New Perspectives on Japan from the U.S.-Japan Network for the Future
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The U.S.-Japan Network for the Future

The U.S.-Japan Network for the Future was initiated in 2009 to identify and support American professionals who demonstrate an interest in and potential for becoming Japan specialists and policy experts. More information about the program is available on the Foundation’s website: http://mansfieldfdn.org/program/dialogues/u-s-japan-network-for-the-future/.

The Maureen and Mike Mansfield Foundation

The Maureen and Mike Mansfield Foundation is a 501(c)3 organization that promotes understanding and cooperation in U.S.-Asia relations. The Foundation was established in 1983 to honor Mike Mansfield (1903–2001), a revered public servant, statesman and diplomat who played a pivotal role in many of the key domestic and international issues of the 20th century as U.S. congressman from Montana, Senate majority leader and finally as U.S. ambassador to Japan. Maureen and Mike Mansfield’s values, ideals and vision for U.S.-Asia relations continue through the Foundation’s exchanges, dialogues, research and educational programs, which create networks among U.S. and Asian leaders, explore the underlying issues influencing public policies, and increase awareness about the nations and peoples of Asia. The Foundation has offices in Washington, D.C.; Tokyo, Japan; and Missoula, Montana.
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Foreword

Many Americans knowledgeable about world affairs have been disappointed that most of the candidates seeking their respective party’s nomination to campaign for the presidency have not displayed the understanding of developments around the world that we can be proud of. But fortunately those who are elected president of the United States can draw on knowledgeable bureaucrats and knowledgeable scholars to devise policies that are better-grounded than some of the simplified emotional appeals candidates made during the long campaign season. Fortunately, also, much of the health of our nation rests on civil society and the strength of our civil society in turn rests on a strong system of higher education.

Since the Japanese economic bubble burst twenty-five years ago, Americans are no longer frightened of Japan’s economic success and the interest among U.S. investors in Japanese stocks has declined. But American higher education courses on Japan have continued to attract students. And fortunately our nation has actually increased the number of knowledgeable specialists studying, teaching, and writing about Japan. Our language training has improved and the younger generation of Japan specialists in general is more comfortable using the Japanese language than our older generation. They have a greater depth of studies to rely on as they develop their knowledge of Japan.

In American universities the marvels of new technology which makes information quickly available and enables mathematical analysis has attracted many young scholars. Those of us who believe in the importance of area studies, of understanding a nation’s history and culture, are under pressure from academic specialists who believe that knowledge is not advanced by area knowledge but by the manipulation of quantitative materials and by some general theories which do not take account of culture and history. Most of us American educators believe that many scholars should be allowed to pursue their own intellectual interests and that our society and global society is enriched by the study of many different topics, no matter how obscure and unrelated to current issues.

But some of us believe that it is vital for our nation to train able people who understand other cultures and who can help us deepen our understanding of policy-relevant issues. Fortunately we have enjoyed the support of our universities and of foundations who share our view. Since 2009, the Mansfield Foundation has been building a program to train a new network of young people who are fluent in the Japanese language, knowledgeable about Japanese society and civilization,
and are performing policy-relevant academic work important for the future of Japan, the United States and the rest of the world. Despite the declining interest in the Japanese economy and a growing emphasis on the hard sciences, the number of knowledgeable Japan experts has actually increased, not decreased, since the Japanese economic miracle came to a devastating inflection point a quarter of a century ago. This reflects the efforts of groups like the Mansfield Foundation, aided by an unfailing commitment from academic pioneers.

As part of our program to train a cohort of new Network Fellows over the course of two years, we select outstanding young scholars who already have obtained a PhD or its equivalent in experience. We bring these individuals together for a week in Washington D.C., where they meet with officials and researchers who are specialists on Japan. We also escort them for a week-long trip to Japan to meet with Japanese politicians, scholars, and others who talk about current issues. It has been an honor and pleasure for us senior advisors—Susan Pharr, Len Schopra, Sheila Smith, myself, and previously Mike Green—to get to know this group of talented young people and to do what we can to help guide them in their quest for understanding and help provide opportunities for them to develop. We are proud of what they have become and what they are accomplishing. They have been trained in Japan and America’s largest academic institutions which have the resources for a rounded study of Japanese society and history. But they are now working at universities throughout our country, at think tanks, at foundations. The fellows who have developed through this program have also formed a strong informal network to sustain each other and to make the best of their training.

We require that each cohort of fellows write a short paper on some policy issue facing Japan, and by connection the U.S.-Japan alliance. Ideally, non-specialists should be able to read and to understand these papers. We proudly present here the policy papers of our third cohort, which reflect the broad diversity of interests Japan and the United States share.

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For too long Japan’s corporate culture has prioritized face time, long working hours, and disregard for the private lives of employees, including required transfers to company branches far from home. These practices reduce pressures for employees to complete their work efficiently, harm family bonding, elevate stress levels, and contribute to a profound lack of sleep. Is it any wonder that Japanese firms have stubbornly low productivity rates? Japanese companies have resisted stronger regulation, so what Prime Minister Shinzo Abe needs to do is meet them on their own turf—to brand a campaign of “change ambassadors” to dispatch to firms on a competitive application basis, learn their challenges, and help them find solutions to boost productivity. With an eye toward the bottom line, Japanese firms might even jump at a chance for a “Cool Japan” business makeover.

The problem of Japan’s long working hours affects women most acutely. Women know that if they have children and take advantage of the government’s increasingly generous parental leave policies, they will return to long hours in the workplace, but now with the added burden of childcare. Women know that if they reduce their work hours on a more permanent basis, companies may reduce their salaries and restrict opportunities for promotion. Yet if they persevere in long work hours, they will be judged against the same performance standards as male colleagues with full-time housewives to shoulder housework and caregiving while they devote their “all” to the firm. How could it be surprising that 60 percent of Japanese women still quit their jobs by the time they have their first child?

The whole system of long working hours is stacked against women with children, but male employees and childless women face punishing work expectations as well. About 20 percent of workers in their late 20s through early 40s work over sixty
hours a week. They scarcely have enough time to meet potential marriage partners, be involved in the community, or learn new skills. If men marry and have children, they know that if they take their paid vacation days or reduce working hours, bosses won't hire replacements and colleagues will resent the extra work.

The Japanese government has tried a mixture of soft regulation, financial incentives, and moral suasion to reduce working hours and promote family-friendly workplaces. Large companies are required to draft non-binding action plans for family-friendly reforms. The Labor Ministry offers modest financial incentives for companies that show family-friendly results. Prime Minister Abe presides over award ceremonies to recognize corporations with superior family-friendly track records. Yet change seems elusive, and companies game the system. They know that if one man anywhere in the company takes a single day of parental leave, they will be eligible for designation as a family-friendly company.

In theory, laws could be changed to cap limits on work hours at lower levels or to force companies to pay more for overtime. But Japanese companies have simply worked around this kind of regulation in the past by reducing base salary pay or bonuses. Japan's wage delivery system makes legal regulation less effective than in other countries. And even Japan's labor unions have not pushed back much against the status quo because so many employees depend on overtime wages.

Prime Minister Abe has used his personal diplomacy to promote women's advancement, but now is the time for him to use his clout to send entire teams of change ambassadors to...learn their challenges, and help them find solutions to boost productivity. Japanese companies have resisted stronger regulation, so what Prime Minister Shinzo Abe needs to do is meet them on their own turf—to brand a campaign of “change ambassadors” to...learn their challenges, and help them find solutions to boost productivity.
them about their own work-life balance. What are their hopes and dreams for their children and grandchildren, and how much time do they spend with them? What do they plan to do in retirement, and are they cultivating a life outside of work to prepare themselves? The initiative would be intrusive, but no more so than these companies are in the private lives of their employees through unpaid overtime service obligations.

This solution need not preclude other important measures to reduce working hours. More resources could be invested in government labor offices to inspect workplaces for compliance with existing work hour legislation, and stronger penalties could be given to companies for violations. The national civil service could work to reduce its own grueling hours. But when large-scale cultural change is needed, falling back on established routines and institutions will not be enough. Part of the idea for this proposal is simply to spur momentum for change through retail politicking at the firm level.

Japan’s corporate culture of long working hours harms employee productivity, health, and opportunities for women’s advancement. But Japan’s challenges are hardly unique. The whole advanced industrial world is ready for Japanese “change ambassadors” to pioneer new strategies for productive and innovative work styles that could benefit us all—that would be pretty cool.

Liv Coleman
Building a Constitutional and Security Policy Consensus in Post-Abe Japan

Shinju Fujihira

On September 19, 2015, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s government passed a series of security-related bills after months of raucous parliamentary debates and public demonstrations. While the new laws allowing the exercise of collective self-defense are significant, they are unlikely to lead to a significant increase in Japan’s overseas deployment of troops, let alone use of force. Nonetheless, major newspapers’ polls at the time indicated that around 80 percent of the public felt the parliamentary deliberation and government’s explanations were inadequate, while over 50 percent were opposed and only one-third supported the new laws.¹ Why did the Abe government pass these laws while confronting significant public opposition and skepticism? And can Japan build a consensus on constitutional and security issues in the long run?

Three factors—cultural, institutional, and personal—explain Abe’s ability to enact security laws swiftly and his inability to persuade a large segment of the public. First, Abe and his supporters underestimated the cultural and normative context of Japan’s security policymaking. As Peter Katzenstein argued two decades ago, postwar Japan has developed strong social and legal norms against the state’s use of force both at home and abroad.² His key insight about norms—that the social norm of pacifism is institutionalized in the legal (Article 9, which renounces war)—explains why the opposition to these new laws has persisted after their passage.

Proponents of security legislation—the ruling coalition, foreign and defense ministry officials, scholars specializing in international security, and right-leaning newspapers (such as Yomiuri, Nikkei, and Sankei)—emphasized the changing balance of power and new security threats in the world, but turned silent when asked about the laws’ constitutionality. Opponents—scholars specializing in constitutional
law, left-leaning newspapers (such as Asahi, Chunichi, and Mainichi), and groups such as Save Constitutional Democracy Japan 2014, SEALDs (Student Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy-s), and Association of Scholars Opposed to the Security-related Laws—made a strong case that the new laws were unconstitutional, but showed less interest in addressing new security threats. The contentious debate between the proponents and opponents exposed the enduring power of Japan’s social and legal norms against the state’s use of force.

Second, the fact that Abe and his supporters could largely ignore the opposition revealed how Japan’s democratic institutions work. In Arend Liphart’s categorization, Japanese democracy over the last two decades has moved decidedly from a consensus to a majoritarian model. Majoritarianism is characterized by centralization of power, with single-member electoral districts, two-party system, one-party government, and dominance of the executive (Prime Minister and the cabinet). Majoritarian politics is often contentious and confrontational; in the United Kingdom, the strong executive is often criticized as “elective dictatorship.” The legislative majority, which is often manufactured by around 40 percent of the total popular vote, can choose to exclude the opposition both within and outside the legislature. The executive and the ruling party confront no challenges to their power, unless there is a major revolt from the backbenchers within their own party.

A strong executive in a majoritarian polity describes the Abe government’s position, with one caveat. In the Japanese case, the electoral reform in 1994, which introduced the single-member districts in the House of Representatives (Lower House) election, has not led to a two-party system. Since the end of the Democratic Party of Japan’s (DPJ) government in 2009–12, voters have not seen a credible center-left party that could unseat the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and its coalition partner Komeito. In the course of parliamentary debates, Abe and his cabinet ministers stuck mostly to describing the necessity of the proposed legislation, and often seemed uninterested in having a genuine debate about their constitutionality and security consequences. Majoritarian institutions gave the Abe government the necessary votes to pass the new laws, even though it failed to address the public’s concerns.

Finally, Abe’s personal background added fuel to the conflict between the new legislation’s proponents and opponents. Abe is a political star of the right-wing, and he expressed his revisionist views—both for wartime history and the postwar Constitution—unapologetically in many books and interviews. In his 2006 best-seller, Toward a Beautiful Country [Utsukushii kuni e], he championed his cause to “break away from the postwar regime,” criticized the decisions of the Tokyo War
Crimes Tribunal, and advocated a revision of the 1947 Constitution as his ultimate political purpose. Given Abe’s political convictions, he has become the enemy number one for those who opposed the security legislation. The demonstrators against the security laws not only held placards that read, “War Legislation [Senso hoan],” but also “Never Forgive Abe-Style Politics [Abe seiji wo yurusanai].” The opposition expressed their outrage and disdain directly at Abe, because for them he represented the revisionist views that they found absolutely unacceptable.

