What factors influenced Japan’s decision to dispatch its Self-Defence Forces (SDF) to Iraq in 2004?

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Abstract

Set against the backdrop of China’s ‘rise’, and growing tensions on the Korean Peninsula, this paper will look to address and dispel two commonly held myths; firstly that Japan’s decision to dispatch its Self-Defence Forces (SDF) was taken almost entirely due to American pressure (gaiatsu), and secondly that by dispatching the SDF to Iraq, the Koizumi administration had answered Ichiro Ozawa’s calls and signalled the advent of a ‘normalised’ Japanese security policy.

It will be contended that despite claims that Japan has a ‘reactive’ foreign policy and that the dispatch was simply a ‘Pavlovian response’ to American pressure, there have in fact always been ‘hawks’ roosting on both sides of the Pacific. However, the years following 9/11, during which the popular LDP prime minister Junichiro Koizumi was in office, provided a unique period of incubation, under which his administration was able to enact several security measures that would have seemed impossible before, yet for many have long-been desired.
1. Introduction

The following study will seek to articulate a comprehensive response to questions over why Japan controversially decided to dispatch its air, sea and most significantly ground forces to Iraq in 2004. In doing so, this analysis will look to dispel two commonly held myths; firstly that the decision was taken almost entirely due to American pressure (*gaiatsu*), and secondly that by dispatching the Self-Defence Forces (SDF) to Iraq, the Koizumi administration had answered Ichiro Ozawa’s calls and signalled the advent of a ‘normalised’ Japanese security policy.

The US-Japan alliance has famously been described as “the most important relationship in the world” (Calder 2009: 1) and the influence of the US on Japanese policy making is undeniable. Indeed, since Japan’s Second World War defeat at the hands of the Americans, and the unusual security arrangement that emerged from it, its foreign policy has largely been viewed as being almost entirely ‘reactive’ to Washington’s direction.

Thus many have wrongly dismissed the dispatch of the SDF as merely a further example of Japan bowing to US expectations. Indeed Uchiyama (2010: 93) argues that Japan’s radical efforts made following 9/11 “can be thought of as an almost Pavlovian response caused by an obsessive conviction that Japan must deploy the SDF and support the USA”. However, it will be argued that, although undoubtedly loyal to President Bush, Koizumi was by no means a drooling lapdog. Considered a ‘maverick’, he had his own ‘hawkish’ agenda, one that had a rich heritage within the conservative echelons of the long-ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), and he pursued this agenda skillfully.

Japan is almost unique in its adoption of international pacifism as a constitutional stance; Costa Rica is the other nation to do so. It has been suggested that unlike in many countries where there is a perceived divide between the foreign and domestic policy agenda, “the question of Japan’s defence posture has always been of the utmost political importance” (McCargo 2004: 182). Although this will primarily be a study of Japan’s foreign and security policy, the influence of domestic factors such as Japanese cultural norms, experiences, and political and bureaucratic institutions will also be explored.

From a realist, International Relations (IR) perspective, Japan’s seemingly passive security posturing is intriguing. Prominent scholar Kenneth Waltz (1979) perceives Japan’s decision not to become a great power in a traditional sense, despite its economic standing, as
somewhat of a ‘structural anomaly’. Moreover, Japan’s impressive and unprecedented economic recovery following its nuclear defeat has fascinated, perplexed and divided observers in equal measures.

The US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 was certainly a controversial conflict, both at the time and retrospectively even more so. However, it is the controversy and significance of ‘Operation Iraqi Freedom’ for Japan specifically, that will be of primary concern for the purposes of this study. Despite incremental increases of involvement in UN Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) throughout the 1990s, Iraq represented the first dispatch of JSDF ground forces into a hostile theatre since WWII. Moreover, when juxtaposed against Japan’s perceived inaction following the 1990 Gulf Crisis, this action is quite striking. A comparative look at Japan’s response to these two respective crises will be utilised as a mechanism by which to explore the evolution of Japanese security policy in recent decades.

This study will inevitably be confronted by some limitations. Notably the acquisition of original primary data was not possible given that for financial and practical reasons interviews with policy makers and politicians was not a viable option. Moreover, the inherently sensitive nature of national security issues also means that certain details are not freely available to the public, thus cited interviews and published transcripts will be relied upon.

In order to gauge certain public opinions, this research will rely upon surveys undertaken by reputable sources. However as Anthony DiFilippo (2002: 155) muses, getting an accurate gauge of public opinion is inevitably difficult as it is often fickle and vulnerable to manipulation by politicians or the media. For example in Japan, whilst the Yomiuri Shinbun newspaper is generally characterised as conservative, pro-government, and pro-LDP, the Asahi Shinbun is more critical of the government and more sympathetic toward the DPJ (Ishibashi 2007: 768), thus this may represent a confounding variable. Language will represent a further limitation, therefore this study will be based on secondary sources that were published in English, or that have been translated subsequently.

Despite these limitations, there is a great deal of relevant literature available and thus following extensive and careful research; this paper will present any assertions it makes with supporting evidence. In terms of the study’s scope, the opening section will look to frame the analysis of Japan’s recent security policy in some context and will thus explore Japan’s foreign since 1945 in some detail. However, the primary thrust of attention will focus on the
six years in which Koizumi was in office. In terms of countries considered, although Japan will receive the most attention, the significance of other nations, most notably the United States, China and North Korea, will also need to be considered.

In order achieve its aims, this paper will look to address the following main research questions:

- What factors have tended to influenced Japanese foreign / security policy making in the past and to what extent were these factors still relevant in 2004?

- To what extent is there a growing ‘realism’ within Japan and did this influence the decision to dispatch the SDF?

- Should the dispatch have been expected given Japan’s pre-9/11 security trajectory?

- To what extent was the dispatch significant? Does it signify that Japan is now a ‘normal’ military nation?

Although certain sections may focus more heavily on a particular issue, these research questions will represent an important point of reference throughout the paper. The opening chapter is essential for contextual reasons and will provide a solid foundation from which to build the subsequent analysis.

Section 3 will explore the significance of the US-Japan alliance on Japan’s decision to dispatch the SDF. It will raise the issue of the ‘abandonment’ versus ‘entrapment’ alliance dilemma, and the post-Cold War security landscape that Japan has found itself in. However, citing Meeks (2010: 26), “there is much credibility in the argument that the identities of governments will determine the nature of an alliance relationship”. Thus the following study will be built on the assumption that there is a need to go beyond the often-abstract speculation of IR theory, and look in more detail into the nature of the respective administrations.

The fourth section will support the Author’s main hypothesis that, contrary to some opinions, there were those within Koizumi’s LDP administration, as well as in Japan proper, that wanted to dispatch the SDF to Iraq. It will not look to explain precisely how, in a legislative sense, the Koizumi administration enacted new security policy measure as many detailed accounts are already available (for example see Midford 2003: 330-333; Tomohito 2007: 113-124; Uchiyama 2010: 84-92), but more importantly why they responded in the way that
they did so.

The final section will support Envall’s (2008) assertion that Koizumi achieved more success than any leader before him in championing the conservative foreign policy agenda. It will also look to see what legacy he has left, and briefly what Japanese security policy has entailed since, and in doing so will show that Japan is not yet a ‘normal’ military nation.

It has been suggested, “theory and policy are both better served by eclecticism, not parsimony” (Katzenstein & Okawara 2008:46). Therefore by widening its grasp, it is hoped that this study will establish a tighter grip on what factors really did influence Japan’s decision to dispatch the SDF to Iraq in 2004.

1. Japan’s ‘Pacifist Addiction’

‘We prefer to work behind the scenes to promote agreements, just like the unseen feet of the water-fowl work to propel the bird gracefully along the water. This adaptation has been very profitable for Japan, though viewed by outsiders as ‘reactive’ and ‘exceptional’’.


Kawashima (2005: ix) contends that “the basic objective of the foreign policy of Japan, like that of any other country, is to ensure the nation’s security and prosperity”. However, although it may strive toward the same objectives, there has been a sense that Japan has somehow pursued them differently to most other nations. Constructivists have argued that post-war Japan has developed “a uniquely antimilitarist identity of purely domestic origin, which constituted or constrained the national security agenda” (Bukh 2010: 5). For many decades, the ‘Yoshida doctrine’, essentially all encompassing nation-wide focus on economic recovery and progression, whilst entrusting its national security to US, has narrated Japan’s external relations.

