

Debating Security in Japan

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Since the post-war era, understanding Japan's security rhetoric and actions presented certain incongruities. While the constructivist arguments underscore that the influence of post-war antimilitarist norm shaped Japan's security behavior, it contradicts the realist underpinnings influencing Japan's choices. To understand Japanese post-war security orientation and comprehend the rapidly unfolding policy shift, this paper explores three sets of questions: firstly, what are the competing schools of thought in the Japanese security debate? What are their core arguments on key issues including Article 9 of the Constitution, potency of the Self-Defense Forces (SDFs), nature of the U.S.–Japan alliance and historical narratives of Japan's past? What are the inter-school and intra-school fault lines? Secondly, what are the drivers that propelled the dominance of each school at different time frames? How does the factional power struggle in the domestic political landscape enable each school to maximize their space and influence in the current security discourse? More specifically, why did mercantilists remained the dominant political force throughout the Cold War? In contrast, what led to normalists gaining momentum and substituting mercantilism as a potent force in the post-Cold War period? Thirdly, how have political elites pursued their competing agendas and critically analyze the case of Shinzo Abe? What are the influences that shaped his values? What are the methods he employed to pursue his ambitions of making Japan a “normal” nation? And how did he consolidate his political strength and manage to realize concrete policy objectives?

Keywords: Article 9, Self-Defense Forces (SDFs), U.S.–Japan alliance, security policy, Shinzo Abe

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Introduction

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is emerging as one of the most decisive leaders in redefining Japan's post-war security orientation. Amid a fiercely contested national debate, Abe has demonstrated political acumen in pursuing his ambition of a "normal" Japan and unfolded certain bold steps towards infusing clarity into Japan's future security role. After assuming office in 2012, he responded to American critique¹ questioning Japanese aspiration to continue as a tier-one nation. Abe argued, "Japan is not, and will never be, a Tier-two country."² Putting Japan back on the map of international power politics required undoing of the limitations that were forced onto Japan in the post-war period, including the constitutional restrictions, especially the pacifist clause—Article 9. On Constitution Day in May 2017, Abe set himself a target of 2020 to culminate the ongoing intense domestic debate into what can very well be the first amendment of the Japanese constitution since it came into effect in 1947. As Prime Minister Abe consolidated his political capital by securing a third term as the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) President in the September 2018 elections with support from five intra-party factions, it infused fresh momentum to deliver on the "great responsibility" of redefining Japanese post-war security orientation and creating a greater role for Japan in the Northeast Asian security architecture. LDP's proposal for revising Article 9 is likely to be submitted to an extraordinary Diet session in fall 2018 since the political calendar in 2019 is packed with the abdication of the Emperor in April and the upper house election in July and Abe is expected to navigate impediments regarding the timing of the national referendum.

Often the triggers behind Japan's policy shifts are analyzed within the narrative of a reactive Japan. As a counter-narrative, Abe conceptualized Japan's role as a *Proactive Contributor to Peace*. To support Japan's "proactive role for peace and stability in the world, in a way commensurate with its national capabilities,"³ Abe is transforming the core of Japan's security policy with important policy shifts. Besides, Abe currently enjoys a relatively strong political strength following the Upper and Lower House elections of the Diet, securing two-thirds of the seats, making it comparatively easier to pursue the ambition of constitutional amendment with the support of the junior coalition partner Komeito and other like-minded parties. Since the Cold War era, understanding Japan's security rhetoric and actions presented certain incongruities. While the constructivist⁴ arguments underscore that the influence of the Japanese post-war anti-militarist norm shaped Japan's security behavior, it contradicts the realist⁵ underpinnings influencing Japan's choices. These contradictions can be traced back to the fact that Japan's national security policy debate has been marked by the interplay of robust ideas that shaped up as four dominant schools of thought in the security discourse. To understand Japanese post-war security orientation and comprehend the rapidly unfolding policy shift, this paper will explore the following set of questions:

- What are the competing schools of thought in the Japanese security debate? What are their core arguments on key issues including Article 9 of the Constitution, potency of the Self-Defense Forces (SDFs), nature of the U.S.–Japan alliance and

- historical narratives of Japan's past? What are the inter-school and intra-school fault lines?
- What are the drivers that propelled the dominance of each school at different time frames? How did the factional power struggle in the domestic political landscape enable each school to maximize their space and influence the current security discourse? More specifically, why did mercantilists remain the dominant political force throughout the Cold War? In contrast, what led to normalists gaining momentum and substituting mercantilism as a potent force in the post-Cold War period?
 - How have political elites pursued their competing agendas and critically analyze the case of Shinzo Abe? What are the influences that shaped his values? What are the methods he employed to pursue his ambitions of making Japan a “normal” nation? How did he consolidate his political strength and manage to realize concrete policy objectives?

Security dynamics in East Asia is rapidly altering. While East Asia hosts three out of the top ten nations in terms of military expenditures in 2016, with emotive history, intensifying nationalism, active geo-political hotspots, differing political systems and nuclear proliferation, the regional security environment is undergoing considerable change. The current Japanese discourse is situated within the template of having the most severe security environment in post-war history, with North Korea becoming an “unprecedentedly serious and imminent threat” and China “changing the status quo by coercion based on its own assertions incompatible with the existing international order,”⁶ which is making Japan revisit its security policy. However, it is important to note that while several policy shifts unfolded in a remarkably short time frame under Abe, the debate on security policy is as old as the constitution itself. The roots of the Japanese security debate can be traced back to much before the rise of the China Threat Theory arguments in Japan.

Competing Schools of Thought in the Security Discourse

The security thinking that has developed into current ideological poles can be traced back to the 1950s. This section of the paper will study the core arguments of the competing schools of thought in the Japanese security debate. Literature review reflects that four contending schools, fiercely debating the nature of the country Japan should aim to be and the kind of role it should perform globally, contest with each other to institutionalize their outlooks by way of policy. The arguments of each school differ on key issues including Article 9 of the Constitution, potency of the SDFs, nature of the U.S.–Japan alliance and historical narratives of Japan's past.

Table 1. Four Schools in the Security Debate

	Far left	Moderate Conservatives	Conservative Right	Far Right
Keiko Hirata	Pacifists	Mercantilists	Normalists	Nationalists
Tatsuo Yoshikawa	Absolute Pacifists	Moderate Defense Advocates	Autonomous Defense Advocates	Ultra-nationalists
Mike Mochizuki	Unarmed Neutralists	Political Realists	Military Realists	Japanese Gaullists
Yonosuke Nagai	JSP, JCP, Komeito	MoF, MITI, EPA, <i>Zaikai</i>	LDP, DSP, JDA	LDP, JDA
Kenneth Pyle	Progressives	Mercantilists	Liberal Realists	New Nationalists
Richard Samuels	Pacifists	Middle-power Internationalists	Normal Nationalists	Neo-autonomists

Source: Prepared from Takao Sebata (2010, 53–57), Keiko Hirata (2008, 125) and Susumu Awanohara (1990, 11–13).

