The Road to Japan’s “Normalization”:
Japan’s Foreign Policy Orientation since the 1990s*

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Abstract

Many analysts of Japanese security policy sense that Japan is on the cusp of a fundamental breakaway from its long-standing Yoshida Doctrine, and they have engaged in a spirited debate about the sources of Japan’s security threat, policies needed to meet these threats, and the extent of the policy changes that would occur in Japan. However, very little analysis has been done to date on explaining Japanese foreign policy changes in recent years.

This paper advances an ideationalist explanation for the recent changes in Japanese foreign policy orientation. It argues that a domestically generated change in self-role conception to act as a “global player” underlies the recent foreign policy changes. The Yoshida Doctrine that has formed the basis of the post-war Japanese foreign policy orientation is moribund now, and Japan wants to increase its political influence that matches its economic might. As a result, Japanese foreign policy has become more active and assertive since the 1990s, and a diverse set of policies ranging from the peacekeeping operations (PKOs) in Iraq, the UN reform proposals, history issues, and intensifying territorial disputes with China and Korea reflect this change in Japanese foreign policy orientation.

This paper supports the argument with the cognitive maps of National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPGs) published by the then Japan Defense Agency and the original survey of Japanese politicians in the Diet conducted in 2006. Both the cognitive maps and the survey support reveal that there is a greater emphasis on internationalism, which is closely connected with the new role conception of global player. The survey also suggests that a sense of insecurity resulting from two security threats to Japan—the rise of China and the North Korean nuclear issue—may be at the root of the emergence of the new role conception. We are already witnessing the emergence of more conflictual international relations in Northeast Asia due to Japan’s desire to play a greater role in the region and beyond, and this trend is likely to continue in the near future.
Introduction

From the long-endured Yoshida strategy to its ill-claimed checkbook diplomacy, post-war Japanese foreign policy had been passive and reactive, taking cues from America’s regional policy rather than formulating its own direction. In the 1990s, however, Japanese foreign policy became increasingly active and assertive. Its enlarged participation in international peacekeeping operations (PKOs) reflects this new activism in international affairs. Its renewed friction with China and South Korea over territorial disputes, the history textbook issue, and the Yasukuni visits, shows that it is no longer afraid of asserting its voice regarding what it believes are its interests and rights.

There is little doubt that such change could not have taken place without America’s nod of approval. Since the early 1990s, U.S. officials have quietly encouraged their Japanese counterparts to assume greater responsibility in international affairs—not only in financial, but also in political and military areas. But to say foreign pressure (gaiatsu) was the main reason for the change is to miss the domestically generated determination to become a “normal” nation-state, to convert its economic power into political power, and to increase its voice in international affairs. Based on the new role conception of “global player,” Japan wants to play a leadership role in the region and throughout the world rather than being content with its traditional roles as a U.S. ally and as an economic powerhouse.

This new role conception is at the root of Japan’s newly found activism in international affairs. Furthermore, this role conception is widely shared by Japan’s political leaders despite their different political preferences. Hence neither a change in the U.S. global strategy nor change of the Japanese government would affect this new general direction of Japanese foreign policy. In the post-Cold War era, the new role conception will continue to guide Japanese foreign policy in the direction of greater activism and assertiveness, and Japan will seek

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power sharing that matches its burden sharing.

To buttress the arguments in this paper the methods of cognitive mapping and survey are utilized. Comparisons are presented in this paper among the cognitive maps of the three National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPGs) of 1976, 1996, and 2005, and analyses are presented of MOFA documents and the 2006 survey of the Diet members. The cognitive map represents a structured thought process that interprets the information received and how it relates to the environment. The maps, coupled with other official documents published by MOFA, provide strong evidence that there was a change in role-conception in favor of greater activism and internationalism, a finding also supported by the Diet survey. The first of its kind that surveys the Japanese political elite’s views concerning foreign policy, the Diet survey reveals that the new role-conception is widely shared among the Japanese politicians regardless of their different political affiliations.

A more active and assertive Japan will certainly lead to more complicated and conflict-ridden regional affairs. Like it or not, Japan’s return to the international community as a “normal” member is something of an inevitability. For too long, Japan had been kept under the shackles of the Second World War, and it is about time for Japan to play more meaningful and constructive roles in international affairs. However, to play a leadership role in the region and throughout the world, the Japanese leaders must first deal squarely with the history issues such as the Yasukuni visits, the history textbook revision, and the comfort women problem. Simply put, in the eyes of regional countries, Japan’s moral leadership is the prerequisite for its political and military leadership.