Given this combination of cultural, institutional, and personal factors, the short-term prospects for forging a constitutional and security policy consensus are grim. In January, Abe expressed his goal of attaining the two-thirds coalition majority in the House of Councillors (Upper House) that would enable him to revise the Constitution. His opponents recently organized the Citizen Alliance for Peace and Constitutionalism [Shimin rengo], which aims to repeal the security laws and unite the opposition parties against the LDP-led coalition in the upcoming House of Councillors election. These dynamics repeat the pattern of 2015, where pacifist and constitutional norms, majoritarianism, and Abe himself divided Japan.

Now is the right time to think about ways to build a constitutional and security policy consensus in post-Abe Japan. Most fundamentally, the proponents must acknowledge the problems associated with the security laws’ unconstitutionality and the public’s demand for more deliberation and explanation. At the same time, the opponents must be open to having a serious debate regarding Japan’s security situation, including the changing balance of power, maritime disputes in the East and South China Seas, North Korea’s missile and nuclear programs, radical Islamist terrorism, and new security threats including those in cyber and space.

One area of discussion could be Sections 1 and 2 of Article 9. As Shinichi Kitaoka has argued, Section 1 (which renounces war) must be preserved, but Section 2 (which says Japan cannot maintain armed forces) no longer represents reality. A focused discussion on amending Section 2 of Article 9 could be one way to bring the proponents and opponents together, and to have a productive constitutional and defense discussion.

In the institutional realm, Abe’s successors must acknowledge that his majoritarian tactics were a mistake, and must resist the temptations of majoritarian power. Future leaders must understand that the most important role of a political leader is to forge a consensus that includes the opposition, especially on issues as consequential as constitutional revision and national security. The future leaders could, for example, offer to meet frequently with opposition activists, discuss their differences,
and explore areas where each side might find common ground. And they must demonstrate that they are willing to compromise, and if necessary, delay passage of consequential laws. Ultimately, Japan needs an alternative center-left party, which can contend against the LDP and alternate in power.

Finally, Abe’s experiences demonstrate clearly that post-Abe Japan needs political leaders who are ideologically centrist, and not committed to constitutional and historical revisionism. Abe was able to pass the security laws, but he was not the prime minister who could forge a national consensus on constitutional and defense issues. With evidence of Japanese elites’ shift toward the right, it will become ever more important for the LDP and other parties to develop leaders whose careers are not defined by their ideological convictions. Japanese democracy is in desperate need of leaders who are committed to defining Japan’s national interests by forging a political consensus on constitutional and national security questions.

Chapter Endnotes

1. These are averages of polling numbers from the Asahi, Kyodo, Mainichi, Nikkei, Sankei, and Yomiuri newspapers.


3. For a good discussion of these opposition groups, see Aki Okuda, Rintaro Kuramochi, and Tetsuro Fukuyama, 2015-nen anpo, kokkai no uchi to soto de: Minshu shugi wo yarinaosu (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2015).


The headlines coming from Okinawa are, as usual, seemingly negative for the U.S.-Japan alliance. Governor Takeshi Onaga, supported by his broad-based coalition of “All-Okinawa” supporters, has challenged the legality of the proposed Futenma Replacement Facility in Henoko, in northern Okinawa, to replace Marine Corps Air Station Futenma, located in a densely populated area in southern Okinawa. He is instead seeking to close down Futenma without replacing it. The mayor of Nago City, which includes the Henoko area, also supports this effort. The reliably left of center Okinawan local media are highlighting the governor’s challenge as a way for Okinawa to: stand up to the conservative administration of Prime Minister Abe in Tokyo, reduce the footprint of U.S. bases, and “strengthen democracy” in Japan. These challenges would appear to be extremely troublesome for alliance managers in both Japan and the United States, who pay great attention to the sustainability of U.S. forces on Okinawa given its strategic importance for the Western Pacific.

However, a more nuanced analysis shows that there is growing support on Okinawa for the U.S.-Japan alliance in general—and for at least some U.S. military presence in the prefecture. There are several reasons for this:

- Governor Onaga, while vehemently against the new facility, remains fully supportive of the alliance with the United States and of a U.S. military presence in Okinawa.

- Okinawans share the rest of Japan’s perception of a rising China threat.

- There is growing support for a stronger military presence among the more conservative, less pacifist outer Okinawan islands.

*The views expressed here are the author’s own and do not represent the U.S. Department of State nor the U.S. government.*
Local regard for the United States and its troops is improving.

Opposition to the central government in Tokyo does not necessarily equal opposition to the U.S. military.

Tokyo, at least recently, has sought to be more considerate and respectful in its dealings with Okinawa.

The Governor Sits on the Fence
Governor Onaga has dragged the anti-base left towards the middle. As the unquestioned leader of Okinawa’s dominant political grouping, his support for the bilateral alliance equates to widespread prefectural support at the political level for at least some U.S. military presence. He began his political career as a member of Japan’s dominant Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), eventually becoming the head of Okinawa’s prefectural party while serving as the conservative, pro-Henoko site mayor of Naha, the prefectural capital. He seized the political opportunity to come out against the Henoko site for the Futenma base in a mostly successful effort to unite the entire island politically—from anti-base leftists to moderates to disillusioned conservatives like himself—under the banner of an “all-Okinawa identity.” This movement opposes the shift of Futenma to the Henoko site because of its environmental impact and because it perpetuates Okinawa’s disproportionate share of U.S. bases. (Okinawa comprises just 0.6 percent of Japan’s land, but claims to contain 75 percent of all U.S.-only military bases.) He won election as governor in late 2014, but even though he now stands in stark opposition to the national LDP on the controversial Henoko site issue, he remains in favor of the U.S. military presence, unlike past reformist governors and leftist leaders who have sought the removal of all U.S. forces from Okinawa.

The Rising China Threat
The sense of a threat from a rising China is keener in mainland Japan than in the outlying island prefecture, but Okinawa also is concerned over Beijing’s rapidly growing economic, diplomatic, and military power. Governor Onaga and Okinawa as a whole appreciate and welcome Chinese tourism, investment, and trade, and Okinawa remains culturally and historically more open to China than the rest of Japan, but rising Chinese influence is generating unease. According to a December 2013 public opinion poll, 76 percent of Okinawans felt China’s military posed a “threat” to Japan, and 89 percent viewed China unfavorably. Local leaders have expressed discomfort with Chinese land purchases as well as a more general sense that some local businesses are “too close” to China’s government. Distrust of Beijing
spiked in May 2013, when China’s government-run media published several articles indicating that Okinawa should be independent—or even, some went so far to add, part of China. Even the two major newspapers in Okinawa, both reliably leftist and anti-U.S., criticized these articles, and local support for independence remains minimal, limited to a fringe element. More broadly, the governor and other local leaders who oppose the Henoko site have stated that, given China’s rise, the presence of the U.S. military on Okinawa is welcome.

**Conservative Outer Islands**

Okinawa’s outer islands are particularly cognizant of the China threat. Being more remote from the mainland and the island of Okinawa itself, they perceive a much more imminent menace from the rapid rise of Chinese maritime and aerial activities in the East China Sea. The disputed Senkaku islands officially are administered by Ishigaki island, where residents have repeatedly made clear their support for the alliance as a way to strongly defend Japan’s claims. A local newspaper openly supports both a greater Japanese as well as U.S. military presence on the island. Likewise, the 1500 voters on tiny Yonaguni island approved a non-binding referendum in favor of a Japanese base in February 2015. More pragmatically, these outlying islands, suffering from depopulation and economic decline, believe that a stronger alliance armed force presence—either U.S. or Japanese—will reverse depopulation and bring more economic activity. And, they are dismissive of Governor Onaga’s efforts to create an “all-Okinawa” identity; they speak different dialects and in many ways share a different culture than the Okinawan one Governor Onaga is promoting back in Naha.

**Improved Sentiment Toward U.S. Bases**

Crimes by U.S. troops on Okinawa have declined, and relations between the bases and the local towns on a people-to-people level are generally seen as healthy. An Okinawa Prefecture Government poll in late 2014 found that 59 percent of Okinawans agree that the alliance with the U.S. contributes to Japan’s peace and security. Forty-six percent of those surveyed had a “bad” or “somewhat bad” impression of U.S. forces—a high number, but nowhere near the overwhelming majority that anti-base activists often claim exists. A large proportion of the protestors against moving Futenma to Henoko are actually from mainland Japan, and some 70 percent of the contributions to the governor’s anti-Henoko site fund also comes from the rest of Japan, highlighting how anti-Abe forces use Okinawa as a tool to attack his policies. Around the bases, anti-American sentiment is weak, due at least partly to the money and business that comes from U.S. forces but also due
to Okinawans’ traditional hospitality and welcoming spirit—a belief in diversity and openness to foreigners that many identify as a major historical and cultural difference between Okinawans and the rest of Japan.

Tokyo's the Problem, Not Washington

Okinawa’s main conflict is not with the United States, but rather with Tokyo, where differences are far more meaningful and historically, politically, economically, and culturally relevant. Okinawa remains Japan’s poorest prefecture, and there is a real sense of alienation and difference, even discrimination, from Tokyo. Political results often stand in stark contrast to the rest of Japan, most recently in the December 2014 Diet elections, when the ruling LDP lost all four constituencies in Okinawa even as it won an overwhelming landslide in Japan as a whole. While the rest of Japan has moved to the right politically, favoring more market reform and a more active security posture, Okinawa remains more pacifist, more liberal, and more egalitarian. Given this background, Tokyo has recently tried to be more sophisticated and nuanced in its handling of Okinawa. In October 2015, in a departure from past practice, Prime Minister Abe appointed a local politician as Minister of State for Okinawan Affairs in an attempt to pay homage to Okinawa’s political needs. Tokyo’s efforts promoting land returns from U.S. military bases, financing the move of U.S. Marines to facilities in Guam, and seeking to move military training away from Okinawa to elsewhere in Japan are all signs it is trying to boost local support for existing U.S. bases and the new Henoko site for Futenma.

Conclusion

For Tokyo, Japanese foreign and security policy increasingly focuses on Beijing; Okinawa is thus playing a more important role, given its key strategic location and proximity to China. Tensions in Henoko will undoubtedly continue, and likely even intensify, as the legal struggle over the plan to move Futenma plays out, pitting Governor Onaga against Prime Minister Abe. But in the broader sense, very few Okinawans currently seek to force out U.S. bases totally and permanently. Even under the current governor, Okinawans themselves back the alliance and a U.S. military presence—even if they would prefer a far more limited one. ■
New Yorkers may have been in the know long before Washington policymakers caught on: that Japan is not coming back as a global power, because it never went away in the first place. But as expectations for a reinvigorated Tokyo continue to rise from the U.S. political leadership, questions about whether it can sustain its economic as well as diplomatic momentum remain. One of the biggest challenges facing the government of Shinzo Abe will be whether it can continue to leverage its political success and think outside of the box to address old problems from new angles.

For many international investors, Japan never lost its allure as the third-largest economy in the world, as witnessed by the resilience of so-called Japan desks at top investment banks and hedge funds, even as the number of those studying Japanese language and politics faltered over the past two decades. Abe’s single biggest achievement in his second attempt as prime minister has been to provide the political stability needed as a foundation for the country’s intrinsic economic strength. That solid grounding, in turn, has caused the administration to redefine Japan’s economic priorities and secure the support needed to move forward with reform efforts that were postponed over the politically tumultuous years of the previous decade.

Certainly, the decision to become a member of the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement has been prescient, with Japan fully acknowledging that being part of the world’s most ambitious trade deal to date would not only make economic, but equally importantly, strategic sense in positioning Japan as a regional power in the future. But simply joining the TPP in and of itself is not enough, especially since the most striking aspect of the TPP is not about lowering tariffs, but creating new
rules and establishing a new economic alliance in the region in which Japan would continue to play a key role. That, however, would require Japan to reinvent itself.

Japan actually has a tradition of some of its most charismatic leaders pushing through fundamental change, especially in dealing with state-owned enterprises (SOEs).