Introducing the four schools, Japanese pacifists envision a state that abides by the value of the peace constitution and practice unarmed neutrality; mercantilists argue that Japan must employ its resources to become an economic power; normalists foresee Japan through the prism of realism; and nationalists articulate the case of a militarily confident Japan. It is important to note that many eminent Japanese intellectuals and political leaders might not fit exclusively into this generic categorization. This is essentially because the political class often borrows liberally from the rhetoric of these approaches suiting their political convenience.⁷ While mercantilists (Yoshida School) remained the dominant belief and political force, pacifism served as the philosophical challenger throughout the Cold War. In contrast, normalism gained momentum and substituted mercantilism as a potent political force in the post–Cold War period.⁸

Pacifists

Drawing from the disenchantment of the devastating war and profound unease concerning the military, pacifists articulated that it is Japan's objective to prove that a modern industrial country could be sustained without armament. Moreover, they traced the foundation of Article 9 not in the post–war constitution imposed by the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP), General Douglas MacArthur, but in the contributions of Shonan Yokoi, Emori Ueki, Tokoku Kitamura, Kanzo Uchimura, Naoe Kinoshita, Roka Tokutomi before the war.⁹

This school mobilized following the war in the late 1940s as a response to militarism witnessed during the war. It zealously advocated for the war–renouncing pacifist constitution and argued for the case of a rigid reading of Article 9—renouncing war as a sovereign right, banning the maintenance and use of military force to settle international disputes. Drawing from Article 9, they argued that Japanese SDFs and American bases hosted in Japan are unconstitutional. The U.S.–Japan Security Treaty was also opposed

since it situated Japan in the U.S. bloc in the Cold War scheme and attracted Soviet antagonism. They advocated “unarmed neutrality” drawing from the assessment that there was no practical military danger from the Soviet Union. The unarmed neutralists strove to end the U.S.–Japan Security Treaty and urged to conclude friendship treaties with Japan’s neighboring countries.¹⁰

The pacifists refused to accept the “free rider” critique engineered by the United States. It has been argued that the United States pushed Japan to improve its defensive power in the backdrop of the Soviet threat. However, it is important to realize that the Soviet threat existed for Japan because it cooperated with the United States. Firming up Japanese defense to cooperate with the United States within the alliance framework would increasingly weaken Japanese security and provoke a Soviet attack.¹¹

The cause of pacifism was pursued during the Cold War by the Japan Socialist Party (JSP), Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the Japanese Communist Party (JCP). Prominent members of this school comprise of Kiyomi Tsujimoto, Mizuho Fukushima, and Seiji Mataichi from the SDP, and Kazuo Shii from the JCP. While post-war pacifism started losing ground in the 1960s following the renewal of the security treaty with the United States, subsequently they once more gained momentum in the backdrop of the Vietnam War before losing steam and paving the way for the mercantilists to dominate the security discourse.

In the post-Cold War era, the pacifist principles got diluted and political opportunism took precedence when the JSP entered into a grand coalition with the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), under the leadership of Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama, and compromised their principle of disarming Japan, agreed on the legality of both SDF and the U.S.–Japan Security Treaty in the 130th Diet session. This compromise proved expensive for the JSP, later called the SDP, in electoral politics. The immediate influence of this school at the policy level is limited. Currently, two SDP representatives each are there in the House of Councillors (Upper House) and House of Representatives (Lower House); and 14 JCP representatives are in the House of Councillors and 12 JCP representatives are in the House of Representatives (Lower House)¹²—a considerable weakening of strength from the 1960s.

With the end of the Cold War, unarmed neutrality faded away since the argument of neutrality *vis-à-vis* the United States and the Soviet Union was no longer valid. Nevertheless, the pacifists continued to harbor reservations concerning firming up military relations with the United States. They contested the Anti-terrorism Special Measures Law in 2001 and the Iraq Special Measures Law in 2003. The pacifists maintained the war was an act of Japanese aggression and the use of comfort women and the Nanjing massacre were war crimes, opposed official visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, and stood in favor of nurturing good relations with Asian countries.¹³

The shrinking space of the pacifists is owing to the dilution of pacifist values by Murayama, growing consciousness of the Japanese electorate to national security issues and fluidity in the Northeast Asian security environment. The end of the Cold War never implied an end of the threats to Japanese national security—North Korea’s nuclear and missile program and China’s military modernization escalated concerns. This questioned

pacifism as a realistic option for national security.

Mercantilists

The mercantilists endorse the Yoshida Doctrine, named after Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru. Yoshida prioritized restoring the economy that suffered devastation owing to the war and depended on the United States for security issues for the time being.¹⁴ His policy speeches indicated that the national objective was the revitalization of industries and augmenting production. The key objective of the Yoshida Doctrine was minimizing defense spending with dependence on the U.S. security cover under the U.S.–Japan Security Treaty while diverting resources for enabling economic development in the post–war era.

Japan has lost 45 percent of her entire territory together with its resources. Her population of almost 84 million has to be confined within the remaining areas, which are war–devastated, with their important cities bombed and burnt. . . . With her war–shattered economy salvaged through American aid, Japan is making progress on the road of recovery. We are determined that our nation shall cease to be a burden on other countries but shall contribute positively to world prosperity, while observing fully the fair trade practices in international commerce. . . . by participating in the various international agreements we intend to contribute to the wholesome development of world trade. The present treaty opens the door to the realization of such aspirations of Japan in the field of international economy.

Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida,
San Francisco Peace Conference, September 1951¹⁵

In the 1960s, Masataka Kosaka, a prominent political scientist of the Cold War era, identified the contours of Japan’s post–war grand strategy, known as the “Yoshida line.” Kosaka, in his writing, argued that Japan pursued an economics–centric strategy and focused on the role of a trading (*tsusho*) state,¹⁶—maximizing the advantages from commercial relations and avoiding participation in international politics. Furthermore, he articulated that Yoshida prioritized prosperity and given his mercantilist approach towards international politics, using “Article 9 as a negotiating tool was so natural for him.”¹⁷ Kosaka advised both Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru and Masayoshi Ohira. He used the expression “mercantile state” (*tsusho kokka*) to explain the most favorable approach for Japan.

