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Abe Shinzo and the U.S.-Japan Relationship in a Global Context グローバルな文脈で観る安倍晋三と日米関係

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Victory for Abe Shinzo and his Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in two consecutive general elections opened the way for Japan to move closer to the policies of the United States and, at the same time, throw off some of the restraints imposed by the postwar peace constitution and the San Francisco Treaty system.

The Abe Administration's Priorities and U.S., Chinese Policies

A new era in the political history of postwar Japan has begun, with changes in the Japan-U.S. relationship likely to follow in the years ahead. For even in a land of patrimonial politics Prime Minister Abe is not a typical politician. His economic policies set him apart. So too does his tie to his grandfather Kishi Nobusuke, who was imprisoned after World War II as an unindicted war criminal. When Kishi emerged from prison he launched the first attack from the right on the Tokyo international war crimes tribunal. Later as prime minister, Kishi reshaped Japan's postwar order and in January 1960 renegotiated the one-sided Japan-U.S. security treaty: the military alliance imposed on the occupied nation by the United States, over historically unprecedented popular opposition. Abe agreed with his grandfather's view that relations with the U.S. should be strengthened, and that the postwar constitution needed to be rewritten. He resolved to follow Kishi's lead and prioritize constitutional revision.

Abe prays before the family grave of Kishi, Dec 22, 2013.

When Abe returned to power in 2012, American leaders and corporate media praised his bold economic policies but felt uneasy about his exercise of independent judgment in foreign policy. On the anniversary of his resuming office, Abe visited Yasukuni Shrine, the unique Shinto religious institution that enshrines the spirits of Japan's 2.4 million war-dead, together with the spirits of fourteen wartime leaders found guilty of grave offenses by the Tokyo tribunal. Chinese and South Korean media protested his action and some Japanese citizens filed a lawsuit claiming his visit violated the constitution's separation of politics and religion. Prior to his first meeting with President Barack Obama at the White House, Abe postponed a scheduled return to Yasukuni. But shortly afterwards he revisited the shrine, ignoring the advice of U.S. Assistant Sec. of State Richard Armitage and Vice President Joe Biden to stay away from paying official homage there. Simultaneously, he angered not only the Chinese and Koreans (North and South) but also the U.S.[1]

What has annoyed American policy-makers is Abe's management of Japan's dispute with South Korea over the Takeshima/Dokdo islets administered by South Korea. Washington politicians want "Trilateral defense cooperation" and they seek to restrain Abe from pressing Japan's claim to Takeshima through international law.[2] Disputes between Tokyo and Seoul are rooted not only in territorial conflicts but also in institutionalized Korean memories of war and Japan's harsh colonial rule. Apart from Japan's renewed territorial claims, Abe's shrine visits, and historical memories, the other spoilers exacerbating tensions on the divided peninsula are North Korea's nuclear posturing and Obama's aggressive military "rebalancing" or pivoting to Asia.

Abe visits Yasukuni Shrine, Dec 26, 2013

History, particularly war memories of the 1930s and early '40s, also casts a shadow over Japan-China relations. Four decades ago China normalized relations with geographically distant America and neighboring Japan. In recent years, in tandem with its rapidly increasing economic and military power, the communist regime began to alienate nearly all of its maritime neighbors. In 1994, five years after the massacre of Chinese students at Tiananmen Square and against a background of growing economic inequality and other popular discontents at home, China's rulers adopted a diversionary policy of anti-Japanese patriotic education. As a substitute for their discredited official ideologies of Maoism and Marxist-Leninism, they began pumping up nationalist sentiment. War museums and school textbooks featuring the history of the anti-Japanese great patriotic war spread all over China. Significant expressions of partisan textbook nationalism also appeared around the same time in South Korea and Japan.

