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Where is Japan Heading?

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By Hisane MASAKI

As Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has adopted its draft of a new constitution that would clear the way for a greater role in international security, many people here and abroad will question:

Where is Japan heading?

Though adoption of a new constitution could be years away, the world is still sitting up and taking notice. The LDP's historic move will certainly be hailed by Japan's most important ally, the United States, as clear evidence that Tokyo is going in the right direction to become a more reliable and responsible security partner regionally and globally. But it will very likely raise grave concerns among many of the country's Asian neighbors who fear that Japan's military genie might be finally beginning to escape its bottle, 60 years after the end of World War II.

The current war-renouncing, pacifist constitution, drafted by the US occupation forces immediately after Japan's defeat in World War II, has never been altered. However, establishing a "self-imposed constitution" has been the LDP's credo since its 1955 founding, and the party has been in power almost uninterrupted during that period. It is the first time the LDP has proposed a new constitution in writing.

The LDP adopted its draft of a new constitution on October 28 ahead of the party convention on November 22 to mark its 50th anniversary.

The LDP draft calls for, among other things:

Rewriting Article 9 - the clause almost synonymous with Japan's post-war defense policy - to acknowledge clearly the existence of a "military for self-defense".

More active participation in international peace cooperation activities. The current constitution is widely interpreted as forbidding the possession of a military. Although, in reality, Japan has about 240,000 troops of the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) and one of the world's biggest defense expenditures, successive governments have explained away the contradiction by claiming that SDF is not a military.

All these elements are missing from the current constitution. Momentum for revising the constitution, which took effect in 1947, has mounted following the September11 general election, in which Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro's ruling LDP-led coalition won a landslide victory, garnering 327 seats - more than a two-thirds majority in the 480-seat Lower House.

Although the coalition between the LDP and New Komeito Party is still far short of a two-thirds majority in the less powerful Upper House, the largest opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) has expressed support for revising the constitution, which would provide the required two-thirds majority in the Upper House.

The initial LDP draft set a nationalistic tone, with its preamble containing references to the "love of the nation" as well as Japan's tradition, history and culture. But that nationalist tone was significantly watered down at the last minute at the instruction of Koizumi, who apparently feared making the LDP draft less palatable to many Japanese by including too much nationalistic wording.

Under Article 96 of the constitution, any amendments must be proposed with support of a two-thirds or more of both houses of the Diet - Japan's parliament - and then be approved in a national referendum with a simple majority vote. Legislation setting procedures for such a referendum still must be enacted. For many years since the end of World War II, even the slightest sign of nationalism in Japan had been widely denounced at home as well as abroad as signaling a resurgence of militarism. But the situation has changed dramatically in recent years. With a sense of stagnation growing among many Japanese people amid the prolonged economic slump, a tide of nationalism is on the rise. Many Japanese also feel more insecure in the increasingly volatile security environment surrounding their country. Discussions on questions that had long been considered taboo have moved into the Japanese mainstream. There have been discussions in the political and media circles even about the pros and cons of Japan possessing nuclear weapons to defend itself.

There is growing alarm in Japan over potential threats posed by neighbors North Korea and China. At the same time Japan is under increasing pressure from its most important ally, the US, to shoulder more of the burden of its foreign and security policy, regionally and globally. Having the kind of "self-imposed" new constitution that was drafted by the LDP is not merely a matter of national pride, but something Japanese

leaders firmly believe the nation must do to cope with those new challenges.
The LDP draft of a new constitution came as Japan and the US were in the final stages of compiling an interim report on the realignment of American forces stationed on Japanese soil. The realignment of some 47,000 American service members deployed in Japan is under negotiation between the two countries as part of the "transformation" of the US military's global posture. The US hopes Japan will serve as a strategic hub for its global security policy through the realignment of its forces in Japan. Japan and the U.S. are to compile a final report on the realignment early next year. The LDP draft of a new constitution also came at an awkward time for Japan's relations with Asian neighbors, especially China and South Korea. Japan's prime minister, Koizumi Junichiro, visited the controversial Yasukuni shrine in Tokyo again October 17, drawing an angry protest from Beijing and Seoul. The Shinto shrine is seen by Asian neighbors as a symbol of Japan's past militarism. Some 2.4 million war dead and 14 World War II Class-A war criminals are enshrined there, including the former prime minister, Tojo Hideki.