Following his seven years as post-war prime minister, Shigeru Yoshida left a strong legacy living through disciples of the ‘Yoshida School’ such as future prime ministers Ikeda Hayato (1960-64) and Satō Eisaku (1964-72), under these men the Yoshida doctrine became “institutionalised and consolidated into a national consensus” (Pyle 1996: 32). Pyle (1996: 26) contends that Yoshida was not merely passive and reactive, observing “Yoshida’s manipulation of both domestic politics and US pressure was both shrewd and cynical”.
Article IX

Under the watchful eye of General MacArthur, Japan turned its back on the Imperial ‘Meiji Constitution’ of the pre-war years, and after just a week of intense planning by a specially appointed panel, the new constitution was born. However, not a single Japanese citizen was involved in its conception.

Yet despite this detail, the Japanese constitution has achieved a unique accomplishment; representing the single longest un-amended constitution still (theoretically) adhered to today. Although it was written to enshrine many of the virtues so cherished by its conquerors, there were some notable differences between the constitution of the US and the one drafted on behalf of the Japanese. Significantly, although Emperor Hirohito “was cut down to human size” (Calvocoressi 2009: 96), MacArthur was keen to keep him in place in a ceremonial capacity in an effort to nullify Japanese unrest. However, inextricably linked to this decision, MacArthur also deemed a war-renouncing pacifist provision constitutionally essential, in order to reassure Japan’s war-ravaged Asian neighbors (Matsui 2011: 236).

According to Hook and McCormack (2001: 4), “constitutions are statements of the raison d’être of states and nations”. Indeed, although imposed upon them, the constitution, and in particular Article 9, which renounces militarism, “struck a chord” with many of the Japanese citizenry (McCargo 2004: 182), and it continues to do so. It has been argued that whilst there is increasingly a wide appetite for constitutional reform, there remains an overwhelming public support for maintaining Article 9 (DiFilippo 2002: 156).

Article 9 declares:

Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as a 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.

One cannot effectively consider the dispatch of the SDF to Iraq, without sufficiently acknowledging the significance of Article 9. Indeed Matsui (2011: 243) contends, “the constitutionality of the SDF may be described as the single most controversial constitutional
question in Japan”. For Japanese politics the constitution continues to be a powerful point of reference, for example when looking to enact the passing of legislation to allow the dispatch of the 600 GSDF troops to Iraq in January 2004, the Diet (parliament) chamber was initially boycotted en masse not only by the main opposition party, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), which protested that the law was unconstitutional, but even by some of the most influential members of the ruling LDP itself (McCormack 2004: 4).

Moreover, there have been several Japanese groups and individuals who have looked to challenge the government in court over concerns of SDF constitutionality, particularly following the SDF dispatch to Iraq. However, senior judicial figures have, largely, come to agree that the courts should not decide the constitutionality of the SDF, since this question is so inherently political (see Matsui 2011: 240-243).

**Japan’s ‘Pacifist Addiction’**

Dobson (2003: 4) contends that contrary to traditional, Western interpretations of antimilitarism based on Christian ethics, Japan has demonstrated “a long-standing commitment to antimilitarism rooted in Japanese society and experience”. Indeed advocates of liberal constructivism have focused on the ideas and norms that have impacted upon Japan’s security policy to make it so unexpectedly unique in its reluctant to use force since the end of WWII (Bukh 2010: 5).

As well as article 9 of the constitution, any potential Japanese militaristic resurgence continues to be curtailed by the three non-nuclear principles that PM Satō first enunciated in 1968 (although the Japanese government has allowed the passage of US aircraft and navy which operate under a ‘neither conform nor deny’ policy regarding the carriage of nuclear materials), and a ceiling on defence expenditures of one per cent of GNP that PM Miki established in 1976.

According to Kenneth Pyle (1996: 20), Japan’s passivity in the international politics of the post-war era is “a product of wartime trauma, unconditional surrender, popular pacifism, nuclear allergy, [and] restraints of a peace constitution”. Such an interpretation does appear to be convincing, however others have offered a conflicting verdict. Katoka Tetsuya (Johnson 1995: 269), for example, suggests that the pacifism of Japan “is not of real commitment, but a
studied and cerebral posturing”; essentially suggesting that Japan has cultivated its pacifist stance. Whilst for Tamamoto (Conners 2004: 35), Japanese pacifism represents a “culturally derived form of diplomacy based on the pursuit of harmony and conflict avoidance”.

Regardless of its origin, Fujiwara (Cooney 2002: 152) contends, “Japan is addicted to pacifism like an alcoholic is to alcohol”. Although this view is a little sensationalist, there have been times when large swathes of the Japanese population, suspicious of American intentions, have reacted fiercely to perceived challenges to their nation’s pacifist stance. Notably, when the government initiated a renewal of the Mutual Security Treat with the US in 1960, more than five million people participated in nationwide protests, including more than 300,000 who surrounded the Diet building itself. A reaction that David Arase (2010b: 37) suggests showed that the people remained adamantly unwilling to accept a revision of Article 9, or a return to international military involvements.

Kawashima (2005: viiii) states that it took almost half a century for the Japanese people to accept the legitimacy of the nation’s Self-Defence Forces. There appeared to be a sense of tentative reluctance even within elements of the LDP itself to review the position of the SDF. Pyle (1996: 15) cites Senior LDP member Gotōda Masaharu, who expressed his opposition to changing the constitution during the Persian Gulf Crisis in 1990 to allow an SDF dispatch, because then “all restraints would disappear, and a great economic power would become a great military power”.

However, as it will later be shown, this failure to act proved to be very damaging for Japan’s international standing, and excruciatingly shameful for the nation’s conservatives. Thus legislation was soon drafted to facilitate the dispatch of SDF personnel in future UN mandated missions. However, to allay fears that Japan was looking to remilitarise, and to eliminate the chance of violent force being used by SDF personnel, five conditions were placed on PKOs, which Kawashima (2005: 36) neatly summarises:

- All relevant parties must have agreed to a cease-fire.
- All parties in the conflict must have accepted Japan’s participation in the PKO.
- Strict impartiality must be maintained.
- Use of weapons is to be permitted only in extremely limited cases of self-defence.
- The JSDF must withdraw immediately upon any breakdown of the above conditions.
These stipulations were stringently adhered to during Japan’s UN PKO involvements of the 1990s, however it will be shown that, to the horror of pacifistic onlookers, the same could not be said of the SDF dispatch to Iraq in 2004.

‘GNPism’

Following the humiliation of the Second World War, the Japanese were left both unwilling and unable to pursue the ‘national mission’ in a traditional military sense. Van Wolferen (1989: 378) states that under such circumstances, “the economic effort […] had to bear the entire burden”. The ideology of ‘GNPism’ was cultivated to undercut radical politics across the ideological spectrum and “cohered the political and business establishment around a policy of economic nationalism” (Conners 2004: 39). America’s policy at this time was made explicitly clear by President Truman, who proclaimed that “economic recovery should be made the primary objective of the United States’ policy in Japan” (quoted in Nippon 1990).

As part of this process, Johnson (1982: 41) has suggested that by purging the military and weakening the Zaibatsu (industrial and financial business conglomerates) immediately after the war, the US “propelled the economic bureaucrats into the vacuums thus created”. Although following the end of the Cold War, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) steadily assumed a role of greater importance, it has been suggested that for many decades it took a back seat, whilst the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) propelled Japanese foreign policy towards an economics-focused ascendency (Conner 2004: 36). During this period, the existence of a ‘developmental state’, spearheaded by these powerful bureaucracies, cemented a legacy of exercising interventionist and protectionist measures to ensure Japan could pursue its interests through economics on the international stage (Johnson 1982: 31).

However, this phoenix’s rise was not without turbulence. In the early 1970s, following the Yom Kippur War and the 1973 oil crisis, Japan came to experience “an acute sense of economic vulnerability” (Kawashima 2005: 23). Thus, as a reaction to this period, and American criticism, Japanese foreign policy makers embraced the notion of ‘comprehensive security’. This practice essentially involved channelling its development aid in ways aimed at contributing to international political and economic stability. Connors (2004: 40) argues this new approach “was effectively a translation of economic needs into a foreign policy idea […]
Japan could claim to be a good international citizen, assisting in the growth of regional stability and thereby enhancing security” (Connors 2004: 40).

Similarly, Under the ‘Fukauda doctrine’ of the late 1970s, Japan looked to reasserted its commitment to peace and cultivating regional economic prosperity by building relations through the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and in subsequent years, “the rhetoric was to be backed by a massive flow of aid and FDI” (Connors 2004: 41). Progress has continued steadily and in December 2003, the leaders of ASEAN member states met in Tokyo for the first ever Japan-ASEAN Commemorative Summit. However, Japan has seemingly taken its economic foreign policy efforts too far on occasion. Following the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis it volunteered to create a $100 billion Asian Monetary Fund (AMF) to stabilise Asian currencies. However, this idea was vehemently shot down by both the US and China, as well as the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

It has been argued that consecutive decades of LDP dominance demonstrated, amongst other things, the strength and popular support of ‘GNPism’ and the Yoshida Doctrine (Connors 2004: 39). However this policy was not always appreciated elsewhere, notably in the United States.

