

Overview of Japan's Postwar Defense Policy

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

— Article 9, The Constitution of Japan (1947)

The above statement was written into the postwar Japanese constitution by the American officials who headed the occupation of Japan. This constitution is sometimes called the "MacArthur Constitution," because General Douglas MacArthur, commander of all Allied forces in the Pacific, directed its writing. The United States fought and occupied Japan primarily to ensure that it would not go to war again, and Article 9 was written to guarantee this. In 1947 General MacArthur envisioned a postwar Japan that would remain disarmed and that would be overseen by the new United Nations.

Changing American Attitudes Toward Japan's Defense

The American vision of an unarmed Japan living in peace under the supervision of a world government was short-lived, however, because the international scene changed rapidly in the late 1940s. Chiang Kai-shek, America's wartime ally in China, was defeated by the communists and fled to Taiwan in 1949. Another one of America's wartime allies, the Soviet Union, quickly came to be seen as the greatest postwar threat to democracy. And in 1950 the Korean War pitted communist forces in the Far East against a United Nations force made up largely of Americans. Thus, by 1950 when John Foster Dulles was appointed to begin negotiating a peace treaty with Japan to conclude the American occupation, he and most other American policy makers had come to see Japan as very important to the defense of American interests and democracy in the Far East.

In negotiating the peace treaty that would end the occupation and return political control to the Japanese government, Dulles also sought to pressure the Japanese to rearm and to conduct a military alliance with the United States. Although most of the allied countries signed the treaty, which was presented at San Francisco in 1951, several Asian states did not, including the new People's Republic of China (whose representatives were not invited to the conference) and the Soviet Union.

Rearmament

Ironically, by the end of the occupation it was the Americans who were pressing for Japanese rearmament while the Japanese government resisted rearmament in the name of the American-inspired constitution. Dulles encouraged Japan to rearm itself in order to become an effective military ally of the United States, but the Japanese were very

reluctant, as many remained shocked by the devastation of the war. The Japanese finally agreed, however, to the minimum compromise that the Americans would accept, which was the creation of a "National Police Reserve," a paramilitary force of 75,000 to defend the Japanese islands.

The U.S.-Japan Security Treaty

In 1952 the United States Congress ratified the peace treaty that formally ended the American occupation of Japan. Simultaneously it ratified the "**U.S.-Japan Security Treaty.**" This treaty allowed the American military to continue to use important bases in Japan for the defense of the Far East and to intervene in Japan to put down internal disturbances should the Japanese government request such assistance. While the Japanese government and a majority of the public supported the ratification of the new treaty, a sizable portion of the public did not. Even many pro-American conservative Japanese felt that the treaty compromised Japan's independence. Having negotiated this security treaty while under American occupation, however, Japan had little influence over its terms.

Japan's Political Division Over Defense

While international events were shaping American attitudes toward Japan's strategic importance, domestic events were reshaping Japanese thinking. Throughout the 1950s, there was strife over the security treaty with the United States and the continued presence of American soldiers in Japan. This conflict paralleled other political problems that pitted the political left and right against one another.

In the middle were the moderate conservatives, representing particularly the business, rural and bureaucratic sectors, which made up a majority of the country. They supported the creation of modest Self-Defense Forces, but preferred to entrust the primary responsibility for the military security of the country to the United States, so that Japan could concentrate on economic recovery.

On the right were the nationalists, who supported the U.S. alliance, but favored a stronger military posture and greater independence from the United States in foreign affairs. They were also generally dissatisfied with the liberal "MacArthur Constitution," because they felt that it was imposed upon Japan from outside, and because it renounced Japan's sovereign right to wage war. The constitution also lowered the position of the emperor; weakened state control of education, local government, and political expression; and supported labor unions and other institutions that the conservatives opposed.

Opposing the moderate conservatives and the right wing nationalists were the labor unions and the socialist and communist parties on the left. These groups had been suppressed by the wartime military regime, but they greatly benefited under the new constitution. The left wing felt that the alliance with the United States might result in Japan

becoming drawn into a conflict peripheral to Japanese interests. For the socialists, peace could only be ensured by complete neutrality and passivism in foreign affairs.

Conflict and Compromise Over Defense Policy

Throughout much of the postwar period the socialist and communist parties maintained enough popular support to achieve the necessary one-third of the Diet votes to block any reform of the Japanese constitution. However, the conservative Liberal Democratic party (LDP) controlled the government for most of this time. The LDP, which includes some right-wing nationalists as well as a larger group of cautious, pro-American conservatives, developed a pragmatic policy of limited rearmament under the protection afforded by a close relationship with the United States. This policy was continually attacked by both the right and the left and even came under pressure from the United States, but for many years it was the prevailing policy in Japan.