What differences?

The LDP draft was compiled by the LDP's new constitution-drafting committee headed by a former prime minister, Mori Yoshiro. By far the most important change from the current supreme law would be made in Article 9. The LDP draft calls for rewriting Article 9 to stipulate that the nation possesses a "military for self-defense" not only to defend itself but to participate in international peacekeeping activities - while retaining its spirit of pacifism. The current Article 9 renounces the use or threat of force as a means of settling international conflicts and forbids the maintenance of a standing military. Japanese soldiers have not fired a shot or made a killing in conflict since 1945.

Successive Japanese governments have interpreted the clause as permitting the SDF's existence, however, many constitutional scholars have argued that the SDF is in violation of the constitution. Proponents of constitutional revision have argued that this contradiction must be addressed by changing the clause in question to more clearly acknowledge Japan's right to self-defense. Due to the politically sensitive nature of the SDF, the Defense Agency, which oversees the SDF, has been granted a lower legal status than government ministries. Many LDP lawmakers are now clamoring for it to be upgraded to the "Defense Ministry".

The LDP draft does not stipulate the right to collective self-defense - the right to come to the aid of an ally in case it comes under attack from a third country. According to LDP officials, however, this controversial right will be permitted, and requirements for exercising it will be provided for in separate laws to be enacted later, including a "Basic Security Law". The Cabinet Legislation Bureau, the constitutional watchdog within the government, has long held a firm view that Japan has the right to collective self-defense but is not allowed to exercise it. This constitutional interpretation has put severe restrictions on the SDF's activities abroad, often frustrating the US. Even logistical support for American forces outside of Japanese territory is deemed by many to be tantamount to exercising the right to collective self-defense.

Like his predecessors, Koizumi has stretched the boundaries of the constitution, most recently in deploying non-combat SDF troops to Iraq. Most LDP lawmakers now believe the nation should be allowed to exercise the right to collective self-defense so that it can implement its defense and security cooperation with the US more smoothly and effectively. The LDP draft makes it clear that the nation holds the right to self-defense. The current constitution does not stipulate that right. The LDP draft emphasizes the nation's commitment to international contributions, saying that Japan "faithfully hopes for international peace" and "will work together with other countries to realize it".

The LDP draft preamble emphasizes three key elements of the current constitution - popular sovereignty, respect for human rights and pacifism. The draft shies away from describing the emperor as head of state. The emperor's current constitutional status as the "symbol of the unity of the people" will remain unchanged. The draft calls for "international cooperation" as well as "freedom, democracy, human rights" and "peace" as the nation's core principles.

The LDP's junior coalition partner, the New Komeito party, is opposed to the LDP-proposed inclusion of "love of the nation" and other patriotic expressions in revising the Fundamental Law of Education, a law often dubbed an "educational constitution". The LDP began to move in earnest a few years ago to revise the Basic Education Law. This is also widely seen as another of a string of clear signs of rising nationalism that has emerged in recent years. In August 1999, the diet enacted the controversial law legally recognizing the Hinomaru (Rising Sun) flag as Japan's national flag and Kimigayo as Japan's national anthem.

Growing Chorus for Change

Maehara Seiji, new leader of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) - the largest opposition party - is known as a steadfast proponent of constitutional revision and strengthened security alliance with the US. Shortly before taking the helm of the DPJ, Maehara said: "It's completely meaningless to dogmatically discuss the right to collective self-defense without considering the alliance with the US. We shouldn't avoid a realistic discussion."

Under the leadership of Maehara, the DPJ is working on its own proposal for a new constitution, a move apparently aimed at countering the LDP-led debate on the issue. The proposal will be announced by the end of this month at the earliest. The draft of the proposal, made known recently, calls for the constitution to be revised to stipulate "a constrained right to self-defense" in line with the UN Charter. This phrase is widely interpreted as endorsing the limited execution of the right to collective self-defense. The DPJ draft proposal calls for allowing the SDF to participate in UN-led collective security activities, such as multinational forces and peacekeeping operations, even if doing so involves the use of force.