**American Gaiatsu and the Birth of the JSDF**

Reinhard (1998: 24) is keen to highlight the fact that the now infamous article 9, revoking the Japanese nation’s right to bear arms, was written before the onset of the Cold War. Indeed, Joseph Nye (1990: 160) notes that ironically, as early as 1950, at the advent of the Korean War, the United States tried to persuade Japan to rebuild its military forces in order to help contain the Soviet Union threat. From the moment the global political landscape turned ‘cold’, the Japanese consistently found themselves under pressure to establish and develop its self-defence forces. Following PM Yoshida’s initial refusal to bow to US pressure to rearm, vehement anti-communist John Foster Dulles was said by a college to have been left “flabbergasted, embittered, and feeling very much like Alice in Wonderland” (Pyle 1996: 24). Whilst the US bled financially and suffered heavy casualties fighting in Korea, Japanese industry profited handsomely. Quoting John Dower (1999: 526), the Korean War “gave a transfusion to the country’s anaemic economy”.
American calls for Japan to rearm found a receptive audience amongst the conservative ‘hawks’ in Japan, however, Arase (2010b: 38-39) suggests that their shared agenda could only make real progress in times of tension or crisis that required an urgent response. The SDF came into existence in 1954, largely under US pressure, following the outbreak of hostilities on the Korean peninsula, when the sizeable police force was rebranded as the Japanese Self-Defence Forces. Today, these forces number well over 200,000 and “are among the best equipped in the world, equivalent to the United Kingdom’s armed forces (Connors 2004: 39). Another example of progress being made following a crisis under US pressure came following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Responding to these events, Prime Minister Zenkōs made pledged to patrol the sea-lanes in international waters as far as 1,000 nautical miles from Japan.

Japanese political scientists explain an apparent reliance on *gaiatsu* as a consequence of America’s ‘smothering strategy’ during the Cold War decades (Johnson 1995: 303). Dobson (2003: 20) writes, from a constructivist perspective, that Japan demonstrated “an excessive adaptation to the favourable Cold War structure of bipolarity” and could not sufficiently or quickly adapt to the transformations in the international system.

Equally, “in part as a result of American prodding” (Nye 1990: 161), Japan did continue slowly increase its military posture under the more hawkish premiership of Prime Minister Nakasone during the 1980s. This period represented the peak of the so-called ‘Japan bashing’ days. It was deemed by many in the US, that “while Japan had access to Western markets for its produce, it played the trading game unfairly” (Connors 2004: 39). Some went as far as to suggest Japan had become engaged in an economic ‘war’ with the United States (O'Tuathail 1993).

Van Wolferen (1989: 419) damningly states that “it is inconceivable that a state with a responsible government sensitive to long-term national interests could have allowed the Japan-US relationship to deteriorate to the extent it has”. This revisionist perspective has much in common with the nationalistic-conservative position held by many in Japan, that the US no longer has any excuse to let Japan ‘free ride’ and both groups agree that the time has come for Japan “to bear sufficient arms to defend itself” (DiFilippo 2002: 101-102).

Despite the embarrassment of the 1990 Gulf Crisis, the government decided the SDF should only operate in UNPKOs, rather than in ‘UN authorised’ missions such as the one in the Gulf...
Early dispatches of SDF personnel under a UN mandate, for example to Cambodia in September 1992, which occurred under bewildering sets of rules of engagement, did initially provoke fears, both at home and abroad. Indeed despite its UN backing, assistance to the Cambodian mission was certainly not uncontroversial or uncontested. Pacifists regarded this action as representing the dangerous first steps towards Japan’s increased military involvement overseas (Kawashima 2005: 36). However Veteran Japanese diplomat Akashi Yasushi, who led the UNTAC mission, questioned the validity of such fears, comparing the Japanese peacekeepers to “maidens”, because they were so “timid and tentative” (Pyle 1996: 155).

Despite the limited nature of dispatches, “the spectre of a resurgent Japan, a Japan of great economic power and an uncertain national purpose, trouble[d] Asia” (Pyle 1996: 6). For many, change to the status-quo of the US-Japan bilateral security alliance was unwelcomed as this arrangement was often seen as “the cap on the bottle that prevented the genie – Japanese militarism – from getting out” (Kawashima 2005: 49). DiFilippo (2002: 42) observes that, given its historical record of military aggression directed at its neighbours, Japan would long-struggle to convince several countries in the region that its remilitarisation was politically benign.

This section has shown that many Japanese share a unique anti-militarist stance, and this has demonstrated great endurance. The constitution that came to be in 1947 continues to have significant ramifications today, particularly Article 9 which ‘forever renounces war as a sovereign right of the nation’. Set against this context, the dispatch of the SDF into an active conflict zone was very significant.

It has also been shown that for many years, Japan has pursued an economics based foreign policy, despite American pressure to rearm, and this created great prosperity for Japan during the Cold War years. However, once cries of ‘free riding’ from the US became deafening, the influence of American gaiatsu proved to be quite significant. Under a UN banner, Japan took its first tentative steps on the international stage.
3. Iraq and American Gaiatsu

'It is about time that Japan should quit paying to see the game, and get down to the baseball diamond.'

(Richard Armitage, in McCormack 2004: 3).

Aurelia George (Johnson 1995: 305) has argued that Japan’s alliance with the US is deemed to be of such importance for its policy makers and politicians that any decisions taken, even if seemingly unrelated, “are held up for scrutiny in terms of their possible impact on Japan’s relations with the United States”. It has been suggested that the scale of the international crisis following 9/11 was rendered to be “of such magnitude that Japan […] felt obliged to reorient its security policy to involve JSDF out-of-area dispatch” (Hughes 2004: 47). Thus if one were to subscribe to such a view, it would appear that Koizumi was left with little choice but to dispatch the SDF to assist the US in its endeavours, in order to ensure that its vital alliance was maintained.

By means of testing this hypothesis, this section will first look to assess if, as a rational nation, Japan wanted, or at least needed, to maintain its security alliance with the US, given the uncertain security environment it has found itself in. Secondly it will briefly look to explore what impact Japan’s perceived inaction following the 1990 Persian Gulf Crisis had on the Alliance, and how this impacted upon Japan’s decision making in 2003. Lastly, the impact of American alliance expectations and gaiatsu will be examined.

Maintaining the Alliance

In 1814, Matternich (Ota 2006: 1) wisely mused that like any fraternisation, an alliance must have a strictly determinate aim in order to avoid disintegration. This has certainly been true of the US-Japan alliance, especially in the post-Cold War years. Lacking the Cold War threat of the Soviet Union, the alliance has required a degree of deliberate cultivation to ensure its continued relevance (DiFilippo 2002: 54; Hughes 2005: 98). Ota (2006: 155) states that Japanese forward bases will become increasing less vital for the US, “therefore, Japan must
provide more contributions than it is currently providing today to the US in order to maintain this vital alliance”.

The US is not universally popular within Japan, however for Kenneth Waltz (Ota 2006: 1), this is of little relevance. He proclaims “states will ally with the devil to avoid the hell of defeat”. Realist theories assume international conflict and competition to be the most natural relations between sovereign nation states, thus survival strategies are developed in response.

However, advocates of liberalism, or those associated with a ‘mainstream’ approach to understanding Japan, would cite the US and Japan’s shared valuing of human rights, democracy and free-markets as a solid bond that would inherently create similar foreign policy preferences (Doyle 2008: 50). Indeed, shared security threats do not represent the only coagulant in their long-standing alliance. To quote Kent Calder (2009: 172), “the US-Japan alliance has never been a purely military conception, even though recent myopic rhetoric has treated it as such”.

**Japan’s Security Landscape**

Berger (2003: 64) states that scholars and policy makers alike “have been slow to recognize the importance of historically based animosities and rivalries”. However, it is not possible to comprehend the international relations of the East Asian region without acknowledging the influence of historical experience and culturally ingrained prejudices.

Japan’s security landscape following the end of the Cold War continues to be one of tensions and uncertainties. Niall Ferguson (interviewed in The World Without US 2009) states that North Korea is “probably the craziest [and] most unstable regime in the world”, whilst tensions over Taiwan potentially “represent the nearest thing to a cause of a world war today”. Thus, Ota (2006: 154) contends “it is desirable for not only the US and Japan, but also for most Asian countries, that the US-Japan alliance be maintained and strengthened”.

