

Policy Forum 04-42A: Japan, Heisei Militarization and the Bush Doctrine



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Japan, Heisei Militarization and the Bush Doctrine

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By [Richard Tanter](#)

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CONTENTS

[I. Introduction](#)

[II. Essay by Richard Tanter](#)

[III. Nautilus Invites Your Responses](#)

I. Introduction

[Richard Tanter](#) , Nautilus Institute Associate, writes: "given the degree of incoherence and even irrationality of US policy under the Bush administration, the acceleration of the process of Heisei militarization by the Bush Doctrine has diminished rather than increased Japanese security."

The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Nautilus Institute. Readers should note that Nautilus seeks a diversity of views and opinions on contentious topics in order to identify common ground.

II. Essay by Richard Tanter

- "Japan, Heisei Militarization and the Bush Doctrine"

By Richard Tanter

Japan is proceeding towards full security normalization, moving closer to throwing off all the externally and self-imposed restraints which for half a century produced a disjuncture between its economic status as the world's second largest national economy and its restricted status in providing global security. In the existing world system, normalization of this kind necessarily means militarization, and that is precisely what Japan has undertaken, a process that can be titled "Heisei militarization. The Bush Doctrine has accelerated but did not cause this process.

On the contrary, the effects and reception of the Bush Doctrine in Japan have to be seen in the light of a long-drawn-out and now quickening series of domestic legal, political, legislative and equipment and force-structure changes in Japanese security policy. In essence, the Bush Doctrine has been welcomed for the cover and opportunities it affords to accelerate already existing planning preferences.

Heisei militarization

The reign name of the present emperor, Heisei, beginning in 1989, provides a useful periodization for these endogenous changes in democratic Japanese security policy and organization under the heading of "Heisei militarization"; and a useful contrast to the fascist connotations of the earlier "Showa militarism".

Heisei militarization includes a continual and growing government-sponsored hollowing-out of the meaning of Article IX of the constitution, and the abandonment of the concept of "defensive defense". It also connotes expanded military budgets, comprehensive upgrading and expansion of military forces structure capacities, legitimization and legalization of use of military force abroad, willingness to rely on military solutions to international problems, and expansion of the domestic coercive powers of the government. The process also evokes a growing public discussion of the possibility of the Japanese military acquiring strategic offensive weapons and weapons of mass destruction - possibly even within the US alliance.

A pattern of Heisei militarization can be seen in a tide of legislation (21 major pieces of legislation since 1992, including nine in 2004). Japanese defense planners have effectively abandoned the concept of "defensive defense" as the foundation of security planning, and adopted instead the view that overseas combat operations capacities are normal.

Heisei militarization and the Bush doctrine

Japan has taken up the Bush Doctrine in a number of ways, including:

- participation in multilateral coalitions to increase international police and intelligence cooperation, border and movement controls, and domestic security;
- a claim of a right of regional pre-emptive attack;
- deployment of air and sea forces in support of the Afghanistan war; participation in the Proliferation Security Initiative;
- deployment of GSDF troops to Iraq, and ASDF and MSDF forces to the Persian Gulf;
- commitment to deploy US-built lower- and upper-tier missile defenses; and
- restrictions on flows of money to North Korea and the movements and residence rights of Japanese-born North Korean citizens.

Missile defense: structural antagonism to China

Of these, both the Iraq and missile defense decisions impose long-term costs and risks, as well as increased strategic uncertainty. The possible domestic and foreign consequences of the Iraq deployment are already crystal clear. However, the missile defense decision potential poses even more serious long-term strategic consequences.

Commonly mentioned problems include the almost open-ended budget demands, the legality of exporting missile defense technology beyond the US; and the question of control over launching.

However the most important consequences derive from the political implications of the technologies involved. The upper-tier sea-based system by its nature will be dependent on the provision of real-time data concerning target missile launch, trajectory and identification. This data will be partly provided by Japan's Marine Self Defense Force's Aegis systems, but primarily by the still-evolving suite of ground- and satellite-based radar and infra-red surveillance systems planned for the US National Missile Defense System.

This interlocking leaves Japan both dependent on US technological support in time of crisis and it implicates it in how US missile defense systems are used against Japan's regional neighbors. This dependence reinforces the perception by China that Japanese and American missile defenses are not separable and virtually ensures that Japanese missile defense will cause long-term structural antagonism between Japan and China.

These missile defense plans also imply a possible modification in mode of alliance binding within the hierarchical US-Japan alliance. Instead of the material dimension of control exercised by the United States via a large number of US military bases spread throughout the archipelago, supplemented by the promise of extended nuclear deterrence, the architecture of missile defense may become the main ties that bind. At the same time, Japan's continued non-nuclear status is publicly and regularly questioned, on both sides of the Pacific.

The nuclear options and the normal state

Since 1967 Japanese nuclear policy has been limited by the three "non-nuclear principles" - though

not as a matter of binding law. US policy, despite five decades of pressure on Japan to re-militarize, has consistently opposed to Japanese development of a nuclear weapons capacity.

Today, Heisei militarization is compatible with both a nuclear and a non-nuclear Japan. However, the road to the nuclear option is now more open and more attractive than ever before. Moreover, there is a new possibility: that a nuclear-armed Japan could emerge within the US alliance.