The paper has three main sections. In the next section, a brief analysis is given of the post-war Japanese foreign policy orientation. The following section will discuss the changes in Japanese foreign policy since the 1990s by presenting several important examples. A closer analysis is then presented of the NDPGs and other MOFA documents as well as a summary of the Diet survey, in order to understand the precise nature of the change.
The Post-War Japanese Foreign Policy Orientation

In the closing days of the Second World War, the Allied leaders met in Berlin and issued the Potsdam Declaration. The Declaration set forth the terms for the surrender of Japan, and clearly stated the goal of the U.S. occupation of Japan: the elimination of the old order that had misled the Japanese people into the path of imperialism, and the establishment of a new order of peace, security, and justice.1

Upon the end of the war, the U.S. administration went about accomplishing the mission of disarming and democratizing Japan through the creation of the Peace Constitution, the purge of the right-wing militaristic conservatives, and the institution of a Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, who was vested with total authority over the Japanese government and people.2

The constitution, coupled with the U.S.-Japan Security Alliance, ensured the “abnormality” of Japan by depriving her of a key right of a modern state—that is, the right to use force to resolve international disputes. The combination of the historical experiences of failed imperialist ambitions, the Allied occupation, and institutionalized “abnormality” generated two characteristics—namely, pacifism and passivism that dominated the post-war Japanese foreign and security policy orientation.

Japan’s pacifism has its roots in its defeat in the Second World War and the atomic tragedies. The end result was the passionate disapproval of any military capability that could be deemed offensive in nature.3 As Royer opines, “The post-war Japanese were emotionally devoted to the ideal of peace at almost any cost”4 (emphasis in the origi-

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1 See the Potsdam Declaration, 1945.
nal). This pacifism was also institutionalized in the form of Article 9, and quickly became internalized by ordinary Japanese.\(^5\)

Institutionalized pacifism not only allowed the post-war Japanese government to focus its attention on economic development and social reconstruction, but also significantly affected the post-war Japanese security posture. Hence, the features of Japan’s post-war defense profile commonly included: (1) a ban on the export of arms and military technology (announced by Prime Minister Sato in 1968)\(^6\) and (2) the three non-nuclear principles, stating that Japan will not possess, produce, or introduce nuclear weapons into Japanese territory.\(^7\) These institutionalized norms of non-military behavior set the general tone of the post-war Japanese security policy.

This cult of pacifism was then combined with an attitude of passivism. In this regard the U.S.-Japan Security Alliance had an overwhelming influence on Japanese foreign policy passivism, as it gave Japan the basic template for its foreign policy and set the outer parameters of Japanese foreign policy, largely within the confines of economic roles. The importance of the Alliance and the U.S. factor was so predominant in Japanese foreign policy that “Japan’s policies toward other countries and regions have been largely derived from its policy toward the United States.”\(^8\)

Passivism can be traced back to the Yoshida-Dulles negotiations in the early 1950s, which established the basic tenet of Japan’s post-war security strategy. Known as the “Yoshida strategy,” it argued that Japan should align with the United States for national security, while domestically focusing on economic development.\(^9\)

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6 This feature was later modified by PM Nakasone to make the United States the sole exception.


9 Masashi Nishihara, ed., *Old Issues and New Responses: Japan’s Foreign and Security Policy Options*, The JCIE Papers, No. 27 (Tokyo: Japan Center for International
In its early phase, the Yoshida strategy was criticized by both the political right and left. The conservatives attacked it because of its total dependence on the United States for defense, favoring instead a rear- mament policy and repeal of Article 9 of the Constitution to make Japan more independent of the United States. The Socialists and progressive intellectuals, on the other hand, opposed Japan’s alliance ties with the United States, fearing that Japan might get involved in possible U.S.-Soviet conflict. Instead, they favored complete “unarmed neutrality” and checking of Japanese militarism. Despite these criticisms from both sides of the political spectrum, the Yoshida strategy endured well into the 1970s.

This passive characteristic was more clearly visible in Japan’s Asia policy. As a result of historical guilt, Asia was generally regarded as an object of negative identification. It was a constant reminder of Japan’s past moral blemish as well as its failed attempt at regional imperialism. Despite the significant amounts of ODAs doled out to East Asian countries, especially to China, the financial assistance was never enough to change Japan’s negative image due to the lingering Second World War issues, such as the apology and textbook issues. Hence from the 1950s to the 1970s, Japanese foreign policy was more inward-looking, orient- ed toward serving domestic political and economic purposes.

Beginning in the mid-1970s, however, as the Japanese economy grew strong enough to cause trade friction with the United States, an important but still limited change occurred in Japanese security policy. For the first time since the end of Second World War the Japanese government articulated an explicit strategic doctrine during this period. Embodied in the NDPG of 1976, the doctrine articulated threshold deterrence and mobilization, that is, Japan itself must possess a force of minimum size but strong enough to deter low-level or limited attacks

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11 Ibid., p. 448.
up to a certain threshold after which the United States would come to its rescue.\textsuperscript{13} Based on this “standard defense force concept” (\textit{kibanteki bo’ei ryoku koso}), the NDPG justified the defense expenditures necessary for military modernization with emphasis on quality rather than quantity. It was also during this period that Tokyo acquired a world-class air force and undertook a substantial naval buildup.\textsuperscript{14}

While a significant change, the 1976 NDPG was limited in its effect in that its main purpose was to justify and maintain the existing force levels rather than to broaden the scope of Japan’s international activities. Furthermore, more importantly, Japan lacked the political will to turn its military buildup into usage. Anti-militaristic norms had not prevented Tokyo from becoming a military power, but the norms had more to do with the \textit{usage}, not buildup, of military power. Lacking such political will to use its military strength, Tokyo continued to rely on the United States for its security and looked to Washington for its foreign policy direction.

