaning. With no agreement on what the words mean or the assumptions underlying them, the debate has proceeded by merely stringing together a long list of abstract words.

For example, there is talk of defending the sea-lanes, maintaining air supremacy over the seas, and denying the Soviet Union warm-water access by closing the Tsushima, Tsugaru and Soya straits, but there is no discussion of what these things mean. On defending the sea-lanes, to cite just one, I have taken every opportunity to ask what exactly this means doing in response to what kind of threat under what circumstances and to what advantage, but I have yet to hear any clear answers. Could Japan possibly defend its sea-lanes in a war against the Soviet Union, a superpower? There has been no specific study of this question whatsoever.

It is the same with air supremacy over the seas and the idea of closing the three key straits. Would Japan actually be able to do these things against the Soviet Union? What specific measures would this entail? There is no discussion of such specifics. Instead, people are caught up in the feeling that Japan has to—or wants to—do something, and they end up mouthing a stream of empty platitudes.

I am more concerned with the realities. To give an obvious example, if the Soviet Union were to attack Japan, it would first try to take out the 28 radar sites and nullify the dozen or so air bases in Japan, which would essentially eliminate Japan's air defenses. Any talk of protecting the sea-lanes or air supremacy over the seas would be moot at this point. Would the Air Self-Defense Force be able to defend against this? It is not likely. For a variety of reasons, adequate fighter training has been impossible, and Japan, unlike West Germany, is unwilling to send its pilots to the United States for training.



Thus this talk of defending the sea-lanes or maintaining air supremacy over the seas is not backed by any specific, realistic arguments. It is simply a smoke screen to rationalize the purchase of anti-submarine patrol aircraft, new fighter planes and Aegis cruisers.

How can we possibly expect any real meeting of minds between Japanese who are just playing with words like this and Americans who want to analyze the issues logically and realistically?

## Making promises

In discussing security issues between Japan and the United States, there is one other need: that each side says what it really thinks. What area is America's top priority in security terms? It is Europe, and Canada comes next. And the truth is that the United States is not all that interested in Japan and the Far East. Of course, the U.S. government will tell you that the Far East is important for American security, but it is much less important than Europe or Canada. It is essential that Japan does not lose sight of this American *honno*.

On the other hand, Japan has made a large number of unfeasible promises to the United States. Speaking to the Na-

tional Press Club in Washington in May 1981, then Prime Minister Zenko Suzuki spoke of seeking to ensure the security of the sea-lanes up to 1,000 nautical miles from Japan. Following his return to Japan, Suzuki said that this was not a commitment, but the fact is that it was taken as a Japanese commitment in the United States. As such incidents have multiplied—and multiplied they have—the feeling has grown in the United States that Japan is eager to make promises but not so eager to keep them. It is imperative that Japan enter into the discussion prepared to say what it can and, just as important, what it cannot do.

For example, Japan should tell the United States very clearly that the Self-Defense Forces are incapable of standing up to the Soviet Union. Even if the U.S. forces, the West German military and the Japanese Self-Defense Forces are armed with the same equipment, their *raison d'être* differ. The U.S. forces are intended to fight overseas. In strategic terms, it is inconceivable that the U.S. should fight on American soil. The West German military is intended as part of the total NATO force to protect free Europe, and not specifically to defend West Germany. By contrast, the Japanese Self-Defense Forces are intended solely to defend the

Japanese islands themselves. Given the geographical, Constitutional, social and political, and economic constraints that they operate under, at best the Japanese Self-Defense Forces cannot do more than defend Japan.

In response to the *Journal's* attempt to provoke a serious discussion of security issues between Japan and the United States, I have tried to explain how difficult it will be to get the two sides actually talking to each other on the basis of mutually understood assumptions. Japanese have to look specifically and objectively at what threats exist and what preparations need to be made in view of this situation. Wiping the slate clean of wishful thinking, both sides have to go back and reexamine this issue from the ground up. Only then will it be possible for Japan and the United States to discuss defense in any meaningful way. ■

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