Later in the 1980s, Naohiro Amaya, ex–Vice Minister of MITI (now METI) argued in favor of Japan’s role as a merchant state and entrusting politics to the samurai states (the United States and Soviet Union). This approach has been subjected to criticism from Kenichi Ito who analyzed it as a “kowtow foreign policy” that would suffer from a trust deficit from other nations; Ota Hiroshi argued that the “merchant nation thesis” is narrow and self–seeking, not sustainable since it is difficult to isolate politics from economics.

Unlike the pacifists, the mercantilists accept the constitutionality of the SDFs and the U.S.–Japan Security Treaty. While the mercantilists consider the alliance with the United States as the heart of Japanese security and foreign policy, they often consider the

alliance arrangement, what Hirata indicates as “unidirectional, emphasizing the United States’ obligation to protect Japan but not vice versa.” The mercantilists arrived as a potent political power in the 1960s and continued through the Cold War era. Up until 1993, subsequent Japanese prime ministers toed the Yoshida line, for instance, Prime Minister Hayato Ikeda designed the income–doubling plan in the 1960s. The Yoshida Doctrine and participation in the international economic system contributed to Japan’s economic achievements. Compared with less than three percent in 1950, the Japanese GNP reached 15 percent of the world share in 1990.¹⁸

Some LDP factions, including the Kochikai, Tsushima, and Yamasaki members, belonged to this school. However, in the post–Cold War period, this school got eclipsed by the right-of-center normalists. From the 2000s, with the rise of anti-mainstream, influential pragmatists, including Hiromu Nonaka, Yohei Kono, Kiich Miyazawa, and Koichi Kato were cornered and the Kochikai faction fractured.¹⁹

As mentioned earlier, Japanese intellectuals might not exclusively fit into any one of the four schools of thought, and the foremost thinkers including Masataka Kosaka and Yonosuke Nagai belonged to both the realist and the mercantilist strand. Nagai argued that during the 1950s, if Japan had obliged to U.S. pressure and followed the path of rearmament, the post–war economic miracle would not have been achieved. Drawing from his robust support towards the Yoshida strategy, Nagai is often recognized as the architect of the term “Yoshida doctrine” in the 1980s. Conversely, Nishihara Masashi is also credited for the same drawing from his writings in 1978.²⁰ Nagai’s vision for Japan is what he calls a “moratorium state” where it ought to preserve its current constitution and continue as a “lightly–armed, non-nuclear economic power.”²¹ He argued that national interest and economic nationalism are the sole drivers that will shape Japan’s strategy.

Even though Japan agreed to the development of SDF to complement U.S. efforts, Yoshida strongly refuted Dulles’s demand for Japanese rearmament after the war. The uneasiness was due to the likely trade-off between economic prosperity and military expenses. Japan alluded to several reasons including its economically devastated situation following the war, constitutional restrictions *vis-à-vis* Article 9, post–war emotional antipathy to military and the regional response to a rearmed Japan. With regard to the U.S. alliance, there is an acknowledgement that Yoshida’s argument of economic fragility in the 1950s is no longer valid following the economic miracle. Mercantilists argued that while the United States would take charge of the military aspect, Japan can contribute to the economic aspect, thus keeping with the constitutional limitations.²²

Regarding the issue of constitutional revision, there are two strands of arguments. The first cluster supports a revision leading to the formal recognition of the SDF and removing the ambiguity regarding the notion of self-defense. The second cluster nurtures reservations articulating that the minor expansion of SDF’s function can be facilitated through a broader reading of the constitution. Any attempt towards constitutional revision would involve huge political expenses. While Koichi Kato, Makoto Koga and Takube Yamasaki belonged to the first cluster, Kiichi Miyazawa, Hideo Hiraoka and

Takahiro Yokomichi belonged to the second one.²³

Contemporary mercantilists are globalists, aligning interests and values with industrial economies and arguing the case of Japan contributing to the international community by offering economic aid to developing nations. Moreover, they underscore the importance of mending relations with Asian neighbors. The pro-China group comprising of Kato, Yamasaki, Koga and Yohei Kono profess the merits of building mutually favorable relations. Several post-Cold War mercantilists including Kato and Kono are critiques of Japan's inability to dispassionately look at its history and responsibility in the war. Kato and Kono made efforts to address the comfort women issue. Moreover, the business lobby including the Japan Association of Corporate Executives (*Keizai Doyukai*) and Keidanren have urged for strong Sino-Japanese relations and criticized Yasukuni visits by top leaders.²⁴

Nationalists

This school is situated on the far right. The salient feature of this school is total rejection of the post-war political order imposed by the U.S. occupation and embodied in the present constitution. There is a necessity to undo these forced restrictions and recuperate national confidence and autonomy which got diluted in the occupation years. The issue of autonomy has been the mainstay of this school. The proponents of this school are not confident about the U.S. commitment to protect Japan under Article 5 of the security treaty. Moreover, Japan's secondary position to the United States hurts Japan's national stature.²⁵

The nationalists often display a chauvinistic approach toward Asian neighbors, glorify the military history, argue that the war was defensive in nature and was a just one. This school argues that Japan opted for war owing to the need to free the Asians from European colonialism and racism; arrest the spread of communism in China; deal with the economic blockade forced on Japan by the United States, the United Kingdom, China, and the Netherlands; and responding to the 1941 Hull Note that stipulated Japanese withdrawal from China and Indochina. Moreover, they urge Japan to stop extending apologies to Asian neighbors as these countries maximize their political gains by manipulating history. This school wants Japan to aim for national power projection and deterrence. They advocate for removing the limits forced on the defense policy such as the arms export ban, three non-nuclear principles, and one percent of GNP cap on defense expenditures.

The nationalists are ardent critiques of the pacifists. Nationalists have often charged the left including the left-leaning newspaper, *Asahi Shimbun* for instigating the Yasukuni shrine controversy. They often argue that in 1985, with *Asahi's* coverage of Prime Minister Nakasone's Yasukuni visit, the issue captured regional attention. These nationalists advocate nurturing national pride through the promotion of a "correct" understanding of history in textbooks and visits to the Yasukuni shrine by political leadership.