A well-known example of Japan’s passive foreign policy is the much-criticized “checkbook diplomacy” during the 1991 Gulf War.\textsuperscript{15} During the crisis, Japan contributed more than $10 billion in total to the UN-led international coalition against Iraq’s aggression in Kuwait.\textsuperscript{16} Despite this substantial financial contribution, Japan received harsh criticism from the international community for doing too little.\textsuperscript{17} While one can be sympathetic toward the Japanese government, which was caught between the critics who wanted more from Japan and the alarmists who found disconcerting any signs of a newly assertive Japanese government, it was clear that the practice of passive foreign policy held a firm grip on the thinking of Japanese foreign policy officials.


\textsuperscript{17} Bowen, “Japan’s Foreign Policy,” p. 58.
Indeed, passivity is the single most visible characteristic of the Japanese post-Second World War foreign policy. Under the wretched economic conditions during the 1950s, Japan had no option but to focus on domestic economic and social reconstruction. Under the psychological, constitutional, and international limitations throughout the whole period, Japan could not engage with the international community in military activities and hence limited its contribution mostly to economic assistance.

Concerning its past foreign policy, the Japanese MOFA admits the passive nature of its practice. In “Current Issues Surrounding UN Peace-Keeping Operations and Japanese Perspectives,” the Ministry states that Article Nine of the Constitution fostered the view that “Japan cannot be involved directly in any armed conflict.” It continues, “Such views led to the formation of an inward-looking, ‘don’t want to be involved’ mentality.” But since the early 1990s this passivity began to give way to greater activism and assertiveness. What was perceived to be an appropriate role for Japan in international affairs also began to change in this period.

Japanese Foreign Policy Since the 1990s: Activism and Assertiveness

Although the Gulf War experience embarrassed the Japanese government and bewildered ordinary Japanese, who simply could not understand the international lack of appreciation for its contribution, it also provided an important catalyst for the transformation of Japanese foreign policy orientation by changing the perceptions of Japanese officials and people as to what role the international community had become expecting of Japan. The use of the phrase “international contri-

“multilateral diplomacy” became increasingly popular among Japanese politicians and diplomats, and in an interesting study of a computer search for the phrase “multilateral diplomacy” in MOFA and Diet documents resulted in a significant increase in the usage of the phrase following the end of the first Gulf War.21

Indeed after the 1991 Gulf War experience, Japanese foreign policy changed significantly. If the post-war foreign policy (from the 1950s to the early 1990s) was characterized by two P’s—passivity and pacifism—the post-Cold War strategy is characterized by two A’s—activism and assertiveness. There are two areas where Japan’s active and assertive foreign policy can be seen. One is UN peacekeeping operations (PKOs) and humanitarian relief operations and the other is its regional security policies. This section aims to examine both areas in more detail.

**Japan’s Activism in UN PKOs**

The enactment of the International Peace Cooperation Law in 1992 provided the legal basis for Japan to send not only its civilian personnel but also its Self-Defense Forces (SDF) personnel to UN peacekeeping operations.22 Since then, Japan has cooperated in eight peacekeeping operations (see Table 1 below), such as in Angola, Cambodia, Mozambique, El Salvador, the Golan Heights and Timor-Leste; in five international humanitarian relief operations (see Table 2 below), such as for Rwandan refugees and Timorese and Iraqi displaced persons; and in five international election monitoring activities (see Table 3 below) such as in Bosnia and Herzegovina and East Timor. Although Japan’s PKOs and humanitarian activities may imply that Japanese foreign policy is reactive rather than proactive, Japan’s expanded participation owes much to her desire to enhance its international engagement and leadership.

With the passage of the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law in October 2001, Japan sent naval support to the Arabian Sea to assist the

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22 Although not provided in the table on the previous page, Japan’s first substantial participation in a UN peacekeeping operation was in 1989, when 27 electoral observers were dispatched to the United Nations Transition Assistance Group in Namibia.
coalition forces in the war in Afghanistan. In 2003, the Koizumi government also decided to deploy 1,000 Self Defense Forces to Iraq to aid in reconstruction—Japan’s most ambitious military operation since the Second World War. All this is a sign of the new Japan wanting to join the international community as a “normal” nation-state and to play a greater leadership role in international affairs.

Table 1. Japan’s Participation in UN Peacekeeping Operations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UN Angola Verification Mission II</th>
<th>Electoral Observers</th>
<th>Sept. – Oct. 1992</th>
<th>3 persons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Electoral observers</td>
<td>May – June 1993</td>
<td>41 persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN Operation in Mozambique</td>
<td>Staff officers</td>
<td>May 1993 – Jan. 1995</td>
<td>10 persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Movement control units</td>
<td>May 1993 – Jan. 1995</td>
<td>144 persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Electoral observers</td>
<td>Oct. – Nov. 1994</td>
<td>15 persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN Observer Mission in El Salvador</td>
<td>Electoral observers</td>
<td>March/April 1994</td>
<td>30 persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Staff officers</td>
<td>Feb. 1996 – present</td>
<td>18 persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN Disengagement Observer Force</td>
<td>Transport units</td>
<td>Feb. 1996 – present</td>
<td>774 persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN Mission in East Timor</td>
<td>Civilian police</td>
<td>July – Sept 1999</td>
<td>3 persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN Transitional Administration in East Timor</td>
<td>Engineer group</td>
<td>March – May 2002</td>
<td>680 persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Headquarters personnel</td>
<td>Feb. – May 2002</td>
<td>10 persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN Mission of Support in East Timor</td>
<td>Engineer group</td>
<td>May 2002 – June 2004</td>
<td>2,287 persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Headquarters personnel</td>
<td>May 2002 – June 2004</td>
<td>17 persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>4,633 persons</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Japan’s Participation in International Humanitarian Relief Operations

