Japan and the American-led Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq

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Japan’s American-led Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq

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Summary

Japan assisted the U.S. and NATO-led, UN-mandated war in Afghanistan (2001-continuing), and contributed to the more exclusively U.S.-led, and controversial “coalition of the willing” that supported America’s intervention in Iraq (2003-11). Japan defined its goals as humanitarianism, reconstruction, and reconciliation. Its actions included:

- Deploying Marine Self-Defense Forces (J-MSDF) for refueling for coalition members in the Indian Ocean (2002-2010);
- Deploying 600 Ground Self-Defense Forces (J-GSDF) to the southern Iraqi city of Samawah in Iraq (2004-2006). The non-combat troops were involved in reconstruction efforts and protected by UK and Australian troops;
- Deploying about 200 Air-Self Defense Forces (J-ASDF) troops to the Ali Al-Salem Air Base in Kuwait to airlift humanitarian aid and reconstruction equipment to Iraq (Jan. 2004-Dec. 2008);
- Dispatching JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) volunteers and other development and technical specialists to conduct massive reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan (under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, or MOFA);
- Facilitating six multinational dialogues in Japan between the Taliban, the Government of Afghanistan, and other nations.
- Facilitating reconciliation seminars among Iraqi Sunni and Shi’ite members of parliament, held in Japan;
- Pledging monetary reconstruction aid to both conflicts. Japan is the largest national donor after the USA for reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan; from 2004-2005, during its deployment to Iraq, Japan was the largest humanitarian donor to Iraq.

Under the administration of President George W. Bush, the American government considered its role in both conflicts as counterterrorism. It first implemented its “war on terror” strategy in Afghanistan, in retaliation against Osama bin Laden’s Al Qaeda network for the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 on the United States. Part of the Afghanistan effort included ousting the government of the Taliban, which controlled the nation from 1996-2001 and provided a base for multinational members of Al Qaeda to operate. Counterterrorism strategy also extended to areas of Pakistan under Taliban influence. The conflict in Afghanistan continues and is the longest war in American history. In 2003, Bush and his closest ally, Prime Minister Blair of the United Kingdom, launched a second attack on Iraq, making the argument

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1 From the start of the war in Afghanistan in 2001 until now, the United States has had two presidents representing two political parties, the Republican party of President George W. Bush (2000-2008) and the Democratic party of President Barack Obama (2009-2016). Japan has had seven prime ministers (including the administration of Abe Shinzō, elected twice and counted here as one), representing two political parties: the Liberal-Democratic Party (jimintō), from 2001-2009 (Koizumi Jun'ichirō, Abe Shinzō, Fukuda Yasuo, Asō Tarō) and again starting in 2013, with Abe Shinzō's second election; and the Democratic Party of Japan (minshutō), serving from 2009-2012 (Hatoyama Yukio, Kan Naoto and Noda Yoshihiko).
that the nation was planning to use weapons of mass destruction, although such
weapons were never found. Taking office in 2009, President Barack Obama ended
U.S. involvement in Iraq in 2011, with some residual personnel remaining until
2012.

Official documents under the Bush administration refer to the “Global War on
Terrorism,” a slogan dropped under the Obama administration.

As a reminder, Al Qaeda did not have operations in Iraq prior to the American
intervention in 2003. A sub-group, Al Qaeda in Iraq, formed after that conflict began.
The present-day Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria (ISIS, also called ISIL or Daesh)
emerged from Al Qaeda in Iraq and in 2013 began territorial takeovers of large
areas of Syria and Iraq. ISIS also has operations in Afghanistan and has claimed
responsibility for a number of terrorism attacks throughout the world.
Introduction: Attacks of “9/11”

On September 11, 2001, a sunny Tuesday morning, nineteen terrorists hijacked four American passenger planes in coordinated suicide attack missions directed at landmark sites in America. The first plane, American Airlines Flight 11, hit the North Tower of the World Trade Center in New York City at 8:46 a.m. Seventeen minutes later, while all the world’s media were covering the story without knowing exactly what happened, a second hijacked plane, United Airlines Flight 175, crashed into the South Tower of the World Trade Center. At 9:37 a.m., a third plane crashed into the Pentagon. Passengers aboard a fourth plane, United Airlines Flight 93, fought back against hijackers who intended for it to hit a Washington, D.C. target, perhaps the U.S. Capitol; it instead crashed into farmland in Pennsylvania shortly after 10 a.m. In less than two hours, nearly 3000 people of several nationalities perished in the four coordinated attacks.

Members of the U.S. government learned of the first crash into the North Tower from CNN and assumed it was a pilot error. The possibility that the attacks were acts of terrorism became apparent after the second attack. Key American leaders assembled a videoconference and within hours, intelligence pointed to the Al Qaeda network under the leadership of Osama bin Laden, who was born in Saudi Arabia and operating in Afghanistan under the Taliban government.2

The visual spectacle of the collapsing World Trade Center towers transfixed people all over the world, and foreign leaders immediately released diplomatic statements of condolences for the victims, condemnation of the perpetrators, and support for American counter-terrorism efforts. One day after the attacks, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1368, expressing the readiness of the international community to take steps to bring the perpetrators to justice. This involved implementing mechanisms designed to ensure global cooperation against terroristic threats.

The first foreign leader whom Bush contacted was British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who had just declared, "This is not a battle between the United States of America and terrorism, but between the free and democratic world and terrorism. Vowing to “stand shoulder to shoulder” with “our American friends,” Blair aggressively sought to build an international coalition to fight Al Qaeda and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, traveling worldwide to have 54 meetings with foreign leaders in the first two months after the attacks.3

2 Osama bin Laden, the leader of Al Qaeda, was born in Saudi Arabia in 1957, and killed by the United States in Pakistan in 2011.

War Against Al Qaeda in Afghanistan

With coalition support, on October 7, 2001, Bush announced that the United States and Britain had begun “carefully targeted” strikes on Taliban and Al Qaeda camps in Afghanistan. A month later, Bush pushed for further global support by insisting that partners must help America fight its “Global War on Terrorism” in a world that offers no room for fence-sitting.4

Over time it’s going to be important for nations to know they will be held accountable for inactivity...You’re either with us or against us in the fight against terror.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) quickly authorized the intervention in Afghanistan and sent in its own multinational coalition in January 2002. Before 9/11, many believed NATO would become obsolete without the cold war. Originally mandated to oppose post-World War II Soviet communism, NATO members included Western European countries, the United States and Canada. Leaders found an opportunity to redefine NATO’s role in a global context by supplying Bush with multinational forces involving as many fifty nations, putting into action the fifth article of the original NATO Treaty, enacted in 1949 and designed to work in concert with the United Nations charter,5

Article 5
The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.

Axis of Evil: Broadening the “War on Terror”

When Bush took office in 2001, his attention was on East Asia. Bush’s first secretary of state, Colin Powell, assured that, “We do plan to engage with North Korea and pick up where President Clinton and his administration left off.”6 On the occasion of his 2002 State of the Union address four months after 9/11, Bush broadened the scope of the conflict.

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claimed that a terrorist “axis of evil”—North Korea, Iraq and Iran—“threaten the peace of the world” because, he said, they seek weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and are likely to traffick arms to terrorists, attack American allies or “blackmail” the United States.7 The American government further monitored weapons in North Korea and Iran while planning a full-scale invasion of Iraq.

Although the UN, NATO, and much of the international community gave their endorsement to the American-led intervention in Afghanistan, the same was not true when the Bush administration expanded its counterterrorism strategy to Iraq. Even some of America’s key allies such as France and Germany believed that the invasion of Iraq constituted an unjust and illegal act of aggression. Unlike the Taliban government leading Afghanistan at the time, the Iraqi government was not linked to the Al Qaeda terrorists responsible for the attacks on America. Moreover, as is well known by now, Iraq did not possess weapons of mass destruction, the main rationale for the pre-emptive strike ordered by the United States and allies as a counterterrorism strategy in 2003.

Japan’s Immediate Response to the Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq

Participating in the wars was politically complicated for many of the states that agreed to send troops and other assistance, a fact that the United States and United Kingdom failed to appreciate. This was especially true in the case of Japan, since Article Nine of its Constitution prohibits the use of force to resolve international disputes. It states:

(1) 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 means of settling international disputes.
(2) 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.

During the Gulf War of 1991, when a US-led, UN-mandated coalition fought Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein over his invasion of Kuwait, Japan handled that prohibition by offering substantial sums of money (and land mine clearance equipment) to the coalition, but no personnel. Allies criticized Japan for “checkbook diplomacy” that risked no Japanese lives. In response, immediately after that conflict, Japan enacted the International Peace Cooperation Law (1992) enabling its Self-Defense Forces to participate in UN Peacekeeping

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7 George W. Bush, State of the Union (Washington, D.C.: The White House), January 29, 2002, retrieved from http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html. The key speechwriter, Canadian David Frum, wrote that he was given an assignment specifically “to provide a justification for a war,” assumed to mean a war with Iraq. Frum aimed to analogize the new enemy with the “axis” of World War II, and his superiors instructed him to use the theological tone of “evil.” Iran and North Korea were added to the troika, perhaps, speculates Hendrick Hertzberg, to follow a “rule of three,” to broaden the global reach of the enemy, or, most likely, as “affirmative action”: North Korea was “bused in to lend diversity to what would otherwise have been an all-Muslim list.” See Hendrick Hertzberg, “Axis Praxis,” The New Yorker, January 13, 2003, retrieved from http://www.newyorker.com/
Operations. Since then, over 10,000 civilian and military personnel have deployed overseas in nearly thirty operations including in Cambodia, East Timor and Sudan. This participation can only legally take place in situations where all parties to an armed conflict have already agreed on a cease-fire.

In 2001, Japanese ambassador to the UN, Sato Yukio, cited the responsibility of Japan to support the American confrontation of Al Qaeda as something imperative to benefit the whole international community. In his October 2, 2001 address to the UN General Assembly, he signaled Japan’s willingness “to engage even more actively in international cooperation, both within and outside the United Nations, to eliminate international terrorism.” On October 29, 2001, Japanese lawmakers passed the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law, allowing Japan to provide “rear area” support to U.S. military operations on foreign territory. Japan’s leaders from the ruling Liberal-Democratic Party (LDP) also viewed participation in the conflicts in terms of duty to the U.S.-Japan alliance, as well as “a rare opportunity to promote their own visions of Japanese national interests,” as Michael Penn sums up, which for this administration meant legitimizing and strengthening the Japanese military.

Within weeks, three Japanese naval vessels sailed from Sasebo naval base to the Indian Ocean to begin refueling support for the U.S.-led coalition forces in Afghanistan. Japan’s role was minimal compared with contributions from other key allies of the United States, and still limited to humanitarian work, yet this participation was nonetheless momentous given Japan’s history of pacifism after the Second World War. When it joined America’s “coalition of the willing” in Iraq, Japan sent its first deployment of ground troops to an ongoing conflict not supported by the United Nations since 1945. Before 9/11, North Korea had been Japan’s main foreign policy concern, so the “axis of Evil” declaration helped link Japan to cooperative counterterrorism efforts with the United States and other allies. Yet the actions in Iraq and Afghanistan greatly heightened Japan’s overseas military presence. As the Ministry of Foreign Affairs statement included here shows, the Japanese government also emphasized the humanitarian goals of its actions in Afghanistan, but this has not satisfied critics who want to maintain the tradition of pacifism, as the essays in Section III show.

**Since Japan’s Withdrawal**

The Marine Self-Defense Forces in the Indian Ocean, the Ground Self-Defense Forces in Iraq, and the Air Self-Defense Forces who conducted airlifting missions from a base in

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Kuwait suffered no fatalities among its armed forces, although there were some hostage-taking incidents and deaths involving other Japanese citizens. At the end of 2003, just before Japan joined the coalition of the willing in Iraq, two of its diplomats were killed in an ambush attack. These sparked intense controversy in Japan, as discussed in Part III.

In Fall 2007, the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law that allowed the J-MSDF refueling mission in the Indian Ocean to support multi-national troops in Afghanistan was set to expire. The LDP government wanted to renew the law but it was not popular among opposition leaders and the general public. Then Prime Minister Abe (LDP), in office for just one year in his first administration, resigned abruptly after publicly staking his career on the extension of the Anti-Terrorism Law. Though many factors likely led to his unusual resignation, Abe formally connected his exit to the need “to turn the tide” against domestic opposition to American-led counterterrorism activities. Abe declared, “Under a new prime minister, the government should aim to continue the fight against terrorism, and to provide a breakthrough in this situation.”\(^\text{10}\) Nonetheless, the Anti-Terrorism Law expired in November 2007, and the administration of Prime Minister Fukuda enacted a new law, the Replenishment Support Special Measures Law, on January 11, 2008, which narrowed Japan’s involvement in the Iraq conflict and only allowed refueling to continue until January 2010. Then in 2010, newly installed Prime Minister Hatoyama Yukio ended the law as part of his Democratic Party of Japan’s (DPJ) platform to reduce Japan’s dependence on the United States and to support Article Nine of the Constitution. The DPJ had opposed participation in the US-led conflicts from the beginning, and had just taken over the premiership of Japan after almost continuous postwar leadership of the LDP.

By then, the U.S.-led wars, particularly in Iraq, had become more unpopular and many major countries had withdrawn from the coalitions. Indeed, Americans elected Barack Obama as President in 2009 in part because of his opposition to the discredited Iraq intervention while he was a state senator in Illinois. Aiming to keep his promise to end both wars, Obama initiated America’s withdrawal from the Iraq conflict in 2011 and began a “drawdown” from Afghanistan in 2014 (though he was unable to complete this). By then, even government and military insiders had become more pessimistic about the prolonged conflicts that failed to result in decisive victory. Daniel Bolger, a retired lieutenant general, titled his 2014 memoir, Why We Lost: A General's Inside Account of the Iraq and Afghanistan War, and begins it bluntly: “I am a United States Army general, and I lost the Global War on Terrorism.” Bolger affirms that the American-led wars were “two long, indecisive counterinsurgent struggles” that overstretched their limited purposes because of initial euphoria, arrogance and lack of adequate domestic debate or military opposition.\(^\text{11}\)

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Just as Americans increasingly described themselves as “war-weary,” in Japan a more confidently repackaged Abe Shinzo returned as prime minister in late 2012, vowing to reinstate Japan’s cultural pride and military strength. Prime Minister Abe’s current campaign is to revise the pacifist Constitution to allow Japan to possess a full-fledged military. Abe began promoting the need for Constitutional reform to the LDP coalition partner, Komeito in earnest in 2014. Abe succeeded in passing two new security laws through parliament to effectively reinterpret Article Nine. One law explicitly allows Japan to provide logistical support for foreign troops in situations that affect Japan’s security, and the other allows Japan to protect allies under attack under the concept of collective self-defense. The new security legislation went into effect in March 2016. Abe is expected to continue his campaign for full revision of the Constitution.

Japan’s attention to Afghanistan and Iraq subsided as new military tensions in East Asia challenged the military relationship between the United States and Japan. One of the main issues at stake throughout decades of postwar debate on Article Nine has been the fear that Japan would get dragged into America’s wars. That issue remains important. Since Japan’s pullout from Iraq and the Indian Ocean a second concern is whether Americans would protect Japan in a possible war with China over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. The tiny, uninhabited islands are claimed by both Japan and China but are administered by Japan. The area they occupy in the East China Sea has become increasingly contentious since 2012, with both nations making provocative shows of military strength in the area to the extent that war might break out at any time. As one official from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs complained, fearing American reluctance to get involved in more military conflicts, “Is the Obama administration really to be counted on?” And it is not at all clear that it is in the best interests of the United States to support Japan if this dispute flares up into all-out war. Security expert Doug Bandow has advised Americans not to be dragged into war against China on behalf of allies such as Japan, over a territorial dispute such as the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. “Benefits to America are indirect and limited,” he warns, and the impression that the United States will “bail out” allies who are in trouble only encourages them to possibly “underinvest in defense, take greater risks, reject compromises, and dismiss negotiations.” So far, however, the governments of both Japan and America have continued to express a strong commitment to each other’s security.

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14 Doug Bandow, “Americans Shouldn’t go to War with China over Asian Territorial Disputes,” Forbes, August 5, 2016 (commentary).
The extent to which America’s post-9/11 conflicts affected state and society in Japan at the beginning of the 21st century may seem unimportant amid other global problems such as acts of terrorism conducted by ISIS and the global rise of authoritarian, nativist politics often directed at immigration and refugee problems. In Japan, too politicians and citizens have turned their attention to the “3.11” earthquake-tsunami-nuclear disaster, new levels of conflict with China, and debate over Constitutional revision. Yet the post-9/11 “war on terror” mainly involving American-led interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq deserves renewed attention. Many of these transnational problems have roots in the discredited foreign policy decisions of the “war on terror,” including the rise of anti-Muslim sentiment and even ISIS itself. The officials who seek to redefine Japan’s security role also draw from their experience in Japan’s first overseas mission to a conflict zone since the end of World War II.

Japan’s participation in the U.S.-led wars still matters to its sociopolitical climate—both regarding international relations and domestic politics. That experience raised questions such as: How much should Japanese citizens trust allies’ representations of international conflicts? Should Japan resume an international posture focused on United Nations support, rather than mainly the US-Japan alliance? Can citizens criticize the foreign policy decisions of their government? To reflect on those questions and other issues concerning the American-led interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, this course reader offers some of the key articles published in the Asia-Pacific Journal during the peak years of those conflicts.
Chapters

Foreign Policy Failure

After the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq, those who search military history for a strategic imbecility comparable to December 7, 1941, will no longer come up dry.\textsuperscript{15} –John Dower, 2009

After the 9/11 Commission Report concluded that “imagination failure” was one of the factors contributing to the government’s failure to anticipate 9/11 or effectively manage its aftermath, John Dower expands the concept of “imagination failure” to begin in the years before Pearl Harbor and stretch all the way to the American intervention in Iraq in Cultures of War: Pearl Harbor/Hiroshima/9-11/Iraq (2009). This course reader uses an excerpt from that book titled, "The Failure of Imagination: From Pearl Harbor to 9-11, Afghanistan and Iraq."

The Failure Of Imagination: From Pearl Harbor to 9-11, Afghanistan and Iraq.
John Dower with an Introduction by Laura Hein
September 6, 2010

Introduction

The Asia Pacific Journal is proud to offer its readers a preview of John W. Dower’s new book, Cultures of War: Pearl Harbor/ Hiroshima/ 9-11/ Iraq (New York: Norton 2010). In the first days after the Al Qaeda attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, prominent American news sources reacted by invoking the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s description of the event as an act of “infamy.” That analogy caught the attention of many people, but Dower has thought more deeply than most about the underlying issues. The resonances between the past and the present are profound and disturbing.

Dower attends to what people do and also how they justify their actions, because he wants to know why smart people—and smart societies—do such stupid things. More precisely, he is interested in why they do the same stupid things over and over again, often with such malevolent consequences. His conclusions about the cultures of war do not bode well for the future. This excerpt focuses on why the United States government was unprepared for the attacks in 1941 and again in 2001 and, to a lesser extent, on the reasoning of both sets of attackers. The “failure of imagination” he analyzes was systemic, involving the failure to

\textsuperscript{15} John Dower, Cultures of War, pp. 17-18. “Strategic imbecility” was the original expression of Samuel Eliot Morison, Dower, pp. 26, 115.
accurately perceive either the potential enemy or ourselves, regardless of the “we” in question. When it comes to war, no one seems to get it right.

Dower is particularly good at registering when his subjects are judging other societies by standards other than those reserved for themselves and teasing out the consequences of those assumptions. Some of that dissonance is racial contempt, the subject that he earlier pioneered in War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986). Readers familiar with that book will not be surprised by the dismissive language with which Americans proclaimed their natural superiority over Japanese—or the extent to which the Japanese sense of privilege based on racial pride mirrored the American one. People were franker about their racial views in the 1940s than today but, alas, Dower had no trouble finding recent assessments that emphasized similar contempt for “people with towels on their heads” and “Arabs wearing robes.” Yet, racism, although impossible to ignore, is not the precise center of the problem. That honor goes to the arrogance of thinking of one’s own society as superior because it is richer or more influential, not just on racial grounds. This smugness explains why Americans simply could not imagine the possibility of effective attacks by either the Japanese or Al Qaeda, even though, as Dower documents, ample evidence existed of not only enemy intentions but also enemy capabilities. Even more disturbingly, as he gently concludes here, on both occasions the shock of the attacks caused Americans to jump directly from under-estimating Japanese/Al Qaeda military capability to wild anxiety about “an omnipotent, unslayable hydra of destruction,” as the 9-11 Commission put it.

Dower asks what happens when Americans judge Japan or Al Qaeda by the same standards as we do the United States, and the freshness of his conclusions reveals how rarely this exercise is conducted. As he explains here, the Japanese decision to attack the United States in 1941 was a “war of choice,” dressed up as a war of necessity, in terms very like those used sixty years later by American government leaders explaining the attack on Iraq. Both decisions were based on some spectacularly wrongheaded assumptions, woven into a rationale that in other respects was logical and informed. So, for example, once Japanese leaders decided that controlling large portions of the Asian mainland was vital to national security, it became very hard not to widen the war in 1941 when faced with strong US pressures to contain their expansion. Americans likewise ignored all the lessons of the failed Soviet attempt to control Afghanistan as well as the advice of nearly all experts on Iraq. And, as the combatants in many conflicts have discovered, after the fighting has started and people have died, it is politically and psychologically easier to continue a war than to end it on any terms other than complete victory.

Refusing to treat foreigners as rational and morally recognizable human beings also blinds us to the unintended consequences of our own actions. Dower describes here how the Hearst newspaper chain congratulated itself in 1945 for having warned its readers steadily from the 1890s that Japan was dangerous. Readers of Dower’s earlier work will also recognize one of his key themes, muted in this excerpt: that, although these newsmen were writing for an American audience, Japanese people, including government officials, also read the editorials. In other words, the hostility of the Hearst papers certainly contributed to the Japanese belief that war with the United States was inevitable. The controversy erupting in August 2010 over whether a planned Islamic cultural center would defile the “sacred ground” of lower Manhattan seems likely to have similar consequences. Many of the Americans
commenting on this plan seem unaware, let alone concerned, that their characterization of Islam itself as an enemy force confirms Al Qaeda's view of the world. Indeed, acknowledging such audiences, and the legitimacy of any of their concerns, is too often treated as unpatriotic in the context of a culture of war.