LDP members of the former Nakagawa/Ishihara faction and a few members of the

Machimura faction, including former defense minister Tomomi Inada, belongs to this school. Other important supporters of this school are Jun Eto, Tetsuya Kataoka and Yatsuhiro Nakagawa. Nationalists like Jun Eto argue that if the 1946 constitution is not amended, Japan will not be able to become a sovereign country and will continue to be morally occupied by the United States.²⁶ Jun Eto has been the foremost reference for Japanese nationalists and ultra-conservative intellectuals demanding constitutional revision. Eto believed that the primary objective of the U.S. occupation policy was to demolish the incomparable empire and replace it with an arrangement where Japan can no longer be the controller of its own destiny deprived of the right of belligerency. He vociferously argued that as long as Japan shadows the Yoshida line, the “shackles of the post-war period” will continue and recuperation will be difficult.²⁷

This school refuses to accept the continuation of Japan’s post-war political standing. It has been argued by Ikutaro Shimizu that Japan should not be under false impression regarding its alliance and that Japan is on its own and can only depend on the Japanese. Hence there is a need to rearm proportionately with its economic status and realize its full potential. He further suggested that Japan is an odd and abnormal case. While a resource deficient Japan relies on maritime space for critical supplies from across the world, it depends on other nations to secure the transit routes for Japan. In addition, he advocated for a nuclear Japan.²⁸ This line of thinking was critiqued by both the pacifists and the normalists. Inoki Masamichi argued that such thought process can lead Japan from utopian pacifism to utopian militarism. Moreover, counter narratives suggested that Shimizu’s proposition will direct Japan to diplomatic isolation and escalate the trust deficit with its neighbors.

It is important to note that not all nationalists support a nuclear Japan. For instance, while Jun Eto argued for building defense capabilities, he did not support nuclear armaments, in contrast to Shimizu.²⁹ Shintaro Ishihara has questioned the trustworthiness of U.S. nuclear cover at the Parliament in the 1970s and suggested that Japan must have its own nuclear weapons.³⁰ His writings in the 1990s, including *The Japan that Can Say “No”* and *The Asia That Can Say “No”* documented his arguments for revising the pacifist constitution and supporting an autonomous defense. Besides, Nishibe has attacked the double standards of Japan’s security approach where it relies on the U.S. extended nuclear deterrence while at the same time abstaining from possessing nuclear weapons as an ethical justification. He further argues that in case Japan does not intend to convert to the 51st U.S. state, it must claim its autonomy and become a nuclear power.³¹

Other advocates of this school, including Terumasa Nakanishi and Yoshinori Kobayashi, focused on the issue of autonomy. Terumasa articulated that Japan needs to go through its second post-war phase with the objective of revamping the national character by discarding pacifism, becoming independent and entrenched in its history and traditions.³² Meanwhile, Kobayashi’s works including *Declaration of Arrogance (Gomanism sengen)* and *Theory on War (Sensoron)* proved to be a roaring success. He also authored a contentious textbook under the Japan Society for History Textbook Reform. Both Yoshinori Kobayashi and Nishibe reflect anti-American sentiments

based on the United States' denial to make an apology to Japan for the devastation in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Normalists

This school advocates for Japan becoming a “normal nation” (*futsu no kuni*). The debate intensified with Ichiro Ozawa's unsuccessful endeavor in the 1991 Gulf War to dispatch SDF to support the U.S.-led UN authorized coalition. Following the international criticism hurled on Japan's “too little too late” contribution in the Gulf War, discussion on a “normal” Japan intensified. Japanese mass media including the leading dailies such as the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, *Asahi Shimbun*, and *Mainichi Shimbun* accorded increasing space to the issue by carrying 39 editorials from 1993–2006.³³

This school argues for a robust defense cooperation with the United States within the framework of a U.S.–Japan alliance. Unlike the nationalists, this cluster does not envision a security policy independent of the United States. They back a strong U.S.–Japan alliance since a closer cooperation asserts Japan's membership into the group of free and democratic states. The normalists favor constitutional revision and the position that the Japanese military must be able to use force to maintain international peace and stability.

What does normalization mean to the Japanese? Normalization does not amount to militarization or military build-up. Ozawa in his 1993 book *Blueprint for a New Japan: the Rethinking of a Nation* describes normalization with regard to international peacekeeping activities and constitutional change. Normal Japan is a country that is capable of contributing to international peacekeeping activities. He further proposed the addition of a constitutional clause to clear the ambiguity of Japan's contribution in the UN peacekeeping undertakings. Ozawa advocated incorporating a third section to Article 9, stressing that “the regulation in paragraph 2 does not prevent the maintenance of military power for the purpose of exercising Japan's right of self-defense against military attack by a third country.” In addition, he proposed including an “International Peace” chapter, underscoring that “in order to maintain and restore international peace and safety from threats to, the collapse of, or an aggressive action against peace, the Japanese people shall contribute positively to world peace through various means including taking the lead in participating in international peacekeeping activities and supplying troops.”³⁴

While the normalists call for a proactive contribution to international security, there are two clusters differing in the way to pursue that ambition: the U.S.-leaning normalists and the global-leaning normalists. While Hisahiko Okazaki, Yukio Okamoto and a few members of the LDP Machimura faction belonged to the first cluster, Ozawa belonged to the second one. While the first group argues in favor of bolstering security cooperation with the United States and making international contribution within the U.S.–Japan security alliance framework, the second group preferred Japan's engagement in collective security through the UN. Furthermore, this school supports constitutional revision primarily to ease Article 9 and create space for the SDFs.

Several LDP leaders in the post-war era preferred repealing Article 9 and facilitating rearming including Ichiro Hatoyama, Nobusuke Kishi, Miki Bukichi, and Banboku Ono. But with the fall of the Kishi administration in the 1960s, they gave way to the mercantilists. Even though with Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone's administration in the 1980s this school gained some ground, they could not undo the Yoshida line during the Cold War era. Addressing the U.S. frustration regarding the trade deficit, Nakasone and other normalists attempted to share the defense burden by contributing through host-nation support for U.S. bases. In the post-Cold War period, they advocated a wider notion of sharing responsibilities with the United States and its allies.

Masamichi Inoki, chairman of the Comprehensive National Security Study Group formed by Prime Minister Ohira, professed a gradual increase in defense responsibilities within the alliance arrangement. It was argued that Japan needs to address the inaptness between its economic might and political influence and its image of an "economic giant and political dwarf" needs to be changed. Japan needs to assume international responsibilities in keeping with its economic strength and help the United States in managing the international order. With trade frictions intensifying with the United States, the study group report urged for a national debate to build an agreement towards assuming a robust political and strategic role.