The ‘rise of’ China has attracted massive attention, both politically and academically. Even during the period in which Koizumi was in office, China’s GDP rose from $1.2 trillion in 2001 to $3.4 trillion in 2007, with its military budget leaping from $17 billion to $46.7 billion.
in this six year period. Unsurprisingly, these trends have provoked concerns among Japan’s defence community and have shaped its policy in response (Calder 2009: 140). David Arase (2010b: 46) contends that China’s “military growth, along with no demonstrated willingness to negotiate arms limits, and a stated intention to use force to take Taiwan if necessary, give both Japan and the US shared concern and a stronger alliance”. However, others remain less convinced, for example Anthony DiFilippo (2002: 154) suggests “there is no evidence that the East Asia-Pacific area would degenerate into a region chaos without the Japan-US security alliance”.

He argues that since the end of the Cold War, “Washington and Tokyo have been constantly evoking the theme of regional instability” (DiFilippo 2002: 54). Although international terrorism and piracy, two threats that continue to be very much in vogue, are flagged as the most pressing concerns, the latest Japanese defence guidelines state that “North Korea’s nuclear and missile issues are immediate and grave destabilising factors to regional security” whilst a “Military modernization by China and its insufficient transparency are of concern for the regional and global community” (Ministry of Defence 2010: 2).

Various surveys indicate that the public increasingly sees North Korea as a great threat to Japan’s security (see Ishibashi 2007: 780). Although Japan’s policy-makers and citizenry have some legitimate grounds to fear Pyongyang’s intentions, it is also the case that anti-North Korean sentiment has been stoked by Japanese conservative politicians and the mass media (Hughes 2009: 5). ‘Hawkish’ politicians as well as conservative journalists argued that Japan needed to dispatch the SDF to Iraq because the United States was the only ally able to defend Japan from North Korea (Ishibashi 2007: 780-782). Indeed Hughes concurs, stating that significant for Japan’s calculations was “the alliance imperative of demonstrating support for the US in Iraq to consolidate US support for Japan in countering North Korea” (2004: 47).

Hideyoshi Kase, former advisor to PM Nakasone and ex-Director General of the JDA, claimed when interviewed (The World Without US 2009) that if the United States was to suddenly withdraw from the East Asian region, that Japan would have to “spend the next ten years rearming in very serious ways, some including acquiring nuclear capability”. Most agree that it seems very unlikely that Japan would look to ‘go it alone’ (Hughes 2005: 146), whilst for Vice Admiral Ota (2006: 64-65), it is arguably too late for Japan to build up
sufficient unilateral capabilities because the Japanese period of peak economic power has already passed.

Moreover, the reality of the situation “goes beyond a classic security dilemma” (Calder 2009: 143). Japan and China share a bitter history and mutual thirst for energy and natural resources. Kent Calder (2009: 65-167) argues that there is now a new security imperative that has emerged as a major concern for all global powers, regardless of their geographical location. One such reality is the importance of stability of the Middle East and in particular the Persian Gulf. Japan sources over 90% of its oil (compared to just over 20% for America), as well as sizeable gas imports from the region. It has been suggested that to many American observers, “Japan has become too large a player to have a free ride in the international trading system any longer” (Nye 1990: 164). The fallout following the 1990 Gulf Crisis certainly vindicated such assertions.

The Gulf War and the US-Japan alliance

Following the Gulf War, Japan was left “dazed and bewildered when it realised that the Cold War was over and the rules had changed. Japan was asked to participate at a level that was equal to its economic status [...] and was not ready to do this” (Reinhard 1998: 35). Johnson (1995: 299) claims it is a great irony that during the Persian Gulf War, despite perceptions, Japan actually supported the US in its venture more than any time before, however, “nonetheless, it was during the Gulf War that Americans concluded from Japan’s reluctant contributions that the Japanese were not serious allies” (Johnson 1995: 300).

Indeed, Japan was seen as ‘stingy’ because although it had more at stake with the potential loss of imports from the Persian Gulf than most other western nations, it was perceived to be willing to make only a small contribution (Reinhard 1998: 36). In Washington in September 1990, the House of Representatives voted 370 to 53 to start withdrawing troops from Japan unless Tokyo increased its “burden-sharing” contributions to the US-Japan alliance (Midford 2003: 334).

Then Director General of the JDA, Ishakawa Yōzō, stated “at this time evidence is needed to show that the US-Japan relationship continues to be firm” (Johnson 1995: 303). Pyle (1996:
154) observes that much of the Japanese public also perceived this imperative and softened their views on potentially dispatching SDF troops, on the grounds that it was necessary as a means “of satisfying foreign criticisms of Japan’s failure to make personnel available to international peacekeeping”.

**September 11 and the Alliance**

Hughes (2004: 46) is keen to stress the significance of Japan’s awareness and fear of “Gulf War syndrome” following 9/11 and a need to to demonstrate solidarity with its ally. However, equally he argues that Japan’s policy makers and citizens alike shared a “genuine abhorrence” at the terrorist acts perpetrated by Al Qaeda and shared a conviction to “expunge transnational terrorism”.

Junichiro Koizumi was one of the first world leaders to offer his support to the US after 9/11, and this was certainly appreciated. President Bush announced to the Japanese Diet in February 2002 “the Japanese response to the terrorist threat has demonstrated the strength of our alliance” (Ota 2006: 6). Nearly two years later, even when it appeared likely no WMD would be found in Iraq, Koizumi leapt to the President’s defence saying, “I believe President Bush is right and he is a good man” (McCormack 2004:4). Koizumi’s shortsighted loyalty is said to have gone significantly beyond that even of British PM Tony Blair (Uchiyama 2010: 94).

A shared set of liberal values also appeared to unite the allies. Bush (2010: 141) recalled that Following 9/11, “Junichiro Koizumi, prime minister of the nation that struck America at Pearl Harbour, called the events of September 11 “not an attack against just the United States but an attack on freedom and democracy””. Kawashima (2005: 54) argues it is still best for Japan to continue to work closely with the US because the two nations “share not only many interests but also basic values”. When fighting a ‘war against terror’, symbols are as important as anything, and when the US declared the importance of such wars being fought by a ‘coalition of the willing’, the dilemma for Japan was how to show its willingness (Yasuaki 2005: 843).

The worsening security environment in Iraq had made government leaders hesitant to dispatch the SDF, particularly following the bombing of the UN headquarters in Baghdad. However, American *gaiatsu* proved to be influential at this crucial moment, following
Assistant Secretary of State Richard Armitage’s demands in late August that Japan should not “walk away” from the task of reconstructing Iraq. Furthermore Armitage spoke with the leaders of the three political parties in power, the LDP, Komeito and Hoshuto, on August 27 2003 and reportedly expressed his hope that Japan decides on measures “through sufficient dialogue while keeping in mind the importance of the Japan-U.S. alliance” (Ishibashi 2007: 776).

Moreover, at a press conference on September 5, Armitage explicitly linked the Iraq problem and Japan’s promotion to permanent member status of the UN Security Council (UNSC), a position that Japan has desired for some time (Yasuaki 2005: 849). This was followed by a visit to Japan in early 2004 by then-Secretary of State Colin Powell, who heavily hinted that if Japan wanted to take seriously the role of becoming a permanent Security Council member, it would be important to prove it was capable of meeting the associated obligations (Arase 2007: 572).

**Concerns**

However, Hughes (2004: 46-47) argues that many in Japan did harbour doubts about the utility of military power in dealing with terrorism and shared a fear of entrapment in future campaigns outside of East Asia. Iraq does appear to offer a perfect example of what Kilman (2006: 12-13) describes as ‘the alliance theory dilemma’; a state might reduce the risk of abandonment by demonstrating commitment to its ally, however, this policy may lead the ally to engage in reckless behavior, toward a third state, thus increasing the likelihood of entrapment.

Bush’s foreign policy was pre-emptive and aggressive, even by American standards, and it was understandable that this would be a cause for concern for many in Japan. Those with pacifist leanings viewed the policy of pre-emptive defence as “an extreme and dangerous form of unilateralism” (Kawashima 2005: 52). The Bush administration’s initial identification of North Korea as part of the ‘Axis of Evil’ in 2002 and the associated talk of regime change sparked Japanese fears that the US might attempt to precipitate a preemptive war to halt the North’s nuclear program, which might threatened to suck Japan into an unwanted Korean confrontation (Hughes 2009: 12).
Some harbour a view that the US is in irreversible decline, Professor Saitō Seiichirō (Johnson 1995: 301) describes America as the ‘vegetating nation’. Whilst Funabashi Yōichi (Johnson 1995: 302) of the Asahi Shimbun interprets the first Gulf War as ‘America’s Suez’, aimed at “disguising its weakness and intimidating the Japanese”. Survey data has indicated at the turn of the millennium a substantial proportion of the Japanese citizenry felt the US military would not come to Japan’s defence in a crisis (see DiFilippo 2002: 155), and therefore questioned the utility of Japan undertaking efforts to buttress this redundant alliance.