In his 1999 book, Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II, (New York: Norton and the New Press) Dower explored the vast (and sometimes unintentionally hilarious) gap between American rhetoric and its actual behavior during the postwar occupation of Japan. Strikingly, most of the Americans involved remained oblivious to the contradictions, even though they were blindingly obvious to outside observers. The ease with which they ignored their own behavior rivaled Japanese wartime self-deception about their efforts to rescue Asia from Western imperialism. Both nations insisted that they be judged by their ideals rather than by their actions. No doubt Iraqi strongman Saddam Hussein did the same.

Perhaps most disturbingly, but also admirably, Dower challenges the idea that striving to put intelligent and ethical people in power is enough. He has a great eye for quirky individuals and diverse personalities, both decision makers and clever observers. Their biggest mistakes are honest ones, although secrecy, propaganda, and cynicism all play supporting roles. Rather than evil villains, the officials highlighted here are smart, usually sincere, and deeply, deeply flawed. Yet, although individuals do make a difference in Dower’s mental world, his message is that lack of respect for far-away people and absence of humility about our own behavior is embedded in institutions as well. Unless we change both the attitudes and the institutions that nurture our cultures of war, we are doomed to repeat our costly mistakes forever. LH

“Little yellow sons-of-bitches”
In all the many volumes of documents, testimony, and commentary about the intelligence failure of 1941, there are no more telling words than an informal confession made by Admiral Kimmel while the congressional hearings of 1945–46 were taking place.

Although the commanders in Pearl Harbor had received a “war warning” message from Washington on November 27, ten days before the attack, when the first wave of Japanese planes swept in, General Short was caught with his air force tightly bunched on the ground, most of his ammunition locked away, and major airfields such as Hickam without any antiaircraft guns. Admiral Kimmel’s Pacific Fleet (except the carriers, which by sheer good fortune had put out for maneuvers) was peacefully at anchor in the harbor. These were the shocking failures that led the first post–Pearl Harbor investigation to charge the two officers with dereliction of duty, later tempered in the findings of the congressional inquiry to grave errors of judgment.
Both Short (who died in 1949) and Kimmel (who passed away in 1968, at eighty-six) argued that Washington failed to share all the information about Japanese plans it had gleaned through the still-secret Magic code-breaking operation. Never, they claimed, were they explicitly instructed to prepare for an actual attack. The two officers were given the opportunity to defend themselves in the postwar hearings, where Short read a 61-page typed statement and Kimmel’s prepared statement ran to 108 pages. The disgraced admiral’s most cryptic and persuasive explanation of why he had been caught by surprise, however, came in a lunch-break conversation with Edward Morgan, a lawyer who eventually drafted the majority report. As Morgan recalled it years later, the exchange went as follows:

*Morgan*: Why, after you received this ‘war warning’ message of November 27, did you leave the Fleet in Pearl Harbor?

*Kimmel*: All right, Morgan—I’ll give you your answer. I never thought those little yellow sons-of-bitches could pull off such an attack, so far from Japan.¹

Although unvarnished language like this did not make it into the transcript of the hearings, the majority report did take care to argue that “had greater imagination and a keener awareness of the significance of intelligence existed . . . it is proper to suggest that someone should have concluded that Pearl Harbor was a likely point of Japanese attack.” Failing to think outside the box is a theme that surfaces and resurfaces in the serious general literature. Gordon Prange, for example, speaks of “psychological unpreparedness”; Roberta Wohlstetter, of “the very human tendency to pay attention to the signals that support current expectations about enemy behavior.”²

Admiral Yamamoto, like his American navy counterpart, also put the American failure in plain language—in his case, in two personal letters written shortly after the attack. On December 19, he wrote this to a fellow admiral:

*Such good luck, together with negligence on the part of the arrogant enemy, enabled us to launch a successful surprise attack.*³
Two days later, writing to the student son of a personal friend, Yamamoto made a bit clearer what he had in mind in speaking of American arrogance. This letter, in its entirety, read as follows:

22 December 1941

My dear Yoshiki Takamura,

Thank you for your letter. That we could defeat the enemy at the outbreak of the war was because they were unguarded and also they made light of us. “Danger comes soonest when it is despised” and “don’t despise a small enemy” are really important matters. I think they can be applied not only to wars but to routine matters.

I hope you study hard, taking good care of yourself.

Good-bye,

Isoroku Yamamoto

Yamamoto obviously misread American psychology disastrously when expressing hope that the surprise attack would strike a crippling blow at morale. The Americans, however, also disastrously misread and underestimated the Japanese. Can there be a more precise confirmation of Yamamoto’s perception of Japan being “despised” and made light of as a “small enemy” than Kimmel’s frank reference to “those little yellow sons-of-bitches”?  
In a rational world, this should not have been the case. American perceptions of Japan as a potential foe traced back to the turn of the century, when Japan startled the world by defeating China and Tsarist Russia in quick succession (in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–95 and Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5), thereby joining the Western, Caucasian, and Christian expansionist nations as one of the world’s few imperialist powers. Financiers in New York and London had helped finance the Russo-Japanese War, and many Western observers expressed admiration for the doughty “Yankees (or Brits) of the Pacific,” but such support and praise were hardly unalloyed. The obverse side of support and respect for Japan and its spectacular accomplishments in “Westernization” was fear of the “Yellow Peril”—fear, that is, that Asia’s masses would acquire the scientific skills and war-making machinery hitherto monopolized by the West.  

From the 1890s to the eve of Pearl Harbor, influential U.S. media such as the Hearst newspapers relentlessly editorialized that Japan posed a direct threat to the United States. Concurrent with Japan’s formal surrender in September 1945, the Hearst syndicate ran a two-page advertisement in *Business Week* proudly itemizing how “for more than 50 years, the Hearst Newspapers kept warning America about JAPAN.” The spread reproduced “a startling prophetic cartoon” from 1905 depicting a Japanese soldier standing in Korea with the sun behind him and his shadow falling across the Pacific onto the west coast of the United States. It boasted about how “the Hearst Newspapers first pointed out the ‘Yellow Peril’ of Japan to U.S. aims and interests in the Pacific” in the 1890s; how in 1898 it had “urged the annexation of the Hawaiian Islands by the United States as a defense measure against growing Japanese power in the Pacific”; how in 1912 the paper had “focused
national attention on Japanese attempts to colonize Lower California”; and on, and on, up to 1941, when “the Hearst Newspapers, right up to the time that bombs fell on Pearl Harbor, were still hammering for increased naval appropriations and for strengthened fortifications in the Pacific.”

Here, it would seem, was imagination and “psychological preparedness” in abundance; and the United States did, in fact, adopt strategic policies that took the rise of Japan into consideration. Hawaii was annexed in 1898, and from 1905 Navy planners identified Japan as the major hypothetical enemy in the Pacific; there was, of course, no other candidate. In the color-coded contingency plans the Navy introduced before World War I, war plans vis-à-vis Japan were coded “Orange.” It has been calculated that, over ensuing decades, officers at the Naval War College tested and refined the Orange plan at least 127 times. In May 1940, the clarity of Japan’s intent to advance into Southeast Asia and the South Pacific led to transfer of the U.S. Pacific Fleet from the west coast of the United States to Hawaii, as a more visible “deterrent.” Several months prior to the Pearl Harbor attack, this ostensible deterrent was augmented by carefully leaked plans to strengthen U.S. forces in the Philippines with advanced B-17 “Flying Fortress” bombers. (In October 1941, Secretary of War Stimson expressed hope that the threat of these bombers would suffice to keep Japan from going after Singapore “and perhaps, if we are in good luck, to shake the Japanese out of the Axis.”) Three times in 1941—in June, July, and October—the army and navy in Hawaii were placed on alert during particularly tense moments in the deteriorating relationship between the two countries.

Beyond this deep history of mistrust and fear, it might have been expected that the plain nuts-and-bolts of military developments—the huge buildup of warships, aircraft, and ground forces that took place in the years preceding Pearl Harbor—would have made it apparent that Japan would be a formidable foe. This was not the case, and as a consequence it was more than just the unexpected attack that shocked Americans. Even more unnerving was the competence of the Japanese military.

This, at least, should not have come as a surprise. Japan had been working toward a capability for waging “total war” since the early 1930s. (Such thinking dated back to lessons drawn from World War I, which stimulated military strategists everywhere to consider how to mobilize the total resources of the nation in the eventuality of another great war.) Isolation from the world community after the takeover of Manchuria in 1931 accelerated these plans, and from 1932 on the military establishment dominated the Japanese government. The nation had been at war with China for over four years at the time Pearl Harbor was attacked; and while the interminable nature of this conflict could be
taken as a sign of military shortcomings and overextension, the other side of the coin was that the China war had created an experienced fighting force and spurred major advances in military technology.

These developments were not hidden, but even the experts failed to see them clearly—or, at least, to see them whole. Thus, the list of Japan’s military capabilities that caught the Americans by surprise seems quite astounding in retrospect. Their torpedoes were more advanced than those of the Americans. (It was last-minute development of an airplane-launched torpedo with fins, capable of running shallow, that made the Pearl Harbor attack so deadly.) Their sonar, which the Americans believed inferior, was four to five times more powerful than what the U.S. military had at the time. Although the high-speed Mitsubishi “Zero,” introduced to combat in China in August 1940, was more effective than any U.S. fighter plane at the time, the Americans underestimated its range, speed, and maneuverability.

The list goes on. According to testimony introduced at the congressional hearings, the Japanese had “better material in critical areas such as flashless powder, warhead explosives, and optical equipment.” Japan’s monthly output of military aircraft by December 1941 was more than double what the Americans estimated it to be. Their pilots, intensively trained and also seasoned by combat in China, were among the best in the world. As noted in an authoritative history of the U.S. air forces in World War II, “the average pilot in the carrier groups which were destined to begin hostilities against the United States had over 800 hours” of flying experience. The “first-line strength” of the imperial air forces “gave them a commanding position in the Pacific.”

In Prange’s emphatic estimation, on December 7, 1941, “Japan stood head and shoulders above any other nation in naval airpower.” The British military historian H. P. Willmott concludes that “in December 1941 the Imperial Japanese Navy possessed clear superiority of numbers in every type of fleet unit over the US Pacific and Asiatic fleets”; that it had “superiority over its intended prey” in the crucial category of aircraft carriers; and that in tactical technique, it was “second to none” at the opening stage of the war. Willmott also observes that the land-based Betty medium bomber developed by the Japanese in the 1930s “possessed a range and speed superior to any other medium bomber in service anywhere in the world.” Other sources call attention to the Imperial Navy’s exceptional skill in night gunnery, and its initial advantage in launching torpedoes from cruisers. As the audacious December 7 attack made painfully obvious, the ability of Japan’s naval officers to plan and execute an exceedingly bold and complex operation—particularly one involving carriers—was simply beyond imagining. Except, of course, that the Japanese had imagined it down to the last detail.

What accounts for this American failure of imagination?

Racism is part of the answer, but only part. The Japanese were not merely “sons-of-bitches.” They were “little,” and they were “yellow.” In the American vernacular, the phrase “little yellow men” had become so common that it almost seemed to be a single word. To be “yellow” was to be alien as well as threatening (as in the “Yellow Peril”); but the reflexive adjective “little” was just as pejorative, for it connoted not merely people of generally
shorter physical stature, but more broadly a race and culture inherently small in capability and in the accomplishments esteemed in the white Euro-American world.

Such contempt was not peculiar to Americans. It was integral to the conceit of a “white man’s burden” and sneering animus of white supremacy that invariably accompanied Western expansion into Asia. When, after Pearl Harbor, the Japanese swept in and conquered their supposedly impregnable outpost in Singapore, the British also expressed disbelief (and engaged in the same sort of racial invective). Wherever and whenever objectivity overrides prejudice, it is usually the exception that proves the rule.12

Still, racial blinders alone do not adequately account for the failure to anticipate Pearl Harbor. The Americans also were unable to imagine what it was like to look at the world from Tokyo. From the Japanese perspective, the entire globe was in turbulent flux and grave crisis. The nation’s situation was desperate. Its cause was just. And things had come to such a pass that there was no alternative but to take whatever risk might be necessary.13

**Rationality, Desperation, and Risk**

The top-secret policy meetings that took place at the highest level in Japan from the spring of 1941, including “Imperial Conferences” at which diplomatic and military decisions were approved by the emperor, are provocative in retrospect because of the generic, rather than uniquely Japanese, outlook they reveal. It was unthinkable for the nation’s leaders to question the assumption that China, including Manchuria, was Japan’s economic lifeline, or that the war there was not merely essential to national survival but also moral and just. Indeed, with Japan having already “sacrificed hundreds of thousands of men” in invading and occupying China, it was all the more inconceivable to consider military withdrawal from the continent as the United States had demanded in pre–Pearl Harbor negotiations. It also was taken for granted that the nation could not break the military stalemate in China without access to the strategic resources of Southeast Asia, and time was running out. “Our Empire’s national power,” explained the head of the Planning Board at one critical meeting, “is declining day by day.” The argument that creation of a “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” would ensure not only the “security and preservation of the nation” and well-being of all Asia, but ultimately “world peace,” went unchallenged.14

This was not propaganda intended for domestic or international consumption. It was what these men believed—the assumptions and emotions that guided their deliberations and decisions. And so, in the end, the policy makers agreed there was no choice but to break off relations with the United States and “move South.” To give in to U.S. demands would be “national suicide.” “I fear,” Prime Minister Tōjō stated at a critical meeting in early November, “that we would become a third-class nation after two or three years if we just sat tight.”15

The fateful decision to secure their nation’s position in Asia by pursuing a war of choice against the United States and other Allied powers was reinforced by a number of seemingly sane and rational projections. These included German victory in Europe, particularly against England and the Soviet Union; U.S. difficulties in fighting a two-front war; the strength of isolationist sentiment in the United States, and consequently probable domestic opposition to a protracted war in the Pacific; and the fact that there was a current of thinking in U.S. ruling circles, exemplified by Joseph Grew, that saw a constructive role for
Japan as a “stabilizing force” against “chaos and communism” in China. Additionally, it was argued that while Japan lacked the industrial potential of the United States, its army and navy were huge; its forces, including air forces, were seasoned by combat in China; and the esprit de corps of the emperor’s loyal soldiers and sailors was superior to whatever fighting spirit the Americans could hope to marshal. (In a casual conversation a few months after arriving in defeated Japan, General MacArthur told a British diplomat he “would have given his eyeballs to have such men” as the Japanese forces he encountered in the Philippines.) Given such considerations, it did not seem unreasonable to hope that the war would end in some sort of negotiated settlement with the United States, with both sides cooperating in maintaining peace in Asia.16

Counterfactual rumination (the “what if” school of history) also helps illuminate the misplaced optimism of Japan’s war planners. That Japan was able to drag out the war for over three and a half years after Pearl Harbor was due in considerable part to the priority the United States gave to the European theater. At the same time, with a little more luck and operational shrewdness Japan might have prolonged the war even longer. For example, what if: (1) Germany had not attacked the Soviet Union while the Japanese were descending their slippery slope to war, thus leaving resistance to U.S. and British forces stronger on the European front; (2) the U.S. carriers had been berthed at Pearl Harbor at the time of the attack, and had not been by sheer chance at sea; (3) the Pearl Harbor attack force had launched a third wave of strikes and destroyed repair facilities and critical fuel sources; (4) the Japanese had changed their military code in 1942, thus thwarting major post–Pearl Harbor U.S. breakthroughs in cryptanalysis that proved critical not only in decisive battles such as Midway but also in the ongoing decimation of Japanese warships and merchant vessels by American submarines; (5) Japanese naval commanders had been less timid at decisive battles such as Midway and the Solomons? (The counterfactual question that trumps all others is what if Japan had excluded Pearl Harbor and the Philippines from the December 1941 offensive? This would have eliminated the “Remember Pearl Harbor” rage that solidified the nation behind retaliation, and forced the Roosevelt administration to decide whether or not to declare war in the face of continuing isolationist opposition.)

There is almost no end to the “what ifs” of history, and perhaps military history in particular. (Hitler’s folly in deciding to attack the Soviet Union is the great strategic what if where the war in the West is concerned.) Be that as it may, Japan’s desperation and consequent willingness to take extreme risks also enter the strategic equation. It was irrational to miscalculate the psychological impact the Pearl Harbor attack would have among Americans, and hope instead that demoralization would be the result. By the same measure, however, the U.S. leadership was grievously negligent in ignoring the possibility of direct attack once it became clear the Japanese had concluded they could not retreat in China and, unless the Western powers lifted their embargoes on strategic exports, had no alternative but to move into Southeast Asia.

Military men, like politicians, cherish cherry-picked history and the symbolism and rhetoric of past challenges and glories. When MacArthur took the Japanese surrender on the Missouri in September 1945, the flag raised at Morning Colors was the same Stars and Stripes that had flown over the Capitol in Washington on December 7, 1941, while the
bulkhead overlooking the ceremony displayed the thirty-one-star flag Commodore
Matthew Perry had flown on his flagship in 1853, when he initiated the gunboat diplomacy
that forced Japan to abandon its feudal seclusion. In the surprise attack of December 7, the
Japanese engaged in similar symbolism. As the attack force approached Pearl Harbor, the
flagship Akagi ran up the “Z” flag signal that had been hoisted more than thirty-five years
earlier by Admiral Heihachirō Tōgō in the decisive 1905 Battle of Tsushima, in which
Tōgō’s modern warships destroyed a huge Russian armada that had sailed all the way from
the Baltic, thereby assuring Japan’s emergence as a great power. The signal read, “The rise
and fall of the Empire depends upon this battle; everyone will do his duty with utmost
efforts.”

Shortly before this, the commander of the Pearl Harbor attack fleet read an “imperial
rescript” to his men that had been prepared earlier by the emperor. “The responsibility
assigned to the Combined Fleet is so grave that the rise and fall of the Empire depends
upon what it is going to accomplish,” the message said. Japan’s sovereign placed his trust in
the fleet to accomplish what it had long been training for, “thus destroying the enemy and
demonstrating its brilliant deed throughout the whole world.”

One side’s infamy was the other’s brilliant deed, on which the very fate of the empire
depended.

**Aiding and Abetting the Enemy**

Al Qaeda commanded no military machine on September 11. It had been engaged in no
negotiations with the United States, nor could it have been, not being a nation-state.
Although Osama bin Laden’s ambitions had grown ever more expansive over the years
since Al Qaeda’s founding in 1988, and although U.S. intelligence specialists took seriously
his vision of a “great Caliphate,” he was not engaged in an escalating quest for autarky—for
military and economic domination of a formal, secure, and self-sufficient sphere of
influence—comparable to the quest that had obsessed Japan ever since its takeover of
Manchuria in 1931.

Even here, however, certain points of comparison merit attention. A full decade of
mounting tensions preceded Pearl Harbor, beginning with the impasse over Manchuria. In
the case of Islamist terrorism, the first attack in the United States took place in 1993, when
the World Trade Center suffered extensive damage from explosives detonated in a parked
van. Although later intelligence connected this to Al Qaeda, this was not clear for a number
of years. A National Intelligence Estimate distributed in July 1995 predicted future terrorist
attacks against and in the United States, but the 9-11 Commission concluded that Al Qaeda
itself was not identified in a conspicuous manner until around 1999—three years after the
NSC’s Richard Clarke dates this “discovery,” eleven years after the organization was
founded, six years after the first attack on the World Trade Center, and only two years
before the September 11 attack.

Where the actual attack plans for 1941 and 2001 are concerned, both were quite long in
the hatching. The Pearl Harbor operation was conceived by Admiral Yamamoto at the end
of 1940, probably in December, and the first draft of an operational plan was drawn up the
following March (by Commander Minoru Genda and Rear Admiral Takijirō Ōnishi, who in
late 1944 would become the prime mover behind the kamikaze attacks). By April, the
project had been moved into command channels, and training in activities such as aerial
torpedo practice commenced in May and June. War games for the entire “Southern
Operation,” including Hawaii, were carried out in Tokyo over a ten-day period beginning
September 11.

The “Operation Hawaii” plan was accepted in principle by the navy chief of staff in mid-
October, and Emperor Hirohito was briefed on this at the imperial palace some time
between October 20 and 25. “Dress rehearsals” by the fleet began in October, and the plan
received final approval by the navy general staff in early November. On November 17,
vessels assigned to the attack force began making their way to Hitokappu Bay in the Kurile
Islands (under Japanese control since the Russo-Japanese War), from where—on
November 25 (November 26, Japan time)—the fleet would depart for the attack. In Al
Qaeda’s case, where there is less information, the 9-11 Commission simply concluded that
the complex September 11 operation was “the product of years of planning.”

It is also provocative to note that collusion or at least mixed signals between the American
side and the enemy preceded both catastrophic surprise attacks. In U.S.–Japanese relations,
this took several forms. Despite the fact that the 1937 invasion and occupation of China
provoked fairly widespread sympathy for China and condemnation of Japan in the United
States, until around mid-1940 pressures to appease Japan came from many directions. For
all practical purposes, isolationists associated with “Fortress America” and “America First”
activities often found themselves on the same page with peace and antiwar groups. Both
desired that the United States isolate itself from foreign conflicts and avoid provoking
Japan in any way that might lead to hostilities. As late as October 1941, one informal
council devoted to “prevention of war” that included several well-known scholars of Far
Eastern relations was still urging the government to “make a deal” with Japan. At both
official and public levels, attention focused far more on Europe than on Asia, particularly
after Germany unleashed its blitzkrieg in 1939; to some degree, this fixation on the war in
Europe strengthened popular opposition to any involvement in the conflict in Asia.

Japanese leaders, naturally attentive to such sentiments, found them in more explicitly
governmental circles as well, where officials like Ambassador Grew were cautiously
receptive to the argument that Japan could be a bulwark against both domestic chaos in
China and Soviet-led international communism. Although Grew became increasingly
critical of Japan’s actions beginning in mid-1940, as late as September 1941 he was still
urging “constructive conciliation.”