With regard to interpreting history, this school has fault lines. The nationalist-leaning normalists is less remorseful regarding history and harbors a provocative posture regarding Imperial Japan's historical baggage including the Yasukuni Shrine and the comfort women issue. In the post-war years, Nakasone was the first prime minister to pay a visit to the Yasukuni shrine in 1985 in an official capacity; Koizumi paid six visits during his tenure as prime minister from 2001–06; Abe instituted in 1997 the Association of Young Diet Members to Consider the Future of Japan and its History Education, which embraced a provocative narrative about Japan's wartime past. Abe has disapproved the 1993 historic Kono Statement for want of realistic evidence and suggested that history textbooks in schools should not incorporate this statement. The second cluster is more open to accepting Japan's war crimes and believes that political leadership should refrain from visiting the Yasukuni shrine. Ozawa condemned Koizumi's Yasukuni visits and interpreted it as the primary reason affecting Japan's relations with its neighbors. Watanabe Tsuneo from the influential *Yomiuri Shimbun* also perceived Koizumi's visit to Yasukuni as unnecessary incitement. Others including Taro Kono and Takakazu Kuriyama shared the same views.³⁵

While the nationalist-leaning normalists resemble some traits of the nationalist school, nevertheless some differences between the two can be underscored. The earlier cluster advocates nurturing a robust partnership with the United States. The normalists are affiliated mostly with the LDP Machimura faction, including Koizumi, Abe, Yuriko Koike and Ichita Yamamoto. Besides, other LDP faction members from the Tsushima faction, such as the Shigeru Ishiba and Aso factions also belong to this school. A few DPJ members, including Ozawa and Yukio Hatoyama, are also normalists.

With regard to nuclear weapons, most normalists do not advocate for a nuclear Japan and argues in favor of depending on the U.S. nuclear umbrella and focus on conventional

build-up. Going nuclear will divert economic resources away from the necessary conventional forces. Some proponents like Nishihara urge revising Japan's three non-nuclear principles with the intention of allowing the use of Japanese waters and ports for the transit of U.S. nuclear weapons.³⁶ Japan has been referred to as a special country drawing from its historical experience and constitutional limitations which has restricted it from normal participation in international affairs. This school vociferously detests this argument of exceptionalism. Scholars like Masamori Sase contend that Japanese pacifism, its position on collective self-defense, boosting of non-nuclear principles while relying on the U.S. nuclear umbrella, defy logic.³⁷

Why Normalists are Dominating the Current Security Debate

The four contesting schools of thought debated Japan's security role through the post-war, Cold War and post-Cold War era. As witnessed in the earlier section, Cold War mercantilists gave way to normalists in the post-Cold War era. This section will critically analyze why the normalists are dominating the current security debate. How are they utilizing the fluidity in the regional security setting and factional power struggle in the domestic political landscape to maximize their space and influence in the current security discourse?

Regional Environment

The North Korean Conundrum: Advancing the premise that Japan is navigating the most severe security environment in post-war history,³⁸ the normalists intensified their movement. Despite the historic Singapore summit between President Donald Trump and Chairman Kim, the 2018 Defense White Paper has upgraded the threat emanating from North Korea by replacing "serious and imminent threat" with "unprecedentedly serious and imminent threat" compared to the previous White Papers following Pyongyang's sixth nuclear test, ballistic missiles launched over Oshima Peninsula and Cape Erimo of Hokkaido Prefecture in violation of UNSC Resolution 2375 and Hwasong-15 ICBM falling within Japan's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the latter half of 2017. For Japan, which is well within the range of Nodong missiles, there is "no change to the underlying status of the North Korean nuclear and missile threat"³⁹ in addition to several instances of illegal ship-to-ship transfer by North Korean vessels in the high seas in violation of the UNSC resolutions. Japanese scholars like Yuki Tatsumi argue that following Pyongyang's departure from the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), their nuclear and missile development program has been a destabilizing dynamic which recurrently escalates regional tensions. While Japan's military options are restricted owing to the legal parameters and lack of hardware, the consequences of economic sanctions are limited.⁴⁰

After a 36-year hiatus, at the Seventh Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea in 2016, North Korea brought out a five-year Strategy for National Economic

Development. Reiterating the military-first *songun* politics, building nuclear weapons and missiles have been outlined as one of the priorities for the Kim Jong-un regime.⁴¹ Besides landing in the Japanese EEZ on several occasions, North Korean ballistic missiles in the recent past have flown over Hokkaido. In 2016, Pyongyang conducted its fourth and fifth nuclear tests, and performed multiple launches of Nodong missiles capable of reaching Japan,⁴² Musudan missiles capable of reaching Guam, and submarine-launched ballistic missiles intensifying nuclear and missile development. North Korea's enhanced technological capabilities with regard to missile range and flight accuracy in combination with progress in nuclear development represents a serious security threat to Japan.⁴³ While there are a few ideas concerning neutralizing the North Korea threat, in case of any escalation Japan might be the primary target for Pyongyang's use or its threat of nuclear weapons.⁴⁴ Hence, "drastically"⁴⁵ developing Japan's ballistic missile defense capabilities against North is the top priority of the Japanese defense establishment. In December 2017, the National Security Council and the Cabinet decided to introduce two Aegis Ashore batteries with the aim of bolstering upper tier interception by Aegis-equipped destroyers. Japan has a multi-tier defense system with upper and lower tier interception by Aegis-equipped destroyers and Patriot PAC-3, respectively.

Managing the China Threat: It was in 1992 when the Japanese defense white paper first mentioned China's maritime activities following the enforcement of the Territorial Waters Act, which claimed the Senkaku Islands as part of Chinese territory. Subsequently, China incrementally increased its space in successive white papers emphasizing Chinese maritime activities and naval modernization.⁴⁶

Chinese assertiveness is largely manifesting in maritime space. Several instances have made Japan anxious, such as the 2004 incident when nuclear-powered Chinese submarines entered Japanese territorial waters southwest of Okinawa, the 2010 clash between a Chinese fishing boat and a Japanese Coast Guard vessel, the 2013 episode when a Chinese vessel directed its radar at a Japanese naval destroyer, establishment of the 2013 Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) incorporating the contested Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, Xi Jinping's instruction to the PLA to reinforce combat responsiveness, uphold military readiness and advance its capabilities "to win regional wars in the information age" and the recent detection of the Shang-class (Type 093) nuclear attack submarine (SSN) in Japan's contiguous zone in the East China Sea in 2018.