With regards to Iraq, “lacking a clear UN mandate, many Japanese felt more comfortable with implementing engagement and economic power rather than military action and regime change” (Hughes 2004: 47). As for humanitarian assistance for Iraq, the need was indisputable, but the insistence that the appropriate way for Japan to meet it was by sending its army was “open to serious question, both because of Japan's constitutional strictures […] and because of doubts over the appropriateness of sending a body of armed men to contribute to the national reconstruction of Iraq” (McCormack 2004: 4). Former LDP secretary-general Nonaka, a leading figure in the anti-Koizumi camp, concurred stating “we do not have to dispatch the SDF. Humanitarian and reconstruction activities can be conducted by civilians” (Tomohito 2007: 120). There were also significant concerns amongst politicians and citizens alike as to whether the fighting in Iraq was actually over and thus ready for reconstruction efforts to begin (Matsubara 2005: 10).

This section has shown that, although sometimes stoked for deliberate effect, Japan does face some genuine security imperatives, which make it want, and indeed need, a continuation of its alliance with the US to guarantee its prosperity and security. Whilst from a liberal constructivist perspective, the US and Japan are also united by shared values, as well as common enemies.

Those who see the dispatch as a natural and expected outcome of alliance maintenance have a case; clearly there was considerable US pressure for Japan to act, particularly in light of Japan’s damaging inaction in 1990. However, many Japanese also saw reasons not to support the US, questioning the utility of deploying the SDF for both micro, and macro reasons.

However, when the Japanese looked likely to falter, American pressure encouraged them. Moreover, by dangling the carrot of UNSC permanent membership, the US was further able
to grease the works. Clearly in Japan there were doubts concerning the Iraq War, but also regarding the alliance itself, thus showing the decision to dispatch the SDF was not an easy one. Yet they did go ahead with the action, and the following section will look to investigate why.

4. Japan’s ‘Hawks’

‘Amid wind and rain, hidden deep in the mountains, there lies a reclining dragon.’


Reportedly two-dozen Japanese were killed in the 9/11 attacks (Calder 2009: 135) and much like in the rest of the world, media coverage was intense. Both the government of Japan and its citizens donated generously to the relief effort. A US military response was not surprising, neither was the military support of its European NATO allies. However, “what was different – and unprecedented – was Japan’s participation” (Calder 2009: 136). Reports have suggested that as early as February 2002, more than a year before the campaign had even begun, Koizumi had made a personnel pledge to Bush that Japan would support the US in an attack against Iraq (Tomohito 2007: 114).

This section will look to explore why the Japanese took this action, for reasons other than because of the US-Japan alliance or American gaiatsu. It will consider the long legacy of nationalism in Japan and how this has influenced the LDP, particularly in light of the embarrassment of the Persian Gulf Crisis. It will be contended that on occasions the Japanese have looked to deliberately use US pressure to pass desired legislation, and that a process of generational change is slowly making the Japanese population increasingly ‘realist’. Finally, this section will investigate the importance of Koizumi himself, in the controversial passing of the ‘Iraqi Reconstruction Special Measures Law’.

The Yoshida Doctrine’s ‘Achilles Heel’

Yoshida (Pyle 1996: 26) reportedly told a young associate (and future prime minister) Miyazawa Kiichi that there would come a day when Japan would rearm, however, at the time “it is our Heaven-bestowed good fortune that the Constitution bans arms. If the Americans
complain, the Constitution gives us a perfect justification. The politicians who want to amend it are fools”.

However, even at the time of the Yoshida-Dulles negotiations were taking place there were those who questioned the trajectory Japan was being set upon. Ashida Hitoshi who, at this time, championed such conservative views, stated “I think the Japanese today are truly foolish and cowardly [...] it is impermissible for Japan alone to adopt the attitude of bystander” (Pyle 1996: 57). Although the Yoshida doctrine did undeniably bring prosperity back to Japan, it had an Achilles heel; “to depend on another country for its security and to suppress national pride was never easy, particularly for the conservatives” (DiFilippo 2002: 102).

There has not been, however, a single unified nationalist view. Whilst some want complete independence from America, some just want a ‘rethink’ of the relationship (see Kersten 2008: 130-137), the latter view is largely adhered to within the ranks of LDP conservatives.

DiFilippo (2002: 110) suggests that symbolic of a recent rise in nationalistic appetite, in 1999 the Diet voted to finally legalise the hinomaru (the Japanese flag represented by the rising sun) and the kimigayo (national anthem). Both of these have links to Japan’s militaristic and imperialist past and critics have raised concerns over potentially sending out the wrong message to people both at home and abroad.

Moreover, South Korea temporarily withdrew its ambassador from Tokyo in protest of the government’s decision to approve the use of nationalistic school textbooks that looked to partially legitimise Japan’s WWII atrocities. Although largely unused, Bukh (2007: 683) suggests these books represented more than just a debate over curriculum, the “history textbooks and school education in general have been important locales for the struggle between competing historical narratives in constructing and contesting national identity”.

It has been argued that “Nationalists want to revise Article 9 so that Japan can participate more fully in UN peacekeeping operations, thereby becoming a ‘normal country’ [and] to be permitted to cooperate with the United States in regional military activities without constitutional constraint” (DiFilippo 2002: 114). There have been flashes of potential change in the nationalist’s favour under Nobusuke Kishi, and even more so under PM Nakasone (1982-86), who vowed to make Japan into an ‘unsinkable aircraft carrier’ and did more than
any Japanese leader before him to push forward the agenda of constitutional revision. However, according to Johnson, this remained unrealistic and “was more a matter of national self-respect than of national security” (1995: 271).

Much has been made of Koizumi’s hawkish reputation, and David Arase (2010b: 42) suggests his ascendancy to power was indicative of an observable trend within the Japanese government, stating “his assertive nationalism reflected the continuing influence of the right wing in the LDP”. Certainly, many of his actions as prime minister did appeal to the nationalist demographic. In his September 2004 speech to the United Nations, Koizumi advanced proposals for a comprehensive reform of the organisation, including the enlargement of the Security Council to give Japan and other major powers a permanent seat (see Przystup 2005: 9).

Controversially, Koizumi also visited the Yasukuni Shrine that commemorates Japan’s WWII dead, including 14-convicted Class A war criminals, every year whilst he was in office, provoking formal protests from the South Korean and Chinese governments (BBC News 2006). However, rather than pandering to xenophobic popular opinion, Rosenbluth et al. (2007: 591) suggest Koizumi may have been making a strategic ploy to solidify his weak electoral flank vis-à-vis conservative, rural voters.

‘Gulf War Syndrome’

Hall (1998: 150) muses that all nations want to look good on the international scene and “this is an occupational disease hardly limited to Tokyo’s cultural and foreign-policy officials”. However, the Persian Gulf Crisis was particularly embarrassing for the Japanese, and even more so for its conservative politicians.

Hornung (2009: 24) states the fact that the multinational forces’ efforts in the Persian Gulf were under the mantra of UN Resolutions made the situation appear to be “a slam-dunk case for Japanese participation”, yet the Japanese were found wanting. Quoting Pyle, “The Gulf War, the first post-Cold War international crisis, revealed the changed environment and Japan’s vulnerability” (1996: 152).
It has been contended, “the Japanese people realized then that [they] should contribute to the international community with perhaps more than just finances and even perhaps sometimes blood” (Ota 2006: 112). Although Admiral Ota’s military background may imbue his analysis with a certain bias, he is not alone in prophesising a need for Japan to do more than write (albeit large) cheques.

Professor Akihiko Tanaka (Cooney 2002: 154) claimed, “Japan felt it was a loser in the Gulf War and it wants to avoid the same situation in the future”. This first crisis in the Gulf significantly influenced Japanese policy makers when the Diet began deliberating action in 2003, indeed “for those leaders who were embarrassed by Japan's performance in the Gulf War, here was an opportunity to make up for the past” (Sakai 2007: 330). Moreover, significant for the 2004 SDF dispatch, the events of 1991 had showed Koizumi the challenges he would face and what measures would be needed to overcome them.

Geopolitical and Generational Change

Evidently the Gulf War awoke many to the fact that things had changed. For Kilman (2006: 2) it demonstrated that “reality had changed and Japan […] had to become more realist”. Combined with this awaking, David Arase (2010b: 55) speaks of “a new wariness and sense of vulnerability” felt by the Japanese public who sense there is no guarantee that Japan will remain where it is for the next decade.

As well as reacting to events, a process of generational change is also said to be influencing Japanese security policy. Arguably, as “inhibitions arising from World War II will not last indefinitely; one might expect them to expire as generational memories fade” (Waltz in Ota 2006: 2). Indeed Kilman (2006: 4) observes a new generation of Diet members that are “unburdened by the legacy of World War II” and thus the decision to dispatch the SDF to Iraq may be understood, amongst other things, as a marker of generational change.