Meanwhile, New Komeito, backed by the lay Buddhist organization Soka Gakkai, remains reluctant about rewriting Article 9, although it has expressed an intention to seek the addition of environment and privacy rights to the constitution. The two smaller opposition parties - the Japanese Communist Party and Social Democratic Party - are adamantly opposed to changing even one letter of the constitution.

Japan's major business lobbies, including the Japan Business Federation, chaired by Toyota Motor Chairman Okuda Hiroshi, have also called for changes in the current constitution, including Article 9. Edward J Lincoln, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, says it is very unlikely a revised constitution will be realized for at least a year or two. "This is an issue that has been hanging over the Japanese for the 57 or 58 years the constitution has been in effect. It's getting closer to a real possibility, but this is a kind of wrenching public debate that is really still in the early phases in Japan," Lincoln said in a recent interview. "Certainly, the outcome of this [September 11] election, with a resurgence of support for the LDP, moves the process in the direction of revising the constitution. I think we're still looking at a five to 10 year horizon for that issue. There's a lot of open debate that still needs to take place."

Proponents of constitutional revision clearly have wind in their sail in political and business circles. But the Japanese public has mixed views. A survey published October 5 by the liberal Mainichi Shimbun, showed that nearly two-thirds of Japanese citizens oppose revising Article 9, although a majority favor other changes to the constitution.

Revived debate on constitutional revision

The current constitution was promulgated on November 3, 1946 and took effect on May 3, 1947. The constitution has never been altered since, in stark contrast with Japan's World War II ally, Germany. Including the period when it was called West Germany until its 1990 unification with communist East Germany, German changed its basic law - or constitution - more than 40 times since the war.

The Meiji constitution, predecessor of the present constitution, was never altered during its 57 year history, either. In Japan, a constitution has tended to be put on a pedestal as an “immortal code.” The Taiho code, established in the early 8th century, was revised in the middle of the same century and renamed the Yoryo code. The ancient code effectively became a dead letter soon afterwards but lived on for about 1,100 years – albeit only nominally - until the 1868 Meiji Restoration, which ended the Tokugawa Shogunate and restored imperial power.

The General Headquarters of the Allied Forces (GHQ) commissioned the cabinet of then Prime Minister Shidehara Kijuro to establish a new constitution to replace the Meiji one. Shidehara set up a committee, chaired by his state minister Matsumoto Joji, to do the job. The committee-drafted outline of a new constitution was so old-guard and similar to the Meiji constitution that the GHQ rejected it. For example, it described the Emperor as supreme commander of Japanese military forces. Upset by the outline drafted by the committee, U.S. Gen. Douglas MacArthur ordered his GHQ staff to draft a new constitution themselves. The GHQ draft constitution was almost identical to the current constitution, except for some points, such as the number of Diet houses. The GHQ draft called for a unicameral parliament.

The Japanese government compiled a draft constitution in line with the GHQ draft and submitted it to the then Imperial Diet. When the draft constitution was introduced to the Imperial Diet, Yoshida Shigeru had succeeded Shidehara as prime minister. The draft was enacted after some modifications, including the so-called Ashida amendment that added the phrase “In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph” to the beginning of Article 9, Section 2. This phrase came to be used later to justify the nation’s possession of war capability purely to defend itself, but not to launch a war of aggression. Ashida Hitoshi served as chairman of the Imperial Diet’s lower house special committee to deliberate the draft constitution. Ashida served as prime minister later, for seven months in 1948.

Article 9, Section 1 says, ”Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes.” Article 9, Section 2 says, ”In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.”

Moves toward establishing a "self-imposed constitution" intensified after Japan regained independence with the San Francisco Peace Treaty, which took effect April 28, 1952.

The Japan-U.S. security treaty entered into force on the same day. The security treaty was revised in 1960. The efforts to establish a “self-imposed constitution” were led by two politicians who both served as prime minister in the 1950s – Hatoyama Ichiro and Kishi Nobusuke. A committee comprising Diet members and scholars was set up within the government to study a possible revision of the constitution. But after several years of study, the committee could not reach a consensus, and the moves toward a “self-imposed constitution” receded significantly.

Known as a hawkish and pro-U.S. politician, Kishi resigned after pushing revision of the old Japan-U.S. security treaty through the Diet in 1960 amid fierce public protests, in which a demonstrating female student at the University of Tokyo was killed in a clash with riot police. His successor, Ikeda Hayato, made economic development his top policy priority in an attempt to deflect public attention and energy from divisive political issues. The Japanese economy posted high growth in the 1960s, and Ikeda’s pledge to double the national income was realized.