Notwithstanding the institution of the China–Japan maritime and aerial communication mechanism in May 2018 that offers communication between SDF and PLA with the objective of preventing accidental collisions, the 2018 Japanese defense white paper maintained its assessment of "strong security concerns" regarding China's unilateral attempts to alter the status quo around Japan, PLA's rapid modernization and advancing operational competence and enhanced A2/AD capabilities. In addition, it cautions that infrastructure development under the BRI initiative may amount to "further expansion of the PLA's activities in areas such as the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean." This concurs with one school of thought that argues that Beijing seeks overseas bases and the PLA may secure improved access in BRI countries.⁴⁷

Tensions over the disputed territorial claims in the East China Sea and the underlying fear of entrapment logic prevailing among a section of the U.S. strategic circuit is making Japan critically measure its policy alternatives. A 2015 Rand Corporation report argued that while “China has not caught up to the U.S. military in terms of aggregate capabilities—and is not close to doing so—but it does not need to catch up to the United States to dominate its immediate periphery. China is increasingly capable of challenging the ability of U.S. forces to accomplish mission critical tasks in scenarios close to the Chinese mainland.” The scale of Chinese defense spending expanded four times in the last decade and 40 times in the last 26 years.⁴⁸

China’s advent as a major actor in international politics is shifting the existing regional balance of power and making Japan respond to the asymmetrical power politics. As Xi Jinping pursues his Chinese Dream and the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, Shinzo Abe is increasingly becoming restless in attempting to redefine Japan’s international role. Envisioning Japan as a *Proactive Contributor to Peace*, the normalists deepened the national debate on the established narrow interpretation of the right to collective self-defense, which has shaped Japan’s involvement in international security. They further intensified the call for easing the restrictions that were imposed on Japan by the constitution.

Depth of U.S. Commitment: In the post–Cold War era, the fear of abandonment intensified with Japan’s response to the Gulf War and later the 1993 North Korean nuclear crisis. If Japan as an ally cannot contribute substantially beyond the bases in the event of a contingency on the Korean Peninsula, the significance of the alliance is subject to question.⁴⁹ However, as Japan incrementally expanded the scope of Article 9 and right to collective self-defense in subsequent years, the alliance stood the test of time. Even though the security alliance serves as the base for regional security, the memories of the Nixon shocks and Sino–centric approach of Clinton and the June 1998 nine–day summit trip with then Chinese President Jiang Zemin⁵⁰ triggered unease in Japan. Moreover, with the unfolding developments in the Korean Peninsula, particularly the outcome of the Singapore summit have failed to reassure Japan that Trump’s North Korea policy reflects Tokyo’s national interests. Prime Minister Abe has articulated his concerns that medium and short-range missiles that are threats to Japan, may not be taken up by President Trump whose focus may be limited to ICBMs.

Table 2. Number of Scramble

FY	Country/	Russia	China	Taiwan	North Korea	Other Countries	Total
2012		248	306	1	0	12	567
2013		359	415	1	9	26	810
2014		473	464	1	0	5	943
2015		288	571	2	0	12	873
2016		301	851	8	0	8	1168

Source: Joint Staff Press Release, Ministry of Defense, April 2017.

Japanese nervousness concerning the U.S. assurance is deep-seated. Currently, Japan is apprehensive about the seriousness of the U.S. commitment towards Asia and especially Japan. During the Cold War, Japan was nervous that the alliance would lead to entrapment into United States' wars but today the United States is anxious that it may get tangled in Japan's conflict due to Article 5 of the security treaty. Japan is conscious about the fear of entrapment reasoning prevalent in Washington. While Japan has kept the United States anchored in the region, President Trump's transactional approach and America First policy have elevated Japan's doubts *vis-à-vis* the U.S. commitment.

Navigating the Domestic Factional Politics

In the Cold War era, mercantilists led the security debate with LDP's Kochikai and Tanaka faction at the forefront. However, mercantilism gave way to normalists in the post-Cold War era. While external variables like the rise of an assertive China and a provocative North Korea support normalists' vision for Japan to perform a proactive role in international security, shifts in the national party-political landscape have also expedited the rise of normalists. The LDP-JSP coalition in the mid-1990s thinned the pacifist ethos of the socialists. Compromising on its decades' long position on the constitutionality of the SDFs and the security treaty with the United States led to the shrinking of political space for the left. Moreover, with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the political discourse shifted to the right.⁵¹

In LDP, the most potent faction, instituted by Kishi Nobusuke, is the *Seiwakai*. Subsequently, Shinzo Abe, Junichiro Koizumi, Taro Aso, and Shigeru Ishiba constituted the core leadership of the normalists. From 2000–2014, *Seiwakai* shaped four Japanese prime ministers. In 2014, *Seiwakai* accounted for almost a quarter of the total LDP parliamentary members. Besides, this school also exerted influence in the MOFA and MOD bureaucracy including Hisahiko Okazaki, Yukio Okamoto and Yanai Shunji.

Tracing the domestic political landscape reflects that key LDP mercantilists factions including the Kochikai and Heiseiken experienced erosion of influence in the 1990s and 2000s owing to internal splits within the group. The contest for influence in Kochikai between Kono and Koichi Kato⁵² and subsequently the failed Kato rebellion led to the bifurcation of the faction into the Kochikai Horiuchi faction and Kochikai Tanigaki faction. While the first contested Kato's collaboration with the opposition in passing a no-confidence vote targeting the Mori administration, the latter supported Kato in his attempt.⁵³ In 2005, Koizumi ousted the leader of the Kochikai Horiuchi faction, Mitsuo Horiuchi, from the party during the Lower House election following his opposition to Koizumi's postal privatization proposal. Ever since the early 1990s, Kochikai failed to crop a prime minister for Japan.

Heiseiken, a descendant of the Tanaka faction, has experienced setbacks during the Koizumi era between 2001 and 2006. Koizumi, affiliated to the *Seiwakai*, targeted Heiseiken which harbored reservations regarding his structural reforms. On the one hand Koizumi fired two foremost Heiseiken leaders for resisting his postal privatization plan and declined to confer important party positions to this faction on the other hand. The

faction split into two groups—one that agreed with Koizumi’s policies and the second that continued to express reservations. Subsequently, Heiseiken’s strength within the LDP moved southward from 101 parliamentary members in 2001 to 73 in 2005, to 69 in 2007, and to 51 in 2014.⁵⁴

The normalist faction, Seiwakai, emerged as the most powerful LDP faction in the national politics with the waning influence of Kochikai and Heiseiken. Foremost leaders of this Seiwakai faction in the 2000s including Koizumi and Abe used the opportunity to argue the case of the normalist school. They pursued their ambitions under the leadership of Koizumi including SDF deployment to the Indian Ocean in 2001 and Iraq in 2003.

It needs to be underscored that the factional fault lines within the LDP seldom appear in Diet voting since the discipline within the party is tight which compels the opposing factions to back the official LDP line. Before legislation comes to the Diet, the support of the LDP’s Executive Council is required.⁵⁵ While the dissenting voices are articulated before voting, LDP unity is displayed when actual voting takes place in the Diet.⁵⁶ For instance, all LDP members barring two affiliated to the Kochikai and Heiseikai factions voted in favor of the deployment of the Japanese navy to the Indian Ocean in 2001. Likewise, with regard to the bill for dispatching SDF troops to Iraq, apart from three LDP members from the Kochikai and Heiseikai, every party member backed the legislation.⁵⁷

The ascent of the Seiwakai faction in the LDP and Maehara faction in the DPJ facilitated the consolidation of the normalist school. Regarding the opposition DPJ, its leaders are mostly drawn from diverse other political parties. With leaders like Seiji Maehara and Katsuya Okada, DPJ has reflected normalist trends.⁵⁸ Few scholars argue that during the DPJ years from 2009 to 2012, Japan followed the normalist school.⁵⁹

Deconstructing the Abe Act: Influences and Approach

Shadow of Grandfather Kishi

While Prime Minister Abe’s father, Shintaro Abe, who was the foreign minister from 1982 to 1986 was a pragmatist, he drew motivation from his normalist grandfather, Nobusuke Kishi. Before serving as prime minister of Japan between 1957 and 1960, Kishi was involved in pursuing Japan’s imperial mission in Manchuria and also served as the munitions minister under the Tojo Cabinet in the Second World War.⁶⁰ Moreover, following the war, he was jailed as a suspected Class-A war criminal for three years. Kishi, a crucial member of the post-war constitutional revision movement, urged in 1955 to embrace constitutional revision as a founding objective of the LDP in order to correct “the weakening of the nation.”⁶¹ As prime minister in 1957, he instituted a research commission on the constitution but he had to give up office before the commission presented its report in 1964. As the political crisis hit post-war Japan following the revision of the U.S.–Japan Security Treaty in 1960, he was compelled to give up office. Subsequently, when the 1964 report came, the then Japanese Prime

Minister Hayato Ikeda steered clear of any action in order not to provoke public sentiments. Kishi made efforts to revisit the pacifist constitution and undo some of the U.S. designed restrictions on Japan.⁶² He argued that Japan must produce an “original and independent” constitution.⁶³ Kishi’s fervor reflected in his argument that for Japan to recover its standing as a “respectable member (of) the community of nations it would first have to revise its constitution and rearm: If Japan is alone in renouncing war... she will not be able to prevent others from invading her land.”⁶⁴ Drawing from Kishi’s influence in his life, Prime Minister Abe is pursuing the unfulfilled ambitions of his grandfather.

The Koizumi Factor

Abe served as the deputy chief cabinet secretary and subsequently the chief cabinet secretary in the Koizumi administration. Koizumi has mentored him as his successor. In December 2004, Koizumi instituted an LDP task force to outline a revised constitution. The party’s pro-revisionist group gathered momentum under Koizumi alongside the Mori faction. Maneuvered by Mori, the LDP Constitution Drafting Committee constituted ten subcommittees⁶⁵ with Yasuo Fukuda and Yasuhiro Nakasone leading the subcommittees on Article 9 and the Preamble. In 2005, the party’s draft constitution was presented which stressed the amendment of Article 9 and advocated authorizing the armed forces in the second paragraph of Article 9 and firmly summarized that Japan must exercise the right to collective self-defense just like other nations.⁶⁶ In the same year, Abe argued that the official reading on collective self-defense had arrived at its limit and “one of the duties of our generation is to change this government’s interpretation so as to enable Japan to exercise that right.”⁶⁷

Ultra-right Nippon Kaigi (Japan Conference) Link

The roots of the Nippon Kaigi in Japan’s current power structure are well established.⁶⁸ A seasoned LDP leader Masakuni Murakami is often credited as one of the architects of the Nippon Kaigi. The primary objective of this group is to undo Article 9 and develop a conventional military. While Prime Minister Abe and Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Taro Aso are special advisors to the Nippon Kaigi, former defense minister Tomomi Inada and Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike are members of this group. Reports suggest that in 2016 more than half of Abe’s cabinet supported the Nippon Kaigi.⁶⁹ With regard to altering the constitution, in 2014 the Nippon Kaigi established the Kenpo group and further launched a drive to gather ten million signatures in favor of constitutional revision. A national rally was held in 2015 at the Nippon Budokan Hall. At this event, Abe shared a video reiterating his intention of revising the constitution.⁷⁰ Moreover, the recent corruption scandal concerning the Osaka-based Moritomo Gakuen land deal that captured the national attention and dominated the Parliamentary debate, indicates the deep links between Yasunori Kagoike, affiliated with the Osaka branch of the Nippon Kaigi and the Abe family.⁷¹ At a Nippon Kaigi event on May 3, 2017—the

70th anniversary of the Constitution Memorial Day—Abe intensified the national debate with his articulation of the 2020 timeline for the constitutional revision of Article 9.⁷²

The Abe Way

When I served the Secretary-General of the LDP, the party pledged to compile draft amendments to the Constitution by the 50th anniversary of the formation of the party.... They were compiled on the basis of various discussions within the LDP. However, constitutional amendment requires approval by a two-thirds majority in the Diet. As such, I will endeavor to finalize the draft amendments by working with both the ruling and opposition parties. As for the schedule, constitutional amendment is a work of historical importance, and I will make every effort to see that it is enacted during my term of office.

Shinzo Abe, December 2006⁷³

Since the LDP reverted to power in December 2012, Abe resumed the “Advisory Panel on Reconstruction of the Legal Basis for Security,” which was initially established in April 2007 during his first tenure in office. Notwithstanding the normalists’ sentiments, attaining a consensus within the LDP, persuading the Komeito and managing the divided public opinion on the question of revising Article 9 presented a litmus test for Abe. Pursuing his goals in the normal course will require Abe to amend Article 9 of the constitution. Any attempts to revise Article 9 will have to follow the procedure outlined in Article 96 requiring a two-thirds majority in both chambers of the Diet before it can be presented for a national referendum. Abe, at the outset, made efforts to ease Article 96 itself but shortly recognized the challenges and opted for reinterpretation of Article 9 rather than dealing with Article 96.