It has been contended that whilst the WWII generation are content with the status quo regarding Article 9, “the younger generation wants Japan to be a normal nation” (Cooney 2002: 175). Furthermore, Berger (2003: 84) interestingly suggests the popularity of right wing manga-comic books “reflects a disturbing trend towards revisionism among young
Japanese”. Koizumi has himself been immortalised in a violent manga-comic that vilifies Hu Jintao and Kim Jong-il and, amongst other heroics, depicts the former Japanese PM single-handedly saving Japan from a nuclear attack (*YouTube* 2009). Certainly, it does appear that many younger Japanese are resentful that Japan’s ‘yen diplomacy’ has not resulted in greater respect or appreciation of their nation and are concerned that whilst other powers, including the DPRK, have nuclear weapons, they do not (Meeks 2010: 27).

However, change is not just occurring in Japan, it has been suggested that a reduction of Asian *gaiatsu* is also significant. A decade of responsible involvement in UN PKOs has reassured Japan’s worried neighbors (Midford 2003: 341-345) and thus allowed Japanese hawks to stretch their wings a little. Dobson (2003: 5) argues that UN mandated peacekeeping efforts have been strategically used by certain elements in Japanese society and government as the justifying factor for overcoming traditional restrictions and forging a new military role for Japan.

Survey data would suggest that the Japanese public are slowly changing their opinions regarding the SDF. An Office of Public Opinion Survey (Kawashima 2005: 37) found that in 1994, 8.6% of respondents stated they thought the SDF should not participate in operations overseas whilst in 2001, advocates of this view dropped to 1.8%. Equally, those who stated they would prefer a more active participation doubled from 15.5% in 1994, to 31.2% in 2001.

However, rather than signifying a worrying militant-nationalist upward trend amongst the citizenry, it has been suggested such findings represents “a belated convergence of public opinion to the realist position that the Japanese government has maintained for decades” (Rosenbluth *et al.* 2007: 585).

**Using American Pressure**

According to Chalmers Johnson (1995: 304), the application of American pressure or *gaiatsu* to ensure the pushing through of legislation is not always as one-sided as it may seem, indeed he suggests, “Japanese officials themselves often invite and orchestrate it”. It has been contended that whilst Japan’s contribution to the ‘war on terror’ was very much in support of US-led policy, these developments did not go ahead simply because of US pressure,
“reflecting the long-term goal of playing a more proactive military role in the world, the SDF on occasion asked the US for a helping hand” (Hook et al 2005: 165).

This is not just a recent phenomenon, for example it has been suggested that with regards to the 1997 revisions to Japan’s security guidelines, “Japan’s leadership wanted these revisions and used American pressure to get the guidelines past their detractors” (emphasis added, Cooney 2002: 150).

Sakai (2007: 333) recommends that a closer look reveals that American pressure on Japan in the wake of September 11 was actually much weaker than it had been 11 years earlier (during the Persian Gulf Crisis). Indeed, McCargo (2004: 206) suggests “American pressure to act was quite limited, given that the USA now generally preferred to ‘go it alone’ wherever practicable”. Whilst the “neo-conservatives globalist and idealist trappings provide a discourse that mobilizes political sentiment, [...] they are little more than window dressing” (Halper & Clarke 2004: 19).

Indeed, the US never actually articulated on the ground wartime responsibilities for Japan (Kilman 2006: 11). Deputy Secretary of State Armitage’s calls for Japan to ‘show the flag’ had been interpreted as a call for Japan to dispatch the GSDF, however, US Ambassador to Japan Howard Baker later explained that this only meant ‘show which side you are on’, the Japanese decided to interpret it how they did (Uchiyama 2010: 84).

Moreover, Koizumi and his cabinet used the volatile post-9/11 security environment to pass other, seemingly unrelated, measures through the Diet that were already in the pipeline, such as a revision to the rules governing the Japanese coast guard. It was Chinese criminals and drug smugglers and suspected North Korean spy vessels, rather than Al Qaida operatives, that Koizumi looked to target, but he was able to use “the demands of an attacked and enraged ally as a foot in the door to pursue goals the LDP had long wanted” (Friman et al 2008: 147).

The Koizumi Factor

Most scholars agree that leaders do make a significant difference in foreign policy (Hill 2003: 69), indeed a great deal has been made of the personal commitment made by Koizumi in
dispatching the SDF to Iraq which some commentators have described as ‘Koizumi’s big gamble’ (Matsubara 2005: 11).

Having unsuccessful run for Presidency twice (in 1995 and 1998), Koizumi finally achieved success in 2001. However, rather than coming to power through the normal avenues, Koizumi carved a different route. Usually either the candidate from the biggest faction within the LDP becomes the party leader or faction leaders negotiate to reach a decision. However, Koizumi lacked any organised Diet support base and moreover was not even a member, let alone a head, of a faction. Koizumi gained a reputation as a maverick and his fellow LDP members nicknamed him henjin or ‘the freak’, “for his policy preferences, antipathy toward his own party, and his forceful personality” (Ikua & Steel 2008: 95).

Over recent years, Japanese television stations have transformed the style and content of their news programmes, and in turn the Japanese electorate have increasingly looked to the news as an important source of political information. Hoshi and Osaka (Ikua & Steel 2008: 99) have argued Koizumi owed much of his popularity to these informal daytime ‘wide shows’, particular with housewives. Koizumi correctly appreciated the need to distance himself from the increasingly unpopular LDP party and successfully orchestrated the media to portray himself as a revolutionary engaged in a ‘civil war’ with the anti-reformists. Koizumi did not initially campaign on the issue of defence reform, however, he learnt many valuable lessons during his election campaign and McCormack (2004: 8) has described Koizumi’s skill in managing the public before and during the SDF dispatch as “remarkable”.

Although Koizumi’s popularity was not necessarily due to his hawkish foreign policy, his popularity meant he could achieve what many of his predecessors could not (Griffin & Blumenthal 2005). Public opinion polls from three different sources (Asahi Shinbun, NHK, Yomiuri Shinbun) indicate that the majority of Japanese people initially opposed the Iraq war. Even a poll taken by the conservative Yomiuri Shinbun in February 2003 found that 56.9% of respondents opposed SDF involvement (Ishibashi 2007: 768).

However, this did not deter Koizumi and he stated, “If I follow public opinion, I will make a mistake. Even though the majority of citizens do not understand my decision, I have to carry out the policy which needs to be implemented” (Ishibashi 2007: 766). This conviction to act without wider backing would support ‘revisionists’ observers who “see Japan as a semi-
authoritarian order with a strong tendency towards centralism” (McCargo 2004: 216). Koizumi proved to be a ‘Teflon’ prime minister, his inherent popularity ensured that his public approval ratings rapidly recovered even after implementing unpopular defense initiatives (Kilman 2006: 4). In 2005, despite the Iraq controversy, Koizumi led the LDP to win one of the largest parliamentary majorities in modern Japanese history.

It has been suggested that this success was partially because of the low ranking of importance of foreign affairs to an electorate who were primarily focused on economics and domestic concerns. A Yomiuri Shinbun (Ishibashi 2007: 773) poll concluded that the issue of the SDF’s dispatch to Iraq ranked as the sixth (20.1%) most important electoral issue on average.

Not only did the LDP and its coalition partners enjoy a significant numerical advantage in the Diet in 2003, Tomohito (2007: 143-144) suggests that the rise of ‘Kantei diplomacy’, a process by which the PM and his cabinet implement policy top-down, increasingly allowed the Koizumi administration to direct the country’s foreign affairs from the centre. Moreover, the DPJ refrained from providing petulant opposition in an attempted to show its competence to run the government, looking ahead to the July upper house elections (Tomohito 2007: 129). Thus the dispatch became more of a valence issue, rather than a cavernous moral divide and by distancing itself from the other two other opposition parties, the DPJ laid the foundations for Koizumi’s success.

At this crucial moment the media also failed to offer any significant opposition. However, for some academics, the ‘war on terror’ came to function as a new ideological imperative, limiting media independence across much of the west, not just in Japan (Robinson 2008: 152). Moreover, it has been claimed that the Japanese Defense Agency (JDA) requested all Japanese journalists to leave Iraq before the peacekeepers arrived and this helped to reduce debate and manipulate public opinion (Zhou 2005: 11).