| Relief of Rwandan refugees | Refugee relief units | Sept. – Dec. 1994 | 283 persons |
| Airlifting units | Sept.- Dec. 1994 | 118 persons |
| Relief of East Timorese displaced persons | Airlifting units | Nov. 1999 – Feb. 2000 | 113 persons |
| Relief activities of Afghan refugees | Airlifting units | Oct. 2001 | 138 persons |
| Relief of Iraqi refugees | Airlifting units | April 2003 | 56 persons |
| Relief of Iraqi victims | Airlifting units | July – Aug. 2003 | 104 persons |
| **Total** | | | **812 persons** |
There are at least three reasons why the PKOs and humanitarian activities became one of the central themes in Japanese foreign policy. First, it suits Japan’s multilateral approach to international issues. As a politically weak power, Japan has favored a multilateral and consensual approach. Multilateralism is so deeply engrained that the Armitage-Nye report views it as part of Japan’s national identity and recommends that the United States respects it in its bilateral relations with Japan.\(^{23}\) An interesting finding of the Diet survey in this regard is that regardless of which political party one belongs to, 80% of the respondents thought that the post-9/11 world is managed by American unilateralism, and 65% thought that such unilateralism is bad for the management of international relations, revealing Japan’s fondness of multilateralism.

Second, PKOs and humanitarian activities provide an easier entry for Japan to return to international activities involving its SDF personnel. Because the roles Japan typically play in PKOs and humanitarian activities are of a non-military nature, there is less resistance to Japan’s participation and hence they can provide a constructive path for Japan’s international rehabilitation. Through such activities not only can Japan lessen the fear of its neighbors about remilitarism, but also improve its international image.

Third, there is no specific legal prohibition on the dispatch of the

SDFs for activities that do not involve the use of force. The standard interpretation of Article 9 holds that it is unconstitutional to dispatch SDFs to foreign land, sea, and airspace for the purpose of using force.\textsuperscript{24} Hence PKOs and humanitarian activities, which are generally perceived to be non-military and not involving the use of force, can be accepted as a legitimate international activity.

Two other areas where Japan’s activism is also visible are its efforts to gain a seat in the UN Security Council and its anti-terrorism assistance. As for the effort to gain a Security Council seat, the purpose is to further enhance and expand Japan’s involvement and influence in global and regional affairs.\textsuperscript{25} Wanting to position itself on an equal status to the other great powers in the Security Council, Japan launched aggressive diplomacy in the UN to convince other nations of the need for Japan to gain a permanent seat in the Security Council, despite a fairly bleak result.

In terms of anti-terrorism, in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, the Cabinet immediately approved a supplementary budget for that fiscal year, totaling US$10.41 billion. The Japanese government has also hosted an international conference on Reconstruction Assistance on January 21-22, 2002, where the Japanese government pledged up to US$500 million in aid over the next two and a half years. In addition, Japan has contributed a total of approximately US$144 million to assist activities of the UN agencies and other international organizations for Afghan refugees and internally displaced persons.\textsuperscript{26} But more importantly, going beyond checkbook diplomacy, the Japanese Diet passed the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law on October 29, 2001, which permitted

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    \item \textsuperscript{24} George Aurelia, “Japan’s Participation in UN Peacekeeping Operations: Radical Departure or Predictable Response,” \textit{Asian Survey}, Vol. 33, No. 6 (June 1993), p. 562.
    \item \textsuperscript{25} A high-ranking official in the MOFA of Japan told the author of this paper that the prime purpose of Japan’s aim to gain a Security Council seat is to acquire \textit{information}. Implicit in his statement is the fact that the sharing of intelligence by the United States with Japan has not been all that satisfactory to Japan. Of course, information is a key factor in discerning the intention of other actors as well as in making appropriate decisions.
    \item \textsuperscript{26} Ryu Yongwook, “War on Terrorism and Japan’s National Identity,” \textit{Harvard Asia Quarterly}, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Winter 2004), pp. 7–8.
\end{itemize}
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the Maritime Self-Defense Force of Japan to dispatch destroyers and supply ships to the Indian Ocean, primarily to provide at-sea replenishments to the American forces. The Air Self-Defense Force has provided airlift support to the U.S. forces with C-103Hs and U-4s.

**Japan’s Assertive Regional Policies**

Japan’s new activism and assertiveness can also be seen in its regional policies, and are suggestive of a fundamental reorientation of Japanese foreign and security policy in the post-Cold War era. In February 2005, when a number of high officials from Japan met with their American counterparts in Washington, D.C., they issued a joint press statement, which stated that Taiwan is a security concern for Japan. It was the first time that Japanese government officials mentioned publicly that Taiwan was part of Japan’s security concern, despite the anticipated strong opposition from China. The 2005 NDPG went one step further and singled out China and North Korea as “potential security threats.”