The privatization of the postal system a decade ago by Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, for instance, was regarded as a challenge against the establishment itself as it led to the slashing of government jobs on the one hand, and encouraging private investment and enterprise on the other. Twenty years before that, Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone introduced bills to privatize some of the country's biggest SOEs, including telecommunications behemoth Nippon Telegraph and Telephone and the railway networks, to make the companies more efficient and to reduce the government's debt burdens in spite of the political backlash. Abe, meanwhile, has leveraged his strong political standing to take on one of the biggest obstacles to reinvigorating Japan's economic engine, despite public opposition. Seen as sacrosanct until recently, agriculture is no longer an industry that must be protected from foreign competition at all costs. In fact, Abe has not only agreed to lift certain measures to protect the country's agricultural system, but is actually turning that equation on its head and actively promoting Japan to become a future export giant of agricultural goods. Just as the United States quickly shifted from being a net importer of energy to a global supplier of natural resources, thanks to the technology of hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, Japan in Abe's mind can become an agricultural giant. His vision to promote Japan as an agricultural exporter is nothing short of revolutionary. It is, in effect, a rebranding of the "Made in Japan" stamp: to produce high-quality goods that would be sought after by consumers worldwide. Except now, it would not just be technology-driven consumer products, it would be producing agricultural products, from perfectly grown strawberries to organic rice, that are safe, beautiful, and delicious for a discerning global market.

The question is whether the Abe government has the vision to take Japan's disadvantages and use its political strength to turn them on their head by creating opportunities. History has proven that Japan can excel in turning lemons into lemonade, not least in its ability to become a global leader in energy efficiency out of sheer necessity.

Can, for instance, the race to meet the needs of a rapidly aging society lead to greater business opportunities and redefine Japan's economic base? Already, there are companies that are not only developing products to help elderly people age in place, but also producing tools to help them to overcome their frailties and

Abe's single biggest achievement in his second attempt as prime minister has been to provide the political stability needed as a foundation for the country's intrinsic economic strength.
continue being active. Robotics too could be part of the solution to address the immediate demographic challenge as well as an area where strategic investments could dramatically change Japan’s industrial future. There is no doubt that Japan’s past formula for growth can no longer make the country competitive, but it is not enough to identify the problems, especially as issues such as limited natural resources and greying societies are shared across borders. Japan’s growth potential lies in being able to provide solutions to those challenges, and Abe currently has the political backing to propose strategies that would prioritize the development of potential industries. Given the limitations of monetary policy, and concerns about the consequences of negative interest rates and the downside risks of raising the consumption tax rate still further, the urgency to develop forward-looking investment opportunities is greater than ever.

Similarly, while Abe’s efforts to highlight the need for greater female participation has led to a considerable shift in the Japanese mindset about working women, more can be done to highlight the opportunities such moves would bring. This is especially true in a globalized market where much of the growth comes from the service sector and the key to nurturing new ideas is to have a diverse workforce that pulls talent beyond the traditional pool of college-graduate men in their 20s to 50s.

The true strength of the Japanese economy will be determined by the government’s ability not only to identify the roadblocks to growth, but to offer policy prescriptions to meet those challenges. Clearly, there is public hunger for sweeping change, and a consensus that the country cannot remain internationally competitive unless sweeping reforms are undertaken. Unlike in the United States, for instance, where opposition to TPP and more broadly, to a globalized world, continues to grow, Japanese policymakers and voters alike are aware that Japan needs to be even more integrated into international markets. Nearly 60 percent of voters support Japan’s entry into the TPP. Indeed, TPP debates within Japan have not only led to discussions about the mega-trade deal itself, but have also been opportunities for broader dialogues about how to ensure the growth of an economic base that would allow Japan to compete successfully in the 21st century.

Having outlined the economic challenges of the nation soon after assuming power for the second time, Abe has yet to flesh out a longer-term growth strategy, despite the public’s eagerness to embrace change. Enabling more older workers to contribute to that change, tapping into the knowledge of Japanese women, and redefining challenges as opportunities for growth are clearly key to the success of Japan’s future economic success.
2015 was a year of resilience for Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Consider what he faced: a contentious debate over national security reforms, widespread opposition to nuclear reactor restarts, a pension record hack that played on public privacy fears, and an economy struggling to gain momentum. Despite these challenges, Abe was reelected in September 2015 to a second term as president of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), and thus able to continue his prime ministership, without facing a single challenger. And he entered his fourth year in office with cabinet approval ratings just shy of 50 percent.

It is increasingly clear that Abe is the most powerful prime minister that Japan has seen in decades, if not ever. First, Abe has not only benefited from two decades of reform to bolster the power of the prime minister’s office, cabinet secretariat and other executive institutions, he has taken steps to further enhance executive institutions. For example, in 2013, the Diet approved the creation of a national security council (NSC), which, while still evolving, has nevertheless solidified the Kantei’s leadership role in foreign and defense policymaking. More significantly, in 2014 the administration created the Cabinet Personnel Bureau (CPB), which formally granted the Kantei authority for appointing roughly 600 officials at the deputy director-general level and above at the expense of ministries and their allies in the LDP. As with the NSC, it is too early to measure the impact of the CPB, but Abe’s ability to create the bureau after years of failed attempts by proponents of administrative reform suggests that the prime minister has realized a meaningful shift in the executive’s control of the bureaucracy.

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However, what sets Abe apart is not his willingness to embrace and extend the institutional power of the premiership—former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, in particular, was determined to expand the powers of the office—but rather that he faces a political landscape that has created a unique opportunity for a prime minister to use these expanded powers.

The LDP, whose sixty-year history has been characterized by infighting among factions and party leaders, has been either unwilling or unable to challenge Abe’s policy initiatives. Unlike Koizumi, who had to contend with factions, policy “tribes,” and ambitious contenders for the leadership, Abe inherited a party whose autonomous institutions had atrophied considerably since his first tenure as prime minister in 2006–2007. As a result, the ability of LDP backbenchers to influence the policy-making process has declined considerably. To some extent, Abe has also benefited from a rightward shift within the LDP, reducing friction between the prime minister and his own party on policy issues. Where policy disputes have existed, Abe has adeptly used personnel decisions to neutralize or manage disagreements.

He has also benefited from a lack of credible challengers for the party presidency. A recent poll of LDP supporters by newspaper Asahi Shimbun shows just how shallow the party’s bench is. Asked who they wanted to be the next party leader, 52 percent could not say. Shigeru Ishiba, whom Abe defeated for the LDP presidency in 2012, was the only politician with double-digit support at 18 percent. Abe himself actually tied for second at 7 percent with Shinjiro Koizumi, the son of former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi. Seiko Noda, the only LDP member who considered running against Abe in September, polled only 1 percent.

What’s more, Abe’s political opposition continues to spend more time fighting among themselves than challenging the government. Despite being on the right side of public opinion on Abe’s controversial national security legislation, opposition parties such as the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) and the Japan Innovation Party (JIP) were unable to translate their resistance into wider public support.

Although the DPJ and JIP have agreed to merge and form a new party whose name literally translates to the Democratic Innovation Party but which will be called the Democratic Party (DP)—and the DP is cementing cooperation with the Japanese Communist Party (JCP)—the opposition is still struggling to agree on how best to oppose the Abe administration and faces an uphill battle to attract voters in the upcoming Upper House election in mid-2016 or in the rumored Lower House snap election that could accompany it.
The result is that Abe has been presented with a unique opportunity to introduce significant policy change: the prime minister’s institutional power is as strong as it has ever been, and the institutional sources of resistance within the political system are historically weak.

Nevertheless, it is still difficult to say what Abe’s enduring achievements will be. He is unlikely to successfully revise the Article 9 “peace clause” of the Japanese Constitution, his longstanding political dream, both because of the difficulties to passing constitutional amendments through the Diet and public opposition to revision.

And while “Abenomics” may have helped to cement Abe’s comeback, each of its three arrows suffered significant setbacks in 2015. Inflation has slowed again, which has raised questions about the Bank of Japan’s ability to reach its 2 percent target rate. Fiscal policy is no longer expansionary, but the government has struggled to articulate how it will achieve its goal of a primary surplus by the 2020 financial year. Although the ‘third arrow’ has had some successes—a new corporate governance code and Japan’s participation in the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement—progress in other areas, most notably labour market reform, has been lacking.

Even the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games, which should have been an obvious piece of Abe’s legacy, faced a setback in 2015 due to cost overruns for the Olympic stadium, resulting in the original plans being scrapped.

But time may still be on Abe’s side. With no sign that the opposition parties will win the public’s trust anytime soon and the LDP firmly united behind the prime minister, his position is secure. Whether or not Abe calls a snap election, following the 2016 Upper House elections he will have two election-free years until the end of his term as LDP president. Those two years could be Abe’s last chance to cement a legacy as a transformative leader.

What sets Abe apart is not his willingness to embrace and extend the institutional power of the premiership...but rather that he faces a political landscape that has created a unique opportunity for a prime minister to use these expanded powers.
Going by statistical measures, Japan is not a particularly religious place.

In a 2008 survey of Japanese people’s religious attitudes conducted by the popular daily newspaper Yomiuri shinbun, only 26.1 percent of respondents reported that they “believed in religion” while 71.9 percent asserted that they did not. Religiosity in Japan appears almost as an inversion of American religious sentiments. The Pew Research Center’s 2014 Religious Landscape Survey calculated that 76.5% of Americans self-identified as religious—a full 70.4 percent as Christian—and only 22.8 percent self-identified as religious “nones.” People in Japan are particularly nervous about religious organizations. Fewer than 10 percent of Japanese respondents to the 2010 World Values Survey claimed to trust religious groups, placing Japan at the lowest level of trust in religions of all surveyed nations—even lower than respondents in the officially atheist People’s Republic of China.

Japanese disavowals of religious belief are potentially misleading. In the same Yomiuri shinbun survey, almost three out of four respondents visited a Shinto shrine or Buddhist temple at the New Year, almost half affirmed that they did not believe that the Japanese people’s religious spirit was weak, and a similar number claimed that they wanted a religious funeral ceremony when they died. Nonetheless, if you ask people in Japan “do you have religious faith?” the answer is likely to be an emphatic “no.”

It may therefore come as a surprise to note the profound extent to which religion undergirds politics in Japan today. Two religious forces, bitterly opposed to one
another, play important roles in shaping policy and electioneering within the governing coalition of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and Komeito Party.

For Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, one of postwar Japan’s most effective Japanese national leaders, Shinto has emerged as a prime motivator. His aims are articulated and advanced by a network of politicians, scholars, heads of corporations, and clergy affiliated with Shinto, literally “the way of the gods,” the indigenous religious tradition that the prewar state formulated as State Shinto, Japan’s national creed until it was dismantled after Japan’s wartime defeat. Most notable among the Shinto-affiliated organizations guiding the prime minister today is Nippon Kaigi (Japan Conference), an association founded in May 1997 that has grown in influence in recent years. After the 2014 cabinet reshuffle, fifteen of nineteen cabinet ministers were Nippon Kaigi members, along with 289 of 480 Diet members, including the prime minister. The organization claims 35,000 members and has announced a plan to recruit a network of one million like-minded followers.

Nippon Kaigi works to return Japan to the imagined glory of its imperial past by promulgating a governmental system based in reverence for the Emperor and a new constitution that will do away with Article 9, Japan’s “peace clause,” paving the way to transform the Japan Self-Defense Forces into a national military. The prime minister has declared constitutional revision a primary reason the Liberal Democratic Party must secure a two-thirds majority in the upcoming 2016 House of Councillors (Upper House) election. The 1947 Constitution can only be amended following a two-thirds majority vote in both houses of the National Diet and a popular vote that secures approval above 50 percent. Nippon Kaigi, working in cooperation with the Association of Shinto Shrines and related organizations, has been campaigning to secure support for constitutional revision. Evidence of their campaigning has emerged recently. Millions of visitors who took part in 2016 in the tradition of visiting a Shinto Shrine at the New Year were invited to add their names to a petition created by the “Association for the Creation of a Constitution for the People of a Beautiful Japan” calling for revision. This Association, a Nippon Kaigi and Association of Shinto Shrines affiliate, is aiming to present 10,000,000 signatures to the Diet, clearly as a means of mobilizing support for a plebiscite following a Diet vote.

The prime minister and his inner circle have otherwise been engaged with religious activities closely tied to Shinto practices of Imperial Japan. On January 5, 2016, Abe and Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida visited the Grand Shrine at Ise, which enshrines the sun goddess and imperial ancestor Amaterasu. During an earlier pilgrimage to Ise in October 2015, Abe indicated that he intended to bring
participants in the May 2016 “Ise-Shima” summit for industrialized nations to pay their respects at the Grand Shrine. Just days prior to the Prime Minister’s New Year’s Ise pilgrimage, first lady Akie Abe visited the controversial war memorial Yasukuni Shrine just as Japan and South Korea reached a landmark agreement on settlement for wartime sex slaves. The Prime Minister himself has refrained from visiting Yasukuni since 2013, when his worship at the shrine on the anniversary of Japan’s wartime defeat prompted sharp rebuke from China and South Korea. Since then, Akie Abe has made frequent visits in his stead, as have numerous members of the Abe cabinet, always at the risk of undermining fragile relations with Japan’s Asian neighbors.