Immediately after the Korean War erupted in 1950, Gen. MacArthur instructed then Prime Minister Yoshida to create a 75,000-strong “national police force.” In 1951, the national police force was reorganized as a “peace preservation force.” In 1954, the Defense Agency and the SDF were established.

For decades after World War II, the now-defunct Japan Socialist Party was the biggest opposition party. The JSP was founded in 1955, the same year the LDP was established. Under the so-called “1955 system” of the LDP keeping a grip on power and JSP leading the opposition camp, the issue of whether to amend the constitution itself was pushed to the back burner. The constitutionality of the SDF’s existence or its activities was put in the political spotlight. The JSP advocated making Japan an “unarmed and neutral” country and abolishing the Japan-U.S. security treaty. The JSP also claimed that the existence of the SDF is in violation of the constitution. This created a twisted phenomenon of the conservative, pro-U.S. LDP aspiring to a new constitution and the progressive, anti-U.S. JSP being in the vanguard of forces seeking to preserve the U.S.-drafted constitution.

But the end of the Cold War made many Japanese feel that such ideological disputes are futile, and the JSP began to lose public support. In 1994, when the JSP was hanging by a hair, it formed a coalition government with the LDP, which had been ousted from power a year earlier by a hodgepodge of anti-LDP forces, including the JSP. The JSP leader Murayama Tomiichi became prime minister. In a significant policy changeover, Murayama declared the SDF constitutional and acknowledged the maintenance of the Japan-U.S. security treaty. He resigned in early 1996.

In 2000, constitution study committees were set up in both houses of the diet. It was the first time that such diet committees had been established in the nation's post-war history. The committees both ended their missions by releasing final reports on their findings in April this year. But the committees, which included lawmakers from the communist and socialist parties, objecting to any constitutional revision, failed to reach a consensus on key issues such as Article 9. The diet committees had no mandate to draft a new constitution.

Watershed in Japan's security policy

A turning point in Japan's defense and security policy came in the early 1990s. Saddam Hussein's Iraq invaded neighboring Kuwait in the summer of 1990, triggering the first Gulf War the following year. The US-led multinational forces were dispatched to the Middle East under a United Nations resolution. Japan chipped in a total of US$13 billion to assist the multinational forces, but did not send the SDF to join the forces. Japan was accused in the US and elsewhere of engaging in "checkbook diplomacy" by just paying huge amounts of money without making personnel contributions. Only after the war ended, did Japan finally manage to dispatch minesweepers to the Gulf.

Learning a lesson from its bitter experience during the first Gulf War, Japan began to establish a legal framework for making greater personnel contributions to international peace cooperation activities. In June 1992, Japan enacted a new law to enable the SDF to join UN-sponsored peacekeeping operations, or PKO, abroad. Under the law, SDF engineering troops were dispatched to join UN peacekeeping efforts in Cambodia prior to the country's first election held in the spring of 1993 after years of deadly civil war. It marked the first overseas mission for SDF troops. Sending troops abroad had previously been a taboo in Japan because of the country's war-renouncing, post-World War II constitution. Japan has since sent SDF troops to join UN peacekeeping operations in Mozambique, the Golan Heights, East Timor and other places.

The law to cooperate with UN peacekeeping operations sets out four principles for sending SDF troops abroad:

The existence of a cease-fire agreement among the parties to the conflict.

The existence of consent for a UN peacekeeping operation from the host country or countries as well as the parties to the conflict.

The impartiality of the peacekeeping operation.

The use of weapons solely for self-defense.

Unless these principles are maintained, SDF troops must return to Japan. Although initially Japan's participation in PKF to separate and disarm warring parties and also monitor a cease-fire was frozen, the law was revised in December 2001 to lift the freeze. But SDF troop activities and firearms are still subject to severe restrictions. For example, SDF troops are not allowed to strike back at assailants on other countries' fellow forces participating in peacekeeping operations. The government is now reviewing the principles to further ease the restrictions on SDF troops' activities.