Just as encouraging, if not more so, was the attitude within U.S. business circles. The dollar
value of U.S. exports to Japan in 1937 was more than five times that of the export trade
with China, and in 1940 still amounted to roughly three times the China trade. A major
portion of these exports consisted of strategic materials such as aviation fuel, crude and
refined oil, scrap iron, and steel—all critical to the Japanese war machine. A fair indication
of sentiment in the business community emerged in a survey published in Fortune
magazine in September 1940, allegedly tapping the views of some “15,000 businessmen”
including directors of the 750 largest American corporations. Forty percent of respondents
chose to “appease” the Japanese, and another 35 percent to “let nature take its course.”
The United States did not begin to impose serious controls over exports until mid-1940, when Japan, following the fall of France to the Nazis, moved troops into the northern half of French Indochina and began the courtship that would culminate in the Axis alliance in September. Part of the U.S. concern involved old-fashioned colonial interests—namely, fear that losing Southeast Asia would deprive Britain of critical resources. The scenario that unfolded thereafter became an all-too-familiar tit-for-tat game: the more the U.S. government tightened economic screws to deter Japanese aggression, the more persuaded Japanese leaders became that their empire faced disaster and there was no alternative but to “move South.”

Although there was no comparable economic dimension in the rise of Islamist terrorism, there was an analogous prehistory of support and appeasement prior to September 11. In the closing decade of the Cold War, U.S. strategic planners embraced the prospect of an anticommunist “arc of Islam” stretching east from the Middle East along the underbelly of the atheistic Soviet Union. The policy birthed by such thinking took the form of covert collaboration with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia in recruiting, training, and arming radical mujahideen for the war against Soviet forces in Afghanistan between 1979 and 1989. President Ronald Reagan posed for a photograph with mujahideen leaders in the White House in 1986, and at one point CIA director William Casey, a devout Catholic, sponsored a translation of the Qur’an for dissemination to Uzbek-speaking holy warriors. More striking is the weaponry provided to these anti-Soviet zealots by true believers in Washington who were persuaded that a shared monotheism made Christians and radical Islamists kindred souls. As itemized by Steve Coll, these weapons included “antiaircraft missiles, long-range sniper rifles, night-vision goggles, delayed timing devices for plastic explosives, and electronic intercept equipment.” Also part of this covert support were Japanese-made pickup trucks, Chinese and Egyptian rockets, Milan antitank missiles, and somewhere between 2,000 and 2,500 heat-seeking Stinger missiles. Although material U.S. aid was directed primarily to the Afghan resistance forces rather than volunteer Arab fighters (like bin Laden), the U.S. government looked favorably on the latter.24

Benazir Bhutto, the Pakistani political leader assassinated in 2008, dwelled on this shortsighted Realpolitik in a book completed only days before her death. In her view, the blowback from covert engagement in the anti-Soviet Afghanistan war (which involved close U.S. collaboration with Bhutto’s political adversaries in Pakistan) was by no means an exceptional instance of myopic Western policies in the Middle East. On the contrary, the United States and European powers had a long history of engaging in “double standards” by preaching freedom and development while in actual practice supporting both dictators and, in Afghanistan, the most radical and oppressive Islamist fundamentalists. Over the course of decades, she concluded, the West had “unintentionally created its own Frankenstein’s monster.” These were harsh words and more than a little disingenuous, since while she was prime minister of Pakistan from 1993 to 1996, her own government—alarmed by the civil strife that followed the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989—had provided covert financial support, supplies, and military advisers to the extremist Taliban who later provided a haven for bin Laden.25

Monsters commonly have multiple creators, but this does not diminish the U.S. role in helping to promote Islamist radicalism early on. Like the Japanese soldiers and sailors who
became seasoned veterans in the war against China and initially benefitted materially from U.S. support through trade in strategic goods, the mujahideen—once proxy soldiers for the U.S. government and romanticized "freedom fighters" in Washington and the U.S. media—emerged from Afghanistan as hardened fighters primed for new missions. It fell to Al Qaeda, birthed in Afghanistan in 1988, to define that mission for them.

"This little terrorist in Afghanistan"
The stunning "asymmetrical" victory of Afghan and Muslim fighters over the Soviet Union emboldened Islamist radicals to believe they could prevail over U.S. military power as well. In a television interview more than three years before 9-11, bin Laden boasted that the victory of lightly armed holy warriors in Afghanistan "utterly annihilated the myth of the so-called superpowers." (This interview was rebroadcast on Al Jazeera nine days after 9-11.) By contrast, U.S. policy makers drew few if any counterpart lessons. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the politicized zealotry they had encouraged in Afghanistan no longer attracted top-level attention. Even within the U.S. military, the effectiveness of Islamist insurgency and terror did not prompt serious attention to counterinsurgency doctrine.

This was true when the Soviet Union withdrew its humiliated forces from Afghanistan in 1989 and official Washington proceeded to remove the latter nation from its radar. It was still true in 2001, when the United States invaded Afghanistan and routed the Taliban in the wake of the 9-11 attacks. And, despite belated attention to counterinsurgency tactics in Iraq beginning around 2006, it would remain largely true where Afghanistan was concerned to the end of the Bush presidency, when the Taliban were on the upsurge and again helping shelter bin Laden. At the beginning of 2009, as a new administration assumed power in Washington, Russia's ambassador to NATO looked back on the twentieth anniversary of the Soviet withdrawal and held this up as a mirror to the beleaguered U.S. military mission in Afghanistan. "They have repeated all our mistakes," he observed, "and they have made a mountain of their own."

Why did top military and civilian leaders fail to take asymmetrical threats from Al Qaeda and the Islamists seriously? As with the earlier failure to take Japanese military capabilities seriously, part of the answer lies in racial arrogance and cultural condescension. When Charles Freeman, the U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia at the time of the first Gulf War in 1991, tried to draw attention to the mujahideen after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, for example, he found no one interested, including top leaders at the CIA. "Part of the attitude in Washington," he recalled, "was, 'Why should we go out there and talk to people with towels on their heads?'"

Michael Scheuer, who headed the CIA's "bin Laden unit" until being cashiered in 1999, tells a similar story in even grittier language. Washington's top personnel and policy makers, he declared, are "so full of themselves, they think America is invulnerable; cannot imagine the rest of the world does not want to be like us; and believe an American empire in the twenty-first century not only is our destiny, but our duty to mankind, especially to the unwashed, unlettered, undemocratic, unwhite, unshaved, and antifeminist Muslim masses." One could only describe this hubris as "arrogance (or is it racism?)," Scheuer went on. The elites simply could not fathom that "a polyglot bunch of Arabs wearing robes, sporting
scraggly beards, and squatting around campfires in Afghan deserts and mountains could pose a mortal threat to the United States.”

This was the “little yellow men” mindset transferred to the Middle East. As in 1941, civilian and military planners underestimated the enemy and failed to grasp both the depth of their self-righteousness and their willingness to take enormous risk as well as heavy losses. Most disastrously, they were unable to imagine this enemy possessing the cunning and competence to pull off a complex and imaginative act of aggression. None of his peers challenged Deputy Secretary of Defense Wolfowitz when, five months before 9-11, he dismissed bin Laden as “this little terrorist in Afghanistan.”

Once again, as with system breakdown and leadership negligence, the diagnostic language in postmortems of the failure of imagination exposed on September 11 is essentially the same as that which analysts have long used in describing the disbelief that greeted Pearl Harbor: psychological unpreparedness, prejudices and preconceptions, gross underestimation of intentions and capabilities. There is a sense of encountering a pathologist’s repetitive case book, glossing near-identical cases. Thus, to crib from Roberta Wohlstetter: prior to September 11, American analysts (with some marginalized exceptions) and decision makers simply were unable “to project the daring and ingenuity of the enemy.” To borrow from Admiral Yamamoto’s letter to a young student: Bush administration planners were undone by the arrogance of despising a small enemy. To appropriate Admiral Kimmel’s pithy words: no one in a position of command thought that those little Muslim sons-of-bitches could pull off such a spectacular attack, so far from home.

In this ethnocentric world, terrorists of the twenty-first century were “little men” in a compound sense—little because they were racially, ethnically, culturally, and religiously alien; and little because, unlike Japan sixty years earlier, and unlike the Soviet Union or China or even Iraq, Iran, and North Korea, they were not a nation-state. When Richard Clarke criticized the Bush administration’s disregard of the Al Qaeda threat, and its subsequent misguided response to September 11, his most vivid revelations concerned the immediate response—and disbelief—of the president’s inner circle of advisers:

On the morning of the 12th, DOD’s [the Department of Defense’s] focus was already beginning to shift from al Qaeda. CIA was explicit now that al Qaeda was guilty of the attacks, but Paul Wolfowitz, Rumsfeld’s deputy, was not persuaded. It was too
sophisticated and complicated an operation, he said, for a terrorist group to have pulled off by itself, without a state sponsor—Iraq must have been helping them.

On the same day, September 12, Clarke went on to record, President Bush “grabbed a few” intelligence experts including himself: “‘Look,’ he told us, ‘I know you have a lot to do and all . . . but I want you, as soon as you can, to go back over everything, everything. See if Saddam did this. See if he’s linked in any way.’”

These responses, revealed after the invasion of Iraq, can be interpreted as genuine or Machiavellian (already preparing to use the 9-11 outrage to initiate a long-desired war against Iraq)—but in all likelihood they were both. Ensuing use of the “war on terror” to invade Iraq, with all the distortion of intelligence data this involved, was duplicitous; but the prior failure to take Al Qaeda or the terrorist threat really seriously reflected a lingering Cold War mindset. The 9-11 Commission singled out “imagination” as one of “four kinds of failures” revealed by the attacks of September 11. (The other three were “policy, capabilities, and management.”) The commission even went so far as to recommend remedying this by “institutionalizing imagination”—an oxymoron one could easily imagine the bureaucratic behemoth taking seriously to heart by forming committees, preparing flow charts, and perhaps even creating a supersecret NIA (National Imagination Agency).

In a passing comment, the 9-11 Commission also took note of what happens when, after unexpected catastrophe, erstwhile little men prove to be formidable adversaries:

Al Qaeda and its affiliates are popularly described as being all over the world, adaptable, resilient, needing little higher-level organization, and capable of anything. The American people are thus given the picture of an omnipotent, unslayable hydra of destruction. This image lowers expectations for government effectiveness.

What the commission was evoking was what one U.S. counterterrorism official called “the superman scenario.” The shocking success of the little Muslim men abruptly endowed them with hitherto undreamed-of powers and capabilities—to the extent of precipitating a declaration of a global war on... what? On a tactic (terror). On a worst-case scenario where Al Qaeda or other terrorists might obtain weapons of mass destruction. Eventually, this paranoia reached such a level that deflating hyperbole became almost a category in itself in the burgeoning popular literature on terrorism. As another counterterrorism expert put it, writing specifically about Al Qaeda,
“by failing to understand the context of the organization, its very strengths and weaknesses, we magnified our mental image of terrorists as bogeymen.” Yet another posed the rhetorical question “Are they ten feet tall?” and deemed it necessary to answer this. “They’re not,” he assured his audience.32

A comparable cognitive dissonance took place after Pearl Harbor. In American eyes, the Japanese foe morphed, overnight, from little men into supermen. Until 1943 or even 1944, when the war turned unmistakably against Japan, the cartoon rendering of the enemy was often a monstrously huge figure. Like the 9-11 Commission, more sober commentators responded by warning of the danger of exaggerating the enemy’s resources and capabilities to the point where this became demoralizing. A typical essay in the Sunday New York Times Magazine in March 1942, for example, might have served as a draft for post–September 11 warnings about being carried away by the specter of an unslayable hydra of destruction. It was titled “Japanese Superman? That, Too, Is a Fallacy.”33

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Notes

1 Prange, Pearl Harbor, 515. Morgan recounted this to Prange in an interview in October - 1976.

2 Report of the Joint Committee on the Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack, 259; Prange, At Dawn We Slept, 689; Wohlstetter, Pearl Harbor, -392.

3 Prange, Pearl Harbor, 552; Goldstein and Dillon, The Pearl Harbor Papers, -121.

4 Goldstein and Dillon, The Pearl Harbor Papers, -122.

5 The conflicting images of Japan at the turn of the century emerge vividly in several lavishly illustrated units on the “Visualizing Cultures” website produced at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology by John W. Dower and Shigeru Miyagawa. See visualizingcultures.mit.edu, and particularly “Throwing Off Asia” (in three parts), “Asia Rising,” and “Yellow Promise/Yellow Peril.” The latter two units are based on Japanese and foreign postcards of the Russo-Japanese War in the Leonard Lauder Collection at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and “Yellow Promise/Yellow Peril” is particularly illuminating on the ambiguous European response to Japan’s stunning emergence as a powerful imperialist -power.

7 For general treatments of these matters, see Akira Iriye, Pacific Estrangement: Japanese and American Expansion, 1897–1911 (Harvard University Press, 1972); also Spector, Eagle against the Sun, esp. chs. 1–5. The 127 tests and revisions of Orange are noted in ibid., -57.

8 On the B-17 bombers, see Prange, Pearl Harbor, 145–52, 290–93; also Spector, Eagle against the Sun, 74–75. The three Pearl Harbor alerts are described in detail in Wohlstetter, Pearl Harbor, 71–169.

9 See, for example, Michael A. Barnhart, Japan Prepares for Total War: The Search for Economic Security, 1919–1941 (Cornell University Press, 1987).


12 For an archives-based analysis of World War II in Asia that is acutely sensitive to (and quotable about) Anglo racism, see Christopher Thorne, Allies of a Kind: The United States, Britain, and the War against Japan, 1941–1945 (Oxford University Press, 1979). American racism vis-à-vis Asians was complicated by the positive attitude many Americans had come to hold toward China by the late 1930s. Although "anti-Oriental" movements and legislation constitute a deep stain in U.S. history of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, sympathy toward the Chinese in their struggle against the Japanese was strong—a development that derived in considerable part from the exceedingly effective positive image of the Chinese purveyed by popular writers such as the Nobel Prize-winning Pearl Buck. I address these matters at length in War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War (Pantheon, 1986).

13 It is worth keeping in mind that surprise attacks have been common in modern times. These include the attack by Germany on the Soviet Union in 1941; by North Korea on South Korea in 1950, and soon after this the entry of the People’s Republic of China into the Korean War; and the Tet offensive in the Vietnam War in -1968.

14 For examples of the bedrock assumptions noted here, see Ike, Japan’s Decision for War, 78, 80, 82, 148, 152, -160.

15 Ike, Japan's Decision for War, 238, -246.

Goldstein and Dillon, *The Pearl Harbor Papers*, 155. For the Missouri surrender ceremony, see Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, vol. 14: *Victory in the Pacific* (Little, Brown, 1960), 362–63. The flag that had been flying over the Capitol on December 7 had previously been displayed at Casablanca (where the Allied policy of “unconditional surrender” was announced in February 1943), Rome, and -Berlin.

Japan’s vision of what was needed to be secure and self-sufficient escalated steadily after the Manchurian Incident of 1931, with huge leaps taking place in 1937, with the invasion of China; in mid-1940, with the movement of Japanese forces into northern French Indochina; and of course in 1941, when the “move South” precipitated the attack on Pearl Harbor. As the empire expanded, so inevitably did the political rhetoric that accompanied it. Thus, the proclaimed “New Order” of 1938 (embracing Japan, China, and the puppet state of Manchukuo) metamorphosed into the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere in 1940. Until around 1936, advocates of the “move South” fought a vigorous internecine battle with proponents of a “move North” against the Soviet Union, aimed at seizing the strategic resources of the Soviet Far East. (The Japanese army was more inclined to “move North” than the navy.) The “move North” argument continued to be advocated up to the eve of the Pearl Harbor attack, and the Americans were well aware of this from their intercepts of the Japanese diplomatic code. This was yet one more distraction—one more example of “noise”—that compounded the analysis of Japan’s intentions. Some high-level U.S. planners (such as Rear Admiral Richmond Turner of the War Plans Division) were so fixated on the “move North” possibility that, in the eyes of later critics, they seriously impeded balanced intelligence analysis; Prange, *Pearl Harbor*, 326–31, is strong on this. For a close analysis of the “rational” quest for autarky or autonomy that drove Japanese expansion from the Manchurian Incident to the war with China, see James B. Crowley, *Japan’s Quest for Autonomy: National Security and Foreign Policy, 1930–1938* (Princeton University Press, 1966).


Grew abandoned his general policy of appeasing Japan in a famous “green light” cable to the State Department on September 10, 1940, but continued to maintain hope that U.S. responsiveness to Japan’s perceived interests would strengthen the influence of “moderates” within the Japanese government. His September 1941 advocacy of “constructive conciliation” came in conjunction with proposals for a personal meeting between Roosevelt and Prime Minister Konoe.

Mira Wilkins, “The Role of U.S. Business,” in Borg and Okamoto, Pearl Harbor as History, 341–76. This excellent analysis includes useful tables and charts. For the Fortune opinion poll, see 350–51; Wilkins speculates that the poll, published in September 1940, was probably conducted in early July—just before the Roosevelt administration imposed the first serious restrictions on strategic exports.

Steve Coll’s Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001 (Penguin, 2004), won the Pulitzer Prize. See esp. 92–93, 97–98 on Casey; 90, 104 on translation of the Qur’an; 11, 125–37, 149–51, 175 on weapons and other support for the Afghan fighters; and 155 on moral support for the non-Afghan mujahideen. The U.S. role in playing midwife to the mujahideen is also documented in vivid detail in Robert Dreyfuss, Devil’s Game: How the United States Helped Unleash Fundamentalist Islam (Metropolitan, 2005), esp. ch. 11. The photograph of President Reagan meeting with mujahideen “freedom fighters” from Afghanistan is reproduced on the cover of Eqbal Ahmad, Terrorism: Theirs and Ours (Seven Stories Press, 2002).


Freeman is quoted in Dreyfuss, Devil’s Game, 290–91 (from an April 2004 interview with the author).

Scheuer, Imperial Hubris, 197–98.

Clarke, Against All Enemies, 30–32, 232.


33 Nathaniel Pfeffer, “Japanese Superman? That, Too, Is a Fallacy,” *New York Times Magazine*, March 22, 1942. In a book written many years ago, I dwelled at length on images of the enemy from both sides of the war in the Pacific, including the metamorphoses of the Japanese from little men to supermen. See *War Without Mercy*, esp. ch. 5 (“Lesser Men and Supermen”). This is not a unique phenomenon, and need not involve race. A similar “little men to supermen” transformation took place, for example, in the so-called missile-gap crisis that followed the Soviet test of an intercontinental ballistic missile in 1957.


**Shifting Orbits: Toward the U.S. “Coalition of the Willing”**

Just before and after 9/11, Japanese were intensely focused on North Korea. They had just learned that the North Korean government had systematically abducted Japanese citizens for espionage purposes. During a state visit by Prime Minister Koizumi to North Korea in 2002, North Korean president Kim Jong-il confirmed that his country had abducted thirteen ordinary Japanese citizens in the 1970s and 1980s—including some only in their teens. The purpose was for the abductees to train North Korean spies in Japanese language and mannerisms so that they could disguise themselves as Japanese citizens. Following negotiations, five of the kidnapped citizens were allowed to return to Japan. North Korea claimed that eight of them had already died, while Japan has failed to verify this evidence and also claims that nineteen citizens or more were kidnapped—not just the thirteen acknowledged by North Korea claims. The abduction news exacerbated anxiety over North Korea’s spasmodic nuclear threats and tests, made still worse by lingering mutual enmity as a result of colonialism, World War II and Japan’s postwar security alliances with South Korea and America. In other words, Japan’s relationship with North Korea was already terrible at the time Bush broadened the scope of the “war on terror” to include the unlikely “axis of evil” encompassing North Korea, Iran and Iraq.

Meanwhile in Europe, because Germany and France opposed the American plan to invade Iraq, U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld dismissed them as “old Europe” — out of touch with the new nations hoping to redefine NATO. The societies and governments of France and Germany agreed that any decision to invade Iraq should be made by the United Nations, and only after the UN inspectors confirmed weapons of mass destruction. As stated above, Japanese public opinion was divided over the intervention, with many people agreeing with France and Germany. The government wished to join the “coalition of the willing” in part because it hoped for American support in its confrontation with North Korea, similar to the growing conflict with China over the disputed islands. **Gavan McCormack** views Koizumi Jun’ichiro’s close relationship with U.S. president Bush as signaling a clear commitment to the American agenda. McCormack also argues that 9/11 provided an opportunity for Japan to ask the Americans to prove their support for Japan’s foreign policy toward North Korea. **McCormack’s “Koizumi’s Japan in Bush’s World: After 9/11,”** demonstrates Koizumi’s intentions to “bask in the glow” of American patronage.

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1. The "Trustworthy Ally"

Half a century ago, General Douglas MacArthur, proconsul in the US occupation, was acclaimed as a benevolent liberator even while patronizing the Japanese people, whom he described soon after leaving Japan as "12-year old children." Today, proconsuls from Washington fly regularly in to Tokyo to inspect and instruct, as if Japan were a peripheral dependency, even though its economy now is roughly equal in scale to those of Germany, France and Britain combined. Japan’s leadership basks in the glow of such patronage, seemingly satisfied with the role of satrap, for all the world like the one-time leaders of East European satellite states in the Soviet empire.

At the first meeting, in June 2001, between Koizumi and US President George W. Bush, Koizumi could be seen grinning with delight from his seat on the presidential golf cart. In May 2003 he became only the fifth national leader (following Russia, Britain, Australia and Spain) to be honored with an overnight visit to the presidential ranch in Crawford, Texas, and at the 2004 Sea Island G8 summit he is to be seen standing at Bush’s right hand. Japanese commentators remark that not since the days of "Ron-Yasu" familiarity between Ronald Reagan and Nakasone Yasuhiro has the relationship between the leaders of the two countries been so close. If one thing seems certain about Koizumi’s politics it is that he would never risk offending Bush’s Washington by taking a "French" or "German" stance on major issues. Yet neither does he seek or expect to be taken into Washington’s councils in the manner of Blair. It may well be that nowhere in the world, including London, does Bush have so faithful a follower.

Although the relationship is close, that does not necessarily mean that Koizumi, or Japan, really wanted to go to war against Iraq or that it supports the US position on Palestine; for Japan under Koizumi North Korea is the key factor. In February 2004, he declared that it was of overwhelming importance for Japan to show that it was a "trustworthy ally," because (as he put it) if ever Japan were to come under attack it would be the US, not the UN or any other country, that would come to its aid. When he declared support for the US-led war on Iraq in March 2003, and when he sent Japanese forces to aid the occupation

In January 2004, it was not Iraq that was in the Japanese sights so much as North Korea. In 2004, Spain, Honduras, the Dominican Republic and Kazakhstan announced their intention to withdraw from Iraq, South Korea canceled plans to send several thousand troops to the northern city of Kirkuk because of deteriorating security, and Poland’s president expressed anger at the US and British deception on which the war was based and suggested an apology was in order. Even in the US and Britain society was turning against the war. In Japan, however, once Japanese troops were sent to
occupy a tiny sliver of Iraqi territory support for them rose steadily. Alone of political leaders who supported the war, Koizumi’s domestic support remained strong and it seemed he might escape without serious political consequences.