Sakai (2007: 363) claims there was a kind of ‘unspoken agreement’ between the government and media to avoid information showing ‘our boys’ in a serious situation, and to give comfort to the readers by saying that they were helping the local people. Thus, in some senses, both the media and opposition parties failed to provide a significant, unified opposition and obstruct the passing of legislation that facilitated the dispatch of SDF personnel to Iraq.
Commentators remarked that not since the ‘Ron-Yasu’ (Reagan and Nakasone) days had the relationship between the leaders of the US and Japan been so close (McCormack 2004: 1). Meeks (2010: 32) contends this remarkable relationship between Bush and Koizumi was largely based on the “their mutual perceptions of security threats and uneasiness about China’s rapid increases in economic development”. Thus although this relationship with Bush was not the source of inception for Koizumi’s hawkish ideas, it certainly reinforced them.

There was also arguably a case of ‘group think’ between Koizumi’s cabinet and his policy advisors. Numerous foreign policy advisers lined up to show Koizumi that ultimately supporting the US militarily was Japan’s only option, even without a further UN resolution (Yasuaki 2005: 853). Koizumi’s appointment of assertive individuals, such such as Okamoto Yukio, to influential positions because they shared his hawkish outlook, inevitably had a significant impact on his considerations (Midford 2003: 338).

This section has shown that there have been noticeable changes in public opinion regarding not just Japan’s place and role in the international system, but also on the role of the nation’s SDF.

Many of the measures taken by Koizumi were very popular with the nationalists or ‘realists’ within Japan, and there is a sense that by capitalising on changing views and the post-9/11 environment, he was able to achieve what many conservatives in the LDP had long-wanted, but had previously found to be impossible.

The embarrassment of the Gulf War made many eager to do things differently the second time around. It has also been shown that US pressure to act was actually quite limited, certainly less than in 1990, as Bush’s neo-conservative administration shared a willingness to ‘go it alone’.

It has been suggested that Koizumi’s inherent popularity and ability to orchestrate the media to achieve his aims, combined with the electorate’s prioritising of the economy and domestic issues, allowed him to act more freely. The following section will look to explore how the deployment of forces to Iraq should be interpreted, and what it might mean for Japan’s future.
5. Interpreting the SDF Dispatch to Iraq

“The Japanese way of thinking depends on the situation rather than principle [...] except for a few leftists or rightists, we have no dogma and don’t ourselves know where we are going”


Questions of Japan’s re-emergence as a military power are by no means new, as early as the 1970s there were predictions that Japan would soon become a nuclear superpower, perhaps even surpassing the US as the world’s newest hegemon (Nye 1990: 155). Such predictions never came to fruition, however, Japan’s foreign policy actions have long-been closely observed and have, on occasion, been wrongly interpreted.

The following analysis will take a retrospective look at the SDF dispatch to Iraq, firstly providing some details of what the deployment actually entailed. It will then examine if the mission can be considered a success, both at an operational level, but also at a wider, strategic level. Finally, this chapter will investigate what kind of legacy the Koizumi administration left and how Japanese security policy has developed since Koizumi’s departure from office in 2006.

Mission accomplished?

Similar to its mission three years prior supporting the US-led campaign in Afghanistan, the Japanese MSDF commenced minesweeping and extensive refuelling activities in the Indian Ocean, whilst the ASDF, based in Kuwait, flew sorties delivering cargo and non-munitions supplies. However, entering an active conflict zone for the first time since WWII, it was the GSDF deployment that was most significant. Having constructed a fortified camp at Samawah, 175 miles southeast of Baghdad, from March 2003 until July 2006 they provided medical care, purified and distributed water, and repaired or rebuilt public facilities such as schools, hospitals and roads. SDF forces also hired over a thousand locals for construction thus aiding the local economy. All were commendable activities, and seen as vital to winning ‘hearts and minds’.
Largely thanks to continuous Dutch, British, and Australian protection, the GSDF were able to undertake their duties without a loss of life, or needing to fire a single shot in anger, thus in that sense was successful. Hughes (2009: 83) suggests that although contributions in Afghanistan and Iraq were quite limited, they have provided SDF personal with valuable experience of operating in international coalitions.

The recent contributions towards both Operation Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom should be seen as “incremental approaches to increase Japan’s contributory support of the alliance” (Ota 2006: 155). Ota (2006: 128) correctly highlights that the kinds of alliance strengthening actions were unprecedented, going well beyond any efforts made since the alliance was established in 1952. Contrary to the Gulf Crisis in 1991, Japan surpassed Washington’s expectations (Atanassova-Cornelis 2005).

Japan’s decision to break constitutional norms and send troops to Iraq was monumentally popular in America, however, it was not so well supported by the DPJ back home. Broadly speaking, the party regarded the US-led invasion of Iraq as illegitimate and criticised Prime Minister Koizumi’s support of it, and in doing so scored valuable political points (see Easley et al. 2010: 8). DPJ leader Hatoyama insisted that Koizumi’s decision to dispatch the JSDF to Iraq was misguided and according to Easley et al. (2010: 8), “the Iraq War deepened and popularised the DPJ belief that to cooperate with “unilateral” U.S. policy is against Japanese national interests”.

Although the dispatch of the GSDF to Iraq was provided with a garb of legitimacy based on the passing of a UN resolution (1483), that appealed for member states to assist with the reconstruction of Iraq, this did little to silence critics. Indeed, unlike UN missions to Cambodia, East Timor and even to some extent Afghanistan, Kent Calder argues Japan’s support for Iraq was different, as this action was perceived to be very much part of an LDP effort to strengthen the bilateral alliance with the US, rather than to fulfil its UN duties (2009: 139-140). Moreover, he contends that the utility and cost of the war came to be seriously questioned in both countries, whilst “the diplomatic costs of involvement, particularly to Japan’s traditionally credible relationships with Iran and other Persian Gulf states, became an increasing issue also” (2009: 149).

Some therefore have asked if the dispatch of the SDF to Iraq was ultimately worth it.
Although it was symbolically significant, the practical reality is that the SDF functioned in a tiny geographical area (less than one per cent of the country), with a numerically insignificant force of less than 600 soldiers, two thirds of which were devoted to security or administration. Although, by Japanese standards, this was a significant sized force, it was noticeably eclipsed by other contributions, such as South Korea’s deployment of over 3,600 troops.

The Japanese troops were housed in what has been described as “one of the most formidable military camps planet earth has ever seen” (McCormack 2004: 5). They resided in an isolated, moated fortress cutoff behind layers of barricades; enjoying the luxuries of their own karaoke bar, massage parlor and gymnasium. It has been deemed questionable if the GSDF presence was more of hindrance than help to coalition operations, given that other nation’s troops had to be syphoned off to continuously protect the Japanese forces. Moreover, “the mission was extremely costly, and made only a questionable contribution to reconstruction” (Hughes 2009: 81). Many of Koizumi’s critics were seemingly vindicated when reports suggested that NGOs were achieving significantly superior results for a fraction of the cost (see McCormack 2004: 5).

**Koizumi’s security policy legacy**

Koizumi has been described as “the most significant Japanese prime minister since Yoshida Shigeru” (Hughes & Krauss 2007: 157). Indeed, although it is questionable if he initially set out with a grand security strategy, Envall (2008) observes that whether by “design, accident or some mixture of the two”, Koizumi did undoubtedly oversee a significant period of evolution in Japanese policy. It has been argued that, capitalising on the geopolitical landscape of the post-9/11 world, Koizumi went far toward accomplishing what previous conservative leaders had only dreamed of doing: setting aside 40 years of constitutional principle and transforming the SDF into a de facto regular army (McCormack 2004: 8).

In Dobson’s view, realist observers have interpreted Japan’s recent activism in overseas military adventures as an “attempt at self-promotion in the international system, with one eye on a permanent seat in the UN Security Council” (2003: 10). According to this view, recent behaviour represents an attempt by Japan to demonstrate that it is now a ‘normal’ nation and
therefore able to undertake the responsibilities expected of it. US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was clearly impressed, characterising the response as conclusive evidence that Japan represented “an economic giant that is emerging as a ‘normal’ state” (Meeks 2010: 27).

Hangstöm (2009: 832) highlights a number of events and processes that have been adduced as evidence of Japanese ‘normalisation’. He suggests they include; the passing of a cluster of national emergency bills that establish comprehensively how to respond to a direct attack, the dispatch of forces to the Indian ocean in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, entering hostile territory for the first time since WWII, and the pursuit of a debate over whether to revise the ‘peace constitution’ and permit the JSDF to take part in collective self-defense.

Japan’s road to ‘normalisation’ is not yet complete. However Kawashima (2005: 42) suggests that recent landmark policy measures represent “a manifestation of the Japanese people’s realisation that in the 21st Century it might be in Japan’s national interest – as well as […] Japan’s moral obligation – to contribute actively to the international community’s quest for a safer world”. Indeed, although historical in its own right, Calder (2009: 136) claims the dispatch of the JSDF “was only part of a larger, decade-long movement toward the globalisation of Japan’s security commitments”.