These somewhat surprising statements are in line with the goals of the 1997 revised U.S.-Japan Security Guidelines and received American backing. The Revised Guidelines changed the function of the Alliance from an instrument to protect Japan from external threats into one designed to cope with contingencies on the Korean peninsula and in the Taiwan Strait. The controversial phrase, “areas surrounding Japan” is interpreted by the former Vice President of the Japanese Defense Agency, Masahiro Akiyama, in terms of “interest rather than geography,” suggesting that the definition of the phrase can be flexible, and that Japan will take part in operations if core Japanese security interests are at stake.

With the Revised Guidelines, Japan’s role in the Alliance also changed from that of a protégé to a partner, providing the basis for

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expansion of Japan’s international activities. As the Armitage-Nye report argues, it is the view of both governments that the U.S.-Japan Alliance “should be regarded as the floor—not the ceiling—for an expanded Japanese role in the trans-Pacific alliance.” Toward this effort, both governments favor revising the Japanese constitution, especially Article 9, which is viewed as a “constraint on alliance cooperation.” Indeed in the post-Cold War era, the United States increasingly looks to Japan to play a leading role in regional and global affairs.

Japan’s assertive foreign policy manifests itself in other areas. Most recently, Japan and the United States have engaged in a simulation exercise to prepare for a sudden landing of foreign troops on an island under Japanese administration, an exercise clearly designed for the protection of the Senkaku Islands (Diaoyudao in Chinese). Previously, the Japanese government restrained itself from engaging in such activities, lest it would provoke neighboring countries. But this is no longer the case. The Japanese government actively carries out measures it sees necessary for the promotion of its national interests.

There is also the conflict over the oil and gas fields in the East China Sea. In response to China’s exploratory operations since May 2004, Japan’s Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry (METI) authorized Japanese companies to engage in similar exploratory activities for natural gas in May 2005. The Japanese political leadership, both LDP and DPJ, have also prepared bills to protect the activities of Japanese private companies and fishermen in disputed waters—by force, if necessary.

China is not the only neighbor Japan is having conflict with. The recent friction between South Korea and Japan over Japan’s intrusion into what South Korea perceives to be its EEZ is another example of Japan’s new assertive foreign policy. The intention behind Japan’s policy on the Dokdo/Takeshima dispute seems to be to internationalize the issue so that the de facto administration and control of the island by Korea could be challenged in the international arena. While both sides

30 Armitage et al., “The United States and Japan,” p. 5.
33 Chosun Ilbo, April 17, 2006.
managed to avoid any military standoff through diplomatic means, the issue is merely being postponed, not resolved. Clear from the remarks of both former Prime Minister Koizumi\textsuperscript{34} and President Roh Moo-hyun,\textsuperscript{35} both sides view the issue as a sovereignty issue, and hence a zero-sum game. Once again, Japan’s current policy toward the Dokdo/Takeshima dispute departs from its previous quiet stance on the issue, suggesting that Japan is no longer afraid to pursue what it believes is in its national interests.

The assertive foreign policy coincides with the rise of conservatism in Japanese domestic politics, especially in the area of education. The annual visits by former Prime Minister Koizumi to the Yasukuni Shrine boosted the number of visits to the shrine by ordinary citizens, especially by the youth. According to an interview with an official at Yasukuni Shrine, the number of children visiting the shrine and its museum known as Yushukan has at least doubled in the past three years. In addition, recently, the Japanese Cabinet approved a bill to revise the Fundamental Law of Education to inculcate a nationalistic spirit—“an attitude of loving one’s nation and homeland.”\textsuperscript{36} The Fundamental Law, often viewed as the “Constitution” for education, has never been revised and stood as the symbol of Japan’s post-Second World War education and emphasis on individualism and peace. The critics fear that the revision would force the students to sing “Kimigayo” and stand for the rising sun flag, which are still associated with Japan’s militaristic past.

Simply put, the current activism and assertiveness in Japanese foreign policy is founded upon, and hence is inseparable from, the rise of conservative domestic politics in Japan. The latest popularity of conservative politics in Japan has had an effect on Japanese foreign policy by constraining Japanese political leaders to adopt hard-line policies on the issues that the Japanese public perceives as being domestic or sovereignty issues.

\textsuperscript{34} Yomiuri Daily, April 18, 2006.
\textsuperscript{35} Dong-A Ilbo, April 19, 2006.
\textsuperscript{36} Asahi Shimbun, April 29, 2006.
The Road to “Normalization” and the Role Conception of a Global Player

The previous section listed several important examples that suggest a fundamental change in Japanese foreign policy orientation since the 1990s. The extensive involvement in PKOs and humanitarian assistance, as well as its assertive stances on certain controversial issues, suggest that Japanese foreign policy became more active rather than reactive, more assertive rather than passive. This section aims to provide a more detailed discussion of this change. Specifically, an analysis will be presented of the nature of the foreign policy change in question through the examination of three NDPGs of 1976, 1996, and 2005, as well as other documents published by MOFAT. The broad argument will be supported by the survey of the Diet members carried out in March 2006.