In May 1960, conflict over Japan's defense policy brought about one of the greatest political crises in the postwar period. The security treaty was central to the LDP's defense policy, but it was not entirely satisfactory to the conservatives. The treaty did not allow Japan any control over how American soldiers based in Japan were to be used — whether overseas, for purely American interests, or in Japan, to put down domestic disturbances. The Japanese government sought a more equal treaty — a treaty of "mutual defense" — that would confer benefits more equally on both sides. The Japanese put this issue before the Americans in 1958, and negotiated and signed a new treaty in 1960. The most important changes were the U.S. commitment to defend Japan in the event that Japan was attacked, the provision that Japan would be consulted before the United States moved major forces into or out of the country, and the clause allowing either side to end the treaty after 1970 with one year's notice.

While these changes were important, many Japanese were still not satisfied, and many opposed any military alliance with the United States. The LDP passed the treaty revision at a special midnight session at which the minority Socialist members were not present. This angered many Japanese and there were mass protests in the streets and in the Diet buildings. These protests were so large and unruly that President Eisenhower was forced to cancel a state visit intended to celebrate cooperation between the two countries. The new treaty automatically received Upper House diet approval a few weeks later, but the battle eventually led to the resignation of Prime Minister Kishi.

Despite the continuing opposition of some Japanese to Japan's alliance with the United States, public hostility to the treaty lessened after 1960 and the treaty was not abrogated in 1970.

By the beginning of the 1980's most opposition parties had come to support the U.S.-Japan alliance. Today the United States government continues to believe that its military bases in Japan are essential for the U.S. forward line of defense in Asia, and the Japanese government continues to view these bases as essential for the protection of Japan. The Japanese government pays a substantial portion of the expenses for U.S. military bases in Japan.

The Self-Defense Forces

Although conservative Japanese remain dissatisfied with Article 9 of the constitution, which renounces Japan's right to maintain military forces, vigorous opposition by the left and among the public has prevented the amendment of Article 9. It remains the basis of Japanese defense policy.

Japan does, nonetheless, maintain men under arms, because Article 9 has been interpreted to mean that it is acceptable to maintain purely defensive military forces, with no offensive capability. Japan's Supreme Court has refused to overrule this interpretation. In 1954, the Diet established a "Self-Defense Agency" which converted the "National Police Reserve" into the Ground, Maritime, and Air Self-Defense Forces. The original bill provided for a force of 150,000, but this number has been slowly expanded to 270,000 — a relatively small force compared with those of any of Japan's regional neighbors, such as Taiwan, the two Koreas, or China. Its deterrent purpose and modest capability is reflected in the prohibition of the ground forces from operating overseas.

Complete self-defense against major threats would require a much larger, better equipped force, which would probably strain the existing political compromise and popular acceptance of the Self-Defense Forces. Under present circumstances it would also likely cause apprehension among Japan's neighbors.

Japan's "Nuclear Allergy"

While there has been growing acceptance of the American alliance and the Self-Defense Forces, nuclear weapons are still taboo in Japan today. As the only people in the world to have been attacked with nuclear weapons, the Japanese have a special aversion to them — they call it their "nuclear allergy." Although Japan's high level of technology would allow easy development of nuclear weapons, even the most conservative governments have supported the "three nuclear principles," which prohibit the introduction, storage, and use of nuclear weapons.

On the other hand, the Japanese government appreciates, especially after the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the need to deter potential opponents from using nuclear weapons against it. For this it relies on the strategic arsenal of the United States, represented particularly by the 7th Fleet; and the public, while uneasy about the visits of the 7th Fleet to Japanese ports, has come increasingly to accept them.

Japanese and American Attitudes Today

Fears about rearmament remain strong in Japan. Opinion polls show that the majority of Japanese support the Self-Defense Forces but do not wish them to be enlarged. Each August, at ceremonies at Japan's National Memorial to the Dead, which honors those who died in World War II, there is great controversy between the left and the right over the government's official participation. Fear of militarism and of war is still strong in Japan today. Many Japanese feel

that the lesson of World War II is that reliance on military power is self-defeating. They also fear that a strong military cannot be controlled and would ultimately destroy democracy.

Having been the victors in World War II, Americans are more concerned with the problems of the present than with the lessons of the past. Japan has become one of the most powerful economies in the world. As Japan's economy continues to grow and its manufactured exports compete with and sometimes take markets away from American industries, many Americans have begun to feel that Japan should accept more of the burden of maintaining stability in the world. Together with the growth of Japanese power and increasing problems of trade have come American demands that Japan begin to accept responsibility for the defense of its own islands and the waters surrounding them.