It may be tempting to attribute Shinzo Abe’s Shinto participation as a calculated appeal to influential allies on the right. However, it is perhaps more productive to regard Abe’s commitment for what it appears to be—a heartfelt reverence for the kami, the gods and spirits of the Shinto tradition, and a desire to see Japan return to a Shinto-centered form of governance. At the very least, the Prime Minister appears eager to promote these ideals and appeal to constituencies that venerate them. This vision entails state-supported recognition of Japan and its Emperor as divine.

The political costs of Abe’s enthusiasm for Shinto may exceed its benefits. According to Kokugakuin University scholar Tsukada Hotaka, support for LDP candidates generated by the Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership, the Association of Shinto Shrines’ political wing, has been comparatively modest, yielding at most between one and three seats in every national election. The influence of interconnected Shinto groups certainly extends beyond elections, as can be seen by Nippon Kaigi’s tremendous pull within the upper reaches of the Diet, yet promotion of rightwing Shinto-associated causes has cost the Abe government support at home and abroad. Visits by LDP politicians to Yasukuni continue to sabotage efforts to repair international relations, and there is no indication that a plurality of the Japanese public is sympathetic to a return to imperial reverence and remilitarization. It is perhaps best to conclude that Abe bucks Japan’s statistical average by genuinely possessing religious faith, and that commitment to Shinto veneration influences his leadership.

Abe’s enthusiasm for Shinto also threatens to disrupt cooperation between the LDP and its junior coalition partner Komeito. The fact that the LDP/Komeito alliance is a marriage of convenience is laid bare when attention is paid to religious dimensions. Literally the “Clean Government Party,” Komeito was founded by Soka Gakkai, which is a lay association based in the medieval Japanese Buddhism of Nichiren (1222–1282). Soka Gakkai, the “Value Creation Study Association,” emerged as
one of thousands of postwar “new religions” that competed for converts. It grew from a few thousand adherents in the early 1950s to claim more than one million member households by the end of that decade—unmatched growth driven in part by the Gakkai’s decision to channel its adherents toward electioneering. Soka Gakkai began fielding independent candidates for the Upper House from the mid-1950s, and for the Lower House after the Gakkai’s third president (now Honorary President) Daisaku Ikeda (1928–) founded Komeito in 1964. From the outset, Soka Gakkai engaged in electoral politics in order to realize eschatological Nichiren Buddhist objectives. As the organization attracted unprecedented numbers of converts, it gained a reputation for aggressive proselytizing and for threatening Constitutional divides between religion and government, largely because it sought governmental support to construct a facility marking the complete conversion of the Japanese populace to Nichiren Shoshu, a particular school of Nichiren Buddhism. The Gakkai’s dogmatic adherence to Nichiren and rejection of State Shinto led to the wartime imprisonment of its first two presidents and the death of the Gakkai’s founder Tsunesaburo Makiguchi.

Thus, cooperation between the Gakkai-affiliated Komeito and the Abe-led LDP may appear unlikely. The coalition came about for pragmatic rather than ideological reasons. By 1970, Soka Gakkai claimed in excess of seven million adherent households, and Komeito was the third-largest party in the Japanese Diet. However, a series of scandals forced Soka Gakkai and Komeito to sever official ties in that year, and both organizations disavowed Nichiren-based goals. Komeito reformulated itself as a party devoted to promoting world peace, and it mostly lingered on the political sidelines for decades. The party remained viable because Soka Gakkai had routinized electioneering on behalf of Komeito candidates as one of its staple religious practices. Though the Gakkai and Komeito officially split in 1970, campaigning for Komeito remains as quintessentially Soka Gakkai as chanting the Lotus Sutra or seeking to convert one’s friends and family. As a result, Soka Gakkai possesses the most potent grassroots-level vote-gathering organization in Japan. With electioneering driven largely by its Married Women’s Division, Soka Gakkai is able to maintain an influential presence at all levels of government.

From 1999, the LDP and Komeito put aside decades of political enmity to operate in coalition at the national level. The LDP continues to depend upon Gakkai voters. At present, Komeito’s thirty-five seats in the Lower House comprise the swing vote for the coalition’s super majority. And, while it only occupies 20 seats in the Upper House and ranks as the Diet’s fourth-largest party, it wields power beyond these numbers, as LDP Diet members along with Komeito candidates rely upon Gakkai mobilization to secure their seats. The coalition has taken the form of a
classic exchange relationship: in exchange for abandoning long-held principles of pacifism and compromising on social welfare, Komeito gets the chance to exert a modest degree of influence on government. In return, the LDP makes occasional policy concessions—such as a recent series of decisions to limit tax increases on household goods—and otherwise puts aside its distaste for Komeito’s Soka Gakkai affiliation as it relies on the Gakkai’s vote-gathering machine.

This relationship hinges upon the continuing participation of local-level Soka Gakkai electioneering. In recent months, there has been reason to question the compliance of the coalition’s Gakkai support base. In the lead-up to the September 19, 2015 vote on security legislation, tens of thousands of protestors gathered in front of the National Diet to voice outrage over the government’s decision to reinterpret Article 9 to allow for collective self-defense. Spotted among these protestors were members of Soka Gakkai who flew the religion’s distinctive tri-color flag and raised placards that remonstrated Komeito politicians for abandoning founding pacifist principles. These protesting members did not represent Soka Gakkai as a whole. Support for Komeito candidates in local elections has continued unabated, and adherents I have known through years of Gakkai-related ethnographic research tend to regard protestors as a potential Fifth Column that threatens the religion’s solidarity—an opinion that appears to be shared widely among members.

There is, however, reason to believe that the protestors expressed dissatisfaction simmering within Soka Gakkai. Even staunch Komeito supporters may be moved to pull back from electioneering. One Men’s Division member in Tokyo I spoke with immediately after the security legislation was voted into law told me that Married Women’s Division members in his district had grown quiet. “They have been lamenting that there are some whose hearts are torn, some who no longer speak with friends.” Another Men’s Division member in Saitama Prefecture who was ordinarily strident in his promotion of Komeito admitted reservations to me in a conversation weeks after the vote. “I intend to support the Komeito candidate [in my district], but when it comes to the proportional representation vote, I will have to see if I truly support Komeito’s policies.”

Rather than a groundswell movement within the Gakkai rejecting Komeito’s capitulation to the LDP, we are more likely to witness what anthropologist James C. Scott termed “token resistance”: a missed vote here, a member absent from campaigning there. The cumulative effect of these omissions may significantly undermine Komeito and its coalition partner at the polls this coming summer. And the more the Abe cabinet promotes its vision of a remilitarized Japan based
in Shinto-inspired ideology, the more likely it is that the coalition will alienate its Soka Gakkai support base.

Conflict between Komeito and the LDP can only be comprehended if religious commitments on both sides are taken into account. Religious practices and dispositions maintained by LDP politicians and the Soka Gakkai campaigners who ensure electoral success for Komeito—and the LDP—also reveal another important point: political analysts need to understand Japanese religion in order to understand Japanese politics. An analysis of Japanese politics that takes into account the history and contemporary manifestation of religious engagement also promises to dispel misapprehensions that religion is not important in Japan today.
Supporters of Japan’s Specially Designated Secrets Protection Law (SDS), passed more than two years ago in December 2013, like to point out that Japan’s reputation as a “spy paradise” necessitated such a law. Such a reputation is detrimental to national security, they warn, since the United States and other allies will be wary of sharing classified information unless Japan demonstrates resolute toughness towards those who would steal and leak secrets.

Who is responsible for branding Japan as a spy nation? The term “spy paradise” can be traced to the mid-1980s and its climate of late cold war tensions, and specifically June 6, 1985, when Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone’s government, seeking greater secrecy powers, submitted a security bill to the Diet. (The bill eventually died in committee.) Yet those unaware of the historical record (and more up to speed on popular culture) might not be faulted for thinking James Bond responsible. Director Lewis Gilbert’s You Only Live Twice, released in 1967 at the height of the cold war, defines Japan as a place of oriental intrigue and sexy spies, betwixt and between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. In brief, Kissy Suzuki can be trusted no more than her colleague Tiger Tanaka as nuclear holocaust looms and SPECTRE mastermind Ernst Stavro Blofeld huddles safe in his volcano base, intent on world domination.

Japan is, of course, no paradise for spies. This truth notwithstanding, the Specially Designated Secrets Protection Law reveals the extent to which Japan’s government under the leadership of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s has doubled down on its commitment to sealing loose lips. By stiffening penalties for the disclosure of classified information while also dramatically expanding the types of information capable of being deemed secret and making the classification process streamlined, fast, and largely untouched by civilian oversight, the Abe administration has made
things tough for would-be spies. It has also, presumably, made things tough for would-be terrorists. (In considering the dangers of the SDS it is well to remember that the definition of “terrorism” in Japan is as slippery as elsewhere. In a blog entry posted on November 29, 2013, the eve of the Diet vote on the SDS, then Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) secretary-general Shigeru Ishiba stated that there was “practically no difference” between those citizens involved in demonstrations against the proposed law and terrorists.) Finally, and most to the point, the law has dealt a devastating blow to journalists, whistle-blowers, Diet members, and other concerned individuals intent on checking the balance of the executive and administrative branches of their government.

But, as others have pointed out, the SDS is not primarily about stopping spies—even if that was the impetus behind its drafting. Nor is it, necessarily, about dismantling Japan’s postwar Constitution piece by piece—this time of Article 21 and its guarantee of press freedoms—in the name of reinterpretation. (Famous in this regard is the Abe cabinet’s July 2014 reinterpretation of Article 9, the so-called “peace clause,” to allow for collective self-defense and interoperability with U.S. forces on overseas missions.) What is clear, and of greatest concern for those intent on maintaining Japan’s signature postwar pacifism, is the role of the SDS in that most persistent of national strategies (at least as far as the LDP platform goes): to make Japan a normal nation. That is, a nation capable of waging war.

Democratic nations require the consent of the governed to wage war. In Japan’s case, opposition to remilitarization is formidable—and as such represents a formidable obstacle to Abe’s intentions for redefining Japan’s position in East Asia and satisfying expectations at the Pentagon. The solution? Conceal more information from the public (especially relating to security issues) and increase penalties for government workers and civilians alike for unauthorized disclosure.

What constitutes a secret under the law is non-public information, and falls within one of four categories: defense, diplomacy, terrorism counter-measures, and espionage on behalf of a foreign power. Within these bounds, governmental agencies hold broad powers to designate information “secret.” In the most recent accounting of January 12, 2016, the number of Defense Ministry cases categorized as “specially designated secrets” reached 270, an almost 10 percent increase over the previous year’s totals. (In 2015, designated secrets from all ministries and the cabinet secretariat reached 443, an almost 15 percent increase over 2014 totals.) As of late June 2015, the cabinet’s office counted 230,000 government documents as classified, given some connection with these designated secrets.
The classification of documents, which is solely entrusted to twenty government agencies, is as dark as the inside of SPECTRE’s volcano base during a power outage. Just one measure of the total lack of transparency is that, extraordinarily, expenditures designated as secret need not pass review by the Board of Audit, a measure of accountability mandated by Article 90 of the Constitution for all governmental expenditures and revenues. The bypassing of this important oversight mechanism for national security-related expenditures was something that former Prime Minister Eisaku Sato—a supporter of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty and, by extension, of U.S. military operations in Vietnam—insisted in May 1968 must never be permitted.

The SDS poses multiple and serious threats to Japan’s postwar democratic polity and continued existence as a peace nation. Fundamentally, Article 9 of the Constitution, which forbids Japan from waging war as a means of solving international disputes, is endangered by the SDS. For, at its core, the SDS enables a redistribution of state’s rights versus individuals’ rights. When the balance so heavily favors a strong state, it eases the way for legislation to protect that state against all possible threats. With the state holding its cards from view, it becomes easy for the Abe administration (or any other) to over-state the size and nature of security threats. When such power overlaps with a strong nationalist ideology, the stage is set for radically new posturing in both regional conflicts and international affairs.