In Japan, where debate on the lost war never ended, Japanese conservatives took alarm at these Chinese developments and fostered their own campaign to raise the level of nationalist education. During the past sixteen months the dialectic between Chinese and Japanese nationalism has played out over eight islets and their surrounding fishing grounds that Japan administers in the East China Sea. Abe and other prominent LDP politicians have repeatedly expressed deep concern about China's naval, air, and civilian fishing boat incursions in the vicinity of these strategically

important, uninhabitable Senkaku/Diaoyu rocks, which are spread over a wide area. They claim to have a vital interest in defending them at all costs but China denies both the legality and validity of Japan's claims. [3] The Obama administration has put the Senkakus under American protection but seeks to avoid being drawn into a shooting war against China over rocks, claimed by Japan, China, and Taiwan. Thus, the Senkaku dispute between Japan and China has come to be seen in Tokyo as a test of the security alliance that supposedly guaranteed America's nuclear protection of Japan.

Japan's major territorial disputes with China/Taiwan, Korea and Russia

Tension has also heated up between China and its neighbors in the South China Sea. Here too both the U.S and Japan are involved. China is denying the Philippines and Vietnam access to the Paracel islands, the Spratly islands, plus reefs and shoals in the South China Sea, which it claims as its own. These maritime and territorial disputes also awaken historical memories and arouse the anger of nationalists on all sides.

Nationalism and Territorial Conflict

Peking, Tokyo, and Washington are the main great power protagonists in these maritime and territorial disputes. Many politicians and pundits in Tokyo and Washington say they respect China's independent path of development. It makes sense for them to say this given the intertwining of their economies with China, not to mention the two trillion dollars that China holds in U.S. treasuries. But they actually share a common hostility toward China's emergence as an economic and geopolitical powerhouse, intent on ending America's exclusive control of broad regions of the Pacific. More specifically, the U.S. and Japan reject the idea of China muscling into the Pax Americana, policing its own access routes in the Western and Southwest Pacific.[4] This shared anti-China enmity, however, coexists with the desire of Japanese and American business leaders to continue investing capital and outsourcing production to China--Japans biggest trading partner. Thus whenever Japan-China disputes arise, the possibility of peacefully resolving them is always present because the giant and middle-size corporations and financial firms of the U.S. and Japan have so much at stake. This is the reason why, to date, they have not allowed their conflicts to get out of control.

Yet nationalistic sentiment and patriotism, historically endemic to nation-states and nation-empires, can at any time destroy these economic relationships. In October 2010 and September 2012, for example, the dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islets led to brief flurries of anti-Japanese protests in several Chinese cities. These events were preceded by Tokyo governor Ishihara Shintaro's attempt to purchase the Senkakus from the family that owned them. Ishihara, adopting the proposal of Inose Naoki, who succeeded Ishihara as governor of Tokyo and was a onetime leader of the leftist Chukaku-ha faction at Shinshu University, put out a call for private funds to buy the rocks. Into the offices of the metropolitan government poured small donations from 103,602 right-leaning, jingoistic citizens.[5] Interestingly, the charismatic Ishihara displayed his ability to outflank the established conservative parties on a hot political issue. In so doing, he showed the potential for the future emergence in Japan of a new constellation of political forces catalyzed by nationalism.

Japan's ties with the Russian Federation, formed after the ideological cold war ended, are not as fraught as its relations with China. To be sure, history issues trouble this relationship too. The absence of a peace treaty and the dispute over Russia's seizure in 1945 of four northern islands off Hokkaido--Etorofu, Kunashiri, Shikotan, and Habomai--are the foremost reasons for Japan's inability to realize rapprochement with Russia. But more recent causes relate to Japan's military alliance with the U.S., and the resistance of American ruling elites to Russia's return to an independent role in Eurasian and world affairs.