However, Koizumi is a paradoxical, unpredictable, sometimes cantankerous leader, whose political instincts pull him in different directions. While taking steps to lock Japan more firmly into dependence within a US-dominated global order, using hostility for North Korea as the fulcrum, he has also taken significant steps towards resolving that North Korean issue. For him to accomplish that, or even to move significantly towards it, would be to shake the frame of US hegemony over Japan and by extension in East Asia generally. It is that contradiction that makes Koizumi, otherwise a showy but shallow politician with a proclivity for neo-nationalist gestures such as ritual visits to Yasukuni shrine, interesting. This paper analyses the circumstances surrounding the troop dispatch and the hostage crisis in Iraq and the recent moves between Tokyo and Pyongyang, in the context of the world’s most important if least understood, relationship, that between its two greatest economic powers.

2. From "Showing the Flag" to "Boots on the Ground"

The US-Japan relationship is often described, especially on ceremonial occasions, as "second to none" in importance. America has "no closer ally" as George W. Bush put it in his message to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the opening of relations in July 2004. Japan’s level of integration with the United States on military and strategic and economic matters is probably greater than that of any other country except possibly Great Britain, and with even less pretence to equality in the relationship. The process of redrawing, and thereby tightening, the US-Japan relationship for the post-Cold War era was carried forward quietly under the Clinton presidency. The security "Guidelines" agreed in 1997 and given legislative effect in 1999 confirmed Japan’s positive cooperation in the event of any future regional crisis (with the Korean peninsula especially in mind). After 9/11, however, US demands escalated steadily. Bluntly advised by Richard Armitage, Deputy US Secretary of State, to pull its head out of the sand and make sure the Rising Sun flag was visible in the Afghanistan war, Japan adopted a Terror Special Measures Law and sent a substantial part of its Maritime Self Defense Forces (MSDF), including an Aegis-class destroyer, to the Indian Ocean to aid and refuel the allied forces.

In March 2003, Koizumi promised "unconditional" support for the coming war in Iraq, ignoring the lack of a UN warrant. Since then, he has repeatedly echoed the Washington-London line on weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and to this day (mid-2004) has yet to concede that he was misled and mistaken. Japan has scarcely begun to address the implications of the fact that the war might have been designed primarily to remove a troublesome independent-minded, secular despot who challenged Israeli domination and US plans for the future of the region, including its oil resources.

From early April 2003, once the war proper was over, Koizumi came under heavy pressure to make good his promise of unconditional support by putting Japanese "boots
on the ground” in Iraq. Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz is believed to have been the source of the "boots" phrase, but the message was conveyed to Tokyo by multiple routes. Richard Armitage, Deputy secretary of State and a very regular visitor to Tokyo, prefers baseball images and so put it this way: "It is about time that Japan should quit paying to see the game, and get down to the baseball diamond."

At their tête-à-tête in Texas in May, Koizumi gave Bush his "heart to heart" (ishin denshin) promise to send the "boots" required. He also pledged to speed up the review of Missile Defense, a project dear to the hearts of Bush and his associates and likely to affect Japan’s regional and global position profoundly in future years. In return, for the first time, Bush declared his own "unconditional" support for the Japanese position on the families of the North Korean abductees -- that North Korea would have to satisfy Japanese demands before there could be any easing of sanctions. It was, as a senior Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) official admitted, a deal: Japanese forces to Iraq in exchange for US support for Japan’s position on North Korean issues. While formal diplomatic statements referred to weapons of mass destruction and, later, the cause of Iraqi democracy, in the Japanese domestic political context the key point was that troops had to be sent to Iraq because the US forces in Japan were essential to defence against North Korea.

Upon return to Japan, however, when Koizumi dithered in the face of domestic opposition, an anonymous Defense Department spokesman put the message bluntly to his Japanese counterpart: "Why don’t you shape up?" Japan’s special ambassador to the Middle East, Arima Tatsuo, was admonished by Armitage: "Don't try to back off." In due course, the Iraq Special Measures Law was adopted in July, and in December 2003 Koizumi issued orders for units of all three (Air, Sea, and Ground) of Japan’s Self-Defense Forces to leave for Iraq. The advance guard, a 600-strong SDF unit flew out in mid-January.

Koizumi railroaded the troop dispatch through against a reluctant parliament and people. When the decision was ratified in the House of Representatives at the end of January, the government relied on a special investigative mission to Iraq that reported that security problems were minimal and the SDF could safely go to Samawah. It later transpired, however, that this report had been drafted by bureaucrats even before the group left Tokyo in mid-September, and that it had been further edited before being submitted to the Diet in January by the deletion of details that might have sounded negative.

Still, the opposition in the parliament and the country was such that the vote had to be postponed till after midnight, when the chamber was boycotted en masse not only by the main opposition party, the Democratic Party of Japan, which protested that the law was unconstitutional, but even by some of the most influential members of the ruling LDP itself, including three of the top figures in the party, the former head of its policy planning committee, Kamei Shizuka and two former Secretaries-General, Kato Koichi and Koga Makoto. None of them accepted Koizumi’s justification for the Iraq War. Former posts and telecommunications minister and parliamentary vice-defense
minister, Minowa Noboru, on 28 January 2004 launched an action in the Sapporo District Court to have the troop dispatch declared unconstitutional. He too insisted that that the SDF could not constitutionally or legally be sent to Iraq, and that reconstruction and humanitarian aid could only be undertaken by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Japanese ambassador to Lebanon, Amaki Naoto, wrote to the Prime Minister protesting that the troop dispatch would breach both the Japanese constitution and international law; for his pains he was summoned to Tokyo and peremptorily sacked.

When David Kay, the former senior investigator in the search for Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, concluded it was "highly unlikely" that there were any such weapons, Koizumi, unshaken, told the Diet (25 November 2003): "I believe President Bush is right and he is a good man." A Foreign Ministry official, evidently accustomed to faithfully following the US line, remarked of the Kay Report: "It is like being betrayed and bitten by a pet dog you trusted." In the world of the high diplomacy of the US-Japan relationship, the intervention of truth and independence of mind was tantamount to the ravings of a mad dog.

When he justified the dispatch by referring to Japan's reliance on the Middle East for 90 per cent of its oil supply and to Japan's responsibility to "international society" and Iraq's need for humanitarian assistance, Koizumi was redefining "international society" and placing a peculiarly narrow construction on "humanitarian assistance." Until 2002, "international society" for Japan meant primarily the UN. In relation to Iraq, however, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan had criticized the US preemptive strike as a "fundamental challenge" to UN principles, the Security Council refused to endorse it, and despite intensive lobbying Japan was one of less than forty of the General Assembly's 191 countries that offered support of any kind to the invasion and occupation. 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 (Self-Defense Forces), was open to serious question, both because of Japan's constitutional strictures on anything to do with armed force and because of doubts over the appropriateness of sending a body of armed men to contribute to the national reconstruction of Iraq.

Japan in Iraq

Till its participation in the British-American force in Iraq, Japan had enjoyed respect throughout the Middle East as a non-Western power, neutral on the question of Israel and Palestine, and constitutionally opposed to the use of force to resolve international disputes. By joining the US-led coalition of the willing it squandered that resource, implicitly inviting the hostile attention of the enemies of the US throughout the region.

Koizumi defended the dispatch by saying that the intervention would be confined to humanitarian and reconstruction work, not using any force, and exclusively in "non-combat" areas. "I am sending the SDF," he said, "because there is no security problem ... The security situation in Samawah is completely safe and there is no risk." His claim
was questionable in point of fact, given that 10,000 or more Iraqi civilians and hundreds of US soldiers had been killed since hostilities were formally declared at an end in May 2003. For the US authorities under whom the SDF served, all of Iraq was a combat zone, and for Deputy Defense Secretary Wolfowitz, even in March 2004 the war was "not over yet." In April 2004, at the time of the hostage crisis, Koizumi himself conceded that the situation was so dangerous that Japan should not entertain any other presence in Iraq than that of a well-armed military unit. As for Koizumi's argument that Samawah was a non-combat zone in the sense that there were no hostilities being conducted by "states or quasi-state organizations," this was simply a Japanese casuistry, worthy to rank with the lies and manipulations practiced in the US and elsewhere to justify the war.

Local Iraqi residents seemed generally welcoming of the Japanese troops, believing at least that Japanese occupation was preferable to American. However, while hoping the Japanese soldiers would bring in their train jobs, clean water, electricity, better medical facilities and better roads, they may well have suspected that such things were only likely to be delivered under an independent, national Iraqi plan for reconstruction. Japanese forces were playing a subordinate role in an occupation that had no plan to create such a body. The SDF was to function in a tiny area (roughly one per cent) of the country, with a numerically insignificant force (550 soldiers), two thirds of whom were devoted to security or administration. The troops were housed in "one of the most formidable military camps planet earth has ever seen," an isolated fortress, secure behind its own moat and barricades, that was also a luxury compound with its own karaoke bar, massage parlor and gymnasium. They would supply 80 tons of fresh water daily to 16,000 people, and give assistance to local schools and hospitals. These highly localized and limited benefits would come at enormous cost, approximately 40 billion yen ($360 million) to mid-2004. The facilities themselves were of course enormously expensive, and the troops were being paid a "danger money" fee of 30,000 yen ($275) per day. By contrast, the French NGO Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED) was providing services in gas, water, health and sanitation (including 550 tons of fresh water daily), to 100,000 people in Al-Muthanna Province for a cost of just over half a million dollars (approximately 60 million yen) per year. Where the NGO operation was low cost, low profile and high impact, the money going mostly on rental for tankers and virtually all the labor being provided by local Iraqis, the SDF operation was high cost, high profile and low impact. It was certainly not a model that could be expanded or reproduced anywhere else but one in which political purpose trumped economic sense or humanitarianism.

From April, the SDF men were often confined to base, protected by a combination of Dutch forces, American mercenaries and local troops, their humanitarian mission drastically curtailed. It was possible to glimpse something of a behind-the-scenes bureaucratic struggle over these issues within the Japanese government when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that it would take over the funding of the French NGO operation, i.e. it would provide about 7 times as much water for Iraq as the SDF had at a fraction the cost.

In June, when an Iraqi provisional administration was installed in accordance with
UNSC 1546, Koizumi was unstinting in his praise for the US, describing the new resolution as "a victory for America’s righteous cause." He was also quick to promise that the Japanese troop commitment would continue under the Multinational Force. He made the pledge, however, not to the new government but directly to President Bush, without consulting either his own or the new Iraqi government or the parliament in Tokyo. Strictly speaking participation in any multinational force was constitutionally forbidden, so Koizumi stressed that it was subject to four conditions, which, he said, had been accepted by US and British authorities (all that counted, he implied): non-use of force, confinement to non-combat areas, adherence to constitutional limits, and operation under Japanese command. The words "unified command," clear in both the resolution itself and Secretary Colin Powell’s accompanying letter to the Security Council, were rendered not by the precise Japanese equivalent but by a vague, unfamiliar and equivocal term, meaning something rather different, a joint command headquarters.

Where official Japan supported war and occupation, NGOs and much of Japan’s civil society opposed it and tried to address humanitarian concerns in a completely different way. As the 500-odd soldiers in their seemingly impregnable, five-star encampment maintained their supply of water to Samawah but otherwise remained mostly invisible, three young Japanese were taken hostage in April 2004, one a volunteer returning to Baghdad to resume work with abandoned street children, another a student investigating and publicizing the health effects of depleted uranium, and the third a journalist committed to photographing and making known to the world the struggle and sufferings of the Iraqi people. Held for a week, 7th to 15th April, they were in due course released through the good offices of the Islamic Clerics Association, and a second group, two journalists seized on 14th April, was released three days later. These representatives of Japanese civil society, and their families, even before their release, became victims of a government and media campaign to legitimize the official SDF mission and to discredit them as reckless and irresponsible. Their detention may even have been prolonged by Koizumi’s use of the term "terrorists" to describe their captors, or Foreign Minister Kawaguchi’s television message (broadcast on Al Jazeera) which called for the release of the abductees but argued that they, and the SDF, were engaged in the same, humanitarian mission. Japan’s official stance, and its civil society’s stance, contrasted sharply. The families and support movement of the abducted desperately insisted on that difference even as the government sought to blur it in order to try to legitimize the SDF operation.

During the detention crisis, government and major media groups treated families and support groups coldly and with suspicion. Prime Minister Koizumi refused to meet them. As the national media, taking its cue from government ministers and spokespersons, took up the cry of "irresponsibility," "recklessness," and causing Japan trouble and expense, the telephones, faxes and home pages of the abductee families were filled with abusive and intimidating messages. Responsibility for their plight was shifted onto the victims, and attention directed away from the nature of the occupation that official Japan supported. By the time the first group of three abductees returned to Japan, the barrage of hostile criticism compounded, if it did not actually cause them to
fall into, a state of shock, so that they arrived home apologetic, exhausted, humiliated, distraught, and, apart from mumbled words of apology, silent.

Although the idealistic NGO volunteers and journalists were pilloried, it was they who were striving to put into practice the principles of the constitution, specifically its rejection of the role of armed force in resolving international disputes, while Koizumi as Prime Minister was actively subverting it. NGO spokespersons since these incidents report their security diminished, and Japan's moral standing as a country of peace squandered, by the dispatch of the Japanese army (as Iraqis saw the SDF).23

Constitution, Common Sense, and International Contribution

Japan shares with Costa Rica an unusual constitutional commitment to pacifism. Its Article 9 renounces the threat or use of force as an instrument of settling international disputes and forbids the possession of "land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential." The ink had scarcely dried on this document, however, before the US government regretted it and began to press for it to be rescinded so that Japanese troops could be deployed in "free world" causes.24 From its foundation in 1955, the ruling LDP committed itself to the American goal of deletion of this troublesome clause. Unable during the Cold War to muster sufficient political or popular support, it adopted a convoluted, extra-constitutional position: that Article 9 could not have been intended to cancel the country's inherent right of self-defense and therefore the Self-Defense Forces (SDF), established in 1954, were legitimate regardless of what the constitution said, as the minimum necessary force "to protect the peace and independence of Japan against direct or indirect threat."25 The SDF therefore exists without constitutional warrant, on the basis of this higher principle, something akin to natural law. On this ground, and on this ground alone, the Japanese public slowly accepted the compatibility of the SDF with the constitution.

During the Cold War, even the most reactionary of Prime Ministers agreed it would be "absolutely impossible" for the SDF ever to function outside Japan.26 In 1992, however, a Peace Keeping Organization Law was adopted, followed by a series of laws to justify SDF peacekeeping missions to post-conflict Cambodia, Mozambique, the Golan Heights, and East Timor. Although confined to road-building or the construction and running of hospitals and refugee camps, nevertheless these missions involved a steady widening and loosening of the official interpretation of Article 9 in the sense that a force whose only justification was the defense of Japan against direct or indirect threat was committed, however innocuously, to various global theatres. Following the September 11 attacks in the US, Japan sent a flotilla of 24 naval ships to the Indian Ocean, which in due course provided about one half of the fuel needs of the allied war force in the Afghanistan War. In 2004, however, when the SDF marched off with substantial armed force to a virtual war zone, it was entering uncharted constitutional waters. In taking this major step, the Japanese government was not only flouting its own hitherto-held interpretation of its constitution but also lacked legal justification (a Security Council resolution) or moral pretext (WMD). Koizumi's desire to prove "trustworthiness" outweighed constitution, law, and morality.
In insisting that the SDF must be sent to Iraq, Koizumi addressed the constitutional problem by offering a new and unique interpretation of the preamble’s pledge to "occupy an honored place in an international society striving for the preservation of peace," suggesting that this vague sentiment should take precedence over the specific clauses in the body of the text. It was an interpretation that left constitutional scholars aghast. On the other hand, he also argued that, in any case, the matter was not important, since constitutional difficulties were so much "theological quibble."

What really mattered was "common sense", something which he, as Prime Minister, was uniquely qualified to offer. Koizumi's position is that "In the common sense terms of the people, the SDF is surely 'military force'... if we talk in terms of principles rather than of pretence... the fact is that the constitution itself is out of step with international common sense." As he put it on another occasion, "The SDF is an army... It should be called the [Japanese] National Army [Nihon kokugun]." When his own visit to Yasukuni Shrine was held by a Fukuoka District court in April 2004 to be unconstitutional, Koizumi simply shrugged it off, saying he found it inexplicable (and implying he would pay no attention). With his brusque appeal to common sense, Koizumi dismisses a half-century of constitutional debate and rides roughshod over the basic principle of the rule of law, yet in Washington, Canberra, and London, that is seen as realism and evidence of positive engagement with the region and the world. This casual manipulation of the constitution by the Prime Minister of the world's No 2 economic power has occasioned scarcely a murmur in Washington and London.

The history of post-1947 Japanese constitutionalism is replete with examples of governments taking initiatives in the teeth of hostile public opinion and the judgments of constitutional experts, creating and justifying the possession of armed force on an exclusively self-defense basis and then steadily expanding its role, winning over opposition simply through fait accompli, with each new step eroding the constitutional principle of Article Nine. None, however, had been so swift and far-reaching as the transformation that occurred in Japan in 2003-4.

In Iraq, for the first time in 60 years Japan committed itself, albeit in a subordinate and non-combat role, to an illegal and aggressive war. The restraints that had blocked the SDF, first from existence, then from any role outside Japan, then from any role in hostilities outside Japan, were one by one swept aside, till only the finest of lines separated it from participation in hostilities. Preying on deep-seated fear of and hostility toward North Korea, 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.

Koizumi’s skill in managing public opinion was remarkable. The decision to send the SDF to Iraq was taken in the teeth of strong popular opposition, running in early to mid-2003 at 70 to 80 per cent, but by early 2004 he had successfully turned that around, so that a small but absolute majority was in favor. Constitutional qualms seem to have been overcome by a flood of patriotic sentiment. Koizumi described the SDF men and women as the "pride of their families, the pride of Japan and the pride of the Japanese..."
people," and the media cooperated enthusiastically in portraying the hometown boys (and some girls) in boots as heroes, lavishing attention on their every move: training in Hokkaido’s snow for the Iraq desert, performing rituals of regimental colors, farewelling their tearful families and crowds of flag-waving supporters. Colonel Bansho Koichiro, the SDF commander, became a media favorite for his rough, homespun sincerity and was to be seen day after day giving friendly speeches in halting Arabic, discussing how to revive the local hospital, or presenting gift sheep to a local community. Koizumi’s gamble, it seemed, had paid off, at least in the short run.

3. Billions

Since the end of the Cold War Japan has contributed a staggering sum in subsidies for the military activities of the US global empire. As the US economy strains under the burden of chronic deficits, military and empire-related spending, and huge tax cuts, and as other nations that bore substantial portions of the costs of the 1991 Gulf War decline to support the present wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, Japanese aid grows in importance. Washington needs billions as well as boots.

In less than three years since September 11, Japan paid around $30 billion (3.3 trillion yen) in "support" costs for the US bases in Japan, including, in 2003 alone, almost $6 billion (638 billion yen) for the bases that most Okinawan people would dearly love to be rid of. It was also paying huge sums as part of its so-called "rear-support" for the anti-terror coalition, including meeting the oil needs of allied ships in the Persian Gulf. In addition, the Japanese government subsidy for the 39,691 US troops stationed in Japan amounts to around $150,000 per head every year. On top of that ongoing commitment it has also promised to build for the US Marines a brand-new base in waters of northern Okinawa likely to cost at least an additional one trillion yen ($9 billion). Washington has no other ally in this league of open-pocket generosity.

Asked for additional aid for rebuilding Iraq, and told that "billions" was the appropriate unit for consideration, Koizumi promised $5 billion, far in excess of any contribution other than that of the US itself and about three times the sum levied from the whole of Europe. Under further pressure from Washington the Japanese government agreed to forego recovery of a large part of the debt owed it by the government of Iraq. Japan is by far the largest creditor, owed just over $4 billion.

Both Washington and Tokyo insist that such generosity is spontaneous. There is certainly little evidence of any popular support for it, but it is fair to say that it is tolerated in grudging recognition that such "taxes" are the price of trustworthiness and the guarantee of US military backing in the event of a showdown with North Korea. On the US side, however, the denial by a "Senior White House official" that the US president would ever think of Japan as "just some ATM machine" was so bizarre as to suggest that perhaps that might be precisely how he saw it.

The same Japanese cooperativeness is evident in interventions in currency markets and in the scramble to oblige Washington by agreeing to the purchase of the Missile Defense...
Japan’s Participation in the American Led-Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq

system. During 2003 the Bank of Japan poured 20 trillion yen (ca $180 billion) into the markets to try to prevent the dollar sliding or the yen appreciating. In 2004, the process accelerated, with an infusion of half that sum just in the first two months of the year, the Bank of Japan was struggling mightily against an ebb-tide of weakening demand for U.S. Treasuries, bonds and stocks to keep the dollar up and the yen down. The "benefit" in this is twofold: satisfying Washington's need to sustain a huge inflow of funds to offset its deficits (and maintain consumer demand) on the one hand, and keeping Japan's manufactured exports competitive on the other. Early in 2004 the IMF noted that, with its foreign debt levels heading towards 40 per cent of GDP, the US deficit was "a significant risk" for the world, but nowhere was confidence in it higher, and readiness to support it stronger, than in Tokyo.

Japan is both the world’s greatest debtor and the holder of about half of its foreign currency reserves. Those holdings, some $673 billion worth and held overwhelmingly in US dollars, multiplied seven times in the decade from 1993. However, over the three years to 2004 roughly $70 billion (almost 8 trillion yen) was written off their yen value, and the eventual losses are likely to be much greater because they could not be liquidated without triggering a dollar collapse and few expect that the long-term trend for the dollar is anywhere but down. Other countries, notably China, have begun to balance their dollar holdings with Euros, but Japan shows no such inclination.

So far as missile defense is concerned, the "mature" alliance relationship requires of Japan that, apart from getting its boots on the ground and its billions into circulation in Washington, it should also install a "missile defense shield." The initial estimates called for 500 billion yen ($4.5 billion) over five years but within a matter of months that had almost doubled. The Rand Corporation in 2001 estimated that a basic system, capable of intercepting "only a few North Korean missiles," would cost approximately $20 billion, and a full coverage system more than the national defense budget. The Asahi recently put a price tag of around 2 trillion yen ($18.5 billion) on such a system. It is bound anyway to be fabulously expensive, to integrate Japan ever more firmly under Pentagon control, to stir China’s distrust, and possibly provoke a regional missile race. Whether it would work is unknown. The record of the PAC-2 missile system, now replaced by PAC-3, during the Gulf War in 1991 was not encouraging: the Pentagon initially claimed a success rate of 96 per cent for 198 missiles fired, but when challenged revised it down to 9 per cent. The best scientific and military opinion seems to be that the present system is unproven, i.e. it might or might not work, but even if it works the protection would be confined to places within 15 kilometers radius of the PAC-3 batteries. The capital and major (US) base complexes might be protected, but much of Japan would not be.

Koizumi’s Crawford ranch commitments -- the boots, the billions, and the Patriots -- was a high price to pay for his ride on the presidential golf cart and his en suite room at the presidential ranch.

The "global economic revival" is precariously poised atop towering twin peaks of Japanese and American debt. The seriously ill Japanese economy takes every possible
step to prop up the equally ailing US economy, pouring Japanese savings into the black hole of American illiquidity in order to subsidize the US global empire under construction, fund the debt, and finance the over-consumption. The debt in the two countries is of similar size, approximately $7 to $8 trillion by most estimates (720 trillion yen for Japan, according to OECD, but estimated to be around one quadrillion yen, $9 trillion plus, if the debts of government instrumentalities are included). The lower figure still amounts to around 150 per cent of GDP, highest in the OECD, if not in modern history.

Even Japan’s gross national debt owes much to the peculiarities of the relationship with the US. During the trade and exchange disputes of the 1980s, the US insisted that Japan prime its pump and expand domestic demand. This set off a fantastic boondoggle in debt-funded public works whose full details are only slowly coming to light. Early in 2004 it was revealed that the Ministry of Public Health and Welfare’s welfare enterprise, "Greenpia," had invested public pension funds so recklessly, especially since the 1980s, in a proliferation of public and concert halls, sports and recreation facilities, etc, that losses were estimated at around 3 trillion yen ($27 billion). A full-scale crisis erupted as the national Diet struggled simultaneously to cover up the scale of the disaster, reassure those with pension entitlements, and adjust to the prodigious losses of public wealth by adoption of a new Pension Law that would increase contributions and reduce benefits. Several key political figures, including the leader of the opposition, resigned when forced to admit that they had neglected to pay their premiums. Koizumi initially insisted that he had acted with perfect propriety, but in due course conceded that he too had not bothered paying the (compulsory) premiums for nearly three years. He dismissed it, however, as a trivial matter that happened a long time ago (around 1970). When pressed to explain his delinquency, while for nearly three years on the payroll of a company for which he did no work, he replied with the words of a popular song: "there are many different ways of living," adding "there are also many different kinds of companies, and different kinds of employees." Responsibility for this disaster can scarcely be laid directly at the American door, but it was nevertheless the desperate attempts to prime the Japanese pump, taken at US insistence, that fed the corrupt, collusive public works system. Koizumi inherited the system and by his policies helped it cover up its criminality and shift the losses onto the public. He added substantially to Japan's debt mountain but his "reform" agenda offered no clue as to how he would ever reduce it.

Some commentators think that the worst of Japan’s stagnant, post-bubble era might now be over, that the decline was temporary and is about to yield to a blaze of new growth, industrial refinement, and prosperity, buoyed in part by China’s boom. They point to the continuing, undimmed gloss and vibrancy of Japan’s cities, the capacity to produce high-quality goods and to establish global trends in consumption, fashion and culture. Yet the country’s bubble-era excess liquidity has long evaporated. Bad debt, chronic unemployment (and under-employment), bankruptcies, the virtual or actual nationalization of major banks, social despair in the country’s peripheries, gloom and anxiety for the future, especially for the public welfare and pension systems, even among the supposedly comfortably employed middle class, persist. The 2004 Budget
projects tax revenues of just under 42 trillion yen and expenditure of 82 trillion yen: in other words nearly 45 per cent is dependent on bonds, or borrowing.\textsuperscript{61} The prospect is one of falling population, spending cuts and tax increases. Education, welfare and overseas aid costs are being shaved, small and medium-sized business cut loose to fend with "market forces."

While demonstrating "faithfulness" to Washington, Koizumi's policies amount to plundering the savings of past generations and the patrimony of unborn ones in the vain pursuit of growth at all cost, raising a Mt Fuji of debt over the land.\textsuperscript{62} Elected in 2000 as a radical reformer prepared if necessary to destroy his party in order to revitalize the country, Koizumi in the event revitalized party rather than country. Some well-informed analysts accuse him of leading the country to destruction.\textsuperscript{63}

4. Becoming a "Great Britain"

Even as the Bush regime faced declining support domestically and increasing isolation internationally,\textsuperscript{64} Japan sent its armed forces to support US operations in an explosive part of the world in whose historic disputes it hitherto had no role and where it had no enemies. It was also paying generously to subsidize the US military presence in East Asia, to fund the wars and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq, and to support the dollar. These were merely installments, however, on the sort of comprehensive reorganization of the Japanese state that the restructured US-Japan relationship calls for. Japan is expected to revise its constitution, to expand its defense horizon in order to support "coalition" operations as a fully-fledged NATO-style partner, and to become the "Britain of the Far East."\textsuperscript{65}

There was no question that Japan in the early 21st century possessed substantial military force. Its military expenditure was second only to the United States, its army bigger than either the British or French, its navy the 5th largest in the world (after the US, Russia, China and the UK), and its air force twelfth largest in the world and larger than Israel's. Its continual equipment upgrading, and its steady projection over more than a decade onto the international stage in UN operations, were such that it was plainly capable of playing a major regional or global military role if it so chose. Washington was now saying: it is time to make that choice.

The Japanese people are slow to grasp the way that the character of the US-Japan relationship has been transformed since the end of the Cold War and particularly since 9/11. Although the relationship is conventionally represented as one of Japan "benefiting" from shelter under a US umbrella, the US no longer just "protects" Japan (by which is meant maintaining a chain of bases centered on Okinawa through which American power is projected throughout Asia) but it insists that Japan must "continue to rely on US protection," and that any attempt to substitute for that reliance an entente with China (or, more broadly, any Asia in which the centrality of the US was not recognized) would "deal a fatal blow to U.S. political and military influence in East Asia."\textsuperscript{66} The thought that Japan might one day become the "Japan of the Far East" rather than the "Britain of the Far East," is a nightmare comparable in the eyes of the Bush
American demands became steadily more importunate as the post 9/11 world order evolved. While the US would withdraw some of its regional East Asian-based forces (or send them directly to Iraq), the overall deployment pattern was being changed so that they could henceforth be deployed more readily not just in the "Far East" as prescribed in the Joint Security Treaty (Article 6) but throughout the "arc of instability" from Korea to Africa. Some command units, including the US Army’s 1 Corps HQ, were designated for relocation from the US mainland to camps in Japan. Already de facto the Japan-based US forces were being deployed directly to the Indian Ocean and Iraq, but the Bush administration's demand meant that the Joint Security Law would have to be revised to give formal, legal recognition to the transformed character of the alliance. This would be the biggest revision of the entire post-war US-Japan security arrangements, and Koizumi was clearly reluctant to promote to the Japanese electorate what amounted to the active, comprehensive, and subordinate cooperation in the establishment of US Asian and global hegemony. Through 2004, the Japanese government procrastinated, to growing US irritation. The crash of a US military helicopter onto a university building in Okinawa on 13 August also highlighted the fact that, eight years after the US-Japan agreement on return of the Futenma (Marine Corps) base facilities "within "five to seven years," the Japanese government had only just begun the survey of the designated relocation site. It would be up to a decade before any airport could be built and the base transferred to this coral reef site in northern Okinawa, and Okinawan opinion was, if anything, hardening against the idea.

Official Japan, and most of the media, concentrates its attention on Japan's role in the post-9/11 world around the Self Defense Force commitment, but is reluctant to address the question of Japanese responsibility for what happens in the totality of the system it thereby supports. As the first anniversary of the Iraq war passed in spring 2004, the American-led occupation of Iraq was increasingly mired in violence, its legitimacy in tatters. Casualties mounted, especially in the massacre of hundreds of civilians, many of them women and children, in Fallujah. Muslim holy places were attacked, the abuse and torture of prisoners became an international scandal, and as opposition began to coalesce into a national resistance, the unwieldy international coalition unraveled. By the time the US Administrator, Paul Bremer, stepped aside on 28 June, leaving his hand-picked Iraqi provisional government comprised of favored American exiles with no indigenous base in place, the US-led occupation was unraveling in a series of scandals and atrocities. The unconditional alliance relationship meant commitment to a system responsible for torture and assassination, and for indiscriminate attacks on civilian and religious targets, especially as US tactics and strategy become gradually "Israeli-ized," and to preemptive war. The Japanese government has no comment on the US-led assault on Fallujah, but when the Israeli government assassinated the Palestinian Hamas leader Abdelaziz Rantissi on 18 April 2004, and the United States showed its understanding, even the Japanese Foreign Minister expressed polite dismay. Japan’s own SDF must change in character too to belong to the same system. If the US has its way, Japan must learn to defy the collective will of humanity for the abolition of nuclear weapons because it is required to accept the maintenance of a nuclear weapon-based
strategy of global hegemony and extension of that strategy to space. Collective security comes to mean for Japan, as for Britain, Japanese troops fighting shoulder-to-shoulder with Americans and British in future Afghans and Iraqs in the service of American designs. It also implies the priority to the requirements of collective security over those of international law and institutions.

Watching the Koizumi administration apparently scrambling to comply with the various demands in 2003, Deputy Secretary Armitage remarked that the US government was "thrilled" that Japan was not "sitting in the stands any more" but had come out as "a player on the playing field." While still pressing Japan to undertake outright constitutional revision, he suggested that, as a minimalist alternative it might be enough for the Cabinet Legislative Bureau to adopt a "flexible" interpretation of the existing words, i.e. revise it without going to the trouble of formal revision. The situation was fluid, however, and the implications for Japan so immense that, less than a year later, he was profoundly pessimistic, seeing the dialogue over the US force restructuring as going nowhere and the relationship as resembling a train-wreck.

If Japan were indeed to become what Armitage describes as a "player," there can be no mistake as to who would be the captain and coach of its team and no doubting the deadly seriousness of the game. The head of the LDP's Policy Research Council, Kyuma Fumio, asked in February 2003 about Japan's position as war with Iraq loomed, said, "I think it [Japan] has no choice. After all, it is like an American state." In similar vein, the grand old man of the LDP, Gotoda Masaharu, in September 2004 referred to Japan as a "vassal state" of the US. Koizumi may slowly be coming to understand that his own term "trustworthy ally" has similar import. The price of his commitments rises steadily. Armitage made clear in another context, talking to an Australian audience, that what he means by "alliance" is a relationship in which: "Australian sons and daughters ... would be willing to die to help defend the United States. That's what an alliance means." Armitage, or for that matter Koizumi, has yet to spell out that "bottom line" for Japan.

5. North Korea: An Axis of Change?

With the Iraqi sector of the "Axis of Evil" disposed of, in a fashion, in 2003, the focus shifted to North Korea. Although Iraq had no weapons of mass destruction. North Korea, by most accounts including its own, either had or was in the process of gaining them. How to deal with it became a crucial, perhaps the crucial aspect of Japanese foreign policy and the US-Japan relationship.

North Korea exercises a powerful hold over the Japanese imagination. An astonishing 600 books about it have been published in the past decade, the overwhelming majority of them hostile. One comic-book account of Kim Jong Il as violent, bloodthirsty and depraved, published in August 2003, sold half a million copies in its first few months, probably more than all the other books in all languages ever written about North Korea. The peculiar wave of Japanese fear and hatred for North Korea not only underpinned the decisions on Iraq but also played, and continues to play, a large role in the
transformation of Japan’s security thinking in general. Without North Korea, it would most likely have been impossible to pass the raft of 13 bills aimed at preparing Japan for the contingency of war that was adopted in 2003-4. Such comprehensive “contingency” legislation had been on the wish list of conservative governments throughout the Cold War but was always blocked by socialist and communist opposition. Now it was able to pass, with little debate and the support of around 80 per cent of Diet members. Some of the new laws were explicitly designed with North Korea in mind: authorizing interdiction of suspect shipping or the blocking of foreign exchange transactions or exclusion of ships of a designated country from entering Japanese ports. Others spelled out special emergency powers, enabling the Prime Minister to impose a virtual martial law regime and compel compliance by local authorities and citizens if he deemed it necessary. Japan was alone among industrial democracies in devoting this meticulous attention to the preparation for war. North Korea is very much on the Japanese mind.

Koizumi both benefits from and plays his part in feeding the national paranoia. His controversial Yasukuni visits and ambiguous statements about Japan’s militaristic past confirm his nationalism, while his devotion to George Bush shows a reassuring (to Washington) alliance-orientation. However, this same Koizumi has also adopted the cause of normalization of relations with North Korea as his major political commitment, alone of world political leaders visiting Kim Jong Il twice, on his own initiative and with at best the reluctant consent of Washington. He could do this with impunity because his fidelity to Washington seemed beyond doubt and because (from January 2004) the boots of the Japanese troops were firmly planted on the ground in Iraq and multi-billion dollar Japanese financial support was propping up the Bush world. Yet on this issue Koizumi was plainly flying his own kite.

Alone among Western leaders, he has visited North Korean leader Kim Jong Il twice (2002 and 2004), after their second meeting declaring Kim mild-mannered and cheerful,” “very smart,” and “quick to make jokes” -- in other words someone to do business with. Koizumi’s pledge to restore trust between Japan and North Korea, so that “abnormal relations can be normalized, hostile relations turned to friendly relations, and confrontation to cooperation,” and to strive to normalize relations within his remaining two years of office, if possible within a single year, contrasted sharply with the view of George W. Bush, who has declared that he "loathes" Kim and finds him "evil," or of Vice-President Cheney, who says that "you do not negotiate with evil, you defeat it." In his talks with Kim Jong Il Koizumi seems to have ignored the official US position of CVID (complete, verifiable, irreversible disarmament), indeed, afterwards he sounded rather like Kim Jong Il’s messenger, pressing the Dear Leader’s suit for direct talks with the US president. With Japan’s voice added to the Chinese, Russian and South Korean calls for a realistic policy to try to solve the North Korean question, the US had no choice but to abandon its hard line stance and for the first time present elements of a "roadmap" for settlement. The alternative was unthinkable: the US either sitting in a minority of one at the six-sided Beijing table or launching an attack. Koizumi’s absolute fidelity on Iraq and other fronts earned him the freedom of maneuver on North Korea.
At root, Japan faces the same unresolved identity crisis that has persisted throughout its modern history. Turning away from Asia in the late 19th century it has subsequently contemplated return only as quintessential and superior, imperial Asian in the first half of the 20th century or as the US-protected, ambiguous, "Western" state of its second half (and beyond). So long as it preserves its psychological distance from its continental and insular neighbors, Koizumi’s Japan sees no option but to cling to the American embrace, and that embrace in turn tightens, further blocking it from reconciliation and cooperation with Asia. It is the attitude described by no less a figure than Sakakibara Eisuke, once known as "Mr. Yen" for his power over global currency markets, as "depraved ideological conservatism," under which Japan follows the US at all times and under any circumstances. So long as Japan’s "North Korea problem" remains unresolved, its dependence on the US will continue.

Put differently, however, this means that if the North Korean problem were resolved (and Koizumi is determined to resolve it), then relations between Japan and North Korea, and almost certainly likewise between North and South Korea, would be normalized. In other words, if peace broke out in East Asia the US military base presence in South Korea and Japan would be difficult to sustain. With military tensions drained from the region, the comprehensive incorporation of Japan within the US’s global hegemonic project would become difficult to justify. Japan could then turn its attention towards its Asian neighbors, and shift its policy priority from being a trustworthy ally for the US to attending to its own multiple problems and becoming a trustworthy member of a future Asian commonwealth. Koizumi may not formulate the options in quite this manner, but as a conservative Japanese politician, with a traditionalist heart, an eye to history and a desire to leave his mark on it, who could be surprised that he also hears and is swayed by the siren song of Asia?

Till now, Koizumi’s nationalism has been more pose than substance. Faithful to Washington on almost all issues (with the important exception of North Korea), he has to disguise himself with strong Japanese national accents and posture: the more he serves foreign purposes, the more important it is that he seem and sound nationalist. Controversial gestures such as his visits to Yasukuni Shrine to pay his respects to the country’s war dead -- most recently on New Year’s Day 2004 -- are probably best seen, not as a sign of a reviving nationalism but as an empty gesture to compensate for an abandoned one; the affirmation at abstract and purely symbolic level of what has been repudiated in substance. Political and military subordination (to the US) require the rhetoric and symbolism of nation. The nationalist pose disguises a form of neo-nationalism, sometimes described, therefore, as "comprador" or "parasite" or "dependent." However, resolution of the North Korean issue would transform this equation.

Of course there are many obstacles to be overcome before Japan-North Korean relations can be normalized. Yet Koizumi’s personal encounters with Kim Jong Il seem to have persuaded him that they can work together and overcome them.

6. Asianism vs. Americanism
The Japanese convention of serving the empire loyally and unquestioningly has been sanctified by a half-century of evolution as an affluent imperial dependency. In the 20th century, the benefits were large and the costs acceptable. However, the blueprints for the 21st century call for a new level of subjugation. On Iraq, Japan toes the line, but on North Korea, and on the fundamental reorganization of the joint security treaty, it wavers. In the "Pyongyang Declaration" of September 2002, for the first time since the ignominious collapse of the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere in 1945, Japanese and North Korean leaders joined in announcing shared commitment to the building of a "North-East Asia" of peace and cooperation. Koizumi may be perfectly sincere in his protestations of commitment to Washington on Iraq, but he is no less sincere in dreaming the traditionalist Asian dream of Japanese conservatism. How long he, or whoever might succeed him as Prime Minister, can contain the contradiction, pursuing simultaneously Asianism and Americanism, remains to be seen.

In September 2004 Prime Minister Koizumi, addressing the United Nations in New York, called for Japan to be given a seat as a permanent member of the Security Council. It was a curious spectacle. Before the same select representatives of the international community, Secretary General Kofi Annan had just declared "illegal" the US-led invasion of Iraq that Japan had supported. Weeks before that, US Secretary of State Colin Powell had declared that there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, negating the justification for the war and occupation on which Koizumi had long insisted. The crisis in the institution as the Secretary-General appealed for a return to the rule of law was plain. A US "vassal state," or an additional US vote in the Council, seemed unlikely to point towards resolving it. Japan as an independent, constitutional peace state might have played such a role, but Koizumi had spent his time as Prime Minister doing his best to negate any such identity. Under mounting pressure, however, facing the US demands for a transformed global security partnership, Koizumi’s commitment was looking increasingly equivocal. A Security Council seated Japan might be even less amenable to US direction. Bush’s response was therefore lukewarm.

In the first half of the 20th century seven million Japanese soldiers marched off to distant battlefields, with shouts of "Banzai" ringing in their ears. Not one of them was ever sent, officially, on a mission of "aggression." Like Colonel Bansho, their task was always honorable: to resist the aggression of others (the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5), to fulfill duties to allies (the Boxer China war of 1900 and World War One), to help the people of a neighbor country (the Russian people against the Bolshevik revolution, 1918-1925), to defend Japanese lives and property against bandits, terrorists and warlords and help construct an order of justice, peace and prosperity (in China and later Southeast Asia from 1927 to 1945). Only long after the event did history render a different, much harsher judgment, one that many thoughtful Japanese, though not the ruling party, have come to accept in essentials. Many Japanese scholars today gloomily suspect that the same will be true of the Koizumi dispatch to Iraq. One influential thinker describes the US operations in Iraq as an aggressive war comparable to Japan's invasion of China that started in 1931. Both, he argued, were characterized by defiance
of international society and the belief that military superiority would be decisive. In his view, Iraq was America’s Manchuko, a base from which to try to transform the Middle East as Japan had once thought to transform the whole of China, and just as likely to mark the beginnings of imperial decline.86

However Japan addresses the dilemmas of regional and global policy, its foreign and security posture has already shifted greatly around the issue of North Korea. The constitution has steadily been emptied of content, the constraints of Article 9’s pacifism dismissed, and the country pushed in the direction of becoming a great power, possessing and using force just like other great powers, albeit as what Gotoda calls a US "vassal state." Paradoxically, when Koizumi reorganized his cabinet in September 2004 he insisted the key problem the country would face during his (probable) remaining two years of office was not the war in Iraq, the transformation of the alliance with the US, relations with North Korea, the growing Japanese fiscal crisis, global poverty, environmental degradation and climate change; instead, it was the task of privatizing the Japanese Post Office.

Notes


14. Quoted in Amaki, p. 64.


17. "Online," PBS, 18 March 2004


22. On 28 May, however, two other Japanese journalists were attacked and killed in their car just south of Baghdad.


33 "Shusho, TV bangumi de 'jieitai o kokugun to aratameta ho ga ii'," Yomiuri shimbun, 2 November 2003.

34 Asahi polls reported opposition falling to 55 per cent in December, 48 per cent in January when the SDF was dispatched, and 41 (vs 42 in favor) in March. Yomiuri found 53 per cent in favor of dispatch by January, and 58 by February. Mainichi found a low of 16 per cent pro-dispatch rising to a high of 50 per cent by March 2004. (Asahi shimbun, 23 February and 21 March, 2004; Yomiuri shimbun, 27 February 2004; Mainichi shimbun, 8 March 2004).


36 Terashima Jitsuro, "21 seiki Nihon ginko no kosoryoku Iraq senso o koete," Ronso, January 2004, pp. 20-27, at p. 24 puts the figure of 10 trillion (ca $90 billion) on Japan's post September 11 "rear support". However, the source of the figure is not clear.

37 Maeda, p. 47.


39 Berkofsky (op. cit.) refers to a recent World Bank estimate that Japan might end up paying up to 30 billion US dollars by 2010.

40 "Japan considers waiving half of Iraq's $7 billion debt," Kyodo, 5 March 2004.


42 Takao Hishinuma and Eiji Hirose, "US official says Japan 'not just some ATM'," Daily Yomiuri Online, 10 October 2003.

43 "Kawase shijo, doru-yasu tsuzuku mitoshi, nebukai 'futago no akaji'," Asahi shimbun, 31 December 2003.


50. Handa, p. 74.


52. Handa, p. 75.


58. See, for example, *The Economist* cover story for 14-20 February 2004: "At last, Japan is flying again."

59. The Long-Term Credit Bank, sold off to a foreign "vulture fund" in 2000, was then reborn as Shinsei Bank. It swallowed 8 trillion yen (ca $70 billion) of public funds in the process, half of it irrecoverably, and its reincarnated form was beyond the reach of Japanese tax authorities. ("Gaishi mokesasetasai seifu," *Asahi shimbun*, 3 March 2004.) The
Resona Bank was rescued by an infusion of two trillion yen in May and the Ashikaga banking group was nationalized at the end of November 2003.

60. Yanagida Kunio, "'Koizumi izen' to Koizumi igo'," Bungei Shunju, November 2003, pp. 94-107.


64. This point is well made by Abdel Bari Atwan, editor of the London-based Arab newspaper, al Quds, in an interview published in the Asahi shimbun, "Chuto seisaku, bei wa tenkan seyo," 18 March 2004.


72. Asahi shimbun, 19 February 2003. Kyuma was appointed General Council Chairman of the LDP in the September 2004 cabinet reshuffle.
73. The word used was "zokkoku." Interview, Asahi shimbun, 21 September 2004.


77. On his departure for Pyongyang, 22 May 2004, NHK TV.

78. "Nicho no kokko seijoka, shusho 'ichinen inai ni',' Asahi shimbun, 3 July 2004.


83. Wada Haruki, Tohoku Ajia kyodo no ie, Heibonsha, 2003, p. 166.


86. Kang Sangjuung, op. cit., p. 1
By contrast, in “Japan in the American Imperium: Rethinking Security,” Peter J. Katzenstein argues that Japan’s participation offered evidence of shifting, unresolved policy alignments as Japanese struggle to find a post-Cold War stance. In particular, Japanese security policy is caught between a U.S.-supportive nationalism and a more distinctive Asianism, a tension that grows greater as China expands its international presence.

Japan in the American Imperium: Rethinking Security
Peter J. Katzenstein
October 3, 2008
http://apjjf.org/-Peter-J.-Katzenstein/2921/article.html

A succession of weak Japanese Prime Ministers, the drama of the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the current global financial crisis once again have returned the subject of Japanese security policy to a position of relative political marginality. [*] Throughout the Cold War, the analysis of Japanese security was a topic largely overlooked by both American students of Japan and by students of national security. Japan, after all, was the country that had adopted a Peace Constitution with its famous Article 9 interpreted as legally banning the use of armed force in the defense of national objectives. Its professional military had little public standing and was under the thumb of civilians. And Japan’s grand strategy aimed at gaining power and prestige and sought to leverage its economic prowess to a position of regional and perhaps global leadership that would complement rather than rival that of the United States. At the same time Japan relied on the continued protection by the U.S. military. To be sure, since the late 1970s the U.S. government persistently pressed Japan to play a larger regional role in Asia and to spend more of its rapidly growing GDP on national defense. But Japan made no more than marginal concessions. On security issues it kept a low regional profile, and since the late 1980s Japanese defense spending consistently stayed below one percent of GDP. Writing on problems of Japanese national security, thus, was left to policy specialists issuing regular conference reports on the ups and downs of the U.S.–Japan bilateral defense relationship. Theoretically informed scholarship was conspicuous by its absence.

Things have changed a great deal. The end of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the 9/11 attacks have fundamentally transformed the international landscape. Having failed in understanding the political dynamics that led to the end of the Cold War, some specialists of national and international security turned their attention from the Western to the Eastern perimeter of the Euro–Asian land mass. Would not the rapid rise of Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, the Newly Industrializing Economies in Southeast Asia, China and Vietnam, yield fertile grounds for the application of the timeless truths of realist theory? As peace was breaking out in Europe, was Asia not destined to prepare for war (Friedberg 1993/94)?

Yet war and ethnic cleansing returned to Europe in the 1990s, while Asia remained peaceful. Thought to be unstoppable in the 1980s, Japan’s economic juggernaut founderd on more than a decade of economic stagnation from 1990, while China’s economy
continued to grow annually by about 8–10 percent, creating new security dynamics in East Asia as well as between East Asia and the United States. The Asian financial crisis of 1997 illustrated how closely Asia’s economic miracle had become linked to regional and global markets. It also showed how, with the exception of Indonesia, Asian leaders skillfully maneuvered out of that crisis in a very short time. The attack of September 11 and the U.S. global war on terror increased regional concerns about the rise of al Qaeda (Chow 2005; Leheny 2005). More importantly, it elevated the political importance of North Korea as a member of what President Bush called "the axis of evil," comprising countries that were suspected of trading in the illicit international market for nuclear technology and thus enhancing the risk that weapons of mass destruction could end up in the hands of groups intent on large-scale violence, or otherwise engaging in criminal or terrorist activities.

**JAPAN IN THE AMERICAN IMPERIUM**

The broader context in which Japanese and Asian security affairs play themselves out continues to be shaped heavily by the United States as the preeminent actor in the international system and in East Asia. For better and for worse, since the 1930s American policies have had an enormous impact on East Asia. The creation of a liberal international economic order after 1945 was an important precondition for the export-oriented economic miracles of East Asian states. And the permanent stationing of about 100,000 U.S. troops in Japan and South Korea guaranteed continued U.S. political involvement. The Korean and Vietnam wars killed millions of Koreans and Vietnamese and left divisive historical legacies, especially on the Korean peninsula. It would be a mistake, however, to equate the United States government solely with its economic, diplomatic or military policies. The United States is both an actor in and a part of an American system of rule in world politics that has evolved over the last half century. The concept of imperium refers to both actor and system, to the conjoining of power that has both territorial and non-territorial dimensions (Katzenstein 2005).

**The American Imperium**¹

The United States government deploys its power in a system of rule that merges the military, economic, political and cultural elements which constitute the foundations for the preeminence of the American imperium in world politics. Territorial power was the coinage of the old land and maritime empires that collapsed at the end of the three great wars of the 20th century: World War I, World War II and the Cold War. American bases circling the Soviet Union during the Cold War and springing up again after the 9/11 attacks underline the continued importance of the territorial dimensions of the American empire. The U.S. has a quarter of a million military personnel deployed on scores of large military bases and hundreds of small ones scattered around the globe. The non-territorial dimensions of American power are reflected in the American Empire, a constellation of flexible hierarchies, fluid identities, and multiple exchanges. It is defined by technologies which are shrinking time and space, the alluring power that inheres in the American pattern of mass consumption, and the attraction of the American dream in a land that, evidence to the contrary notwithstanding, is viewed by many millions around the world mainly as the promised land of freedom and unlimited possibilities.
Territorial empire and non-territorial Empire are ideal types. They merge in the political experience and practices of the American imperium and the formal and informal political systems of rule as well as the combination of hierarchical and egalitarian political relations that it embodies. This imperium is both constraining and enabling. The relative importance of its territorial and non-territorial dimensions waxes and wanes over time, shaped by the domestic struggles in American politics that reflect the rise and fall of political coalitions with competing political constituencies, interests and visions. Japanese and Asian security affairs are encompassed by an imperium which embodies both the material, territorial and actor-centric dimensions of U.S. power on the one hand and the symbolic, non-territorial and systemic dimensions of American power on the other.

Regional core states such as Japan and Germany play crucial roles in linking world regions such as Asia and Europe to the American imperium. Specialists focusing on the politics of regional powers other than Japan and Germany—such as China, Korea, Britain or France—may rightly object to the singling out of Germany and Japan as special core states. Yet, core states play different roles, as supporter states in the case of Japan and Germany, and as regional pivots in the case of, for example, China and France (Chase, Hill and Kennedy 1999). The distinction between pivot and supporter is a historically specific rather than a structurally general argument. It identifies Japan and Germany as core states not because of their size and power but because of their specific historical experience and evolution in the Anglo-American imperium. And because the imperium is Anglo-American, for both structural and historical reasons Britain -- with its “special relationship” to the United States and for many decades wracked by fundamental disagreements about its European role -- cannot play the role of supporter state.

A historical comparison of Japan with Germany has advantages over the narrower conceptualization that Richard Samuels (2007) has offered in his recent book. Samuel’s account is a triumph of “old” security studies over “new” security issues such as human
security, environmental degradation, terrorism or the spread of weapons of mass destruction. It is striking how the discursive moves of the main-stream and anti-mainstream in Japan’s multiple strategic traditions so carefully tracked in his book are remarkably narrow in what they have to say about the full range of Japan’s contemporary security challenges. Equally significant, Samuels rigorously sidesteps all opportunities to place Japan in a comparative perspective. The attentive reader thus is left with an analysis that makes Japan look unique rather than distinctive. Japan’s self-defined sense of vulnerability is a subject that looms large for Samuels. Yet this condition is hardly unique to Japan. Stubbs (1999, 2005), Zhu (2000, 2002), and Larsson (2007) have applied the same concept to explain a variety of political outcomes in Asia, and I have tried to do the same for the small European states (Katzenstein 1985). Is there some distinctive quality to the experience of vulnerability that sets Japan apart from other states? Furthermore, in contrast to Germany with its important role in NATO and the EU, Japan, the other main Axis power that suffered total defeat in its challenge of Anglo-American hegemony in the middle of the 20th century, has resisted firmly the internationalization of its state identity and security practices (Buruma 1994; Nabers 2006). Is there a relation between the experience of vulnerability and the resistance of internationalization? And if there is, what is its nature? Answers to such questions are important. Neglecting comparisons makes Samuels’s core claim—that Japan is currently in the process of articulating a new grand strategy involving various forms of hedging—empirically indistinguishable from that of its main rival: that Japan is currently in the process of refurbishing its existing grand strategy. One of the great virtues of the book, however, is the fact that repeatedly the author graciously concedes this central point (Samuels 2007: 64, 107–08, 209. See also Pyle 2007; Midford 2006; Mochizuki 2004).

Because only Japan and Germany challenged in war the Anglo-American world order in the first half of the 20th century, and experienced traumatic defeat and occupation, no other world region has evolved similarly situated core states. After its historic victory over the political alternative that Fascism posed to Anglo-American hegemony in the middle of the 20th century, U.S. foreign policies sought to anchor its Japanese and German clients firmly within America’s emerging imperium (Lake 1988).

Gavan McCormack (2007, 79–80) writes: "...it is hard to escape the feeling that they [U.S. officials today] functioned rather as proconsuls, advising and instructing, while seeing Japan still as an imperial dependency, rather like General MacArthur a half-century earlier, who was acclaimed a benevolent liberator even while treating the Japanese people as children." An assessment that was correct for the late 1940s is wrong half a century later. In the case of Japan as much as Germany it is a mistake to argue that this client status remains intact. Eventually both states left their client status behind, becoming regional powers in their own right and supporters of the United States. Each is intent on exercising economic and political power indirectly, thereby simultaneously extending the reach and durability of the American imperium (Katzenstein and Shiraishi 1997, 2006; Katzenstein 1997). These two supporter states were of vital importance in keeping Asia and Europe porous rather than closed regions. Their attachment to the American imperium was steady, first in the name of anti-Communism, and subsequently in the name of globalization and counter-terrorism. Yet the difference in the geo-strategic context—as yet no politically
viable East Asian Community, no large immigrant Muslim population in Japan, a
geographically proximate perceived national security threat in the form of North Korea,
and a deep suspicion of an increasingly powerful China—has left Japan a more dependable
supporter state of the United States than Germany. The bipartisan Armitage-Nye report of
October 2000 illustrates how far American policy has come to recognize Japan’s strategic
importance for U.S. foreign policy in East Asia, and how far it has left behind policies that
regarded Japan as a client (as in the 1950s) or the subject of external pressure politics (as
in the 1980s) (Green 2007: 147).

This is not to deny that as history changes, so may the character and standing of these two
supporter states. Japan and Germany are increasingly removed in time, although not
necessarily in terms of their memory, from their traumatic national defeats. After 9/11 the
Bush administration’s sharp turn toward a militant and unilateralist policy has given rise to
strong opposition among mass publics abroad (Katzenstein and Keohane 2007). For
example, democratization in South Korean politics gave rise to an anti-Americanism that
has been accentuated greatly by the abrasive political style of a hapless U.S. diplomacy
(Steinberg 2005). Anti-Americanism among the young in particular has risen to heights
that would have been inconceivable in the late 1990s. In China, American-inflected
globalization is embraced while anti-hegemonism, especially its behavioral manifestations,
continues to be a powerful oppositional ideology that resists American primacy. While it is
not as virulent or racist as anti-Japanese sentiments, this anti-Americanism is a powerful
latent force that is readily activated around many issues and most certainly around the
volatile issue of Taiwan (Johnston and Stockmann 2007).

Japan is a notable exception to these changes in East Asian popular attitudes. In the mid-
and late 1950s Japanese anti-Americanism ran so deep, in the form of opposition to the US-
Japan Security Treaty, that President Eisenhower cancelled his visit in 1960, after the
Japanese government informed the White House that a full mobilization of Japan’s total
police force could not guarantee the physical security of the Presidential motorcade from
Haneda airport to the Imperial Hotel in downtown Tokyo. Since the end of the Vietnam war
anti-Americanism has virtually disappeared as Japan’s party system has moved to center-
right, and as a new national consciousness has taken hold of a younger generation
psychologically no longer moved by the dominant concerns of the 1950s and 1960s and
unnerved by North Korean nuclear-reinforced bluster and China’s rise. At a popular level
the relationship between Japan and the United States is free from rancor. Despite sustained
protests against American bases in Okinawa, public opinion polls typically show above 60
per cent of the Japanese public favoring the United States, about twice as large as
corresponding numbers for various European countries (Pew Global Attitudes Project
2007; Tanaka 2007).

Furthermore, as the character of the American imperium changes, its two supporter states
are unavoidably repositioned in the matrix of Asian and European politics. There exists
thus no reason why the role of these supporter states could not be filled by others. If
Germany were to be submerged totally in a European polity (which seems very unlikely)
and if Japan’s GDP were surpassed, eventually, by China’s (which seems very likely, but not
imminent), together with other historical changes affecting Asia, Europe, and the United
States, this might eventually transform the role played by traditional supporters and other regional pivots. In the case of France and China, for example, the magnitude of such changes would have to be very substantial. These two states are crucial pivots. But it is hard to imagine how they could replace Japan and Germany any time soon as Asia’s and Europe’s supporter states.

**Japan**

Alliance with the United States has provided the political and strategic foundations for Japan’s economic rise in the American imperium (Ikenberry and Inoguchi 2003, 2007). To be sure, with the passing of time Asia has become more important as war and occupation receded and as Japan’s reconstruction and economic clout made it Asia’s preeminent economic power. But it was Asia viewed from Tokyo through an American looking-glass. There was more than a whiff of the historical role that Japan sought after the Meiji restoration—casting itself in the role of interlocutor between Asia and the West.

Since 1945 Japan has experienced a phenomenal rise. Its economic fortunes were helped greatly by serving as the Asian armory in America’s global struggle against Communism, first in Korea in the 1950s and subsequently in Vietnam and Southeast Asia in the 1960s. The collapse of the Bretton Woods system and the two oil shocks of the 1970s set the stage for the economic rise of Japan in financial markets. The 1980s were the decade of Japan’s global ascendance as an economic superpower, ending in a speculative bubble that collapsed into economic torpor lasting more than a decade. In manufacturing Japan’s technological prowess is no longer unchallenged in defining East Asia’s economic frontiers.

Japan has a mature economy that is trying to cope with an aging and thrifty population and with being one of the two main sources of credit for the United States. This completed the transformation of Japan’s strategic relationship with the United States from client to supporter state.

Japan has been important in supporting, both directly and indirectly, U.S. policies in a variety of ways (Krauss and Pempel 2004; McCormack 2007; Pyle 2007; Hughes and Krauss 2007). It helped refurbish the institutional infrastructure of international financial institutions following the Asian financial crisis of 1997, became for a while the world’s largest aid donor, and played a central role, especially in the mid-1980s, of intervening in financial markets to realign the values of the world’s major currencies. Since the 1980s Japan has accommodated the United States on issues central to the functioning of the international economy, with evident reluctance in opening Japanese markets for goods, services and capital and with an air of resignation in amassing close to a trillion dollars in reserves, substantial portions of which have helped to finance perennial U.S. budget and trade deficits.
Japan’s Participation in the American Led-Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq

Japanese aid allocations 2005-06

With governments deeply involved in shaping their nations’ economic trajectories Japan expected to lead Asia both directly through aid, trade and advice and indirectly by providing an attractive economic model. Japan could not develop and grow unless Asia also developed and grew. By focusing on the politics of productivity, Japan hoped to sidestep political quarrels and dispel historical animosities. It thus sought to create the political conditions where its highly competitive industries could prosper through energetic export drives and smart foreign investments. Regional development and Japanese ascendance would thus be indelibly linked in a win-win situation which cloaked in liberal garments asymmetries in economic position and political power.

This strategy proved politically unworkable. In the 1960s different Japanese proposals for more formal regional integration schemes foundered on the deep suspicions that other Asian states, many of them former colonies or the targets of Japanese invasion, harbored against Japan. Having been rebuffed, the Japanese government settled after the early 1970s on more informal and market-based approaches to Asian integration. After the dramatic appreciation of the Yen in 1985 Japanese firms were quick to develop far-flung networks of subcontractors and affiliated firms. Foreign supplier chains of Japanese firms provided a
new regional infrastructure for industries such as textiles, automobiles, and electronics. Thus Japanese investment had a deep impact on specific economic sectors, whole countries, and the entire Asia-Pacific region. And the regionalization of Japan’s economic power had the political benefit of diffusing much of the political conflict with the United States over bilateral trade imbalances. For Japanese enmeshment has helped create a more integrated regional economy in East Asia that is now fueled also by Korean, Taiwanese, Southeast Asian, and Chinese firms. The structural preconditions for this process of regionalization was the insatiable appetite of American consumers for inexpensive Asian products and the openness of American markets to imports from Asia. This outcome was fully compatible with the grand strategy of the United States which in the early 1970s normalized its relations with China to balance the Soviet Union during the Cold War, and which has consistently favored a far-reaching liberalization of markets. There would have been fewer and smaller Asian miracles and less Asian regionalism without the parking lots of American shopping malls filled in America’s irresistible emporium of consumption (DeGrazia 2005). And while it is premature to reach an informed assessment of the political consequence of the financial crisis that spread from Wall Street to Europe and throughout the global financial system, it seems reasonable to expect economic retrenchment on Main Street to affect the business prospects of Asian exporters who will look, as they have in recent decades, for growth in Asian markets while American consumers are squeezed and interests rise in the United States.

The role of supporter state was also evident in Japan’s national security policies. Although it was constrained for decades by a pacifist public culture and, somewhat less, by Article 9 of its Peace Constitution, the Japanese government has consistently adhered to policies that supported the United States, especially in the 1980s and with increased intensity since 9/11. To be sure there have been moments—such as in the mid-1970s and the mid-1990s—when the American staying power in Asia appeared sufficiently uncertain so as to suggest the need for possibly far-reaching changes in Japan’s security strategy. But these moments of uncertainty passed quickly, and Japan remained a close ally of the United States—then and now.

The reasons for Japan’s steadfast support have varied. The military, economic and political advantages of the American security umbrella were at the heart of the Yoshida doctrine and widely recognized in all political quarters. Expending less than 1 percent of Japan’s GDP for national defense was feasible because American taxpayers spent a lot more. And as Japan’s standing in the Asia-Pacific increased so did the pressure of the U.S. government to have the Japanese government play a more expansive, and expensive, role in regional security affairs—as a reliable junior partner of the United States. Some of Japan’s critics, both at home and abroad, detected in the 1980s a new tone of assertiveness and a new nationalism in Prime Minister Nakasone’s Japan. Two decades later, under Prime Ministers Koizumi and Abe the increase in an assertive Japanese nationalism was more prominently there for everybody to see. This was the political context in which the Japanese government, in February 2005, decided to raise its profile on one of the region’s most vexing problems, by issuing a joint security declaration with the United States that identified the peaceful resolution of the Taiwan issue as a shared strategic objective.
Prime Minister Koizumi’s strategy was to attach Japan even more closely to the United States than in the past (Samuels 2007: 86–108; Hughes and Krauss 2007: 160–63), while toying with the idea of bringing about an opening toward North Korea. After the 9/11 attacks the Diet passed in record time legislation permitting the dispatch of the Japanese navy to the Indian Ocean to provide logistical support for the U.S.-led coalition forces in Afghanistan. After the U.S. invasion of Iraq the Diet enacted legislation permitting the deployment of the Japanese army to Iraq to aid in reconstruction and the stationing of the Japanese navy and air force in the Persian Gulf to provide logistical support of the American war. In 2003 the Japanese government agreed to acquire a ballistic missile defense system which should be fully operational by 2011. And legislation introduced in 2005 gives the Prime Minister and military commanders the power to mobilize military force in response to missile attacks, without Cabinet deliberation in the course of analyzing particular empirical contexts or Parliamentary oversight. Since Japan is buying the main components of both weapons systems, the Patriot Advance Capability (PAC)-3 and the Aegis destroyers, from the United States, missile defense will further consolidate the U.S.-Japan alliance and tighten technological cooperation between the two militaries. In 2006 the U.S. and Japan completed a Defense Policy Review Initiative which strengthened the bilateral alliance to meet regional and global security threats. Toward that end and overriding significant local objections, Prime Minister Koizumi agreed to a substantial and costly realignment of U.S. bases in Japan. The practical implication of this agreement was to make Japan a frontline command post in the projection of U.S. military power, not only in East Asia but extending as far as to the Middle East. Like previous ones (Katzenstein 1996: 131–52) this was a further reinterpretation of the geographical scope of the U.S.-Japan security treaty and the mission of U.S. bases that went well beyond protecting the Japanese homeland and securing regional stability in East Asia. In fact, the Japanese and U.S. governments issued a joint statement stressing their shared global objectives of the eradication of terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. These important changes in the U.S.-Japan alliance are clearly linked to changes in the character of Japan and the East Asian context. Yet it is easy to overlook the fact that, with the disintegration of the Japanese Left, strong opposition to Japan’s playing a larger military role has changed as it has moved to other political parties; that opposition has not disappeared.

After 9/11 under Koizumi’s leadership Japan embraced what looked like a grand strategy of unquestioned security alignment with the United States. Japan appeared to be deeply invested in enhancing its special relationship with the United States, imitating that other island nation, Great Britain. But under Abe and Fukuda, leaders of astonishingly little staying power in office, within the context of the US-Japan security alliance, policy vacillated again between nationalism and Asianism. It remains to be seen how Japan’s strategy will fare under Prime Minister Aso as the United States moves beyond the Presidency of George W. Bush (C. Hughes 2007).

**JAPAN AND CHINA: TWO TIGERS ON ONE MOUNTAIN?**

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, China’s entrance into global markets and its gradual
Socialization into the role of a responsible regional power has been the single most important development affecting Japan and East Asia. This is not to argue that China has already replaced Japan as the preeminent economic power in Asia. Far from it. In 2002 Japan accounted for 13.5 percent of global GDP almost four times China’s figure. In terms of market exchanges, a better measure of regional and global power dynamics than purchasing power parity measures of GDP, Japan was leading China by a ratio of 4:1 and about 40:1 on a per capita basis. After a decade of economic stagnation Japan’s share of the combined regional GDP of Northeast and Southeast Asia had slipped from 72 to 65 percent. And during the same period of explosive economic growth, China’s GDP as a proportion of Japan’s had increased from 13 to 23 percent (Katzenstein 2006: 2). And even though the situation is changing from year to year, it is good to remember that until 2005 China was still lagging behind Germany as the world’s leading exporter. Current Chinese plans call for increasing the country’s GDP to $4.4 trillion by 2020, quadrupling the figure for the year 2000. If successful, China is likely to top Japan by that time in terms of market size measured at current exchange rates. Although these facts deflate a bit the breathless adulation with which some journalists and politicians are greeting the Chinese juggernaut, just as they greeted Japan’s in the 1980s, it is beyond doubt that very significant changes in China are having a profound effect on Asian and Japanese security.

**China’s Rise**

The political rise of China as a responsible regional power is an important political development (Kang 2007; Johnston 2004; Economy and Oksenberg 1999; Johnston and Ross 1999; Selden 1997). In the 1970s and 1980s China exchanged the role of a revolutionary for that of a realist power. China’s raison d’etat had a hard-edge of realpolitik that reminded some observers of Imperial Germany in the decades leading up to World War I. After more than a century of humiliation and isolation, was not China finally entitled to its rightful place under the sun? The international politics of sports, energy, xenophobic nationalism, economic mercantilism all seemed to point in that direction. Indeed, some realist theorists who had been baffled by the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union in Europe, saw in Asia a region "ripe for rivalry" (Friedberg 1993/94).

China’s diplomacy, however, is not only hard-core realist. On many issues China has adopted a multilateral and accommodating stance. It has recognized the long-term advantages that accrue from its growing economic power and that dictate a diplomatic strategy supporting what has come to be known as China’s "peaceful rise." This change is visible in comparison to both the United States and Japan. A shift in its national security doctrine in September 2002 established the United States as a revisionist power in the Middle East, in contrast to China playing the role of a status quo power in the international system. In its war against terror the U.S. government sought far-reaching changes. Most importantly it has claimed the right to preemptive attack, even under circumstances when there would be time and opportunity to seek approval from the United Nations. In sharp contrast China joined many other states in insisting on the importance of the legitimacy that international approval confers, as the U.S. had in the era of multilateralism that it had ushered in at the end of World War II. Anti-hegemonism became once again the watchword in Beijing as it balanced carefully a strong interest in China’s territorial sovereignty with
growing demands of multilateral diplomacy, including on hot-button issues such as North Korea's nuclear weapons program. In East Asia, in particular, instead of running the risks of Euro-centric balance-of-power politics China is seeking to return to a Sino-centric bandwagoning politics, thus creating political space for the cautious hedging strategies of a number of East Asian states. And Chinese diplomacy has shifted to include multilateral regional arrangements as an explicit tool to supplement its bilateral approach to regional and global issues.

In contrast to Japan with its more inward economic orientation, the distinctiveness of China's ascendance lies in an economic might and political clout that is structurally predisposed to reinforce rather than challenge East Asia's openness in a world of regions. Central to that structural predisposition is the realignment, rather than (re)unification, of a vibrant Chinese diaspora in Taiwan and Southeast Asia, with the Chinese state (Gomez and Hsiao 2004, 2001; Callahan 2003; Naughton 1997; Weidenbaum and Hughes 1996; Dædalus 1991).4 Millions of overseas Chinese had left the Southern coast of China in the 19th century for destinations throughout Southeast Asia. Over time they became the economic elites in various countries. As successive waves of Asian states experienced their economic miracles, often with the help of developmental states, throughout East Asia networks of overseas Chinese were ready as important intermediaries connecting national political elites with foreign firms. While the core of Chinese business has remained family-controlled, surrounding layers of equity-holding and political control were gradually taken over by members of the indigenous political elites. In the 1990s, in terms of its sheer economic size the overseas Chinese economy in Southeast Asia reportedly ranked fourth in the world.

The category of "overseas Chinese" is ambiguous. In the 19th century the Chinese diaspora lacked a homogenous identity as it was divided, among others, by dialect, hometown, blood relationships and guild associations. As mainland China was engulfed in civil war, revolutionary upheaval and Maoist rule, a thin veneer of common expatriate experience grew, but not enough to conceal the enormous variability in the political experience and standing of the overseas Chinese in different parts of Southeast Asia. The cultural trait that helps define the overseas Chinese thus is an almost infinite flexibility in their approach to business.

The overseas Chinese presented the Chinese state with a formidable problem after the Communist Party seized power in 1949. The 1953 census listed the overseas Chinese as part of China's population. And the 1954 Constitution of the Peoples Republic of China provided for representation of all overseas Chinese in the National People's Congress (Suryadinata 1978: 9–10, 26, 29). However, conflict with Indonesia and other Southeast Asian states forced a change in policy. All of these states were wary of the political allegiance of their ethnic Chinese populations. After 1957 Chinese foreign policy encouraged the overseas Chinese to seek local citizenship and local education. And since 1975 China's constitutions have stripped overseas Chinese of membership in the National People's Congress. During the last generation an overwhelming number of overseas Chinese have accepted citizenship in their new homelands. The term overseas Chinese now denotes ethnic Chinese of Southeast Asian birth and nationality.
In China both provincial and central governments have sought to strengthen the relationship between China’s surging economy and the overseas Chinese, and especially Taiwan, through an active encouragement of foreign investment, remittances and tourism. What Barry Naughton (1997) calls the "China Circle" connects Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the overseas Chinese throughout Southeast Asia. Upward of one million Taiwanese businessmen now live in China, undercutting ineffective attempts of the Taiwanese government to resist the strong pull of China’s surging economy. And it is easy to forget that outside of this China circle the overseas Chinese constitute also a North American and indeed a global diaspora.

Since the late 1970s China has attracted half a trillion dollars in foreign investment, about ten times the total foreign investment that has flown into Japan since 1945. Between 1985 and 1995 about two-thirds of realized foreign investment in China is estimated to have come from domestic Chinese sources which used Hong Kong to circumvent domestic taxes, one-third from foreign investors. Since 1995 this proportion is widely believed to have reversed itself. Of the 250 billion dollars of total foreign investments, perhaps as much as half has come from Taiwan, and additional undetected funds have flown in from Southeast Asia. Whatever the precise figures, in the coming years even closer tie-ups between overseas and mainland Chinese business are the next phase in the global spread of Asian business networks. It is these market- and state-driven tie-ups, not formal political institutions, which are the defining characteristic of the rise of China and the role of Asia in world politics. The evolution of Chinese capitalism thus is not only a domestic but also a regional and global phenomenon. Across a broad range of issues, uniquely in Asia, China is linked inextricably to the Asia-Pacific. And as a rapidly emerging creditor of the United States and a looming military rival at least in the eyes of important segments of the American defense establishment, China is also linked intimately to the American imperium.

### Japan and China

Japan must come to terms with a China that is both a vital economic partner and also a political rival in East Asia (Lam 2006; Dreyer 2006; Cohen, 2005; Abramowitz, Funabashi and Wang 2002; Friedman 2000; Wang 2000; Zhao 1997; Taylor 1996; Iriye 1992). Japan adheres to an increasingly international economic and a fully internationalized security strategy. In sharp contrast, China follows a fully international economic and a more conventional national security strategy. Both reinforce the porosity of East Asia. In the latter stages of the Koizumi administration the deterioration in Sino-Japanese relations was striking. Between May 2004 and October 2005, for example, the relations between these two regional powers were affected negatively by a series of high-profile political events, on average once a month (Pei and Swaine 2005: 5). By the end of Koizumi’s Prime Ministership, Japan’s relations with China had reached rock-bottom. In 2005 just under 10 percent of the Japanese and Chinese public held favorable views of the other country (Sato 2007: 3; Tanaka 2007). Perceptions of imagined slights and hurt pride have played out on both sides against very different interpretations of the past. They are illustrated by the strong opposition of the Chinese public to any historical revision in the interpretation of Japan’s role as the aggressor in the East Asian war in Japanese textbooks. Japanese fear and
envy feed anti-Chinese sentiments as Chinese rates of growth since the early 1990s have outstripped Japanese rates by margins of 13:1 in per capita gross domestic product and ownership of personal computers, 12:1 in patent applications, 11:1 in total trade, and 9:1 in research and development expenditures (Pei and Swaine 2005: 6). Domestic politics create political incentives in both countries to magnify and exploit popular sentiments, driven by factional infighting in China and electoral strategizing in Japan. China and Japan thus risk being trapped in a political relationship of deepening suspicion and enmity that runs counter to their growing economic interdependence and the prospect of joint gains.

Prime Minister Abe’s visit to Beijing in October 2006, right after he took over from Koizumi, and the return visit of Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao in April 2007 have helped improve the political climate between the two countries. Both governments saw the change in Japanese leadership as a chance for bringing about an improvement in bilateral relations. Furthermore, there exist concrete plans for resumption of more frequent meetings between the political leadership of the two countries (Pilling 2006; Dickie and Pilling 2007). But many contentious issues persist under the surface. Most importantly, Prime Minister Abe remained deliberately ambiguous in his talks with the Chinese government and Japanese journalists about a possible visit of the Yasukuni shrine, avoiding the need to tell the Chinese that he would not and domestic supporters that he might be making such a visit. His resignation made the issue mute as his successor, Prime Minister Fukuda, was committed to better relations with Japan’s East Asian neighbors, illustrated by the agreement with China over the Diaoyutai/Senkaku islands in June 2008. It remains to be seen how Prime Minister Aso will handle this issue. Domestic political weakness may force him to abandon a diplomatically sensible ambiguity on Yasukuni Shrine in favor of shoring up his nationalist base in Japan with a gesture that the Chinese leadership may be unable or unwilling to ignore. Such a political move would not come as a total surprise. As Foreign Minister Aso, more than Prime Minister Abe, favored a "value-based" foreign policy that creates an "arc of freedom and prosperity across the democracies in Pacific Asia" designed to exclude China. For its part China remains very suspicious of Japan’s reinvigorated security alliance with the United States, the refashioning of Japan’s national security apparatus, and plans to revise the constitution (Pei 2007). Chinese exploitation of natural gas reserves in the middle of disputed waters in the East China Sea, and Japan’s hope for Chinese backing for its permanent seat on the UN Security Council provide additional roadblocks for improvement in political relations between two governments.

The domestic, regional and global contours of politics suggest that the evolution of Sino-Japanese relations will be shaped by a mixture of engagement and deterrence in their bilateral relations, by their competitive and complementary region-building practices in an East Asia that will resist domination by either country (Katzenstein 2006), and by the cultivation of their different strategic and economic links to the American imperium. Japan has had a deep strategic partnership with the United States for more than half a century. For China, those links are rooted in a developmental trajectory that prizes economic openness and that increasingly seeks global engagement on all fronts. Through Japan and China a porous Asia is tethered in both its security and economic relations to the American imperium. The U.S. presence in East Asia can help stabilize Sino-Japanese relations at least in the near- and medium-term while political efforts at East Asian region-building proceed.
Despite the political turbulence and rapid changes in Sino-Japanese relations, for some years to come the American imperium and East Asia may remain politically compatible. And because their political strategies are so different, the two tigers may learn how to live on the same mountain.

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Notes

[*] I would like to thank Mark Selden for much more than his careful editing of the manuscript and his superb critical comments and suggestions. The errors of omission and commission that remain are simply the result of my inability or unwillingness to follow his good advice.

[1] This section summarizes some of the major arguments in Katzenstein 2005.

[2] In terms of purchasing power parity, according to some estimates China's economy surpassed Japan's as early as 1994 (Shiraishi 2006: 10).

[3] According to the IMF, by 2006 Japan’s GDP was $4.367 trillion compared to China’s figure of $2.630 trillion, a ratio of 1.66:1. (accessed 4 August 2007)


References


The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) publication included in this reader, “Japan’s Assistance to Afghanistan: Towards Self-Reliance,” explains that, regardless of the issues raised by McCormack and Katzenstein, Japan’s humanitarian efforts in Afghanistan are substantial. Many of these projects involve collaboration with NATO, grassroots organizations and various international organizations, especially those in the United Nations orbit, and represent an attempt to separate Japan somewhat from American military actions there. One of the many parallel events included in the 2012 commemoration of 3/11 was a UNICEF-sponsored videoconference between high school students in Fukushima and the Tajwar Saltana Girls High School in Afghanistan, one of the schools rehabilitated by funds from UNICEF and the government of Japan.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs
“Japan’s Assistance to Afghanistan”
**State, Society and Humanitarian War**

Military interventions since the end of the cold war have often been justified as humanitarian. But, as both experts in international relations and others have noted, that justification requires deciding whether we should give priority to state sovereignty or the rights of individuals. In the best-case scenario, nations intervene in other sovereign nations to prevent despotic leaders from violating human rights; however, the nice-sounding ideal of “humanitarianism” can easily become a pretext for interventions that have little moral justification.

“Humanitarian” reasons had special relevance in the post-9/11 “war on terror” since coalition partners in Afghanistan believed they were fighting Al Qaeda to protect Americans and others from additional terrorist attacks and to prevent the Taliban from abusing Afghans. In Iraq, the United States and United Kingdom did not act in self-defense but conducted a preemptive strike in the mistaken belief it would prevent Iraq from causing harm to others through weapons of mass destruction. Are humanitarian interventions ever justified? What about when the premise is mistaken? In international law, instructs Richard Falk, the United Nations was designed to act as the negotiating body that exerts a “bright yellow light of caution”. He argues that the UN should be empowered to check whether an intervention is based on a false pretext of humanitarianism, or conversely, when the doctrine of non-intervention allows the world community to ignore a true humanitarian crisis such as genocide.17

For Japan in the past these norms governing the ideal of “humanitarian intervention” were especially important because they suggest conditions under which Japan can constitutionally play a role in international military interventions. Moreover, given Japan’s commitment to uphold the ideals of the United Nations as part of its own campaign to secure a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, it was significant that the nation followed America’s lead in rejecting the United Nations in order to invade Iraq.

Two selections from *The Asia-Pacific Journal* call attention to Japanese concerns about “humanitarianism.” Shirakawa Toru, in "Invasion in the Name of Humanitarian Aid: The U.S. in Afghanistan" observed and interviewed American soldiers in Afghanistan and discovered that humanitarian aid and violence are hard to separate and that the soldiers have many motivations for joining the military, and are often driven more by ambitions for overcoming class obstacles rather than patriotic spirit or humanitarianism. He is troubled by the fact that humanitarianism is not more actively promoted on the ground in Afghanistan.

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Invasion in the Name of Humanitarian Aid: The US in Afghanistan
Shirakawa Toru, Translation by Zeljko Cipris
May 17, 2009
http://apjjf.org/-Shirakawa-Toru/3144/article.html

It has been seven years since the US military launched air strikes in revenge for the 9/11 terror attacks. The Taliban have not been suppressed and Afghanistan remains in a state of war. Although overshadowed by the war against Iraq, this too is a war of aggression. A Japanese photo journalist examines the US-Afghan War. The azure skies peculiar to Afghanistan weigh heavily on the land. Rivers that are supposed to flow among the mountains have dried up, exposing the earth’s cracked skin. Snow remains here and there, but it is still too early in the season for it to moisten the soil. Magnificent mountains extend in all directions.

Infantry Company "Alpha"
I reached the Spira district among these mountains on a “Chinook,” US army’s giant transport helicopter.

Afghanistan’s mountains
I covered the front as a US armed forces war correspondent, accompanying the army’s 1-503 Rifle Infantry Company “Alpha” which is deployed in Spira, in Afghanistan’s eastern Khost province.
Spira is adjacent to the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The border region, known as a tribal area, is not governed by the laws of either country. Since the 2001 US invasion, the ousted Taliban have been attacking foreign troops and the Afghan army, while basing themselves in this tribal area. “Alpha’s” mission is to carry out humanitarian aid, as well as to interdict and suppress the Taliban who come across the border. Their stated objective is the provision of medical aid to the population who live in the vicinity of the front-line base. Along with a combat unit numbering about a hundred, there is a humanitarian aid unit of six. Among the latter there are women physicians and even veterinarians. I left the base with the humanitarian aid unit who said they were going to visit nearby houses. A protection unit accompanied us. Though they call themselves doctors and vets, they look no different than combatants. They wear bulletproof vests and sunglasses. M16 rifles hang from their necks. Physicians who are supposed to be saving lives are carrying rifles. It is a strange spectacle. “There’s a woman. Don’t come in.” As they approach a house, a man of about forty, presumably its owner, is standing in the doorway. The eyes with which he looks at the US troops are extremely frightened. “Please don’t come into the house. There’s a woman inside. Please stop.” The man firmly refuses the US army’s medical assistance. The commanding officer persuades the man to yield, promising that only female soldiers...
will enter.
The female soldiers enter the house. The protection unit soldiers follow directly after them. This is not what was promised. As I enter the premises, I see protection unit soldiers on the roof.
I tense up. Nearly all the people who live in the border region support the Taliban. The Taliban often use private houses as a base. If any Taliban are discovered, there might be a firefight.
Fortunately, the protection unit emerges from the house having found no one who looks like a combatant. Medical treatment has been given, but it is a formality. The man, whose skin is dry, has been given cream. “Sometimes we even bring an Afghan doctor from a hospital. The medicine’s free too. We show them that we can do what even the Taliban can’t.” The aid unit’s commanding officer looks triumphant. As we leave the house, we see that soldiers from the protection unit have lined up the males of the house against a wall. A soldier is holding what looks like a camera against a man’s face. The man’s eye is reflected in the apparatus lens.
“I’m taking a photo of his retina and data-basing it.”
I ask him what for, but the soldier says nothing more. According to what a British journalist familiar with army activities tells me later, it is so that when a Taliban fighter is captured they can check the data base and find out what village he is from. Evidently the data can also be useful for targeting air strikes.

“Humanitarian Aid” as an Instrument
I asked “Alpha’s” commanding officer about the aid project.
“Finding the Taliban is extremely difficult. They blend in with the local population. However, if we can turn the local people into our allies through the aid we give them, they are likely to report them to us. This is one of our ultimate objectives.” No longer relying exclusively on military attacks, the US army is changing its strategy and attempting to win the people over through humanitarian aid.
Yet recalling that man’s frightened eyes, I cannot think that the strategy is succeeding. Many Afghans regard the United States as an aggressor. Their distrust of Americans cannot be wiped away so simply. The commanding officer also says that the aid will serve to build a better Afghanistan. However, this is a vision of Afghanistan’s future projected by the United States, a vision whose support by the Afghans is rather doubtful. I cannot help thinking that for the US army, the beautiful words “humanitarian aid” have become an instrument of aggression.

Ignorance Kills
Questioning US Soldiers
I arrived at the US military base Salerno in east Afghanistan’s Khost province. Camp Salerno, which adjoins the provincial capital also called Khost, is one of the main bases on the eastern front. In the early days of the US invasion it was subjected to frequent rocket attacks by insurgent groups and so acquired the inglorious nickname “Rocket City. I stayed here waiting for permission to accompany the troops on their front line mission. Though I had been led to think that I would be able to start working outside the base right away, I ended up waiting for ten full days. I used that time to talk with many new recruits. I wanted to know what sort of thoughts led young people to become soldiers. Many young
men and women are in the army. I wanted to know why.

Why They Became Soldiers
The first soldier I interviewed was a youth of twenty-one. The officer in charge of public relations brought him in. I was told he was an Officer Cadet attached to headquarters. Evidently his father is a military man and his goal is to become a splendid soldier like his father. He is not afraid of the Taliban, and is filled with soldierly pride. He says he has come here in order to bring peace and reconstruction to Afghanistan. He sounds just like a military spokesman. I’d like to hear something a little closer to his true feelings. During interviews, almost all the answers are like this. The army’s media education is thorough. The content of the questions must be submitted in advance. Because the PR officer is present, even one-on-one conversation is difficult. The army permits reporting under its auspices because this is to its advantage. They will never show anything that might be to its disadvantage. But they are dealing with people. At times real feelings happen to spill over. A woman soldier from a minority background talks with me inside a car as she guides me around the base. “I want to go home. I didn’t want to join the army. I got in at seventeen, right after leaving high school. At seventeen you can’t sign the enlistment papers by yourself. My mama just went ahead and signed them. I want to go back soon.” The United States has a system that allows those who join the military to attend university nearly free of charge, so many join up for that reason. This young woman comes from a poor and small town. Among the developed nations, the United States is the country with the greatest disparity between rich and poor. For those born in provincial towns and villages it is difficult to rise economically. If they hope for a better life, joining the army – dangerous though it is – offers the only way out. America’s reason for stationing troops in Afghanistan is “to save Afghanistan.” Everyone says it unanimously. But do teenagers who can hardly control their lives risk those lives to join the army “to save Afghanistan?” A 19-year old Hispanic woman soldier I interviewed at Camp Salerno says it without hesitation: “I don’t know anything about the Taliban, or others like them. All I know is that they are bad people.” She is not shy about her motives. “I joined the army because I wanted to get out of the little Texas town that I’m from. My friends said I’d gone crazy. But I don’t care.” She joined the army at eighteen. Seventeen or eighteen – these are still children. They enter the army before they are capable of judging things as adults. Last year alone two hundred and twenty US soldiers died in Afghanistan. There is no guarantee that she will not be next.