The SDS poses a threat as well to the very principle of parliamentary democracy. While the law allows for the maintenance of two oversight committees populated by eight members each from the House of Councillors and House of Representatives, leadership of the committees as well as the majority of members hail from Abe’s party, the LDP. Moreover, the number of cases (presented in generic summary) offered for their review is paltry. There is no stipulation in the law as to the number of cases that must be released for oversight; judgment on this score rests solely on bureaucratic discretion. While it is true that the committees are empowered to ask for detailed information on any given case, the strength of the ruling party majority on the committees means that proposals for more information can be quashed in committee as happened in March 2015 when the five LDP and Komeito members on the Upper House’s committee rejected a proposal made by their three colleagues from the opposition (Democratic Party of Japan and Japan Restoration Party) to seek more information on secrets recently designated by the National Police Agency and National Security Council. Communist party member from the Upper House Sohei Nihi has recently called for the scrapping of the oversight committees as patently incapable of assisting in efforts towards democratic accountability.
It is not just the gradual centralization of power in the executive and increasing prioritization of security-related concerns that invites comparison between Abe’s administration and those wartime regimes of which his grandfather, Nobusuke Kishi was a prominent member. Indeed, it is governmental intrusion on civil liberties enabled by the SDS that especially brings to mind Japan’s “dark valley” of the 1930s and 1940s. For under the SDS, those entrusted with exposure to secrets must pass a “suitability evaluation,” a kind of background check that probes not only possible criminal or terrorist connections but also the personal, financial, medical, and pharmacological particulars of any potential secret-holder, be they public servant or private citizen. Personal details of the candidate’s parents, spouse, and close family members are also subject to inquiry. (As of December 2015, some 97,560 individuals underwent thoroughgoing background checks.) What is more, today’s security police conduct undercover surveillance of political protestors (especially those active in anti-nuclear, anti-base, and anti-SDS demonstrations) in a manner not dissimilar, some say, to the methods employed by the dreaded prewar and wartime Kenpeitai, or military police. The fear of saying anything that might be interpreted as “secret” is another recrudescence of wartime ways.

Is the SDS working? It’s hard to tell. There have been no reports of arrests—proof neither positive nor negative of the law’s effectiveness given the secrecy that enshrouds adjudication of infractions. Ironically, the most egregious violation of the law so far appears to have been the indiscretion of Defense Minister Gen Nakatani who, at a February 17, 2016 reception attended by top U.S. military officials, blurted confidential information about the sharing of intelligence between the United States and Japan regarding North Korean missile launches. Conviction for such a violation of Article 1 of the SDS (relating to defense-related secrets) carries a ten-year jail term. (The immediate reactions to Nakatani’s blooper were only pained expressions and awkward cringes by Commander of the Pacific Command, Admiral Harry Harris and others within earshot.)

For the time being, popular protests against the SDS have quieted. Two years after the well-populated demonstrations that accompanied the law’s passage and clogged the streets surrounding the Diet building, protests today are few and often anemic. Perhaps this will change with the enactment of new security legislation later in 2016—a likely scenario should Abe and his party win big in the Upper House elections scheduled for early summer. In the meantime, Japan’s citizenry remain shaken, not stirred.
A retired lieutenant general of the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) remarked at a symposium in early 2015 that getting married and staying married are two very different things. In a similar sense, becoming allies and staying allies are not the same thing, and the recent adjustments to the U.S.-Japan security alliance are efforts to ensure that the United States and Japan continue to benefit from the alliance in a changing world.

The 1960 alliance agreement between the United States and Japan established an asymmetric bargain rooted in the security environment of the cold war: the United States committed to defend Japan, and Japan agreed to provide bases that the U.S. military could use for operations in Asia. Japan developed military capabilities to defend itself, but the treaty does not require Japan to defend the United States in any capacity.

These days Japanese officials invariably describe their country’s security environment as increasingly “severe.” The perceived threats to Japan represent increased risk for the United States because of its alliance obligations, and also increased need for U.S. support. Although it was not—and will not be—framed as a trade-off, an understanding emerged among Japanese policymakers and elites that Japan should make a greater military contribution to the U.S.-Japan alliance in order to insure that the United States will protect Japan. In the fall of 2015, after months of debate and protests, the Japanese Diet passed a package of controversial security legislation. This new legal framework, based on the July 2014 Cabinet Decision asserting a limited right of collective self-defense, enables Japan to aid the United States in a conflict that poses a serious threat to Japan.

*The views expressed here are the author’s own and do not represent the Congressional Research Service nor the U.S. government.
In April 2015, the two allies announced a revision of their bilateral defense guidelines, which provide a framework for the evolving alliance arrangement. The United States agreed to play a role in “gray zone” contingencies—situations that involve the use or threat of force but do not cross the threshold of war—that threaten Japan’s security. President Barack Obama’s 2014 declaration that the alliance treaty applies to the contested Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea was an earlier manifestation of this U.S. commitment. Obama was the first president to confirm the U.S. obligation to act in the defense of these uninhabited islands, and he made the statement in Tokyo for added impact. Conversely, new alliance guidelines describe how the Japanese military could play a larger role (yet a non-combat role) in supporting U.S. operations both in the region and around the world. The most cited hypothetical case is JSDF minesweeping operations in the Strait of Hormuz, which is a key sea lane for Japan’s energy imports.

Faced with greater security challenges than twenty years ago, the United States and Japan have doubled down on their alliance. The United States is no longer seen as a superpower colossus, and China’s military budget is steadily dwarfing Japan’s, alongside the risk of a conflict with North Korea. The prescription that the two allies arrived at is increased integration or, in some contexts, “seamlessness.” The logic behind this integration is that, to the extent that the U.S. and Japanese militaries are indivisible and can fight in a unified manner, the deterrent power of each is multiplied. A potential adversary will be less adventurous when faced with retaliation by the combined force of the United States and Japan.

The revised defense guidelines and new Japanese security legislation create opportunities to improve bilateral defense coordination by fostering more realistic training exercises and military planning. These peacetime activities should lead to improved performance in an actual contingency.

One avenue for increased integration and deterrence that has not yet been explored fully is co-basing, which would entail stationing the same types of U.S. and Japanese forces at the same base for the same purpose. Co-basing may create logistical and communications efficiencies, but more importantly it lowers the barriers for cooperative military responses and raises the costs of independent action, a factor that potential adversaries could not ignore. The revised guidelines mention co-basing and co-location of operational headquarters, something that the Japanese service commands and their U.S. counterparts in Japan largely have achieved.
Yet there are downsides to a tighter security alliance. Prior to 2015, when constitutional and legal restraints prevented Japan from participating in U.S.-led military campaigns, Tokyo could support Washington with little concern for dangers to the JSDF. In future cases where the United States is considering military intervention, Japan may be more of a contrarian voice rather than the reliable supporter it has been in recent decades because Japanese leaders may fear heavy U.S. pressure to dispatch a JSDF contingent. The Japanese public in particular appears to reject a military role for Japan abroad, even when core national interests might be at stake.

Public opinion and fiscal challenges in Japan will continue to encourage a cautious, low-profile national security strategy even as China’s emergence as a regional great power prods Japan to balance against China. Conditions in Northeast Asia appear to be ripe for an arms race, but the evidence indicates that, at least in quantitative terms, Japan is not racing along with China. Japan’s normative cap on defense spending of 1 percent of GDP is a powerful constraint, compounded by persistent budget deficits.

This discussion raises the question: if Japan will not increase its defense spending by any substantial amounts (1–2 percent annual increases notwithstanding), is that enough to ensure its security and independence? The easy response is that the U.S. alliance commitment will be sufficient. But will the United States remain satisfied with the alliance bargain if Japan declines to bolster its defenses in the face of increased threats, and instead relies on the U.S. military? The answer to this question returns to an earlier topic: collective self-defense.

With the current constraints from anti-militarist public opinion and persistent budget deficits, the most plausible direction for increasing Japan’s security contributions (to the alliance and global security in general) is qualitative reforms. Collective self-defense, the recent “dynamic joint defense” initiatives, shifting force posture toward the Ryukyu Islands, improving space and cyber resiliency—all these reforms and others represent efforts by Japan to do more without spending more. The revised defense guidelines map out a framework for the JSDF to play a greater role in regional conflicts and even certain conflicts in distant but strategically vital regions. Like a married couple that rekindles their love at a more mature age, the United States and Japan are adjusting their alliance so that each country balances risk and reward in an era of more pressing security challenges.
In the upcoming July 2016 House of Councillors election, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) hope to secure a large enough victory to allow Abe to move ahead with his dream of revising the Constitution. In order to revise the national charter (something that hasn’t happened since it came into effect in 1947), Abe will need a two-thirds majority vote in each chamber of the Diet, followed by a majority vote in a national referendum. The LDP and its ruling coalition partner, Komeito, already control a two-thirds majority in the House of Representatives, but currently only control a simple majority in the House of Councillors. Moreover, public support for the Abe government has been floundering around 40 percent since last summer, when the governing parties passed a pair of controversial new security laws aimed at loosening restrictions on the use of the Self-Defense Forces, a change many decry as unconstitutional.

Seventy-three seats will be allocated based on majoritarian contests within prefectures, and another forty-eight in a nationwide proportional representation contest. In thirteen prefectures, between two and six seats will be up for grabs, while thirty other prefectures will have just one seat each. For the first time, two sets of rural prefectures (Tokushima and Kochi; Tottori and Shimane) will be combined into joint districts, each with one seat. Abe’s plans for constitutional revision largely hinge on his party’s ability to win a majority of the thirty-two single-seat contests.

The opposition will be led by the Democratic Party (Minshinto), which was newly formed in March 2016 with the merger of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) and Japan Innovation Party (JIP), in a strategic attempt to unite the opposition in advance of the election. The Democratic Party is opposed to Abe’s constitutional
The Democratic Party is opposed to Abe’s constitutional revision plans, but faces a major dilemma in its strategy to block his ambition: how to manage coordination among the remaining opposition parties and simultaneously increase voter turnout. In the single-seat districts, coordination is crucial if the opposition parties want to avoid handing the LDP-Komeito plurality victories by splitting the opposition vote. The dilemma is that, while coordination within the opposition will decrease such a risk, it may also decrease turnout among the disaffected, “floating” voters who the Democratic Party desperately needs to mobilize if it hopes to win. Low turnout tends to benefit well-organized parties with loyal, easily mobilized supporters, such as Komeito and the Japanese Communist Party (JCP). This is the reason why Komeito has opposed holding a double poll for both Diet chambers in July 2016—a double election would increase voter interest and turnout, thus dampening the party’s advantage.

Coordination and turnout problems have plagued the opposition in recent elections. In the 2012 House of Representatives election, the DPJ faced competition in many single-seat districts from the so-called “Third Force” parties: the Japan Restoration Party (later re-branded as JIP), the Tomorrow Party of Japan, and Your Party, as well as the JCP and others. These parties split the vote, handing the LDP-Komeito coalition plurality victories in scores of districts. In addition, turnout dropped from a historic high of 69 percent in 2009 (when the DPJ scored a landslide victory and took control of government away from the LDP for the first time since 1993), to a historic low of 59 percent. In an analysis of district-level vote differences between the 2009 and 2012 elections, Steven Reed and colleagues estimate that the decrease in voter turnout in 2012 hurt the DPJ the most. For every ten abstentions, the DPJ lost nine votes.1 Many voters who turned out to support the DPJ in 2009 became disillusioned during its three years in government and decided to stay at home in 2012. Turnout declined the most in districts where it had increased the most in 2009.2

The DPJ suffered further losses in the 2013 House of Councillors election, when it again faced competition from other opposition parties in the single-seat districts. In 2014, Abe’s decision to call for a new House of Representatives election took the decimated opposition by surprise. In part due to a lack of time to find candidates, the opposition did a better job coordinating.3 However, turnout decreased to a new historic low of 53 percent, and decreased most in the districts where opposition candidates stood down. Ethan Scheiner and colleagues estimate that the withdrawal of a DPJ candidate in a district in 2014 resulted in a roughly two-percentage-point
Looking forward to the July election, the implication of these patterns is that the Democratic Party has an opportunity to reverse recent electoral setbacks, but only if it manages to simultaneously avoid competition with the remaining opposition parties in single-seat districts and convince disaffected voters to show up at the polls. Overcoming the first challenge will require cooperation from the notoriously recalcitrant JCP and a smattering of other small parties and independents. The other challenge will be to convince voters that the newly rebranded Democratic Party is a credible alternative to the LDP-Komeito coalition or at the very least, that it is important for them to turn out to vote in order to prevent the ruling coalition from getting the two-thirds majority Abe needs to revise the Constitution. The dilemma is that cynical voters may view cooperation with the unpopular JCP as desperate or unprincipled, and again stay home from the polls.