The argument in this section is that in the 1990s not only was there a role conception change concerning Japan’s international behavior, but this new role conception became widely shared by the political elite, despite their different political preferences. In other words, the new role conception was domestically generated and represents Japan’s will to become a “normal” nation-state. As such, neither a change of U.S. global strategy nor a change of the Japanese government will alter the more active and assertive direction of current Japanese foreign policy. In addition, as suggested by the Diet survey, Japan’s new activism seems to be based on its sense of insecurity caused by the rise of China and the North Korean nuclear/missile issue.

Learning from the lessons of checkbook diplomacy, and in search of a new place in world affairs, the MOFA convened a policy meeting among seven leading IR specialists in 1999. The output was the article published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs entitled “Challenge 2001-Japan’s Foreign Policy Toward the 21st Century.” The article reflects the foreign policy course Japan wishes to take in the 21st century. While

37 The seven academics are Takashi Inoguchi, Masayuki Yamauchi, Shinichi Kitaoka, Susumu Yamakage, Akihiko Tanaka (all from University of Tokyo at the time of the discussion), Ryosei Kokubun from Keio University, and Shigeki Hakamada from Aoyama Gakuin University. The actual document is available at http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/challenge21.html.
recognizing the importance of the U.S.-Japan Security Alliance, it nevertheless suggests a new role for Japan in light of the new trends and emerging challenges.

The article states that the overarching goal of Japanese foreign policy in the next century is to become and act as a “global player” by securing a greater voice in international frameworks. To this end, the authors recommended that Japan should push for the reform of the United Nations Security Council with the goal of attaining a permanent seat in the Council in mind. Furthermore, they also stress the need to begin an open discussion on the role of the Self-Defense Forces (SDFs), implicitly alluding to the revision of Article 9 of the Constitution, and on what concrete measures beyond economic assistance should be taken to contribute to international efforts to resolve conflicts, alluding to Japan’s political and military participation in international operations.

These recommendations all go beyond the previous images associated with Japan in international affairs—namely, to provide financial assistance and to engage in quiet diplomacy rather than taking a leadership role. Indeed, it seeks to alter the fundamental strategic thinking that prevailed in the past in a more world-oriented direction, and hence explicitly calls for the expansion of SDFs’ activities and of Japan’s decision-making capabilities in international institutions through the acquisition of a UN Security Council seat.

The change in the perspective and role conception of Japan is also visible in the NDPGs published by the Defense Agency. In the past, excessive attention has been paid to the details of the documents and hence the focus tended to be on such strategic concepts as the “Basic Defense Force Concept” (1996 NDPG) and the “multipurpose, flexible and effective” structure of the Self-Defense Forces (2005 NDPG). While it is important to notice such changes, such an analysis misses the most important change present in the NDPG documents—namely, that both 1996 and 2005 NDPGs reveal increasing activism in the post-Cold War Japanese foreign policy and push Japan further in an active, world-oriented direction. This can be clearly seen in the cognitive maps

drawn from the NDPGs.

Figure 1, below, is the distilled summary of the cognitive maps, and confirms the change that has taken place in the strategic thinking within the Defense Agency. The (+) sign denotes a positive causal relationship between the two variables, while the arrow denotes the direction of causation.

This figure shows a clear difference between the 1976 NDPG and the latter 1996 and 2005 NDPGs. It suggests that the means to achieve international stability during the Cold War era have changed and is different from those in the post-Cold War era. The realist emphasis on military balance of power is no longer viewed as effective. In some sense, it is hardly surprising that strategic thinking changed between the 1970s and 1990s; after all, the international security environment has changed, requiring a change in strategic thinking.

But what is noticeable is the emphasis put on internationalism. Both participation in regional security frameworks and international activities are regarded as the prime factors improving international

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**Figure 1. Comparison of the Cognitive Maps of the 1976, 1996, and 2005 National Defense Program Outlines**

**a. International Stability**

1976: Military Balance of the U.S. and USSR $\rightarrow$ International Stability (+)

1996 & 2005:

International activities $\rightarrow$ International Stability (+)
Regional Security Framework

**b. Japan’s National Security**

1976 & 1996:

U.S.-Japan Alliance $\rightarrow$ Japan’s National Security (+)
Japan’s Defense Capability

2005: The same as 1976 and 1996. In addition,

Bilateral and multilateral security cooperation $\rightarrow$ Japan’s National Security (+)

stability. Japan now sees an enhanced activism in the international community as the crucial way to achieve its key national defense goals.

The 2005 NDPG further states that in order to improve the international security environment, “Japan will, on its own initiative, actively participate in international peace cooperation activities (author’s emphasis).” 39 While it would be dangerous to interpret this statement to mean the complete independence of Japanese foreign policy from America’s, it points to Japan’s greater willingness to voice its own concerns.

Also, while the means for achieving Japanese national security remain largely unchanged, the 2005 NDPG puts greater emphasis on bilateral and multilateral security cooperation, such as security dialogues and exchanges. This again reflects Japan’s fondness for a multilateral approach through participation in international security frameworks.