The Cabinet Legislation Bureau, which performs a crucial role in defense policy, aided Abe’s cause. Despite the fact that the Bureau had previously articulated that Article 9 outlaws collective self-defense, in August 2013, Abe changed Director General Tsuneyuki Yamamoto with Ichiro Komatsu who allowed the Bureau to succumb to Abe’s cause. Komatsu argued that it is the cabinet that should decide the issue of constitutionality. Furthermore, he underlined that “it is not correct for the Cabinet Legislation Bureau unilaterally to decide “left” when the cabinet is thinking “right.”⁷⁴

The advisory panel report was submitted in May 2014. The Abe administration engaged in a fierce debate which culminated into the July 2014 cabinet decision facilitating an expansion of the narrow interpretation of Article 9. The cabinet decision triggered apprehension, mainly owing to the approach embraced by Abe to accomplish the policy shift. His decision to shrewdly evade constitutional amendment, and alternatively reinterpret the pacifist constitution through a cabinet decision, failed the expectations of several interest groups. While Abe’s efforts of reinterpreting the pacifist constitution demonstrate a bold step towards imparting clarity in Japan’s security role in the coming days, many felt that Abe’s endeavor to accomplish “what is effectively a constitutional revision through the ad hoc decision of a single cabinet is equally a fundamental attack upon democratic government and the sovereignty of the people.”⁷⁵

Subsequently, Abe consolidated his power in the Diet with Upper and Lower House elections. While the election was fought primarily on economic issues including the merits of Abenomics, the mandate bolstered Abe's ambitions *vis-à-vis* Article 9. Abe has managed to create conducive numbers in both Houses to initiate an amendment in accordance with Article 96 of the constitution. However, achieving the numbers in the Diet alone will not accomplish Abe's goal. He still needs to garner public support in a national referendum.

The Way Forward

In the Cold War era, the United States increasingly analyzed Japan's role through the lens of a "free rider" or "buck passing" narrative. However, internal policy discussions in the National Security Study Memorandum 5 (NSSM) of the Nixon administration reflects the fault lines among the State Department, Pentagon and the Treasury Department and brings out the duality concerning what kind of Japan the United States wanted in Asia. The U.S. approach concerning Japan during the Cold War was divided between those who required Japan to contribute more for national and regional security and those who were anxious that Tokyo needed to be restricted from pursuing an autonomous defense policy and that the U.S.–Japan Security Treaty was a tool to restrain Japan's ambitions in Asia. The United States needed Japan to shoulder greater responsibility for its own defense. However, this did not suggest United States' readiness to grant more autonomy to Japan.⁷⁶ Nixon approved National Security Decision Memorandum (NSDM) 13 in 1969. It underscored that the United States encouraged "moderate increases and qualitative improvements in Japan's defense efforts while avoiding any pressure on her to develop substantially larger forces or to play a larger regional security role."⁷⁷

Subsequently, in October 1970, the Japan Defense Agency (JDA) published the maiden post-war defense white paper urging for an exclusively defensive posture.⁷⁸ In the mid-1970s, the JDA instituted a Defense Issue Study Group. Then JDA director general, Michita Sakata and administrative vice-minister, Takuya Kubo argued for limited small-scale forces for self-defense. In October 1976, the Miki cabinet approved the National Defense Program Outline (NDPO). This first comprehensive defense strategy of the post-war era articulated that the presence of the U.S.–Japan Mutual Security Treaty and the existing "equilibrium" among the United States, the Soviet Union and China will uphold stability and avert full-scale aggression against Japan. Situating Japan in this strategic environment, the NDPO focused on developing the minimum necessary defense capability to deter small-scale aggression. A month later, Japan adopted a one percent GDP cap on defense expenditures. Following the 1976 NDPO, an exclusively defensive posture constituted the core of Japanese defense policy.

The end of the Cold War did not imply peace and stability in international politics. The fear of abandonment and entrapment continued for Japan in the post-Cold War years as well. During the Cold War, the Sino–U.S. rapprochement in the early 1970s unfolded the fear of abandonment following the Nixon Shock and Japan's approach

towards the Vietnam War echoed its fear of entrapment in the U.S. wars. Subsequently in the post–Cold War era, with a checkbook diplomacy critique during the Gulf war and later with the war on terror following the 9/11 attacks, Japan realized the urgency to shoulder larger responsibilities beyond economics and contributing to international security matters.⁷⁹ Article 9 constitutes the epicenter of Japanese security debate. The primary reason why Article 9 survived in the post–war era is because of two extremely divergent stimuli, that is, pragmatism and pacifism. While the pragmatists measured the national interests in practical terms, pacifists cultivated the value of non-violence. While pragmatists reinforced the policy of dependence on the United States to guarantee Japan’s security by employing the post–war resources for the economic development of Japan, the pacifists refined the character of peace nation (*heiwa kokka*). The divergence within the right (conservative revisionists and conservative pragmatists), and much less between the left and the right safeguarded the survival of Article 9.⁸⁰ Thus, Article 9 garnered support from both the conservative pragmatists, who were on a quest of securing interests vulnerable under the U.S.–Japan alliance, and the pacifists. However, under Abe, Article 9 is set to adapt with the changed circumstances and enable Japan as a *Proactive Contributor to Peace*.

Abe indicated that his idea with regard to Article 9 is to preserve the original two clauses and then add a third clause which will categorically spell out the status of the SDFs. According to some opinion polls, this appears to be relatively more acceptable than the overall revision. Opinion polls in the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, *Kyodo*, and *Nikkei* reflect that the majority of the respondents support the SDF clause. 53 percent, 56 percent and 51 percent support the SDF clause in the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, *Kyodo*, and *Nikkei* survey, respectively.⁸¹

Japanese security policy has been solely guided by the pursuit of national interest, like any other state in international politics. Just as it was in the national interest of Japan to follow mercantilism as the dominant belief and political force in the Cold War era, normalism served its national interests best as a potent political force in the post–Cold War period. The East Asian theatre is rapidly evolving. With shifting balance of power, the region is witnessing a contest between a rising challenger and an established power. National interest priorities demand Abe to reorient Japan’s security posture. Constitutional reinterpretation and the subsequent 2015 Legislation for Peace and Security; 2014 Three Principles on Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology; crafting the maiden National Security Strategy and instituting the National Security Council are concrete steps in that direction.

Securing a numerical advantage in electoral politics and the target 2020 set ahead to amend the constitution, Abe may create history if he manages to win the national referendum. While political elites in the LDP are keen, ambiguity in public sentiment reflects the complexity of the issue. While the media in Japan has well-established political affiliations and ideological leanings, opinion polls on the subject steered by several media houses including the *Asahi Shimbun* (left-leaning) and the *Yomiuri Shimbun* (conservative/center-right) reflects the depth of his challenge. Some suggest that it would be possible for Abe to realize his goals of constitutional amendment if

on one hand he continues to harvest political capital and on the other hand emphasize SDF's positive contributions to international peace. With this, Abe can calm the electorate's doubt pertaining to military action.⁸² Besides the domestic constituency, Abe will have to navigate the regional anxiety as well. As the U.S. expects Japan to assume greater responsibilities, the crucial challenge before Prime Minister Abe is to define with clarity the scope and limits of his vision for Japan as a *Proactive Contributor to Peace*. Fundamentally, managing the balance between sharing greater burden in safeguarding regional peace and stability as part of the enduring alliance with the United States on one hand, and factoring in regional sensitivities as well as its fractured domestic sentiments on the other hand is necessary.

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