The Democratic Party’s success in the election may ultimately depend on whether voters can look past the DPJ’s disastrous turn in government from 2009–2012. One strategy that may reap payoffs is to focus on mobilizing the estimated 2.4 million young people who are newly eligible to vote thanks to the recent reduction of the voting age from 20 to 18, and who may be too young to remember the party’s past mistakes. Turnout among voters aged 20–29 has been lower than 40 percent in recent House of Councillors elections, so there is a large swath of potential supporters to mobilize if the party can find the right message.

**Chapter Endnotes**


While leading a study abroad course to Tokyo last summer, I was struck by negative characterizations of Chinese tourists on Japanese television. In conversations with the Japanese proprietor of a small restaurant as well as her customers, I heard misgivings voiced about the influx of Chinese students made visible by their part-time jobs in convenience stores and chain restaurants. This is small-minded and shortsighted. Japan sorely needs to come to terms interpersonally with China—not at the state level, but through visitors like tourists and students.

2015 represented the greatest year-on-year growth in tourism to Japan since the Tokyo Olympics in 1964. Among the nearly twenty million visitors to Japan, the number of tourists from mainland China represented nearly a quarter—an increase of over 80 percent compared to 2014. Doing more to nurture them may rankle those who disagree politically with the Chinese government, but it is ultimately in Japan’s best interest for the future—building networks of citizen-level connection should buttress their hopes for Northeast Asian diplomacy and fuel changes to come in Chinese politics.

At the University of Arizona (UA), a state flagship institution with over forty thousand students, I teach a large lecture course entitled Japanese Anime and Visual Culture. My enrollment is fueled by student interest in Japanese pop culture, but students soon realize they will learn much more than that. As an anthropologist, I am keen for my students to be able to deeply contextualize the pop culture products they enjoy—something that is possible only with a clear understanding of history, political issues, and contemporary society in Japan.
At first the number of Chinese nationals taking my course on Japanese pop culture surprised me, but semester after semester they have remained a strong contingent. Like many U.S. universities, the UA has worked to build relationships with China, increasing the number of incoming Chinese undergraduates, creating joint programs, such as the recently announced collaboration between our Eller School of Law and Ocean University in Qingdao, and promoting study abroad, such as my own East Asian Studies Department’s summer courses in Shanghai.

My Chinese students have experienced the so-called “anti-Japanese” education decried by Japanese conservatives. And yet, now enrolled at a university in the U.S., they have been some of the most interested in learning about all aspects of Japanese society in my courses. Their deep appreciation for Japanese cultural products propels them to engage their neighbor—even from afar, deep in the Sonoran desert!

So what of the recently arrived visitors to Japan? Chinese tourists may seem to reveal a serious reversal of fortune for Japan. They echo the waves of Japanese who went abroad on the crest of Japan’s bubble economy. With China and Korea now ascendant, Japan must reckon with how these tourists symbolize its own economic decline. But if one takes seriously the idea of what Japan represents for China’s growing middle-class, mainland Chinese tourists mean something more than that, for both China and Japan.

For visitors from a country that has been rocked by environmental problems, is awash in counterfeit goods, and that wrestles with the uneven deployment of new wealth, Japan must seem steady and dependable. Interviews with Chinese tourists give credence to the notion that Japan is seen as trustworthy, navigable, and representative of quality in service as well as consumer goods. Moreover, the average Chinese tourist spends a significant amount of money, approximately $2,000 per visitor. For Japan to stand as an easy, safe, and luxurious destination leads to an unavoidable comparison with other potential destinations as well as with China itself.

Like the Chinese students in my classes here in Tucson, there are a variety of reasons students choose Japan. Japanese universities are much less expensive than those in the U.S., and Japan enjoys proximity in distance and, in some respects, culture. Chinese students in Japan experience life in Japan firsthand, unfiltered by the Chinese Ministry of Education, the raft of war films featuring Japan as aggressor that flood Chinese movie theaters, or the restricted media environment of the mainland. That said, if the average Japanese citizen is disdainful of them—to say nothing of Japan’s virulently xenophobic anti-Chinese activist groups—their direct impression of Japan may be one that confirms so-called “anti-Japanese” education in China.
Soft power is not the only way Japan can redeem itself in Asia, but the attractions of Japanese cultural products do much to bring young Chinese to the table. For those tourists or students who travel directly to the source, I can only hope their experience of Japan buoys their relationship with the country. Waiting until the run-up to the 2020 Olympics would be waiting too long to capitalize on the Chinese human capital arriving in ever-increasing numbers to Japan. Taking clear steps to rein in hate speech and enjoining the media not to chase ratings with demonization is a start, but if the Japanese government is serious about improving diplomatic relations long term, bolstering support for citizen-to-citizen interaction is a good way to do it. ■
In October 2015, Shinzo Abe, Japan’s Prime Minister, reshuffled his cabinet, and in doing so, created a new cabinet position. Abe named Diet Member Katsunobu Kato the Minister for Promoting Dynamic Engagement of All Citizens. In Japanese, that position has a slightly different name; it can be translated as the Minister of the Revitalization of the Hundred Million. This title was an interesting choice, because the phrase “ichioku so” (“the hundred million together”) was often used in government slogans during and immediately after World War II to refer to the Japanese people, in slogans such as “Let the Hundred Million Jump to their Feet” (and, after the war, “Let the Hundred Million Confess Our War Guilt”). However, during World War II, the phrase was aspirational. Japan’s population (excluding its empire) never reached one hundred million residents during World War II (Japan’s population would not reach one hundred million until 1967). In 1945, Japan’s population was just under 72 million people; it would grow until 2007, when it hit 128 million. Importantly, that number has been decreasing every year since. Thus, the name of this new cabinet position seems to accept that Japan’s population will continue to shrink at a significant rate.

Japan’s population is shrinking because of its low birth rate, which is accompanied by Japan’s long life expectancy. These two problems are often joined together in one Japanese word: shoshikoreika, or “the few children many elderly issue.” This is a problem because as Japan’s population pyramid inverts—and as the ratio of working people to retired people declines—it will become more and more difficult to care for Japan’s elderly. There are several possible solutions to this problem, including greater workforce participation (especially among women), workers being bid away from other occupations, women having more children, or Japan admitting immigrants. So far, the Abe administration has focused on the first solution, with
Abe’s “womenomics” agenda, which has included adding many more spaces for daycare, thereby freeing women for work.

The Abe administration has not promoted an agenda for immigration reform to rival their womenomics agenda and, indeed, the Abe administration recently declined to admit Syrian refugees into Japan. The most important recent changes to Japan’s immigration policy occurred before Abe became prime minister. As a result of Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA) with the Philippines (2006), Indonesia (2007), and Vietnam (2009), Japan admits nurses and caregivers from each country. However, these reforms have not even begun to address problems stemming from shoshikoreika. By the end of 2014, Japan had admitted 1,004 nurses and caregivers from the Philippines, 1,235 from Indonesia, and 138 from Vietnam—in total, Japan had admitted 2,377 foreign nurses and caregivers.²

At the end of December 2011, the Japanese Ministry of Justice announced that it would establish a point system in immigration admissions that will give preferential treatment to highly skilled immigrants. The Japanese government estimated that this program would lead to the admission of 2,000 foreign laborers in 2012.³ In contrast, a 2000 study by the UN Population Division found that “in order to keep the size of the working-age population constant at the 1995 level of 87.2 million, Japan would need 33.5 million immigrants from 1995 through 2050.”⁴ In short, the EPA programs and the point system do not even begin to address the challenges that shoshikoreika poses for Japan.

Although Japan’s prime Minister and Diet have been reluctant to make more significant changes to Japan’s immigration policy, some Japanese politicians have been willing to advocate this. In 2008, a group of eighty Diet members from the LDP released a report that proposed a number of changes to Japan’s immigration and citizenship policies in a number of substantial ways. Most controversially, the report suggested that Japan should change its immigration admission policies so that 10 percent of Japan’s population would be comprised of immigrants; this would involve admitting roughly ten million foreign residents to Japan. Outside the LDP opposition parties have (sometimes) advocated immigration reform. Diet Members from the small Happiness Realization Party and the once influential but now defunct Your Party have regularly expressed support for increased immigration.

In the summer of 2016, there will be a House of Councillors election, and there is a chance that Prime Minister Abe will dissolve the Diet and call for a House of Representatives election at the same time. In the lead-up to this election, parties will likely form, merge, and dissolve, as candidates and potential candidates struggle
to challenge the dominance of the Abe-led LDP/Komeito majority government. In previous elections, parties have not, for the most part, focused on issues relating to immigration. However, as a possible 2016 election approaches, it would be good for Japan if some political parties advocate an immigration policy that is meant to help address shoshikoreika. This kind of advocacy would start a debate between parties that the public could participate in, adjudicate (by voting), and thereby help to address this demographic crisis that Japan is facing.

Chapter Endnotes


Opposition to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) has been empowered by frustration with expanded economic inequality in the United States. For example, TPP opponents in the U.S. Congress argue that the TPP will deprive U.S. workers of jobs and hence further expand income inequality.

Indeed, economic inequality has expanded and reached an alarming level in the United States. However, the expansion of inequality is not because of free trade or globalization per se, but because policymakers have failed to adapt America’s safety net of social security, and its education system.

What policies are needed for the United States to enjoy the benefits of globalization while minimizing the negative effects, such as the expansion of income inequality? I call such policies the “homework” of the United States.

The economics textbook shows the theorem that free trade creates winners and losers, but as an aggregate the gains from free trade exceed the losses, and hence the losers’ losses can be compensated with the winners’ gains. For the political economy of international trade, this theorem is even more important than David Ricardo’s comparative advantage model that proves that free trade benefits every state.

In other words, to enjoy the benefit of free trade brought by globalization, the United States needs to do the “homework” of building the institution to compensate losers’ losses with winners’ gains. The point here is that the severe income inequality in the United States will not be solved by not participating in the TPP. That would be just like saying you can handle difficult homework by not going to school.
Have free trade agreements like the TPP contributed to economic inequality? No, the current unprecedented inequality has been brought out by ineffective economic and social welfare policies, including tax reduction for the affluent, the absence of a national health care system, and poor public education policy, which are rooted in the increasingly divisive tendency of American domestic politics, especially in the U.S. Congress.

During the second debate between the presidential candidates in the 2012 election, President Obama argued for the importance of education reforms, stating that the United States would need skilled labor to compete with developing countries in the global economy. If the productivity of better-paid U.S. workers is the same as that of less-paid developing countries’ workers, U.S. workers will face downward pressure on their wages. Obama argued that the only sweeping solution to this problem is education reform to make U.S. workers more competitive.

The current average wage of U.S. workers is lower than forty years ago, as U.S. workers have faced competition with workers in developing countries. Losing competition with foreign labor is inevitable if wage increases do not accompany productivity increases. The absence of the TPP will not make U.S. workers more competitive. Rather, turning back on free trade will make American producers less competitive, lower the quality of American products, and raise prices of the products distributed in the United States, which will result in harming the unskilled workers who already suffer from low wages.

Economic theory assumes that labor can move between different jobs with no cost. What this theory implies is that policies that lower the cost for labor to move from a declining industry to a growing industry would be important to promote free trade. In fact, a growing body of empirical research shows that severe barriers to mobility have created long-term losses to workers hit by imports.

Thus, for example, social welfare policies such as improving unemployment insurance and maintaining a job training system would promote free trade. The cost to move from one sector to another would be high if a worker loses basic health insurance coverage when unemployed while changing jobs. Therefore, a national health care system would also help to promote free trade.

In sum, the absence of the TPP would not build the needed safety net system, nor make U.S. workers more competitive, let alone solve the problem of income equality. Rather, U.S. producers would lose the growing market of the Asia-Pacific region that would have opened with the TPP, U.S. manufacturers would further lose
competitiveness, U.S. economic growth would be constrained, and most importantly it would be more difficult to establish the safety net because of governmental revenue shortage. Hence, economic inequality might be even further expanded.

It is wrong to mix up opposition to the TPP and the problem of economic inequality. This mix-up will not solve the problem of inequality. In his speech in the U.S. Congress, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said: “Let us bring the TPP to a successful conclusion through our joint leadership.” Although he drew applause from the audience, he has to worry not only about opposition in Japan but also about the United States’ possible failure to do its homework.
The “Beyond-Economics” Importance of the Trans-Pacific Partnership

Hiroki Takeuchi

In his speech to the U.S. Congress on April 29, 2015, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said: “The TPP [Trans-Pacific Partnership] goes far beyond just economic benefits. It is also about our security. Long-term, its strategic value is awesome.” During a speech on April 6, 2015, U.S. Defense Secretary Ashton Carter stated that “passing TPP is as important to me as another aircraft carrier.” What is the security implication of the TPP that both Prime Minister Abe and Secretary Carter emphasize? This essay explores the TPP’s implications “beyond economics,” considering the importance of the TPP from the security perspective.