The change in strategic thinking is also supported by a survey of the Diet members conducted in March 2006. The questionnaire was sent to the 450 members of the Lower House of the Diet, and 80 of them responded. The margin of error is 10% at the 95% confidence level. The summary statistics of the survey is shown in Table 4 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party Age</th>
<th>LDP</th>
<th>DPJ</th>
<th>NKP</th>
<th>SDP</th>
<th>PNP</th>
<th>JCP</th>
<th>Indep.</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30s</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12 (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40s</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50s</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24 (30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60s</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23 (29%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70s</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>45 (56%)</td>
<td>23 (29%)</td>
<td>4 (5%)</td>
<td>3 (4%)</td>
<td>2 (2.5%)</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>2 (2.5%)</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both the overall statistics and, where appropriate, the party-specific statistics (only for LDP and DPJ) are presented. 40 A number of interest-

40 This is because the samples of the other political parties are too small to draw
ing findings were obtained.

First, the move toward new activism and assertiveness in Japanese foreign policy seems to be rooted in its sense of insecurity. When asked to judge Japan’s current security environment (see Figure 2, below), 11% said that it was very unsafe and 53% said that it was unsafe, while 23% of them opined that it was average. Only 13% said that it was safe and no one judged it to be very safe.

**Figure 2. Is the Current International Security Environment Safe for Japan?**

![Figure 2. Is the Current International Security Environment Safe for Japan?](image)

This sense of insecurity arises mainly from two countries that Japan views as potential threats—North Korea and China. When asked to rank six regional actors (South Korea, China, North Korea, Taiwan, Russia, and America) in the order of potential threat to Japan’s security, the result was the clear formation of three groups of potential threats (see Table 5, below). North Korea and China ranked first and second,

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general conclusions about their views concerning foreign affairs. This certainly does not mean that the other political parties are unimportant. For practical purposes, however, it is important to note that the LDP and DPJ are the two most important political parties in Japan, and tend to dominate policy debates relating to foreign affairs.
respectively, forming the most threatening group. The medium-threat group is made up of Russia and South Korea, while both Taiwan and the United States are not considered as much of a threat.

This view of North Korea and China is connected with the North Korean nuclear and missile issues and the rise of China. As shown in Figure 3, when asked to select the two most serious international issues Japan faces today from the listed ten options, the rise of China and the North Korean nuclear issue easily topped the list. 30% of the respondents selected the rise of China, and another 24% selected the North Korean nuclear issue (with an additional 6% selecting the North Korean kidnapping of Japanese citizens), as the most serious security issue Japan is facing today. While the North Korean nuclear issue received similar responses from both LDP and DPJ, within LDP, the rise of

Table 5. Overall Threat Scores for Six Regional Actors
(1: the least threatening and 6: the most threatening)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>North Korea</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Russia</th>
<th>South Korea</th>
<th>Taiwan</th>
<th>USA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Score</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3. What Are the Two Most Serious International Issues for Japan Today?
China figured prominently as a security issue (33% of LDP respondents). Within the DPJ, in addition to the North Korean nuclear issue (27%) and the rise of China (22%), the Yasukuni problem also figured rather prominently with 17% of the DPJ respondents selecting it.

Japan’s sensitivity to a possible North Korean missile attack stems from the experience of the 1998 Taepodong missile test, and it formed the basis for adopting the missile defense system is also to nullify the North Korean military threat. Given last October’s North Korean nuclear testing, the figure for North Korea as a threat will be much higher than 27% today.

With China, the oil/gas field and Senkaku/Diaoyu disputes cause a sense of insecurity. Fueling this sense of insecurity is the dramatic alteration of the relative balance of power between China and Japan in the 1990s. While China has moved quickly in its economic and military modernization, the Japanese economy had been caught in recession for most of the 1990s. Although still ahead in absolute terms, Japan lags well behind China in almost all areas in terms of differential rates of growth.

Second, in terms of the future direction of Japanese foreign policy, the majority favored playing a leadership role in the region and throughout the world. This is consistent with the new role conception of “global player” promoted by MOFA.

As shown in Figure 4 on the following page, when asked about the international role Japan should play, the traditional role conceptions associated with Japan, namely, an economic powerhouse and America’s ally, made up only 21% of the total. In contrast, the view that Japan should play a leadership role in Asia or in the world consisted of 40%

41 Furthermore, the sense of lagging behind seems to worry the Japanese government. The 1990s saw a dramatic alteration of the relative balance of power between China and Japan. See Minxin Pei and Michael Swaine, “Simmering Fire in Asia: Averting Sino-Japanese Strategic Conflict,” Policy Brief, No. 44 (Nov. 2005) (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment). Although still ahead in absolute terms, Japan lags well behind China in almost all areas in terms of differential rates of growth. While the Chinese government has moved quickly in its economic and military modernization, the Japanese economy had been caught in recession for the most of the 1990s and its constitutional limit kept a firm lid on Japan’s military development.
and 26% of the total responses, respectively, a clear indication that the current Japanese political leaders hold the view that Japan should enlarge its role in international affairs.