Abe, however, has sought improved ties with resource-rich Russia and "has met with Vladimir Putin five times since coming to power in 2012, more than he has met any other foreign leader."[6] He even attended the Sochi Olympics whereas Obama and the other G-8 leaders boycotted that event. Abe's visit to Russia in April 2013 was the first by a Japanese prime minister since Mori Yoshiro's in 2002. Putin has also visited Japan and said he is ready to resolve the "Northern territories" issue. Putin clearly wants Russia to remain open to the world economy and has long encouraged Japanese investment in Siberian development projects. Both leaders share a common goal of seeking to revitalize national pride after suffering great national catastrophes. For Abe the catastrophe was Japan's defeat in 1945 and the San Francisco peace settlement; for Putin it was the breakup of the Soviet Union, followed by the economic collapse of the 1990s. On this score, the two men probably felt much closer to one another than they did to Obama.

Given the relatively small size and imbalanced nature of Russia's economy compared to the economies of the U.S., the largest EU nations, and Japan, it was quite realistic for Abe to seek to woo Putin. Perhaps too the tensions with China and South Korea drove him to enlist Russian support for his claims in the East China Sea. Or Abe may have seen in Putin a possible means of checking further close ties between the heartland states of Russia and China. Why should Japan be shut out of their deepening economic collaboration when it has competed for decades with China for Soviet oil, gas, and timber resources, and has the capital to invest in eastern Siberian projects?

The Russo-Ukraine Crisis and Its Implications for the Asia-Pacific Region

Whatever the reasons that drew the two leaders together, the global operations of the United States and the ambitions of EU politicians intervened and soon provoked an international (Russo-Ukraine-U.S./EU) crisis that dealt a blow not only to Abe's and Putin's hopes. This crisis has also affected the strategic calculations of China. Very briefly, the circumstances were these:

For more than a decade the U.S. government and the EU had been interfering in the historically fragmented Republic of Ukraine, intent on splitting it off from Russia and advancing NATO bases further eastward, as they had done with other former Soviet republics. Putin tried to resist their efforts. He protested the U.S.-led wars in Yugoslavia, which culminated in the bloody separation of Kosovo from Serbia. He demonstrated his resolve in the five-day Russo-Georgia War of August 2008; and at the EU-Russian summit in January 2014 and on other occasions he warned about foreign interference in Ukrainian affairs. On November 21, 2013,

Abe and Putin meet April 29, 2013

pro-Russian Ukrainian president Victor Yanukovich rejected an agreement with the EU that would have given NATO a staging ground for a future move into the Russian Federation. Yanukovich favored instead joining Russia's proposed customs union and Eurasian Economic Community.

One week later EU and American officials began to deliberately destabilize Yanukovich's corrupt regime. On February 22, 2014, armed, anti-Russian protestors seized power in a violent, illegal coup d'etat that ousted the democratically-elected Yanukovich, forcing him to flee for his life.[7] Many of them were neo-Nazis members of the Svoboda (Freedom) Party; some belonged to the ultra-nationalist Right Sector, which is alleged to have sent its activists to neighboring Poland where they received police training in advance of the coup.[8]

Putin responded to the coup in Kiev with a regime change of his own. On February 27, he ordered his elite military forces, already in Ukraine's Crimean peninsula by treaty, to take over the peninsula, historic home of Russia's Black Sea fleet. A peaceful referendum was held; Crimea formally reverted to Russia; whereupon Russia moved some 40,000 ground troops near its border with Ukraine but otherwise remained neutral, urged dialogue, and refrained from sending weapons and troops to support the Russian-speaking population in eastern Ukraine. [9]

Obama reacted by aligning himself with the neocons in his State Department and the warmongers in Congress. He and his ostentatious Sec. of State John Kerry denounced Russia's action, depicted it as simple "aggression," based on trumped up pretexts, and branded Moscow an "expansionist" state that had acted illegally--all of which were brazen, demagogic exaggerations. Having recognized the coup regime that Russia refused to deal with, Obama and the EU leaders followed with a limited financial freeze targeting individual Russians. They repeatedly threatened further sanctions intended to harm vulnerable parts of Russia's weak economy. Now the crisis has entered a new, more ominous stage. Obama sent a guided-missile destroyer into the Black Sea for naval exercises, ordered fighter-bombers to fly over the Baltic Sea states of Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania, along Russia's western border. His other saber-rattling move (which makes sense only in term of U.S. domestic politics) was to send a symbolic force of paratroopers to visit the Baltic states and Poland for military exercises.[10] Concurrently, the mainstream Anglo-American media continues to wage a relentless anti-Russian, anti-Putin propaganda campaign just as they had done during the Russo-Georgia War.[11]

Worried but undeterred by these U.S.-EU overreactions, Putin waited for the tensions between pro and anti-Russian Ukrainians to deescalate and the American leaders to come to their senses. Meanwhile, he and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov tried to fight back against the Western propaganda campaign. As a sensible way of resolving Ukraine's problems, they urged the interim leaders in Kiev to adopt a federal system of organization of the different regions of their divided country together with Finnish-style neutrality.

These developments in faraway Ukraine dealt a profound blow to Abe's attempt to develop mutually beneficial trade relations with Russia. He had no choice but to abandon his effort to advance a resolution of the "Northern territories"/Kurile islands issue. In order to preserve the military alliance with the U.S., the Abe regime was bound to support Washington's condemnation of Russia's unilateral annexation of the Crimean peninsula. It had also to support the diplomatic and economic sanctions that the U.S. put in place and repeatedly threatened to ratchet up. Caught between the regime change policy of the EU and the U.S.-led NATO on one side, and its military alliance with the U.S. on the other, Abe and his ministers naturally opted to safeguard their primary commitment. But of the sanction measures taken by various states against Russia, Japan's was the mildest, suggesting it had not given up on building an economic relationship with Russia.[12] Neither, probably, had Putin given up on Japan.

China and other great powers were also affected by the evolving crisis in Ukraine. China shares a long border with Russia, has supported Russia in the Syrian civil war, and benefits from a rapidly developing commercial and energy trade with the Russian Federation. Not wanting to upset these ties, Peking has remained publicly silent. Its silence is also related to its concern about Obama's containment strategy.[13]

One conclusion that may be drawn from the dangerous, still out of control Ukrainian situation is that structures of military alliances of the Cold War-era are unsuitable instruments for dealing with political crises that arise directly from America's post-Cold War efforts to remake entire regions of the world and then leave the states in those regions in the hands of rulers willing to serve U.S. and Western imperial interests. Obama, like other American presidents before him, supports militarily and diplomatically the most despotic, anti-democratic rulers in every Middle Eastern and North African country.[14] China, lacking significant military alliance structures and an empire of overseas military bases, proceeds more cautiously in those regions. But in the vast Asia-Pacific region the U.S. cannot easily regulate interstate relations by resorting to military force and threats. What it does, instead, is use its web of bilateral military alliances to constrict the choices of its allies, preventing them from pursuing omnidirectional foreign policies. When American leaders see geopolitical advantage in doing so, they will use their allies as pawns.

U.S. Power in the Asia-Pacific and Japan's Options

In the past, when the U.S. was the main superpower and the rest of the world was still recovering from the ravages of war and colonialism, the U.S.-Japan Security alliance and the U.S.-established-and-financed NATO abetted rearmament in allied states and increased the likelihood that they would be drawn into America's wars. This happened to Japan on a small scale when President Harry Truman intervened on his own authority and internationalized the Korean civil war. Today, China has replaced the "Soviet threat" as the justification for a new arms race; and the U.S. has become an economically weakened and over-extended superpower, lurching from one failed war to the next. Japan's military alliance with the U.S. still engenders distrust among neighboring nations while undermining Japan's own potential for democratic development. Nevertheless, today the alliance system may be less of a threat to peace than it was during the era of ideological cold war.

In the Asia-Pacific region, nuclear-armed China is an open economy that trades with the whole world. This means all the nations that have territorial conflicts with China also benefit from Chinese trade and tourism. How can such a dynamic economic power be "contained" and why should it be afraid of defying the United States in places where its vital interests are concerned? Japan and the U.S. jointly pursue a traditional strategy of controlling the sea-lanes and maritime choke points though which Chinese and foreign-flagged ships must pass carrying most of the imported oil and raw materials that China's factories need to continue producing goods. Do Washington and Tokyo policy-makers really imagine that a maritime choke point strategy can influence China's behavior?

Moreover, if one of the aims of the Obama administration's Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is to contain China by excluding it from

U.S. economic initiatives, this too makes little sense. For the TPP is unlikely to prejudice either Japanese or American trade with China. In fact, trade is only a small part of what the secretly negotiated TPP focuses on. The agreement is mainly about capital investments, intellectual property and copyright protection, financial services, insurance, health care, and the like. Access to the Japanese market for American autos and agricultural products is the TPP's secondary goal. However, it is difficult to see how the TPP will help ordinary Japanese citizens. It is more likely to reduce their living standards just as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) destroyed Mexico's agriculture and harmed working class Americans. The TPP is an expression of the predatory nature of twenty-first century U.S.-style capitalism. Yet Abe is committed to joining this controversial agreement provided he wins enough U.S. concessions to protect Japan's agricultural production and auto industry. Membership in the TPP will affect all aspects of Japan's commercial relations with other nations; it will also strengthen state censorship of the internet.

There is no doubt that Japan's leaders feel vulnerable and are working with the Pentagon to surround large Japanese cities with fully operational U.S.-made ballistic missile defenses against China, which they both see as their chief antagonist, and North Korea, which they see as posing a secondary threat to the Japanese nation. Over the next five years Japan's leaders plan to increase the size of their naval and air Self Defense Forces in order to "partner" more effectively with U.S. forces, but also to be capable of dealing with China and North Korea independently of the U.S. Are they doing this because of nationalism? Or is it because they see objective trends in the U.S. that lead them to suspect that in the near future the U.S. may no longer be a reliable ally?

The same questions must be asked of China, which has historically experienced the greatest dangers to the state from foreigners attacking from the sea. What is driving Xi Jinping and other Chinese autocrats to engage in political conflict with neighboring states and become more assertive about its maritime and coastal defenses? Is the driving force the poisonous combination of nationalism and economic necessity—i.e. *capitalist driven imperialism*? Stated differently: Is China constructing a maritime imperium in order to protect its own national capital accumulation the way Western imperialist did from the late nineteenth century to the end of World War II?

Another question is: Who benefits most from the current maritime conflicts? U.S.-Japanese partnering may be good for the military and shipbuilding industries of both countries, but it carries the danger of Japan getting entrapped in American "peace keeping" and costly war fighting operations, as it has done in nearly all of America's wars from Korea onward. The difference is that under Abe and the new "Guidelines" that are to govern U.S.-Japan military relations, Japan is going to provide not only naval and air but also ground-force support for the U.S. military.

Japan's helicopter aircraft carrier

In 2015 the two new, helicopter aircraft carriers being built at the Yokohama shipyard of Ishikawajima Harima Industries will be brought into readiness.[15] More Self Defense Force destroyers are being upgraded and equipped with guided missiles. Already in possession of counter-strike weaponry, Japan is acquiring technology that erodes the very distinction between offensive and defensive capability. A qualitative jump in Japan's military capacity is in process. Yet qualifications are necessary. Japan enlarged navy will still trail well behind America's; and in ongoing Japanese debates about the meaning of "collective security," "national security," and "secrecy," the proponents of a future conversion from a peace-state to a "normal" war-fighting state are using terms whose meaning remains contested. Therefore, at the present time, it cannot be said that they are even on the same page as the managers of the American empire.

Recently the LDP ended a self-imposed ban on the export of conventional arms and war materiel. Although restrictions on arms exports to belligerent nations remain, Japan will become a global exporter of certain types of weapons, able to enter into co-production and licensing deals with other countries. Following this announcement Prime Minister–cum-Commander-in-Chief Abe agreed to share submarine and other military technology with Australia. The U.S. is expanding militarily in Australia under ANZUS, another cold war-era military alliance aimed at restraining China.

Japan already has a "strategic partnership" relationship with the Philippines, but Abe has shifted its focus from economic exchange to strengthening Filipino naval defense capability in the South China Sea.[16] For the time being, the Filipino-Chinese confrontation has been limited to dialogue. The Benigno Aquino government, however, has adopted a two-track policy for dealing with China. One track consists of negotiating a new defense treaty with the Obama administration twenty-two years after the Philippine Congress ousted the U.S. military from bases it had occupied since 1898; the other track is the initiation of formal legal proceedings against China at a UN tribunal under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.[17] China, however, has insisted on resolving the territorial dispute through bilateral negotiations, and has announced it will not participate in dispute arbitration, which it has the right to do under international law.[18] By drawing the US and Japan into its dispute with China, Aquino could end up hardening China's stance and being used as an American pawn.

Abe and Vietnamese President Truong Tan Sang recently concluded a defense partnership agreement with Vietnam similar to the one Abe made with the Philippines. It too contains both economic and military components and is directed against China. It will bring the navies of Japan and Vietnam into closer cooperation and could deepen ties between their military industries.[19] On Okinawa new facilities for joint use by the U.S. and Japanese armed forces are being built. And on Yonaguni, the southernmost island of the Ryukyu chain, which is remote from Tokyo but near Taiwan, Okinawa, and the Senkakus, Japan is building a radar site and stationing some one hundred soldiers so as to have them in closer proximity to the Senkakus.[20]

The build-up of military power by Japanese neo-nationalists has gone hand in hand with their weakening of democracy at home. This can be seen in three areas. First, in December 2013, Abe rammed through the Diet "a sweeping, vague and hastily drafted "Specially Designated Secrets Law (*tokutei himitsu hogo hou*), with harsh punishments of from ten to five years imprisonment for offenders.[21] This new law, pressed on Japan by the secrecy-obsessed Obama administration with strong support from Japan's Foreign Ministry, established a wide sphere of secrets. It deprives citizens and journalists of their right to know and to access government information on matters vital to people in a procedural democracy.[22] It represents a major enhancement of the power of the state and the goals of its leaders; an increase in police officials charged with monitoring suspected violators is inevitable.

Abe's newly established National Security Council (NSC) suggests the potential for a further deepening of Japan's regime of secrecy. A sixty person National Security Bureau in which "about a dozen uninformed officers of the Self-Defense Forces" will participate is in the offing.[23] The core NSC members are to be the prime minister, chief cabinet secretary, foreign and defense ministers. They will be able to strengthen executive power should they ever decide to conceal their decisions from other members of the Diet. Thus, not only will the Japanese people confront the problem of how to regulate state secrecy, they could also witness hereafter a gradual

shift in power from the bicameral Diet to the Prime Ministers office, i.e. the executive branch of capitalist government.

Second, to deepen the U.S.-Japan bilateral relationship according to LDP logic, revision of Japan's "peace" constitution is necessary. Thus, the new "autonomous" constitution that the LDP drafted *prior to Abe's formation of a cabinet* garnered international attention. The draft document was to be the core component of the legal structure being built to turn Japan into a state that, if attacked, can wage offensive operations in concert with the United States. The LDP leadership initially hoped to have its provisions adopted swiftly, particularly with respect to Article 9 (renouncing the use of force to settle international disputes) and Article 96 (requiring a two-thirds majority of each House and a special election to amend the Constitution). Those two changes would unbind the executive power, giving the prime minister discretionary authority to declare an emergency, set aside the law, and disregard the rights of citizens. Over the past several months, however, *Abe abandoned explicit revision and reverted to revision by interpretation. In these matters Abe, as prime minister, has said that he will have ultimate responsibility for defining the meaning of "collective security."*[24]

Another notable point about the LDP's draft constitution is that it elevates the emperor's status from "symbol" (*shocho*) to "head of state" (*genshu*), thereby altering the conventional understanding of the position of the emperor and opening the way to a future expansion of imperial authority.[25] One cannot help but speculate that the LDP's real aim is to increase the emperor's participation in ceremonies and later use him in whatever future different steps may be required in order to revise or entirely rewrite the Constitution. Constitutional change by reinterpretation would make that possible.

Since Abe returned to power a year after the 3/11 earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear meltdown disaster at Fukushima, his administration has repeatedly ignored public demands for a moratorium on nuclear power generation. It continues to accumulate a large stockpile of plutonium from the processing of spent nuclear fuel.[26] Despite the ongoing danger from radiation and irradiated water accumulating at the Fukushima site, it insists that Japan will restart many of its presently idled reactors and must continue to rely on nuclear energy to generate electricity.

The Abe administration is often criticized in the Japanese media for "hiding or soft-peddling its real intentions" in order to "avoid touching off a public backlash."[27] LDP politicians, bureaucrats, and lobbyists follow the very same "soft-peddling" strategy in advocating constitutional revision, and in hiding from the public the lengths to which they are willing to go to assist the U.S. military in maintaining America's global empire.

Third, operating in a climate of heightened nationalism the Abe regime has taken the long-standing issue of vetting the content of middle and high school history textbooks "completely out of the hands of historians and educators and placed it "directly under the control of politicians."[28] The school textbook issue arose in the mid-1950s, when the occupation had ended and pent-up nationalist sentiment was beginning to express itself. It garnered national and international attention thanks to the prominent historian Ienaga Saburo who battled the Ministry of Education in one legal suit after another over the legality and constitutionality of its textbook vetting process. Ienaga's court cases and historical challenges influenced many Japanese educators. For the past two decades Japanese, South Korean, and Chinese scholars as well as high school teachers have been addressing in creative ways the issue of biased textbooks that breed xenophobia. Although their efforts to produce accurate historical narratives continue, the policies and language of nationalist politicians of the past few years have set them back.[29]

The Legacy of the Asia-Pacific War and the San Francisco Treaty

On April 28 Abe plans to commemorate the San Francisco Peace Treaty. Sixty-one years ago neither the People's Republic of China nor the Soviet Union signed that document. Russia and China still have not signed and South Korea was not even invited to the San Francisco conference. When the one-sided peace treaty with Japan took effect in 1952, the U.S. occupation of the home islands ended. Japan regained partial sovereignty by agreeing to leave intact many American bases on the home islands and to sacrifice the Ryukyus and the Ogasawara (Bonin) islands by leaving them under U.S. military control.[30]

Japan regained the Ogasawara islands in 1968 and in 1972 acquired "residual sovereignty" over the Ryukyu chain, which had been absorbed into the empire of imperial Japan between 1874 and the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95. For many centuries the Ryukyu kingdom, with Okinawa its largest island, had maintained dual Sino-Japanese allegiance in international affairs. The Meiji regime ended the ambivalence of the Ryukyuans about their political identity and turned the islands into an internal colony. When the Americans conquered Okinawa in 1945, they confiscated agricultural land and built air bases for waging war in Asia. They then used the legally unprotected island to store nuclear and chemical weapon and to bury the toxic wastes generated by their air and naval operations.[31]

During the Korean and Vietnam Wars, the Pentagon used Okinawa for conducting long-range bombing operations. Local base commanders stored their cancer-causing PCBs and Agent Orange on the island, totally indifferent to the environmental destruction they were causing but always willing to lie about it.[32] Today Okinawa is a source of conflict in Japan's relations with a minority of Okinawans who are fighting peacefully to prevent the construction of a new American military base at Henoko and rid themselves of American military bases. The struggle of indigenous Okinawans, longtime Japanese residents of Okinawa, and Japanese from the main islands who have joined them, stands at the vanguard of global movements for political justice.

China is shaking up the American-crafted status quo in the Asia-Pacific region, and one of the ways some Japanese neo-nationalists react is to air certain injustices enshrined in the San Francisco peace treaty. Many of the injustices stem from the Japanese government's formal acceptance (in Article 11) of *all* the judgments of the deeply flawed Tokyo International War Crimes Tribunal and the Allied military commission trials.

These trials once revealed to the Japanese people the nature of their lost war and the many war crimes committed by the imperial armed forces. But partly because the Truman administration tried Japan's war criminals for crimes against peace and war crimes but covered-up its own war crimes by not allowing them to be discussed or judged, the trials could never be forgotten. They continue to impact Japanese, Chinese, and even American historical consciousness. Truman had ordered the firebombing of sixty-four Japanese cities. He followed this with his vengeful decision to exterminate the non-combatant residents of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and end the war before the Russians could enter it.

It was Truman who ordered atomic bombs detonated over Hiroshima and Nagasaki when Japan's navy lay beneath the seas, its armed forces had been objectively defeated, and its government was in the process of seeking a face-saving way to surrender. This act of barbarism by the American state, with the full support of most ordinary Americans who believed the lies Truman told about the Bomb, has gone down in history. No American president has had the courage to publicly atone for it. Moreover, the U.S. government supported all the forces in early postwar Japanese society who wanted to forget the past, including Emperor Hirohito's role in starting and waging Japan's colonial war against China and its imperialist war against Anglo-American-Dutch imperialism.

Japanese atrocity deniers reject the postwar trials' findings mainly for ideological reasons. So the need to look back at Japanese colonialism, war and war atrocities still exists, as does the need to publicly re-address the whole San Francisco peace settlement, in

which the Japanese government was forced to accept all the judgments and verdicts handed down by the international tribunal.

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Today, many Japanese books and journals of opinion express disappointment with the arrogant behavior and double standards of American ruling elites in their dealings with other nations. But this discourse should not be conflated with the public speech of Japanese neo-nationalists who actually wield power. They have taken account of Obama's difficulty in getting things done in Washington. They know his credibility has been diminished by his policies and actions. But Japan's leaders are not talking openly about independence from their overstretched, financially strained protector that lost the initiative in international affairs and whose power can be countered, as Russia is showing in the strife over Ukraine-Crimea. Instead, Japanese ruling elites are creating the political and material conditions that someday could lead Japan to act independently of Washington's instructions. For now, however, the Abe cabinet's intention seems to be to remain a loyal, subordinate U.S. ally, able to participate more proactively in the American policy of militarily containing China and North Korea by surrounding them with chains of military bases and rebuilt, refurbished Pacific ports.[33]

Abe and the LDP are intent on reshaping public consciousness on almost everything that for over sixty years fixed Japan's place in the post-World War II peace settlement. This includes the matter of secrecy and constitutional revision by the duplicitous strategy of "reinterpretation" rather than amendment. In a situation where Japan confronts Chinese revisionism, opinion surveys suggest that the public still supports Article 9 but strong majority support for the peace constitution and its ideals may be waning.[34]

This trend is only to be expected when important ruling elites either manipulate or ignore the preferences of ordinary citizens and insist on having only their views prevail no matter what the costs to the nation as a whole. The absence of loud protests from mass-based opposition movements is allowing them to have their way. But this does not mean that public sentiment on these issues can't be altered. The constant airing of progressive views on matters of national security and the constitution can lead people to perceive the negative side of the constitutional changes that the LDP seeks. It can succeed in mobilizing them to wrest control of key issues from conservative elites and achieve very different goals.

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Notes

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