The shifts in the balance of strategic incentives and disincentives for medium-sized states in an era of nuclear proliferation are well-understood and apply equally to Japan as to India or Israel. Less well known is the diminishing influence of once powerful domestic Japanese institutional and cultural constraints on Japanese militarization in general and nuclear weapons acquisition in particular. From the 1950s to the late eighties, powerful peace movements backed by cross-generational public opinion constrained Japan's nuclear option. Both these factors are now weak. The climate of mainstream public discussion-what is sayable in "respectable" political circles-has widened dramatically in the past decade. Whereas public calls for nuclear armaments were once deeply shocking to the great majority of Japanese citizens, they are now almost commonplace. A slew of public comments and alleged "slips of the tongue" by senior Japanese politicians have opened the way. None of these statements expressed government policy. But their utterance in Japan's symbolically charged political force field has rendered legitimate open discussion of nuclear weapons in the mainstream of Japanese politics.

Concurrently, four decades of firm non-proliferation policy in the US has been eroded in recent years by remarks widely reported in Japan emanating from a variety of official, including Vice-President Cheney, Senator John McCain, and former Secretary of Defense William Cohen, and unofficial elite sources.

Again, while none of these statements represented US government policy or even a significant trend in US policy circles, many Japanese leaders perceived them to reverse the near-absolute certainty of US opposition to Japanese nuclear armament over the previous half century. These American loose lips have shaken many Japanese and thereby transformed the climate of discussion on both sides. This perception was reinforced in Japan by the application of an American double standard to other regional proliferators, some of whom (Israel) were regarded favorably, some of whom were frowned upon but ultimately accepted (Pakistan and India), and some of whom remained highly constrained by American pressure (Taiwan, South Korea). When this perception is joined with the American failure to halt North Korean proliferation, many Japanese leaders feel obliged to entertain the possibility that American extended nuclear deterrence is a dead letter, along with the prospect that Japan may have to "go-it-alone" on global nuclear security issues.

At the same time, Japan's technical capacity to develop and deploy an effective nuclear armament has grown rapidly in the 1990s. Japan's visible latent nuclear capacities continue to evolve, to the point where by 2004 Japan's combination of fission and breeder reactors and reprocessing facilities provided undoubted massive and reliable capacity for advanced thermonuclear weapons. With the addition of the powerful H-II and H-IIA rockets, in-flight re-fuelling for fighter-bombers, and military-grade surveillance satellites, Japan now has the undoubted capacity to satisfy all three core requirements for a usable nuclear weapon: a weaponized nuclear device, a sufficiently accurate targeting system, and at least one, if not more, adequate delivery system. What it lacks-and this may be an important restraint in the short-term-are delivery platforms such as submarines to support a secure retaliatory force that would dissuade a nuclear adversary from launching a pre-emptive strike against these hypothetical strategic weapons that would be land-based and vulnerable.

The combination of shifts in the balance of strategic incentives and disincentives, the diminishing of once-powerful domestic restraints, increasingly unclear US non-proliferation policy, and heightened

and certain technical capacity renders the move from increasingly common and reputable public policy discussion of Japanese nuclear weapons to policy commitment more feasible and more likely than ever before. The emergence of the possibility that the US may not oppose a nuclear-armed Japanese ally - like its British, Pakistani and Israeli allies - heightens that likelihood still more.

With eyes wide shut: Japan as a normal state in a militarized world

The manifold political, legal and military-technical processes of Heisei militarization also promote an autonomous foreign and security policy beyond the existing US alliance. Japan is likely to become more militarized to meet its own perceived security needs, irrespective of what Washington demands or wants from its erstwhile ally. Like France and Britain, Japan is likely to intervene militarily overseas to protect citizens and crucial economic interests deemed threatened by existing conflicts. The Malacca Straits, Aceh and the Philippines come to mind as possibilities under certain circumstances.

Similarly, the likelihood of Japan moving from latent to actual nuclear armament is now greater than a decade ago. However, such an undesirable outcome of Heisei militarization would not be a reversion to the old stereotype of Japan as addicted to militarism, but rather the common and dangerous behavior of a normal medium-sized state in a militarized world.

Not surprisingly, given the degree of incoherence and even irrationality of US policy under the Bush administration, the acceleration of the process of Heisei militarization by the Bush Doctrine has diminished rather than increased Japanese security. Japan has become technologically implicated in any American conflict with China through missile defense--the Taiwan Straits and Korea leap to mind. And the enthusiastic participation of the Koizumi cabinet in the ongoing war of occupation in Iraq will lead inevitably, not only to the first Japanese deaths in a foreign war since 1945, but also to the first killing of foreigners by Japanese troops in five decades. And with that will come an inevitable re-assessment of Japan's strategic intentions and capacities by all countries, especially its neighbors.

III. Nautilus Invites Your Responses

The Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network invites your responses to this essay. Please send responses to: napsnet-reply@nautilus.org . Responses will be considered for redistribution to the network only if they include the author's name, affiliation, and explicit consent.

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[Return to top](#)
[back to top](#)

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