Strengthening Japan-US alliance

Separately from the UN peacekeeping operations, Japan has beefed up its security alliance with the US in the past decade. The pace of this move has been accelerated after the terrorist attacks in the US in 2001. Against this backdrop was growing awareness among many Japanese of the necessity to make their country's security and crisis management system more robust.

In April 1996, the then-prime minister, Hashimoto Ryutaro, and the American president, Bill Clinton, issued a joint security declaration in Tokyo reaffirming the importance of the bilateral security alliance in the post-Cold War era. In September 1997, Japan and the US adopted new defense cooperation guidelines to flesh out the 1996 joint declaration. In May 1999, as the legal framework for implementing the guidelines, Japan enacted three laws, including the Law Concerning Measures to Ensure the Peace and Security of Japan in Situations in Areas Surrounding Japan.

The Japanese government initially faced an uphill battle in getting diet approval for the laws. But the increased sense of crisis among many Japanese over threats posed by North Korea smoothed the way for their diet passage. North Korea had test-fired a Taepodong missile over Japan into the Pacific in August 1998. Also, two North Korean spy ships were spotted in March 1999 in Japanese territorial waters off the Noto Peninsula, Ishikawa Prefecture, central Japan. In December 2001, a North Korean spy ship blew itself up and sank after a firefight with Japan Coast Guard patrol boats in waters off the Amami Islands, Kagoshima Prefecture. North Korea is also believed to have nuclear weapons.

Meanwhile, Koizumi and US President Bush, who both took office in early 2001, have forged a close personal relationship with each other. Their personal chemistry seems very good. Koizumi has been one of the staunchest supporters of the Bush administration's "war on terror" and the Iraq war.

The Koizumi government enacted two new controversial laws to enable the SDF to assist US-led military operation in Afghanistan and Iraq. Under the first law, enacted in October 2001, only several weeks after the September 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, SDF naval vessels were dispatched to the Indian Ocean to back up US-led coalition forces' operation in Afghanistan through fuel supplies to coalition warships. By international standards, even refueling such ships effectively means exercising the right to collective self-defense.

Under the second law, enacted in August 2003, the Koizumi government approved a plan to dispatch several hundred ground troops to Iraq at the end of that year. The SDF troops have been deployed in the southern Iraqi city of Samawah on a humanitarian and reconstruction mission, such as water purification and repair of roads, schools and other infrastructure.

The 2001 Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law, which was enacted as a temporary one with a two-year life span, was first extended for another two years in 2003. The law was extended again on Oct.26 - this time for another year - before it was to expire on November 11. The 2003 Law Concerning the Special Measures on Humanitarian and Reconstruction Assistance in Iraq has a four-year life span.

On December 9, 2004, the government extended the SDF's Iraq mission under the law for another year, although a majority of Japanese people opposed the extension. The current mandate of the SDF mission is to expire on December 14. The Koizumi government is preparing to extend the mission for another year, although it is considering the possibility of beginning to withdraw SDF troops in the middle of next year.

Instead of establishing or extending a temporary law on a case-by-case basis as it has done so far, the Koizumi government is now considering a comprehensive permanent law to enable the SDF to more smoothly participate in international peace-cooperation activities, including assistance in the restoration of a war-devastated country and a dispute settlement by multinational forces. The DPJ leader, Maehara, has also called for a permanent law on antiterrorism in general.

In addition, Japan will introduce a US missile-defense, or MD, system in 2007. The two countries have also agreed on the development and deployment of a more advanced MD system, starting in fiscal 2006, to counter the threats of missile attacks from North Korea, which has

deployed an estimated 200 or so Rodong missiles capable of striking almost all of Japanese territory. The Koizumi government also has eased a decades-old ban on arms exports, enabling Japan to export parts and components needed for the joint development and production of the advanced MD system.

Meanwhile, Japan and the US have negotiated the realignment of American military bases in Japan. In stark contrast with the strengthening Japan-US security alliance, America's relations with another major Asian ally, South Korea, are creaking. Although Seoul says it is still committed to a strong relationship with Washington, the bilateral security alliance is coming under increasing strain, and policy differences have emerged in recent years over how to deal with North Korea's nuclear programs. The US plans to withdraw a third of its 37,000 troops deployed in South Korea by the end of 2008.

Anxieties among Asian nations

Although China vehemently opposed a Japan-US security treaty in the 1950s and 1960s, it began to refrain from denouncing it after the Sino-US rapprochement began with a 1972 visit to Beijing by then president, Richard Nixon. Indeed, China appeared at times to give it tacit approval. This attitude was attributed to China's belief that the anti-Soviet nature of the security treaty served its own interests. Another reason, many experts said, was that China viewed the treaty as a "cap on the bottle" of latent Japanese militarism.

At least until several years ago, China's position was believed to be that the Japan-US security alliance was all right as long as it was simply to defend Japan against possible attacks from a third country and did not become anything that allows the US to increase its military interference in regional contingencies, especially one in the Taiwan Strait. That may no longer be the case today.

The ongoing move toward a stronger security alliance between Japan and the US has alarmed China, especially since a peaceful settlement to tensions in the Taiwan Strait was included in a list of common strategic goals that the defense and foreign ministers of Japan and the US announced in February they would pursue under the planned new security arrangements. There are also suspicions in China that the real US motive for the sweeping overhaul of its military's global posture might be what some call the "soft containment" of the rapidly ascending military and economic power.

The new National Defense Program Outline, adopted by the Japanese government in December 2004 to replace the old one adopted in 1995, called for a "flexible" SDF to cope with various types of threats, including terrorism. It also upgraded overseas peacekeeping activities to one of the SDF's primary missions. The new document also expressed alarm over China, noting its military's rapid modernization and increasing naval activities. It was the first time that a National Defense Program Outline had stipulated an alarm over China since the first one was compiled in 1976.

Japan's relations with China - and also with South Korea - remain at their lowest point in decades because of rekindled territorial disputes, Tokyo's bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council and the controversy over Japanese school textbooks authored by rightwing scholars, as well as Koizumi's repeated visits to Yasukuni shrine.

Diplomatic tensions are also running high between Tokyo and Beijing over a Chinese natural gas project in the disputed waters in the East China Sea near the so-called median line, which was drawn by Japan but has not been recognized by China. Of the various issues currently plaguing bilateral ties, this dispute is potentially the most volatile and could even lead to military confrontation. Tensions have been high since last month when a Chinese destroyer aimed its guns at a Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force P3-C surveillance plane near the disputed waters of the Chunxiao gas field.

Even in the US, there is growing concern that continued chilly relations with Asian neighbors might erode the influence of Japan in the region and, as a result, hurt American interests there. Meanwhile, China and South Korea are closely watching developments in the Japanese debate on constitutional changes for signs of a resurgence of militarism.

Immediately after the LDP compiled its first draft of a new constitution in early August, China Daily, the English-language newspaper of the Chinese communist party, said in an editorial titled "Japanese proposal to shift military outlook" that by amending the constitution, the LDP wants Japan to be freed from constrains that limit military cooperation with allies.
The daily said: "It is not difficult to see the bare fangs and brandished claws in the proposal." It also said that the LDP draft "demonstrates Japan's new mindset - encouraging military expansion". It concluded, "This is nerve wracking." Referring to the wartime history, the article also said, "Without a guilty conscience, Japan is attempting to turn itself into a regional military bully."

JoongAng Daily, a major South Korean newspaper, said in an editorial titled "On Japan's constitution" in early August that "Japan has long argued that it needs to have military power in proportion to its economic might, and that it needs to become a 'normal country'. If the constitution is revised, that wish is likely to become a reality. "Any sovereign country has the right to change its constitution to accommodate the changing times. But there is something that Japan must keep in mind. It needs to demonstrate that it cares sincerely about the concerns of South Korea, China and its other neighbors over Japan's militaristic past. Only then can the global community trust Japan as a 'normal country'," the paper said. Citing Koizumi's repeated visits to Yasukuni shrine, said, "But Japan seems to be going in the other direction."

Sixty years have passed since the end of World War II. Nevertheless, Japan's relations with China and South Korea remain haunted by the war-time history. It is often said that an assailant easily forgets what he did but the victim doesn't. Many people in neighboring Asian countries still harbor bitter memories - whether direct or indirect - of Japan's wartime aggression, occupation and atrocities. For them - and also for some Japanese people - even another 10 years would be too long to wait for true, heart-to-heart reconciliation between Japan and its Asian neighbors. They would think that talking about a better future 20 or 30 years from now is actually the same thing as saying that it will never come.

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