However, this movement should not be interpreted as a complete betrayal of Japanese norms. For Kawashima (2005: 42), it demonstrated that Japan had come a long way, however, “not toward the resumption of militarism, as the pacifists had warned, but towards a closer working relationship with other like-minded countries in their fight against terrorism”. Whilst for Rosenbluth et al. (2007: 588), changes under Koizumi “suggests the rise of a cool realism rather than an emotional and potentially combustible patriotic fervor”.

Another interpretation is that ironically the SDF dispatch represented the ‘lesser of two evils’. By appeasing its critics and demonstrating to Washington its continued commitment toward alliance maintenance, Koizumi had enabled Japan to continue to adhere to some variant of the Yoshida doctrine. Japan continues to be afforded American military protection, access to the US market, kept its military expenditures low, and reassured its Asian neighbors as well as the Japanese themselves that it is not pursuing outright militarism (Ishibashi 2007: 783-
Representing a prime example of what Michael Green has called ‘reluctant realism’ (Ishibashi 2007: 788).

**Post-Koizumi**

Koizumi handed over to Abe Shinzō, the first PM born after WWII, symbolising a ‘generational change in leadership’. Arase (2010b: 52) also highlights the fact that Abe was the grandson of Kishi Nobusuke, and “was raised to power by LDP right wingers who may have wished to see Kish’s ambitions and rearmament finally realized by his grandson”.

Indeed, some notable progress was made. In 2007 the Defense Agency finally found itself elevated to Ministry level. Moreover, bilateral security ties with the US were strengthened by the two countries deployment of radar technologies, laying the foundations for a joint missile defence capability. However, the constitutional ban on collective self-defence continues to leave many important questions unanswered for this project (Calder 2009:23). Furthermore, in April 2008 the Japanese High Court ruled that the dispatch of troops to Iraq was partly unconstitutional (*Reuters* 2008) and threatened to put the brakes on similar deployments in the future.

In 2009 Japan’s security trajectory looked set to be thrown off course when the DPJ, led by Yukio Hatoyama, overturned decades of virtually uninterrupted LDP dominance. Hatoyama who was well educated “and unusually cerebral for a Japanese politician” (Arase 2010a: 44), secured popularly with pledges to make the government work to improve the everyday lives of the people, to make the bureaucracy more honest and accountable, and to reduce the corrupting influence of money. However, Hatoyama also gained great support with his pledge (which he outlined in an article for *The New York Times*) that if elected, he would put the US-Japan security alliance on a more-equal footing. Hatoyama also looked to distance himself from Koizumi’s provocative legacy and notably called for a secular memorial to replace the Yasukuni Shrine as the place to honor the war dead (Arase 2010a: 51).

Like Hatoyama, President Obama was ushered in on wave of change rhetoric. In terms of foreign policy the Obama administration has shown that, perhaps due to America’s experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq, it is now less willing to act unilaterally (*The Economist*
2011) and thus, the threat of Japan becoming entrapped by American unilateralism should now be lower. However, Hatoyama was naïve to assume that President Obama would want to support his campaign promises, in particular his pledge to give Okinawa citizens more say in how and where American bases were located. Having clearly misjudged the mood, he was forced to resign. The party’s leaders decided to sacrifice Hatoyama’s political neck rather than to risk the security alliance with the United States (Rosenbluth 2011: 43).

Japan continues to subtly expand and advance its military capabilities and is arguably involved in something of a “quiet arms race with China”, shadowing Beijing’s offensive expansion with its own defensive counter measures (Hughes 2009: 52). In 2009 the Diet passed legislation that would allow the SDF to patrol off the coast of Somalia to guard not just Japanese ships but foreign ones too and allow the SDF to open fire if guarded ships were approached despite warnings. The passing of such legislation is significant as such powers clearly extend beyond that of self-defence (Matsui 2011: 252).

Meanwhile, following Japan’s recent arrest of a Chinese trawler captain and his crew, the Chinese government aimed a barrage of vitriol at the Japanese government for “international lawlessness” and “a reversion to Japan’s imperialist impulses”, demanding an immediate apology and compensation (see Rosenbluth 2011: 51). Thus showing that regardless of who is in power, and despite decades of responsible behavior, Japan’s security trajectory is likely to continue to be interpreted with one eye on its militaristic past.

7. Conclusion

This study sought to explain why Japan controversially decided to deploy its ‘Self-Defence Forces’ to Iraq in 2004. As it intended, it has proven that US pressure alone did not lead to this momentous action being taken. Instead, American gaiatsu represented just one of several significant factors.

In order to achieve its aims, this paper set out a number a number of complementary research questions. Firstly this study looked to establish which factors have influenced Japanese foreign policy making since WWII and to what extent these factors continued to be relevant in 2004. It has been shown that a culturally unique commitment to pacifism and a borderline
fear of remilitarisation became institutionally engrained in Japan. Thus for many years the Yoshida doctrine proved to be not only an economically pragmatic solution, but morally soothing for many Japanese too.

However, by entrusting its national security to Washington, Japan has found itself at times held to ransom. Although the rational offered for the steady expansion of offshore activities since 9/11 has been explained as a desire to support the ‘international community’ in general, it is clear that supporting its American ally was the primary concern (Calder 2009: 138). Japan’s sense of vulnerability, given the belligerence of the DPRK and the ‘rise’ of China, certainly provided the imperative for such alliance-maintenance efforts.

However, it has also been argued that US pressure to act was actually quite limited, certainly less than in 1990, as Bush’s neo-conservative administration increasingly demonstrated a willingness to ‘go it alone’. Alliance maintenance theory and those that describe Japan as a ‘reactive state’ place too much emphasis on the influence of the US and foreign gaiatsu and therefore wrongly assert that change cannot occur from within Japan (Dobson 2003: 24-25). It has been shown that contrary to such assertions, there has been a Japanese engine also driving change.

It has been shown that there have long-been those within Japan that have harboured more nationalistic, or ‘realist’, foreign policy ambitions for their nation. Whilst some of his prime ministerial predecessors, such as Kishi (1957-1960) and Nakasone (1982-1987), showed a willingness to progress these aims, Koizumi showed the way. Not only did he have a hawkish outlook, but also the popularity and political nous to overcome opposition and initiate security measures that he and his cabinet deemed essential to safeguard Japan’s national interests.

However, citing Christopher Hood (2008: 1), “it is important not to over-emphasise the Koizumi phenomenon”. The SDF dispatch was only possible because Koizumi was able to take advantage of a changing environment that he too, was a product of. There was a generational realisation that if Japan was to cope with the vicissitudes of a changing international system, it too might need to change. As Arase (2010b: 40) eloquently observes, “chequebook diplomacy earned Japan little credit”. It has been suggested that for many 2003 was seen as an opportunity to both prove its worth as an ally but also to banish the shame that had haunted the Japanese for over a decade.
From the notoriously beneficial position of hindsight, Calder (2009: 136) contends that the measures taken following 9/11 should not be viewed as predictable, but certainly as is part of a larger process. The Japanese public had slowly relaxed its paralysing fear of remilitarisation and its suspicions of the SDF. This was partly due to the reassurance offered by several UN authorised PKOs in which Japanese forces showed themselves to be restrained and responsible. Dobson (2003: 25) has suggested the mantra of UN peacekeeping has been able to tap in, or ‘piggy-back’ upon, the anti-militarist sentiment that has long characterised Japan, and thus slowly weakened its resolve.

This study has made it clear that the SDF dispatch in 2004 has not signalled the advent of a ‘normalised’ Japan. Quoting Hill (2003: 69), “it is all too easy […] to confuse the personalities of state foreign policy – the visible foreign policy executive – with the national character”. Although Koizumi’s popularity made certain actions possible, for many this popularity was not earned because they agreed with his hawkish foreign policy vision, indeed for some, it was in spite of this.

American calls for Japan to rearm have always found a receptive audience amongst the nation’s conservatives, however as Arase (2010b: 38-39) suggests, this shared agenda has only been able to make real progress in times of tension or crisis that have required an urgent response. The Korean War marked the first such example and ultimately led to the initial formation of the JSDF. Ironically 9/11 represented the biggest crisis for the United States since Japan struck them at Pearl Harbour, and under this unique opportunity, a unique Japanese leader seized the opportunity to progress the conservative’s long-held ambitions.

It is unlikely that Japan will reverse this progress, but it may ease off the throttle even if it does not apply the brakes. Meanwhile, “the perceived contradictions between Japan’s constitution and its security ambitions mean that the issue of revision is likely to return over the longer term” (Hughes 2009: 137). Certainly, regional tensions remain. Although Hatoyama’s swift fall from grace demonstrated the Obama administration’s unwillingness to compromise on the subject of US bases in Japan, for now it also appears less likely that Japan will be expected to deploy the SDF overseas again in the near future.
References:


