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# Japanese Domestic Politics and Security Cooperation in Northeast Asia

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## Introduction

In late August 2009, a historic transformation took place in Japanese politics. The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) won a landslide victory in the lower house election, getting 308 seats out of the total of 480, while the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) suffered a catastrophic defeat that reduced its seats from 300 to 119. In the upper house, the DPJ also achieved a plurality, with 109 of the 242 seats. The LDP lags behind at 82 seats. For the first time in Japan's postwar history, the LDP is not biggest party in the National Diet.

The impact of this historic change on Japanese diplomacy in general—and on its Northeast Asia policy in particular—is still uncertain. The LDP's defeat implies the defeat of its conservative foreign policy agenda as well. There appears to be support for the rather liberal tone of DPJ diplomacy, emphasizing the importance of global issues, nontraditional security concerns, neighborly diplomacy, and an East Asian community. The popularity of the DPJ's diplomatic agenda is not entirely surprising if one looks at the postwar history of Japanese diplomacy, which has generally been liberal and internationalist.

But political conservatism in Japanese politics is real as well. It is likely that Japanese diplomacy toward Northeast Asia in general, and North Korea in particular, will continue to be constrained by domestic politics, which are susceptible to the influence of the conservative politicians who are anti-China and anti-North Korea almost by definition.

How can one understand this apparent inconsistency? Why and how has political conservatism influenced Japan's diplomacy in Northeast Asia, despite Japan's tendency toward liberal and internationalist diplomacy? This paper will attempt to solve these puzzles by analyzing the structural problem in the domestic politics of postwar Japanese diplomacy and placing the rise of political conservatism in the overall context of this structural problem. It will then provide a quick overview of the evolution of Japanese security policy after the end of the Cold War and demonstrate its relevance to the structural problem. It will discuss an alternative perspective to Japanese diplomacy in Northeast Asia through the examination of the U.S.-China strategic relationship and Japan's place in Northeast Asia. Finally, it will conclude by assessing the limitations and opportunities of Japanese diplomacy under the new DPJ government and its implications for Northeast Asian security cooperation.

## Structural Problem in Postwar Japanese Diplomacy

Conservative discourse and politics in Japan not only constrain Japanese diplomacy, but complicate the perceptions of countries in the region, particularly in Northeast Asia. For the purposes of this paper, “political conservatism” has five defining characteristics.

- (1) It believes that the [postwar constitution](#), imposed by the winners of World War II, is the source of unjustifiable constraints on Japanese diplomacy, and maintains that a revision of the war-renouncing Article 9 is essential for Japan to engage in “independent” diplomacy as a sovereign state.
- (2) It regards the postwar records of Japanese diplomacy as having been exceedingly constrained by the history of war, and as having lacked “assertiveness.” This belief is most relevant to issues of national security, particularly historical and territorial disputes with China and the Republic of Korea (ROK).
- (3) It wishes to regard the history of the Japanese wars since the Meiji Restoration as not being unique, and tends to equate them with the other wars in world history. It believes that Japan's “official” view on the history of war, including its definition as a war of “aggression,” is too self-degrading and self-destructive.
- (4) It generally lacks any future-oriented strategy, despite its frustrations with the postwar premises of Japanese diplomacy. Its assertiveness comes from its perceived need to fight domestic opponents promoting liberal views of Japanese history. This domestic fight often gets closely intertwined with

Japanese diplomacy toward China and South Korea, because of their important roles in Japanese debates.

- (5) It has mixed views toward the function of the U.S.-Japan alliance in Japanese diplomacy. As far as the ideology of political conservatism is concerned, particularly in relation to the history of war and the postwar constitution, the United States is the primary source of Japan's postwar problems. The conservatives' lack of any future-oriented strategy, however, makes it almost inevitable to come back to the alliance with the United States in dealing with traditional security issues, including Japan's national defense.

The rise of political conservatism in Japan is real, but it will not dictate the future of Japanese diplomacy and security policy.<sup>1</sup> Its influence on the daily management of Japanese diplomacy may complicate both domestic decision-making and foreign perceptions, but not to the extent of a Japan-China geopolitical clash. In short, Japanese diplomacy held hostage to political conservatism would mean that Japan will largely remain a source of confusion in regional politics, but will not become a source of instability or great-power rivalry.

It is quite likely that the rise of political conservatism is only a transitional phenomenon, caused by the demise of the Cold War structure and the collapse of the so-called 1955 regime in Japanese domestic politics (which was characterized by the ideological divide between the Socialist Party and the LDP). Progressive leftism had dominated Japanese politics through many of the postwar years, advancing a rather idealistic diplomatic agenda. The current rise of traditional conservatism is a reactionary phenomena triggered by the demise of the leftist forces. But its assertions and agenda are equally unrealistic, despite being ideologically different. In order to understand this dichotomy, a brief overview of the structural problem embedded in the "Yoshida line of diplomacy" is in order.

The two fundamental premises of postwar Japanese diplomacy are the postwar constitution (most importantly Article 9) and the U.S.-Japan security treaty. Japanese diplomacy conditioned by these principles has been called the Yoshida line, because both were choices made by former prime minister Shigeru Yoshida. Arguably, the Yoshida line still guides Japanese diplomacy, because not a single word of the constitution has been changed since its inception in 1946, or of the U.S.-Japan security treaty since it was revised in 1960. The debate about a possible revision to the constitution has recently ceased to be taboo, and Japan's role under the U.S.-Japan alliance has been expanding. But changes in Japanese diplomacy since the end of the Cold War are still best understood within the parameters of the Yoshida line.

The Yoshida line of foreign policy has had an important structural problem: It is susceptible to challenges of nationalists seeking "autonomy" and "independence." This is because both of the basic premises of the Yoshida line—the postwar constitution and the U.S.-Japan security treaty—essentially deprive Japan of freedom of action and constrain Japanese options in a fundamental way. In a way, it should be natural for any sovereign nation constrained to such an extent to be exposed to the challenges of conservative nationalism of one kind or another. Both of Yoshida's choices, however, were reasonable against the backdrops of the extraordinary war of aggression and the Cold War. Under these circumstances, postwar Japanese nationalists seeking "autonomy" and "independence" were unrealistic.

In fact, postwar Japanese nationalism has often manifested itself as spiritual values or passion rather than articulate diplomacy or strategy. As such, postwar nationalism in Japan should be regarded as a *symptom* of the peculiar structural problem rooted in the Yoshida line, rather than a *solution* to the problem. This was amply demonstrated by the fact that postwar Japanese diplomacy was largely a success—Japan became the second-biggest economic power in the world and a nation committed to international peace. Arguably, it was the Yoshida line that has represented Japan's "postwar realism."<sup>2</sup>

But the structural problem is complex. Nationalism is divided between the ideological left and right, and the cleavage between the two was wrought by none other than Yoshida. In 1946, when Yoshida

accepted the postwar constitution, the Cold War had not yet erupted and the Allied Powers contemplated a postwar order under the principle of international cooperation most typically symbolized by the United Nations. It was expected that Asian peace would be maintained by a democratic China, which had joined the United Nations as one of the five permanent members of the Security Council as the center of Asian stability. The security of Japan, embracing the postwar constitution, was expected to be guaranteed by the United Nations.

When the Cold War started in Europe in 1947, the postwar constitution of Japan, at least from the logic of international politics, became outdated. It was therefore natural for the United States to begin to push for Japan to reconsider the postwar constitution, particularly Article 9. Yoshida, or for that matter the Japanese people in general, however, did not think it was wise to do so. The idea of a security treaty between the United States and Japan then emerged. Yoshida eventually signed the security treaty with the United States in San Francisco in September 1951, right after signing the [San Francisco Peace Treaty](#).

The Yoshida line thus came to embrace the postwar constitution and the U.S.-Japan security treaty, the products of entirely different international environments. As a result, Japanese nationalism seeking “autonomy” got divided between the left and the right. The leftist political forces, believing in the postwar constitution almost as a bible, naturally had negative views toward the history of war and attacked the U.S.-Japan security treaty, and later the Self-Defense Forces. The political forces to the right of the Yoshida line liked neither the postwar constitution nor the U.S.-Japan security treaty out of their urge to seek “independence.” They gradually came to accept the security treaty while harboring the agenda of a possible constitutional revision, as explicitly written in the LDP’s party platform when the party was created in 1955.

Divided nationalism attacked the different premises of the Yoshida line from left and right, but the Yoshida line has proven to be robust. Under these circumstances, changing the constitution has been tantamount to a significant modification of the San Francisco peace regime, which has made constitutional revision virtually impossible. On top of that, the majority of the Japanese public repented the war enough to voluntarily retain the postwar constitution.

Logically speaking, the greatest obstacle to the conservative agenda is the United States. The conservative agenda, however, has never been elevated to the level of an alternative strategy, precisely because a Japanese strategy without the United States is simply unthinkable in the real world. This fundamental twist in the conservative agenda occasionally surfaces when specific issues, such as the “comfort women,” get politicized. But it never evolves into the question of a national strategy because even the most conservative politicians would have to say that the alliance with the United States is indispensable for Japanese diplomacy and security policy. The conservative political forces in Japan are thus fundamentally constrained by the structural problem of postwar Japanese diplomacy. This is precisely why the conservative urge to revise the postwar constitution and reject the victors’ account of World War II has never been expressed as part of any future-oriented strategy.

Here, the roles of China and South Korea are critical in two respects. For one thing, the over-estimation of the importance of conservative forces in Japanese politics fuels them, because naïve anti-China and, albeit to a lesser extent, anti-Korea sentiments are somewhat prevalent among the Japanese public, particularly over historical and territorial issues. Here, it is important to make a distinction between ideological convictions among the conservative forces, on the one hand, and somewhat naïve sentiments among the Japanese public. In a nutshell, many Japanese do not share conservative ideologies (to the contrary, their values are rather modern), but when and if the conservative arguments get closely intertwined with anti-China and anti-Korea sentiments, then it may look as though the majority of the Japanese support the conservative agenda.

Second, China’s and South Korea’s interpretation of Japanese political conservatism is critical, partly in order to control it in the decision-making process of Japan as stated above, and more importantly to define

Japan's regional role properly. The Chinese and South Korean tendency to overestimate and overreact to the conservative trend in Japanese politics could give rise to a misconstrued image of Japan as a traditional great power. This would obviously have important ramifications for the future of a security order in Northeast Asia.

In order to demonstrate this, the following will examine the changes in Japanese security policies since the end of the Cold War.

### **Accounting for the Post–Cold War Changes in Security Policies**

Recent changes in Japan's security policies, which many observers tend to interpret as indicating a more assertive Japan in the style of a traditional great power, can be categorized into two types. The first is a set of attempts to remedy exceedingly minimalist policies (often labeled as one-country-pacifism) of a postwar Japan. In essence, the concept of "Japan as a normal state" was raised in this context, presupposing some sort of "abnormality" in the postwar Japanese defense and security policies. The fundamental significance of the changes, therefore, should be measured against the peculiar reference points of postwar Japanese defense and security policies, which were rather "abnormal" for a sovereign state. When judged in this manner, the continuity—conditioned by the postwar constitution and Japan's alliance with the United States—is more important than the changes.

Former Secretary-General of LDP Ichiro Ozawa raised the concept in the early 1990s, when he was breaking off from LDP to create a new opposition party named the Shinseitou. At the time, the "abnormality" had to do with Japan's inadequate adjustment to the end of the Cold War, in general, and its inability to respond to the Gulf War in 1991, in particular. Japan's awakening to the new security realities in the post-Cold War world has led to a greater participation in international peacekeeping operations, and later the re-affirmation of the U.S.-Japan alliance, as seen below.

The second set of changes has been manifest—particularly since the demise of the 1955 regime caused by the collapse of Socialist forces in Japanese politics—in the vocal protests by Japanese nationalists against the postwar state of Japan's defense and security policies. These political actors are, in essence, voicing sporadic frustration against the majority-consensus of a postwar Japan, without any alternative strategy for Japan's future. They have become a driving force of actual change in a complex decision-making process, though they are still bound by the basic premises of the Yoshida policy line.

The first critical change in Japan's security policies after the Cold War occurred in the domain of international security, where the 1991 Gulf War awoke the government to the new geopolitical reality. The absolute humiliation resulting from Japan's incapacity, other than through "checkbook diplomacy," to contribute to multinational efforts to defeat Iraq was a central driving force behind the enactment of the [International Peace Cooperation Law](#) (PKO Law) in June 1992. Under the PKO law, Japan was able to dispatch its Self-Defense Forces to peacekeeping operations in Cambodia, followed by Zaire, the Golan Heights, and East Timor.<sup>3</sup> As Japan's role in international security expanded, conservative politicians passed laws in the National Diet with amazing ease, which in the previous years would have been nearly impossible. To that extent, changes have been remarkable.

These experiences have influenced the context of political discourse on security matters in Japanese society. It was particularly significant that an overall change in domestic atmosphere lifted long-standing taboos on national and international security, including the debate over the revision of Article 9 of the Japanese postwar constitution. Since then, public opinion in support of the constitutional revision has steadily evolved. One of the opinion polls conducted by the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, for instance, reveals that while 56 percent of respondents favor constitutional revision, 70 percent of those who favor it do so because they believe the present constitution does not clearly justify the existence of the Self-Defense Forces, and 47 percent because they feel that the current constitution cannot adequately deal with new issues such as contributions to multilateral security.<sup>4</sup> Similar results were found in other opinion polls, indicating that

constitutional revision is far from an issue of nationalism for the majority of the Japanese public; rather, it is a question of internationalism.

Underneath this rather healthy evolution of public opinion, however, there remains a serious gap between the typical conservative agenda—which is inseparable from historical revisionism—and the more internationalist majority opinion. In recent years, the gap has been blurred by the rise of animosity toward China over historical issues and toward North Korea over the abduction issue. This animosity complicates Japanese diplomacy as well as foreign perceptions of Japan's role in the region.

The second important change that happened to Japan after the Cold War was the reaffirmation of the U.S.-Japan alliance. The immediate trigger was not a “China threat,” as is often believed, but the Korea crisis of 1994, when the Clinton administration seriously considered surgical strikes against North Korean nuclear facilities.<sup>5</sup> At this juncture, policymakers in Tokyo and Washington realized that they had not prepared any feasible military cooperation in the event of war on the Korean peninsula.<sup>6</sup> The prospect of Japan being a bystander to a Korean attack raised concern about the future of the U.S.-Japan alliance and prompted the bilateral reaffirmation process.

The 1994 crisis in the U.S.-Japan alliance led to the revision of the 1978 [Guidelines for Defense Cooperation](#) between the United States and Japan, which materialized in 1997. The [new guidelines](#) meticulously delineated what Japan constitutionally and legally could and could not do in cooperating with the United States in the event of a regional contingency. This, in essence, tied Japanese security policy to that of the United States, rather than encouraging Japanese strategic independence. U.S.-Japan security interdependence became even more explicit under the Bush administration. While Japan has taken a more active role in international security, the Yoshida line remains robust and has not been fundamentally shaken.

The recent preoccupation by many observers with the rise of Japanese conservatism fails to recognize, let alone appreciate, the liberal and internationalist tradition of postwar Japanese diplomacy. An alternative perspective is badly needed, not necessarily as the basis for an alternative Japanese strategy, but as a tool to analyze Japanese politics properly. This would contribute to the marginalization of Japanese conservatism in Japanese politics as well as to the construction of a new mechanism of Northeast Asian security cooperation.

This paper will now turn to the discussion of an alternative perspective, an interpretation of the DPJ diplomacy, and its implications for Northeast Asian security cooperation.

## **U.S.-China Relations and Japan-ROK Relations**

The structural problem of postwar Japanese diplomacy, in which nationalistic frustrations are bound to rise, is the original cause for confusion in Japan's security profile. In order to properly locate Japan in the Northeast Asian security landscape, it is critical to recognize that the most important strategic relationship in East Asia has been and will continue to be the one between the United States and China, and that Japan is a lesser strategic player. It is therefore a fundamental mistake, both analytically and policy-wise, to treat Japan as one of the “four great powers” in Northeast Asia.

The strategic relationship between the United States and China could be described as the two great powers having “different dreams in the same bed.” Each needs to strategically coexist with the other to tackle its own agenda, but their long-term strategic visions run parallel. The most fundamental differences will continue to exist in their long-term military strategies and their political values. In a way, precisely because their strategic preferences are firm, long-term, and generally parallel, they attempt to avoid confrontation. This state of strategic coexistence is likely to continue in the foreseeable future, and will even be strengthened under the Obama presidency.

In principle, the Bush administration considered China a strategic competitor, but it actually spearheaded efforts to build a relationship of strategic coexistence with China soon after its inauguration.

September 11, 2001, created a new foundation for such a relationship. Under these circumstances, the United States has come to define China as a “stakeholder” in the current and future international system. This was a step forward from the previous discourse on America’s China policy, which tended to be preoccupied with the dichotomy between engagement and containment. Engagement and containment had one thing in common: Both treated China as an outsider of the U.S.-led international system. In contrast, the stakeholder argument now assumes that China is already in the system. Indeed, former U.S. assistant treasury secretary for international affairs Fred Bergsten has proposed the Group of Two (G2), recognizing both the fundamental differences with China and the necessity to work with China in tackling an international agenda.<sup>7</sup>

In a nutshell, the United States and China are “small universes” in their own right, and are not typical nation-states. Against this backdrop, the confusion in the security profile of Japan is an obvious source of complication for the discussion of U.S.-China-Japan trilateral relations. It appears that the dominant Japanese motivation for this trilateralism is the sense that Japan is being left out of the ever increasing ties between the United States and China. For reasons already stated, this assumption is irrelevant, and even detrimental to the otherwise useful dialogue among the three if the agenda is set properly. A pertinent agenda for the trilateral dialogue should include, on top of regional and global economic issues, confidence-building, the role of the U.S.-Japan alliance, and Chinese military transparency.

South Korea has voiced strong concerns over the concept of U.S.-China-Japan trilateralism. The deep-rooted fear for many South Koreans is that this trilateralism may develop into a condominium of the “great powers,” determining the fate of the Korean peninsula at the cost of South Korean interests. Here, Japan has a particular responsibility to ease this traditional Korean concern, and it is important in this endeavor to recognize Japan’s strategic positioning as not equal to the United States or China. From this perspective, it is natural for Japan to approach the U.S.-China-Japan trilateralism from a standpoint closer to South Korea than the United States or China, and Japan should represent the interests of South Korea in the trilateral dialogue.

The misconstrued conventional wisdom on the security profile of Japan is also a source of confusion for U.S. security policy toward East Asia. The issue of “Japan passing” the United States, for instance, does not really exist, because the strategic foundations and rationales of U.S. relations with Japan and China are essentially different in nature. China is a truly independent strategic player, while Japan is not. Japan’s actual security profile, which is still fundamentally constrained by the legacies of the war of aggression, is much closer to that of a middle power, which makes its alliance with the United States the necessary foundation of its security policy.

The same confusion is a sharp reminder that Japan has not fully taken advantage of this lesser strategic profile in advancing its own “autonomous” diplomacy in Northeast Asia and in its relations with South Korea and China. This author would argue that Japan’s diplomatic and long-term strategic interests will be optimized if Japan takes South Korea as a genuinely equal partner, and approaches regional issues by making the Japan-ROK relationship the important strategic reference point.

This point should be obvious if one anticipates scenarios of an eventual unification of the Korean peninsula, which could well be triggered, in one way or another, by a possible regime change or collapse in North Korea. In such an event, or even in the process of such transformation, the United States, China, and Russia will advance their own independent policies with their respective military might as the tool of last resort, regardless of whether they will cooperate or clash. In this process of critical transformation, both Japan and South Korea would have to continue to rely on their alliances with the United States, and the lack of genuine strategic cooperation between Japan and South Korea would seriously complicate U.S. strategy—as well as the national interests and strategies of both Japan and South Korea.

The same analytical perspective should be stressed in looking at the relationship between Japan and China in Northeast Asia and more broadly in East Asia. For many Koreans, for instance, the revival of



geopolitical rivalry between Japan and China over the Korean peninsula seems inevitable, but in all likelihood this is unlikely. This perception is a product of the strong South Korean inclination to equate China and Japan in the discussion of its national strategy, even though this is not a relevant perspective to the future course of Japanese diplomacy.

Belief in a Japan-China rivalry is also rampant in the popular discourse on East Asian regionalism. It is true that there are some elements of competition between Japan and China in their somewhat different approaches to East Asian regionalism. It is a fundamental mistake, however, to see their relationship as a geopolitical rivalry between the “great powers.” China, in a nutshell, is a small universe in its own right, and the China-centered process of East Asian regionalism, which appears inevitable in the foreseeable future, is a common issue of concern, for better or worse, for the rest of the countries in East Asia, including Japan.

Here, the Japanese role is premised on the perceived necessity to work together with other East Asian countries who share the same interests and agenda, as demonstrated by former prime minister Junichiro Koizumi in 2002 when he advanced the concept of an East Asian community. This author would argue that this derives from the common strategic ground of like-minded East Asian countries, which are all geopolitically positioned between the United States and China.

In this broader picture of East Asian regionalism, let alone regionalism in the Northeast Asian context, Japan-ROK cooperation is important in dictating the future of regional cooperation and unification. As the Franco-German reconciliation triggered European unification, Japan-ROK reconciliation, more than Japan-China reconciliation, can have similar results for Northeast Asia.

### **Northeast Asian Security Cooperation and the DPJ Diplomacy**

Arguably, the time has come to deal with the North Korean nuclear problem with a mid- to long-term perspective, envisioning, if only theoretically, the eventual unification of the Korean peninsula. In other words, the so-called solution to the nuclear problem could and indeed should be addressed as a critical phase in the process of an eventual unification of the Korean peninsula. Of course, scenarios of such a process are various, but the implications and possible impact of the measures taken today should be judged and planned with this long-term perspective in mind.

For Japan to do this, the alliance with the United States will continue to be the most important factor, because Japan, unlike the United States, China, and Russia, does not have and is not likely to obtain the tools (not to mention the military means) with which to engage in the unification process as an independent security actor. In this context, the importance of Japan-ROK cooperation cannot be overstressed, as it would benefit South Korea as well. This applies to the ongoing Six Party Talks, and if substantial cooperation between Japan and South Korea gets accelerated, the future will be totally different.

Today, however, that lack of cooperation has given North Korea an opportunity to take advantage of differences between Japan and South Korea, and occasionally between Japan and the United States as well. And here, the abduction issue is critical. The abduction issue is of course important for Japan, or for that matter, for any democracy. If the same thing had happened to the United States, for instance, what would the U.S. response in Congress and the general public be? The problem for Japan is not making the abduction an important issue, but rather is a failure to place the issue in a more comprehensive framework in dealing with North Korea and in the Six Party Talks. This is a typical case of foreign policy being held hostage to political conservatism in domestic politics.

So far, the North Korean nuclear problem has followed a cyclical pattern between slim hope—encouraged by Pyongyang’s cooperation with the IAEA and participation in the Six Party Talks—and much despair—triggered by its repeated decisions to turn its back against international cooperation and accelerate its nuclear programs. Given that no party can afford to risk a war on the Korean peninsula at the moment by pushing North Korea into a corner, the cycle is likely to continue under the Obama presidency.

At least in theory, an untested domain in this stalemate is closer cooperation between Japan and South Korea. Perhaps the issue of Japan-North Korea normalization can be reexamined between Japan and South Korea, rather than leaving it simply to Japan. Also, the extent to which Japan and South Korea can build genuine cooperation in the short term will have a decisive impact on the outcome of the eventual unification of the Korean peninsula. Needless to say, in advancing their cooperation, both Tokyo and Seoul should consult closely with the United States as its allies, as well as with China as its friendly neighbors.

One of the serious obstacles to this potentially constructive partnership between Japan and South Korea is the conservative urge in Japanese politics to seek more “independent” tools of security policy regarding North Korea. The typical case in recent years is the conservative argument to consider the acquisition of some attack capabilities against the North Korean missile sites. This, however, is clearly a case of the conservative urge being trapped in the structural problem of postwar Japanese diplomacy. The argument, therefore, is a symptom of the problem, and should not be regarded as an indication of Japan’s strategic shift.

In retrospect, former prime minister Junichiro Koizumi’s diplomatic agenda and thinking were far more liberal than usually believed, including his attitudes toward Japan’s past history of aggressive wars, despite his repeated visits to the Yasukuni Shrine. More importantly, former prime minister Shinzo Abe’s conservative ideology did not appeal much to the Japanese public, again contrary to conventional wisdom. This was sharply demonstrated by the results of the upper-house election in July 2007, when the LDP under Abe’s leadership gained only 37 seats, while the DPJ won 60 out of the contested 121 seats. In August 2009, a landslide victory of the DPJ over the conservative leadership of the LDP in the lower-house election inflicted once again a serious blow to the conservative trend.

Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama of the DPJ has shifted the focus of East Asian diplomacy toward the establishment of an East Asian community by placing a premium on Japan’s relations with its neighbors, particularly China and South Korea. The virtue of the political leadership lies in its capability to set a long-term goal and sense of direction into the future. In this regard, the DPJ diplomacy has enjoyed a promising start.

The ultimate value in this long-term approach does not lie in, and should not be judged by, whether the goal is achievable in the near future. But it is imperative for near-term policies to be rationalized against a clearly defined long-term goal. This approach is badly needed for regional security cooperation, precisely because the obstacles to such a goal are not easily overcome. Here, having a long-term sense of direction should make policymakers, including bureaucrats, approach these obstacles differently from in previous years, with the intention of managing and eventually removing them rather than becoming hostage to the immediate challenges. The Hatoyama administration appears to understand these principles, and thus might actually succeed in its diplomatic endeavors.

## **Conclusion**

After the nation’s defeat in World War II, Japanese diplomacy was built on remorse over its aggression in Asia. Many in this defeated country embraced the pacifist constitution as the cornerstone of its postwar identity. After 1947, however, unarmed neutrality became an unrealistic option for Japan, and the constitutional renunciation of military potential had already lost its international relevance. Even so, former Prime Minister Yoshida resisted Washington’s pressure to rearm, and the Japanese public supported his efforts. Japan could not ensure its own security without military strength, and so an alliance with the United States was born.

This was the start of the Yoshida line of foreign policy, built on the twin rails of the war-renouncing constitution and the U.S.-Japan security treaty. In adopting this policy, Japan renounced any ambition of winning a place among the major powers through the exercise of force. The policy thus eloquently expressed Japan’s “postwar realism,” built on a determination to step down from the stage of power politics

among major powers. Japan was born anew and embarked on a fresh start with the 1951 signing of the San Francisco Peace Treaty. The treaty served as the foundation for the Yoshida line, which became an integral part of the postwar San Francisco regime that contributed to Japan's postwar peace and prosperity.

The challenges of traditional nationalism and political conservatism against the basic premises of the Yoshida line were somewhat natural phenomena, but they were nothing more than the exemplification of a *symptom* of the peculiar structural problem of postwar Japanese diplomacy. In the same vein, the changes in Japan's security policies after the end of the Cold War represent an extension of the postwar realism of Japan rooted in the Yoshida line, rather than any significant divergence from it.

After the end of the Cold War, the new security environment transformed Japan from an isolationist pacifist into a more internationalist pacifist seeking participation in international security. In this context, the public began to show greater support for a revision of the postwar constitution, particularly the total renunciation of military potential in Article 9. But many countries have been wary of this transformation, and have expressed concern that Japan may be seeking a return to its former major-power status. Among its neighbors, domestic calls within Japan for Japan to become a "normal state" have been equated with a desire to exert its military will on others. Such concerns are a gross distortion of Japan's foreign policy, but the lack of strategic focus in the conservative debate in Japan has aggravated the misunderstandings.

Seemingly revisionist political statements made by conservative Japanese leaders actually reveal nothing other than frustration with the postwar setup. Such frustrations are being vented in increasingly haphazard ways, often out of resentment toward attacks from China and Korea over historical and territorial disputes. Paradoxically, such isolated expressions have gained a degree of public support precisely because of a lack of a strategy on the conservatives' part. Were a desire to revive Japan's prewar aspirations actually articulated clearly as a strategy, the Japanese public would be the first to reject it.

In this context, the new initiatives by the DPJ government have the potential to steer Japanese diplomacy toward multilateral security cooperation in Northeast Asia. Even under the LDP government, Japan's approach to East Asian regionalism yielded positive elements of regional peace and prosperity, particularly in domains where Japan was relatively free from the burdens of history. Although the details have not been pinned down, the Hatoyama administration has ventured in a similar direction for its Northeast Asia policy. The next step should be to construct cooperation in concrete terms by defining the Japan-ROK partnership as the basic strategic reference point.

## Endnotes

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