Is China a Responsible Stakeholder?

The fact that the defense secretary, in charge of national security, claims the importance of an economic agreement suggests the TPP’s strategic importance as rule making for the rule-based international order. In addition, President Barack Obama’s statement that “we can’t let countries like China write the rules of the global economy” suggests concern that the United States might miss the opportunity for rule making to form the rule-based international order. To understand the strategic importance of the TPP, imagine what would happen if the TPP fails to take effect. The TPP is economic rule making in international politics. Now that China challenges the U.S.-led rule-based international order, if the United States fails in the U.S.-led rule making, trust in U.S. leadership will be lost. Moreover, China's attempt to impose Chinese-led rules will be a threat for the states that follow the current U.S.-led international order.

For example, China has refused to follow the U.S.-led international order in the South China Sea. Although exclusive economic zones (EEZs) originally existed
based on the lines agreed upon by the surrounding nations, China has challenged them and declared the whole South China Sea as China’s territorial waters. Patrick Walsh, former commander of the U.S. Navy Pacific Fleet who commanded “Operation Tomodachi” during the 3/11 East Japan Earthquake, reported that when he raised the legitimacy of this declaration with a Chinese participant at a conference, the Chinese participant brushed it aside saying: “Because we claim it.”

From China’s standpoint, the existing EEZs in the South China Sea were determined without China’s participation when China was not powerful enough to participate in such a decision, and hence China should redraw the lines now that it has sufficient power to push its own demands.

In the meantime, perhaps China is also trying to build a Chinese-led international order by establishing several international institutions, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the “One Belt, One Road” initiative (also called the New Silk Road initiative). Moreover, China is trying to take the initiative in the negotiation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership to compete with the TPP. However, it is not certain whether the Chinese-led international order is welcomed by other nations. President Xi Jinping’s pompous slogans, such as the “China dream” (Zhongguo meng) and the “great restoration of the Chinese nation” (Zhonghua minzu weida fuxing), make other nations doubt China’s intention to use its power as a responsible stakeholder.

Although China is eager to expand its influence in the Asia-Pacific region, it does not feel any responsibility for whether its behavior will lead to regional stability or have any influence on the regional security. It is doubtful whether it can provide international public goods of regional stability and peace in lieu of the United States even if it becomes as powerful as the United States. In that sense, the rise of China in the early twenty-first century may be similar to that of Russia (the Soviet Union) in the early twentieth century, which also did not have any intention to provide international public goods. I do not conclude that the rise of China will follow that of Russia, but I am afraid that if U.S. influence in Asia retreats under the current conditions this region will become destabilized.

“Power” in the context of international politics consists of “capability” and “intention.” Although the TPP will not alter China’s worldview or ambitions, proposing the TPP as “our rules” will enable “us” to impose on China a yes-or-no choice, which is expected to help us ascertain whether China has the intention to use its capability as a responsible stakeholder. If China’s answer is “yes,” the TPP including China will further deepen economic interdependence in the Asia-Pacific region, which will contribute to regional stability. If China’s answer is “no,” the best strategy
will be to push the TPP as “our rules” to confront China’s challenge to the U.S.-led international order. Because many nations doubt China’s intention to use its power as a responsible stakeholder to build a Chinese-led international order, the TPP is not just a trade agreement but may become the foundation of stability in the Asia-Pacific region.

**China Concerned with Domestic Stability**

If one takes into consideration Chinese domestic politics, the TPP’s security implications for Japan will be even more evident. Since 2011, China has spent more for police than national defense. The biggest threat for the Chinese government is not the United States (with the overwhelming military power), Japan (with which China has historically had friction and conflict), nor Russia (which shares long borders with China), but its own people’s dissatisfaction with the state and society. To maintain one-party rule, China’s authoritarian regime has used local governments as a scapegoat to sway the people’s dissatisfaction with the central government. As a result, since the 1990s, the rise of resentment over rural taxation, land condemnation, and official corruption has led to increasing popular protests against local governments, and those protests have often escalated into burning the buildings of the targeted local government. In the meantime, no government’s buildings have been attacked by foreign force since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. The Chinese leadership has to face the internal threat (neiyou) before managing the external threat (waihuan).

I am often asked how China is responding to the TPP. This question assumes an aggregate actor called “China.” However, to understand the China that is concerned with the internal threat of domestic instability, rather than the external threat in international politics, one should consider China as a “plural form,” not a “singular form.” Specifically, as Miyamoto Yuji—former Japanese ambassador to China—suggests, the Chinese leadership is divided into reformist internationalists and conservative hardliners. These two groups are divided over how to respond to the internal threat, and they are fighting an intense power struggle. Although both the reformist internationalists and the conservative hardliners agree that maintaining social stability is most important to achieve the utmost goal of regime resilience, fearful of domestic unrest and challenges to party rule, they have exactly opposite views on how to achieve this goal. On the one hand, the reformist internationalists argue that China should implement economic reform to achieve sustainable economic growth, which would bring social stability and enable one-party rule to be maintained. On the other hand, the conservative hardliners argue that China
should keep the rent-seeking mechanism that supports corrupt vested interests under state capitalism to maintain one-party rule.8

On the TPP, the reformist internationalists insist that China should commit to domestic economic reforms by joining the U.S.-led international order through mechanisms like the TPP and to cooperative foreign policy in order to appreciate a peaceful international environment, so that it can benefit from the interdependent relationship with the global economy. By contrast, the conservative hardliners insist that the TPP would directly undermine the rent-seeking mechanism enjoyed by those who have particularistic vested interests under the state capitalist system, and hence China should adopt abrasive and nationalist foreign policy projecting its power even if it may cause friction in international relations.

The Political Economy of One-Party Rule

Deng Xiaoping, who introduced the market economy with the slogan of “open-up and reform” (gaige kaifang), clearly proclaimed that China should adopt the cooperative foreign policy to implement domestic economic reforms. Moreover, as he established political and economic institutions to achieve economic development, he even expanded popular political participation to a limited extent, without contradicting the absolute principle of maintaining one-party rule.

However, the Tiananmen Incident in 1989 reminded Deng of the historical lesson that the market economy would lead to increasing popular demands on the government, wherein people’s dissatisfaction with corruption, inequality, and inflation results in demands for democratization. Jiang Zemin, who came into office just after the Tiananmen Incident, took the cooptation strategy that encouraged former officials and former state-owned enterprise (SOE) managers to become nominally private entrepreneurs.9 This cooptation strategy helped China prevent the market economy from increasing the demand for democratization.10 At the same time, it formed the state capitalist system where the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) champions the collusive rent-seeking mechanism by distributing the rent to various societal groups, which has since overshadowed the Chinese economy.11

Hu Jintao, who succeeded Jiang in 2002, raised the slogan of “harmonious society” (hexie shehui) to curb corruption rooted in the state capitalist system and to solve the economic inequality that had rapidly expanded in the Chinese economy. However, Hu was never able to consolidate his power base and failed to undermine the corrupt rent-seeking mechanism, and as a result, economic inequality expanded during his ten-year tenure.12 To shrink economic inequality, it was inevitable that
the corrupt vested interest structure be curbed and the “real economic reform” of the SOE reform be implemented, but one can easily imagine that Hu faced desperate resistance and backlash from the conservative hardliners led by Jiang, and as a result Hu’s reform floundered.13

In short, the CCP has used the collusive rent-seeking mechanism under the state capitalist system as a tool to maintain popular support for one-party rule, and hence has to keep creating the economic rents to be distributed. However, the CCP faces the dilemma that the “real economic reform” that would undermine the rent-seeking mechanism will be necessary to sustain economic growth. It will also be necessary to adopt cooperative foreign policy, so that China can maintain good relationships with its trading partners like the United States and Japan. The reformist internationalists as well as the conservative hardliners have understood this logic. However, they have completely opposite stakes in the “real economic reform” and hence the TPP would become the source of a power struggle in the CCP.

TPP as “Gaiatsu” on China
Considering the division between the reformist internationalists and the conservative hardliners in Chinese domestic politics, what implications does the conclusion of the TPP have for China? China shows strong interest in the TPP. However, we should keep in mind that the reformist internationalists and the conservative hardliners have very different interests. The TPP will impose on China a yes-no answer regarding politically sensitive issues such as SOE reform, the implementation of intellectual property rights, and the improvement of labor conditions.14 In other words, joining the TPP will require China to be committed to the “real economic reform” that the reformist internationalists want to advance. The conditions to join the TPP include the SOE reform, which will directly undermine the rent-seeking mechanism that the conservative hardliners desperately want to protect. Moreover, because many of the state capitalist enterprises rely on copied products or low-wage labor, the TPP’s inclusion of the rules regarding intellectual property rights and labor conditions will severely undermine the vested interests. Therefore, the TPP will impose on China the “gaiatsu” (literally “foreign pressure”) to empower the reformist internationalists by encouraging the “real economic reform.”15

In short, the TPP will empower the reformist internationalists in the power balance in Chinese domestic politics, making China’s behavior more cooperative in international politics. By contrast, if the TPP fails to take effect, the conservative hardliners will be empowered, making China’s behavior more aggressive. Therefore,
the security implication of the TPP is evident: the TPP will strengthen security in East Asia. The rise of China has been changing the security environment in the Asia-Pacific region. Thus, failing to pass the TPP would not simply continue the status quo, but efforts to empower the reformist internationalists in Chinese domestic politics should be made to maintain the status quo. Moreover, taking into consideration the TPP’s security implications, the TPP should be kept open for China’s future participation, so that it would promote domestic economic reforms in China.

**Will the U.S. Congress Approve the TPP?**

Now that the international negotiation of the TPP is concluded, the next hurdle for the TPP to take effect is whether the U.S. Congress will approve it. This is a serious concern given the increasingly anti-internationalist tendency of the U.S. Congress. The TPP will come into effect if six or more nations approve it and those approving nations represent more than 85 percent of the GDP of the twelve participating countries, which means that the TPP will not come into effect if either the United States or Japan fails to ratify it. In the U.S. Congress, “the possibility of China’s participation in the future” has become an argument for opposing the TPP. Opponents think that the United States will lose additional jobs when China joins the TPP in the future. It is true that globalization has caused the loss of jobs for U.S. manufacturers. However, the absence of the TPP will not stop globalization or increase jobs. Rather, the TPP will make U.S. workers more competitive, because it includes rules regarding SOE reform and labor conditions and requires the developing countries joining the TPP to follow those rules.

Through the twists and turns of discussion about Trade Promotion Authority in 2015, lawmakers in the U.S. Congress increasingly realized the strategic importance of the TPP. I hope that the discussion about approving the TPP will follow the same path, so that lawmakers will focus on the strategic interests in the TPP to approve it. In the meantime, in Japan I expect the TPP to become an opportunity to promote reform policies on agriculture and the labor market. Perhaps more importantly, the TPP will be a foundation of Japan’s national security.
Chapter Endnotes


8. It is important to consider China as a plural form, because otherwise one might take an anti-China tone in this paper. In actuality, this paper’s position is for the reformist internationalists and against the conservative hardliners.


14. Of course, China’s accession to the TPP will be negotiated with the members over a lengthy period, and China will have ample opportunity to try to protect the vested interests that the conservative hardliners desperately want to protect. However, the opportunity to join the TPP will at least empower the reformist internationalists by giving China a clear incentive to commit to the reform.

15. Economically desired policy will not be made unless it is politically feasible. Thus, in order to make China commit to domestic economic reforms and behave as a responsible stakeholder in international relations, the reformist internationalists should have been empowered and foreign policy to empower the reformist internationalists, such as the TPP, should have been implemented.
In 1979, Ezra Vogel published *Japan as Number One* and touted the then-rising global power’s efficient economic production, effective governance mechanism, high-achieving education system, and other domestic successes. As epitomized in this book, Japan’s rise to economic superpower status in the 1980s left the image of a hardworking and ingenious people who sacrifice their short-term personal gains for greater collective goods. However, its legacy in terms of political principles and foreign policy is decidedly unclear. Its constitutional commitment to peace was overshadowed by criticisms of checkbook diplomacy, especially in the first Iraq War. Its decades of democratic stability are eclipsed by international criticisms for its failure to face up to past human rights violations. What is Japan’s national identity in the political realm? What will be Japan’s main contributions to world politics? These questions arise as the current Abe administration pursues a more assertive policy agenda that has invoked criticisms of both its foreign policy and domestic practice.