Broken down into the major political parties, 24% of the LDP members favored the traditional roles, while 35% favored a leadership role in Asia and another 34% favored a leadership role in the world. Among the DPJ members, 10% favored the traditional role conceptions, while 33% and 25% favored leadership role in Asia and the world, respectively. Interestingly, none of the 80 respondents chose the role conception of “military great power,” which suggests the existence of a strong antimilitarist normative grip on the elite’s thinking. In line with changing Japan’s international roles, the majority of the respondents (approx. 70%) favored the expansion of SDFs activities.

Third, when asked, “What is the best means to achieve peace and stability in East Asia?” 38% (see Figure 5 below) of the respondents chose the avenue of regional security frameworks such as ASEAN or ARF, and 30% said that the U.S.-Japan Security Alliance would be the best means. This view is once again consistent with the cognitive maps of the NDPG’s that showed the double emphases on the U.S.-Japan Security Alliance and on participation in international organizations for Japan’s national security.

Here the LDP and DPJ had some differences. Within the LDP, 39% and 36% chose the U.S.-Japan Security Alliance and the regional securi-
ty frameworks, respectively, as the best means to achieve regional peace and stability. A meager 9% of the LDP respondents chose the betterment of bilateral relations with China and Korea as the best means to regional stability, while no one chose the UN. In contrast, within the DPJ, only 5% chose the U.S.-Japan Security Alliance, while 43% chose the avenue of regional security frameworks. A sizeable 19% opted for the UN as the key to regional peace, while another 19% thought that betterment of bilateral relations with China and Korea was the best means.

The result suggests that while the members of both parties emphasize the regional security framework and hence multilateral approach to regional security, the LDP members see greater value in relying on the U.S.-Japan Security Alliance, whereas the opposition members believe that the improvement in the bilateral relations with China and Korea and global security framework would enhance peace and security in the region.

On the whole, both the summary of the cognitive maps and the Diet survey reveals a new and different foreign policy orientation. This new direction of Japanese foreign policy departs from the passive nature of its past practice in that it is willing to take a political leader-
ship role in international affairs and is not afraid of asserting its views with regard to the issues concerning Japan’s security interests and sovereignty.

**Conclusions**

Writing in 1994, Tadokoro opined that Japan would have to answer questions in two key areas. One of them was whether Japan would play a more active role in foreign policy, including in the military and security fields. In no uncertain terms, the Japanese government has decided in the affirmative. A longtime economic giant but a political pygmy, Japan has decided to become a “normal” nation-state by expanding its international participation and contribution both in scope and quantity. This road to normalization is a departure from the passive and reactive policy of the past—based on the Yoshida doctrine, and involves a wide range of activities, from international PKO and humanitarian activities to regional territorial and history conflicts with China and South Korea.

The previous discussion provides strong evidence that while the importance of the traditional ties with the United States through the U.S.-Japan Security Alliance is not forgotten, the new role conception of “global player” has already taken firm hold of the strategic thinking of the Japanese political leaders. Japan wants to play a greater leadership role in East Asia and beyond, and has therefore participated extensively in international PKOs and humanitarian activities, as well as voiced its security concerns and sought to gain a seat on the UN Security Council. It is this deeper change that is the key to understanding the future direction of Japanese foreign policy. With the political determination to become and act as a global player, Japan is set to rise again in international affairs.

Japan’s increasing activism has worried its neighbors, especially China and South Korea, however. One Chinese analyst views the U.S.-Japan Security Alliance as an “excuse for Japan to pursue a more active

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policy."43 Japan’s activism in the international arena is also being carefully observed by South Korea, and its Ministry of National Defense published a detailed summary of Japan’s military buildup in 2005.44

So far as regional affairs are concerned, we are likely to see the separation of economics and culture from politics. Because everyone sees benefits of increased economic integration and cross-national cultural exchanges, all countries will continue to enhance their relations in these areas. But in politics, Japan’s bilateral relations with China and Korea will face a bumpy road due to the existence of deep-rooted mistrust. Furthermore, perceived as a sovereignty issue, both the historical45 and territorial issues are likely to hamper bilateral relations between Japan, and China and Korea.

Like it or not, however, Japan’s normalization is inevitable. It is not necessarily bad either, since the regional powers can make greater use of Japan’s resources for regional peace and stability. What is needed is smooth transition from the current state to the one where it is accepted that Japan can participate in military affairs as a full member of East Asia. To this end, Japan’s military development should take place gradually, broadening from humanitarian efforts in the region to enhanced participation in regional security dialogues finally to full participation in all areas. It is likely to be a long road to normalization, one that will involve more friction with the neighboring countries. If you thought that managing one rise (rise of China) was difficult enough, take a deep breath—because the chances are that we will have to manage another rise (rise of Japan) in addition.

45 The Yasukuni issue will not be resolved unless Japan’s political leaders stop visiting the shrine or they find some other method that can be acceptable to the Chinese and Koreans, such as removal of the remains of class-A war criminals from the shrine. The history textbook issue is a bit more delicate, as the Japanese right sees the introduction of patriotism/nationalism into the education system as a critical step for the rise of Japan in international affairs. As such, finding a compromise that satisfies all parties will be difficult. All in all, the issue will still be characterized by emotional responses from all parties.