On the foreign policy front, many recent administrations have emphasized proactive participation in international peacekeeping efforts and promotion of democracy in the world. The Abe administration is particularly emphatic about greater international engagement but this policy has met with strong criticisms from domestic constituents and international observers. There is a problem of perception here. Because of Prime Minister Abe’s and his political associates’ long standing goal of revising the Constitution, any efforts to change Japan’s commitment to peaceful resolution of any international conflict invoke suspicion. This was the underlying reason for the surprisingly broad and long-lasting opposition to the new interpretation of Article 9 adopted last summer to enable the exercise of the right of collective self-defense.
The commitment to peace enshrined in Article 9 has been at the core of Japan’s post-World War II national identity. If taken seriously, it is a grand political experiment that is worthy of international attention and possibly praise. In reality, however, the world has not taken notice, perhaps because Japan has long had one of the largest defense budgets in the world or because it has failed to shake off the demons of its fascist past. If the peace principle is not drawing much attention, much less praise, why should the Japanese government, whether Abe is at the helm or not, continue to uphold Article 9, especially given Japan’s increasingly tense security environment? The recent efforts to award Japan a Noble Peace Prize for Article 9 might change the dynamic and prompt Japan to make a renewed commitment to the peace principle. Barring such sudden growth of international support for Article 9, the long-term trend on this issue is likely a shift away from a strong commitment to Article 9.

I am of the opinion that a modest revision to Article 9 today would be better than continuing decoupling between the law and the practice and a potential nationalist outburst that would result in a more radical departure from Article 9. Distance between law on the books and law in practice is fairly common in any country, but having one of the central articles of the national Constitution so decoupled from actual practice could fundamentally undermine rule of law. Article 9, if read literally, does not allow for any military and does not have any explicit exception for a defense force. As such, it is not easy to convince Japanese middle school students that the Self-Defense Force is consistent with the text of Article 9. If the most important legal document of the land is bunk, why then should those students believe in rule of law? Furthermore, if the tension between Japan and China spirals out of control, or if North Korea’s dalliance with nuclear weapons turns the wrong corner, it wouldn’t be a surprise if moderate Japanese turn nationalistic overnight and demand complete revision of Article 9 to attack the enemy state. With a modest revision that explicitly allows defensive warfare and direct participation in combat as part of international peacekeeping efforts, Japan’s response in a future crisis will be moderated, and there will be less room for technical legal reinterpretation. As much as I admire and value the spirit of peace activists in Japan, literal enforcement of Article 9 is equivalent to not locking one’s house in an environment of rampant crime.

Instead, with a revised Article 9 that renews Japan’s commitment to never fight any aggressive war but allows retaliatory or restorative military action and full participation in international peacekeeping activities authorized by international organizations, Japan can continue to maintain its national identity as a leading peace advocate in the world. For that, however, other image problems need to
be resolved, most notably the image of Japan as regressive in the area of freedom and human rights.

The Abe administration’s response to recent incidents has not been helpful. For example, in the last few months, we saw a flurry of departures of TV newscasters seen as critical of the administration. This was followed by Minister of Internal Affairs and Communications Takaichi Sanae’s statement that a public broadcasting station could be shut down if it repeatedly violated its political neutrality in its programming. There is likely some coincidence in the departure of those TV newscasters, and there is no concrete evidence of pressure from the cabinet on the TV stations. However, in the case of NHK anchor Kuniya Hiroko, who had a contentious interview with Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga last year, there is a strong suspicion that the NHK management yanked her, after twenty-three years in that position, because of the perceived displeasure about her in the Abe administration. This took place on the heels of a long list of criticisms of NHK management personnel’s loose lips; NHK president and board members appointed by Abe have made a series of verbal gaffes on topics ranging from history issues with Korea and China to support for traditional gender roles.

Then came Takaichi’s statement. While she might be technically correct that the Minister has legal authority to shut down a broadcasting station, a democratic government ought to be particularly careful to avoid statements that could be perceived as a threat to freedom of speech. Prime Minister Abe has so far supported her stance. This approach by the government is not conducive to an environment in which investigative journalism flourishes. The Abe administration needs to go out of its way to ensure freedom of speech. For that purpose, rather than clarify how the government has the right to close down a TV station, it should emphasize that this right will be highly unlikely to be exercised in Japan.

Another issue that has ensnared Japan is the comfort women debate. This issue first emerged in the late 1980s to early 1990s as an international human rights problem linked first to the feminist issue of prostitution tours in Asian countries and then to the emerging global issue of violence against women in Rwanda and former Yugoslavia. What had been largely forgotten for forty years suddenly became a major international political issue in this period. Since then, the diplomatic and civil society interactions between Japan and South Korea have taken many twists and turns, leading to a “final, irreversible resolution” in December of 2015. At the core of this issue is wartime violence against women. Punishment for and protection from this violence became an international norm in the past two decades, as demonstrated by multiple UN resolutions. Many politicians in Japan failed to
recognize this changing normative environment and made misguided comments about comfort women that outraged many in the world. The contentions made by conservative deniers are certainly unsavory. Their main arguments are that the comfort women were not forcefully brought to comfort stations and that they worked as prostitutes, not as sex slaves. Even if these contentions are true, the systematic nature of the comfort women system and the fact that the military at least condoned the system are enough to condemn the Japanese military in the court of international public opinion.

To be fair, conservative campaigns to “correct” the understanding of the comfort women system have had consequences. Sloppy reporting by Asahi newspaper—the main media outlet that led the reporting on the issue in the 1990s—was exposed, and Asahi had to retract a good deal of its reporting on this issue. Historians have found some documents from U.S. government archives that corroborated conservative claims that comfort women were treated well in some cases. I was stunned recently to read a pamphlet created by a progressive feminist NGO, FeND, that seeks to debunk comfort women deniers’ claims. In the last ten to fifteen years, conservatives in Japan have made so many gains in demonstrating the lack of coercion in comfort women system that the pamphlet, which tries to counter conservatives’ claims one by one, reads more like a concession speech by the movement for comfort women. This is the reason why conservative forces in Japan have been so energized, feeling that they have won the battle in Japan, and now seek to fight the same battle on the international stage, with the United States as the main theater.

This is not a productive endeavor in my view, if the focus is on exonerating Japan on the comfort women issue. Even if the conservative groups are able to demonstrate that the comfort women system was not a coercive military-run system, the big picture doesn’t change: many young women, mostly from Korea, were taken to those stations not knowing what they were getting themselves into and were put in a position to repeatedly provide sexual service to Japanese soldiers against their will. This most euphemistic of descriptions is enough to make most Americans cringe, and it would be impossible to draw sympathy for the conservative claims that there was nothing wrong with that system since other countries had similar operations.

What should Japan do then? I argue that Japan should take a complete 180 degree turn, fully acknowledge the comfort women issue as a national shame, and place it at the center of its identity as an advanced rights-protecting nation. The Abe administration has shown some encouraging signs in recent months. The December 2015 agreement with South Korea went much further in acknowledging and apologizing for the comfort women system than many thought would be possible
under Prime Minister Abe. The subsequent denier comments by unapologetic Liberal Democratic Party members were quickly met with sanctions by the Abe administration and apologies by the perpetrators. Japan should go one step further in taking ownership of the comfort women issue by establishing a research center on wartime sexual violence in Japan with branches in other countries. The center will conduct comprehensive research on the comfort women system and establish an archive for this issue assembling all the relevant documents and offering access to any interested researchers and students. The center should be run on the principle of full transparency and commitment to prevention of wartime sexual violence. This operation will demonstrate to the world that Japan has fully faced up to its past wrongdoings, which should satisfy progressives’ main demand. For conservatives, their pursuit of “truth” should be achieved through data collection, and any inaccuracies in past reports and studies about the comfort women system should be revealed through the center’s resources.

The center should also examine other past and ongoing situations of wartime sexual violence in the world. It will host archives and quantitative data on sexual violence and become a hub for research and policy making on this issue. Progressives should be happy to see Japan’s strong commitment to prevention of wartime sexual violence, and research on many cases of wartime sexual violence will enable deep understanding of the issue and policy prescriptions for prevention of future violations. For conservatives, who often claim that Japan is unfairly targeted for the comfort women system when such sexual violence has existed throughout the world, the center’s research will enable fair evaluation of the comfort women system in the context of comparative research.

The crossroads that Japan stands at right now can lead to two different destinations. One is the path of Turkey. The Turkish government has consistently denied Armenian genocide, quashed a U.S. congressional resolution in 2007 through aggressive lobbying (right after a similar resolution on comfort women was adopted in Congress), remains a military power in an important geopolitical area, and uses that strategic importance to wield significant influence as a key ally of the West in the region. With the rise of China, Japan is also a strategically important ally for the United States and is already a sophisticated military power despite Article 9. Japan could play power politics and leverage this strategic importance to deny the comfort women system and aggressively challenge the current discourse, for example, by complaining to American history textbook publishers about the description of comfort women. But is that the path that Japan wants to take? Turkey today has to defend something that happened 100 years ago. With opponents of this view entrenched in top educational institutions
across the world in the form of Armenian studies centers, Turkey’s credibility is challenged every day in higher education. Turkey’s president faces criticism about this issue wherever he goes. Turkey faces exclusion from a powerful regional institution, the European Union for this and other reasons. Is this the path that serves Japan’s national interest the most?

An alternative would be the path of Germany. Germany went from the perpetrator of arguably the worst crime in modern history to a powerful economy that is committed to rights protection in the same timeframe as Japan’s post-WWII transformation. Germany has placed the Holocaust at the core of its post-WWII identity and established many research centers and museums to commemorate it. It has slowly shifted its military’s identity to the point it can now play a significant role in NATO operations. Recently, in facing the refugee crisis, Chancellor Merkel took the lead in humanitarian efforts to accept refugees from the Middle East. While there has been some backlash against this policy and Merkel has backtracked on her promise to accept more refugees, few would dispute that Germany tried to do the right thing. Germany is respected as a positive force in the world, and has established itself as the undeniable leader of the EU.

Conservatives in Japan often argue that the Holocaust was an incomparable crime, the likes of which Japan has never committed, and that Germany has conveniently put all the blame on Hitler and glossed over the culpability of others. The fact that few others make such claims attests to the success of Germany’s postwar reconciliation. Conservatives in Japan should learn from Germany’s approach rather than to complain about its success.

Japan already has many factors on its side if it pursues the path of Germany. Other than China and Korea, very few countries perceive Japan as a potential military aggressor, and if a moderate revision of Article 9 is to take place, few outside of East Asia would worry about Japan’s military invasion in the future. With a center for prevention of wartime sexual violence, Japan’s commitment to peace and women’s rights protection would become widely known and counter the image of the comfort women deniers.

Taking more refugees and immigrants ought to be the next step in following Germany’s path. Surely, there will be many challenges as Germany and other countries have experienced. However, contrary to popular belief that Japan is not a hospitable environment for foreigners to settle down, I argue that Japan can be an excellent host nation for immigrants. One of the greatest challenges that Germany, France, and other European nations are facing on immigration issues is religious
conflict. With a strong tradition of religious tolerance, Japan is in a better position to accommodate Muslims or Hindus or any other religious groups. Having never colonized most of the refugee-producing countries in the Middle East and South Asia, Japan doesn’t have the kind of historical baggage that European countries carry. Furthermore, Japan had the tradition of speaking for the non-white populations in the world in the era before WWII, being the first nation to propose a racial equality clause in the 1919 Paris Peace Conference. Conservatives often boast of this Japanese tradition—which in reality was decoupled from actual practice in the colonies—and now they have a chance to revive this legacy.

The Abe administration and subsequent Japanese governments can shift the course of Japan’s policy in the direction of peace, freedom, and rights, and lead Japan to the pinnacle of positive contributions in the world. Recent global public opinion polls have already found Japan to be number one in positive contributions to the world. The surveys don’t clarify what those contributions might be, but the path that consolidates Japan’s commitment to peace, freedom, and rights will surely further improve Japan’s image in the world. With a strong mandate, Prime Minister Abe has an excellent opportunity to steer Japan in this direction. I urge him to learn from the summer of discontent regarding reinterpretation of Article 9 and follow the path laid in the December agreement with South Korea on comfort women to take the bold next step on peace, freedom, and rights. It will surely produce better yields than the negative interest rate.
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