Big Leagues and TV Games
The atmosphere is not in the least soldierly. Nearly all the talk is about big league sports and TV games. Inside the base, they have almost no contact with Afghans. Even on patrols, the only time they leave the base, they only see the town through the thick bulletproof glass of an armored vehicle. I suddenly recall the words of an Afghan friend: “The Americans intend to massacre us.” His overly intense way of speaking stays strongly in my memory. But perhaps it is not so. The American soldiers’ minds are mostly occupied with thoughts of big league sports and home. Not merely ignorant about Afghanistan, they are indifferent to it. Yet every year many thousands of Afghans are killed by US armed attacks. It may be a commonplace to say that “ignorance kills.” Yet it is an indisputable fact that the US military is killing Afghans on a massive scale.
A Prayer For Husband and Son Killed by an Air Strike

Mother Zuraiha has spread a mat on top of the snow, and is trying to warm her body as best she can by exposing it to sunlight. She lives alone in a small tent. The tent, such as it is, is a crude thing made not from vinyl but from patched scraps of cloth. There is nothing inside the tent but a slender wooden pole and thin bedding. The temperature is just below freezing. Her body motionless, Mother Zuraiha is praying to God ever so quietly. Mother Zuraiha lives on a vacant lot called Chamara Babrak in north Kabul. Many refugees live nearby in the tents they have put up. Three hundred refugee families moved here in November of last year. All are from the village of Hashur in Helmand province, a region of fierce fighting. Following last November’s American and British air strikes, the villagers fled for their lives. The US army’s objective in occupying the country is evidently to “rescue and reconstruct Afghanistan.” At least that is what they say. But not a single person who lives in this camp believes their words.

Mother Zuraiha’s Story
What happened in your village? I ask.

Mother Zuraiha tells me, tears trickling down her face.

That day, Mother Zuraiha and her son Naser, almost 23, were washing their donkey in the yard. Her husband was drinking tea inside the house. From the other side of the mountains, they heard the sound of an airplane. Since many US troops are deployed in the area, she did not pay it much attention. Suddenly there was a terrific explosion. The following instant Mother Zuraiha found herself lying next to a pile of rubble. The house had been smashed to pieces. She searched for her son. He should have been right next to her. He was lying quite a distance away. She shook her son to wake him up, but he did not respond. With much effort she lifted him in her arms and saw some of his brain protruding from his head. She sought her neighbors’ help in trying to save her husband. But they were all running about in confusion, and her voice did not reach them. Even now when she has left her village, her husband’s body remains crushed beneath their house.

As she spoke, she said the word “tikatikadon” any number of times. In Dali, the word means “air strike.” Each time she utters this all too common word, her face becomes distorted with pain. Mother Zuraiha herself was wounded. The air strike left injuries over her whole body.

Why was your village attacked?

“Would a woman like me understand why? We’re ordinary peasants. Now I’m just so sad that I lost my husband and son.”

What do you think about the foreign army?

“I don’t understand why they do such heartless things. But they probably trust too much in their own strength.”

Mother Zuraiha continues

“Here I’m just praying for my husband and son. If someone brings me food, I’ll eat it. If no one brings it, I’ll sit here hungry. Life here is terrible. Sometimes I think it would be better for me to die. How good it would’ve been if I’d been able to die the day my husband died. Life here is truly miserable. Thank you for listening to me, my son.”

She calls me her son. In Afghanistan one calls male neighbors to whom one feels close “son.”

Finding even recollections of the past events hateful, Mother Zuraiha says nothing more.

This year Afghanistan has been hit by an unusually severe cold wave, and more than 1,100
people have died throughout the country. In Kabul too, late night temperatures drop as low as minus 30 degrees Celsius [minus 22 F]. I wonder if Mother Zuraiha will be able to survive the winter.

**Dropping bombs and drinking cola**
Have US soldiers ever tried to imagine the aftermath of an air strike? Most likely they have not. Pilots take off from the base and fly to the location they have been told to fly to. They push a button, the bombs drop and go off with a bang. They return to base, drink a coke, and go to bed. Though they are in Afghanistan, they never come in contact with Afghanistan. But air strike victims like Mother Zuraiha certainly exist. The soldiers are completely insulated from that reality.

Mother Zuraiha is one of a multitude of refugees. This year too, as the snow melts, the fighting is intensifying. Will ignorant soldiers resume dropping their bombs and go on increasing the number of victims like Grandmother Zuraiha?

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This article was translated for the Asia-Pacific Journal by Zeljko Cipris. Zeljko Cipris teaches Asian Studies and Japanese at the University of the Pacific in California and is a Japan Focus associate. He is co-author with Shoko Hamano of *Making Sense of Japanese Grammar*, and translator of Ishikawa Tatsuo’s *Soldiers Alive* and of *A Flock of Swirling Crows and Other Proletarian Writings*, a collection of works by Kuroshima Denji.
The main official reason that Japan supported the American-led war in Iraq was to help Iraqi civilians. Yet in 2004, when five Japanese civilians offering their own services to Iraqi and Japanese people were taken hostage in Iraq, several members of the Japanese government sharply criticized their presence in Iraq. The first three Japanese civilians were held for 8 days, and the other two for 3 days. Video footage in Iraq of the first trio, restrained with knives held to their necks, offered a glimpse of Japanese citizens caught up in the violence of war, and tested Japan’s commitment to the American-led effort: the captors accused them of being spies, shouted “No Koizumi” and threatened to execute the trio if Japan failed to pull its troops out of Iraq within three days. Through intervention by the Islamic Clerics Association as well as other Japanese leaders, including the VAWW-Net Japan (Violence Against Women in War-Network Japan), foreign minister Kawaguchi Yoriko, and others working behind the scenes, the captors were persuaded to release them. Announcing their decision, the captors cited “common ground” with the victims, and compared the U.S. bombing of Fallujah in Iraq to Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan. Clearly one issue for their captors was whether Japan was a firm supporter of the USA or was “detachable” as a common Asian nation. These five citizens were fortunate,18 but the kidnapping of foreigners in Iraq and their videotaped supplications became a common tragic motif of the Iraq conflict. From the start of the Iraq war in 2003 until the end of 2005, about 425 non-Iraqis were kidnapped, 18 percent of whom were executed.

Within Japan, however, more than their capture, the big political issue was the unwelcome homecoming given to the five uninjured survivors. The victims and their family members were pressured to apologize for the transgression of traveling independently to Iraq, and the government required them to pay back some of their repatriation expenses. In the “moral ending” of the media story that unfolded, they should have had greater personal responsibility (jiko sekinin), meaning working through the Japanese government or not at all. Imai Noriaki aroused the most curiosity. Why would an 18-year old travel to a war zone, and why did his family allow it? The young humanitarian explained his thinking in a book translated and excerpted here as “Why I Went to Iraq: Reflections of a Japanese Hostage.” Simply put, Imai wanted to gather first-hand information on war victims for his work in the Coalition for the Abolition of Depleted Uranium (DU). He and his family believed that his fellow traveler and friend, aid worker Takato Nahoko, had enough experience in Iraq to be an effective guide. As Norma Field explains in her introduction, young people such as Imai and Takato wanted to convey war's brutality to other Japanese in a way unmediated by conventional or official reportage. Their actions challenged the honesty of the hawkish members of the Japanese government and their portrayal of the “war at home.”

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18 In July 2015, one of the hostages, journalist Yasuda Jumpei, returned to the Middle East and is believed to be held hostage in Syria by the jihadist group al-Nusra Front or possibly transferred to ISIS.
Why I Went to Iraq. Reflections of a Japanese Hostage
Imai Noriaki
Introduced by Norma Field
Translated by Scott Mehl, Ayumu Tahara, Ariya, and Norma Field
December 1, 2007
http://apjjf.org/-Norma-Field/2620/article.html

The December 2003 deployment of Self-Defense Force troops to Iraq by the Koizumi administration took Japan closer to the practical repudiation of the non-belligerancy principle of Article 9 than any prior move in its more than half-century of existence. Of course, as the very existence of "self-defense forces" attests, Article 9 had already been subjected to considerable abuse by interpretation, virtually since inception. Nevertheless, the deployment to Samawah was controversial. It stirred visible opposition in the beginning even though it soon faded, at least from public view. Thus is a status quo created.

When three young Japanese were captured and held hostage for eight days in April of 2004, however, with withdrawal of the troops made the condition for their release, controversy erupted with a vengeance. Once they were released, however, relief was quickly overwhelmed by hostility. Encouraged by the mass media, members of the general public and politicians vented their wrath on the young people and by extension, their demanding families who had caused so much "trouble" through their "selfish" actions. Quite apart from sanctimonious pronunciations about "personal responsibility," the government, by disclosing the public sums spent on the hostages, including stiff reimbursement fees for official return transport that it insisted upon, effectively reinforced the image of the three as thoughtless trouble-makers. And last but hardly least, the Internet, especially the anonymous 2-Channel discussion board, played a memorable role in fanning the flames of furor. Ironically, it was a statement from then Secretary of State Colin Powell about the importance of risk-taking that had a quelling effect.

The extraordinary display of national hostility that was the "hostage incident" (hitojichi jiken), as it has been called, condenses a number of factors worth teasing out. Social relations and the invocation of a national community on the Internet are an obvious one. Although the issue of troop deployment itself was eclipsed, the response to the hostage incident suggests the kinds of issues ranging from the strategic to the psychological that are little articulated in the struggle over Article 9. Neither a culturalist analysis (Japanese are hierarchical, anyone who violates authority is punished), as offered by Onishi Norimitsu in the New York Times, nor a circumscribed political one (it was Koizumi who had staked his career on troop dispatch, and responsibility for any harm befalling Japanese citizens as a consequence had to be shifted elsewhere) as effectively laid out by Philip Brasor in the Japan Times, ¹ can be more than a beginning to understand the phenomenon. We need to take into account long-term frustrations with the economy as well as the demonstrable lack of "personal responsibility" on the part of government officials through the years of the thinning social safety net (the pension scandal—of nonpayment by high officials—would break later in the same month as the hostage incident) in order to grapple with the character and intensity of the backlash greeting the three, as well as the lack of sympathy for the young man (Koda Shosei) who was
captured and beheaded in November of 2004. We would also need to consider how the amorphous yet pervasive sense of a society that had lost its purpose after the postwar recovery, miracle, and bubble and recession found expression in this moment.

The most thorough structural analysis, one taking into account both general conditions and those specific to Japan, would, however, be wanting if it failed to reflect on the nature of the rupture that the incident precipitated. In a war zone more and more considered too dangerous by international news agencies and establishment reporters, it was left to freelance journalists literally taking their lives into their hands to produce reports independent of official sources. Of the three Japanese hostages, Koriyama Soichiro (then 32), was a freelance photojournalist; Takato Nahoko (34) had experience working with Baghdad streetchildren; and Imai Noriaki (18), who had called himself a freelance journalist from his high school days, wanted to investigate depleted uranium (DU) munitions. Each was driven by a need to see for him or herself what was actually going on and acted to realize that desire. Our bureaucratized world counts on the inertia yielded by everyday busyness to enforce its conventions. Routine discourages the very experience of the desire to "see for oneself" outside the institutions of consumption, notably tourism. To witness young people who had actually followed through on that desire must have been breathtaking to some and infuriating to others. There is something deeply unsettling about recognizing that it is not necessary to go along with the pretense that the world is as described, and to see actual individuals, not so different from those around us, making that breach at great personal risk. The anonymity of the Internet attacks offers a telling contrast.

In the three years since the incident, the three have gone on with their own lives. Imai, who was only 18 at the time, is understandably most visibly in the throes of self-definition. As a college student, he has worked hard to involve himself in the community, starting up a portal internet site with fellow students. Through his interviews and volunteering, he has taken up such issues as local veterans’ war memories, intersex, and the global water crisis. Recently, as if coming full circle, he has been forming ties with the Muslim student community, learning about their religious practices and everyday life in a provincial Japanese city. If there is any basis for characterizing Imai’s decision to enter Iraq in spring of 2003 as naive, among other qualities, then his writings and subsequent conduct suggest that it should be understood as a willful, indeed, purposeful naivete.

Part 1 below excerpts from his book, Why I Went to Iraq. The first section recounts his own research on the effects of DU. The citizen group to which he belonged decided to produce a picture book in order to make a broad appeal on the dangers of DU and selected him to go to Iraq to investigate conditions first-hand. Here there seems to be a collective naivete about what might be learned from a brief visit by an amateur; the assumptions and goals are incommensurate with the gravity of such travel at that moment. It is as if Imai’s individual needs and the wish of the group to do something coalesced, and Imai became the bearer of purposeful naivete. The second selection gives a vivid account of the days of captivity. Part 3 is a short account by Imai’s grandmother, whom he calls "the person I respect most in the world." Part 4 is the first of a two-part article written by Imai two years after the incident that recounts his efforts to meet with his anonymous critics. After his traumatic return to Japan, Imai spent seven months in the UK for language study. Upon his return, he opened the hate mail that had accumulated at home and painstakingly inputted the contents into his
computer in an attempt to grasp the nature of the anger directed at him and the others. Part 5 consists of selections from his blog entries from September 2006, February 2007, and December 2007.

Part 2, the only selection not principally concerned with Imai, calls for separate comment. It is an English translation of a letter written at the time of the hostage crisis by the friend of a member of the Violence Against Women in War Japan Network (VAWW-Net Japan, a group that has been active in seeking justice for former comfort women). It was sent to Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya, and ten thousand copies were distributed in Fallujah and Ramadi. It is reproduced here with the permission of Ms. Hosoi Akemi, the VAWW-Net member who posted it to the list. First and foremost, it is stunning in its difference from the discourse of the mainstream media inasmuch as the hostage-takers are addressed as brothers and fellow-believers. This difference resonated with members of the VAWW-Net Japan listserv: as one of them posted, "I've been referring to the hostage-takers as criminals, following the Japanese government and media, but I've stopped doing that."

If the Internet rage directed at the hostages is one representation of this moment in postwar Japanese history, this letter is quite another. It reflects the fruition of some of the most promising developments in postwar Japan: (1) the commitment to peace dating back to the earliest period after the end of the war; (2) the disposable income from the decades of "peace and prosperity" that meant young people traveled widely, and beyond Europe and the U.S.; and (3), most immediately, the grass-roots ties developed through the diffuse effects of (1) and (2). When people talk about generations, they are talking about history. Ms. Hosoi notes that the overwhelming number of Japanese who have involved themselves in Iraq are in the latter half of their thirties, the generation that took the value of international friendship for granted. (This makes Imai Noriaki something of an exception.) She speculates that the conservative reorganization of education has had the effect of making younger people more inward-looking and at the same time, contemptuous of other Asian countries. One of the common criticisms directed at the hostages was "Why don't you stick to Japan if you want to do volunteer work?"

We must not, finally, in our concern to analyze the crushing hostility directed at the hostages, neglect to acknowledge the outpouring of support during their captivity and upon their return, so obscured by media fascination with the attacks. Seeing an image of Imai's face, the lawyer Nakajima Michiko said to herself, "That's me, fifty years ago," and rushed to join others to sit in at the Prime Minister's residence. Indeed, we might understand the cumulative aspirations for a new Japan and a new world on the part of postwar generations expressed in support for the hostages as responding to the will-to-hope inchoately expressed in the radical naivete of their act.
Supporters gathered in Tokyo

1 Onishi’s article may be read here.

Brasor’s here (both accessed 19 December 2007).

2 The three have written their reflections on their hostage experience in the stunning photojournal Days Japan (Vol. 4, No. 9, September 2007). Takato Nahoko grew up in Chitose, Hokkaido, a major station for Self-Defense Forces. Work with Iraqi children, including providing medical supplies and caring for homeless youth, led her to make a number of trips to Iraq prior to her capture. The ties she made through this work translated into rescue efforts by Iraqis (see Part 2, below), such as by the owner of the Internet cafe who offered it as the center of the rescue mission. For a fine interview in the Japan Times, see here (accessed 28 November 2007). Takato is the author of two books, Aishiteru tte do iuno? ikiru imi o sagasu tabi no tochu de (What does "I love you" mean? On the road in search of the meaning of life; Bungeisha 2002); and Senso to heiwa: soredemo irakujin o kirai ni narenai (War and peace: I still can’t hate the Iraqis; Kodansha 2004). Her blog may be read here (accessed 10 January 2008).

Koriyama Soichiro is a prizewinning documentary photographer, working primarily in the Middle East and Southeast Asia since 2001. For examples of his work, visit here (accessed 4 December 2007). Koriyama is the author of several books, including Mirai tte nan desu ka: boku ga ichiban toritakatta mono (What’s this thing called “the future”? What I most wanted to capture) and Senso no ato ni kita mono: kambojia ga utsusu jidai (What followed upon war: Our age as reflected by Cambodia), both from Shin Nihon Shuppan (2004 and 2005:) and Kizuitara kamera baka (When I came to, I was addicted to the camera; Ei Shuppansha, 2006).

3 Boku ga iraku e itta wake (Tokyo: Commons, 2004).
For Nakajima’s own antiwar activism, see a Japan Focus article "Gendered Labor Justice and the Law of Peace." Another important individual, among many, who dedicated himself to mobilizing support was Minowa Noboru (1924-2006), eight-term LDP lower house representative from Hokkaido who served, among other capacities, as parliamentary vice minister of the (then) Defense Agency and postal minister. He declared Prime Minister Koizumi’s dispatch of the SDF to Iraq unconstitutional and mobilized plaintiffs from around the country for a citizens’ lawsuit. At the time of the hostage capture, he sent a message to Al Jazeera offering himself as a substitute. Norma Field

PART 1 Why I Went to Iraq

From Chapter 2

The attested dangers of depleted uranium (DU) shells

Even in Japan there were incidents in ’95 and ’96 in which American soldiers at a U.S. Army shooting range on Torishima (north of Kumejima, in Okinawa Prefecture) fired depleted uranium (DU) rounds "by mistake." The U.S. Army tried to gather up all the DU shrapnel but we still don't know whether they got it all.

As for the specific dangers of DU, there are reports by doctors in Samawa, Iraq, where the Self-Defense Forces were deployed, and by Gulf War veterans. I took these up in my FAX Reports.

"According to many doctors at the Samawa Obstetrics and Gynecology Clinic, the cancer rate among children started increasing rapidly from 1991, and leukemia and brain tumors have become three to four times as frequent. On top of that, the rates of miscarriage and abnormal deliveries have doubled or tripled" (DU Report 2).

Carol Picou, who enlisted as a U.S. Army nurse during the Gulf War, describes the symptoms of radiation sickness as follows:

*Our babies [i.e., babies of returned Gulf War soldiers] are born without thyroids. Veterans exposed to radiation have been getting thyroid cancer. *We’ll have to take synthroid [a thyroid hormone] for the rest of our lives. *Doctors are suspicious that there are squamous cancer cells growing in my uterus. They've made me undergo twelve tests already and I’ve been ordered to repeat those tests. My muscles have atrophied.

There are times when I can no longer control my bladder or my bowels. *The army issued me diapers and said I could catheterize myself for the rest of my life. In fact, I’ve been catheterizing myself since 1992 and wearing diapers for just as long.

Our babies are born with congenital birth defects. Since coming back to the U.S. I’ve taken all the medicine my doctors have given me. *I was afraid I would have a child born with birth defects and had my tubes tied. Pictures of Gulf War babies with birth defects appeared in Life magazine. *Deformed babies born in San Antonio in our support group of 125 veterans look like the babies born in Iraq. One of them had only one ear and one eye and his heart was on the wrong side of his chest. (from DU Report 21, portions revised.)"
While I was looking into the problem of DU shells and nuclear contamination, I was learning too about the dangers of exposure to other forms of radiation, and what I found was mind-boggling. In December 1949 America intentionally scattered iodine 131 from a nuclear facility to investigate the effects on the human body. In the old Soviet Union, too, they put radioactive substances into a river to test the effects it had on the towns along the river. And in the areas around uranium mines there are adverse effects from radioactive contamination.

What got me started, then, was the DU shells, but I was beginning to have questions about atomic power and nuclear energy as well. From then on, I wanted to tackle the issue of atomic energy.

Why was so little attention given in Japan to the problem of DU shells during the Gulf War? Alternatively, why weren’t the pros and cons of economic sanctions against Iraq more widely debated? It’s incomprehensible to me. The Gulf War started when I was six, so I don’t even remember any images of it. Certainly there were images that I saw after the fact, but at the time I didn’t see or know anything. Of course, it would be quite astonishing if a six-year-old were to have had any interest in it.

Deciding to go to Iraq—and persuading my family

On the 31st of January, 2004, the "NO!! Small-scale Nuclear Weapon (DU) Sapporo Project" hosted a talk, which I attended, by Ms. Sato Maki of the JVC (Japan International Volunteer Center), titled "Iraqi Children Now: The Effects of DU Shells."

On February 13th the inaugural meeting of the Campaign for Abolition of Depleted Uranium was held in Tokyo. The campaign was started in response to a call from the attendees of the first meeting of the International Coalition to Ban Uranium Weapons held in Hamburg, Germany, in October of 2003 (see the website).

At a meeting the day before, we discussed the possibility of putting together a picture book about DU shells, and the Sapporo group agreed to take on the project. The Sapporo members were all in favor; they thought that in order to make a picture book, someone should go to Iraq and see first-hand and photograph the Iraqi people’s food, their clothing, the scenery.

"So who’s going to go?"

"Why don’t you go, Imai?"

"If Imai goes and writes about what he sees, then it’ll be more likely to appeal to young people."

And I was in fact quite interested in the culture and the way of life of the Iraqi people and wanted to go. But I also had serious doubts. For starters, when I told my family that I wanted to go to Iraq, they were vehemently opposed. The previous summer, when I had told them I wanted to go to the Congo, they hadn’t let me go. "It costs too much to get there." "It’s too dangerous." "You’re too inexperienced." And as a matter of fact, I didn’t have any money.
This time, whenever we talked about how things were dangerous in Iraq, everybody would get more and more anxious. Persuading my family was not at all easy. Seriously, it really got to me! "If we don't take any risks, we're not going to get anywhere," I explained . . .

This time Ms. Takato would be going with me. She and my mother started talking to each other and began researching. Ms. Takato tested me, asking me pointblank:

"You won't be free to go wherever you want in Baghdad, and you won't be able to take pictures freely. Are you sure you want to go?"

"I know I could die from gunfire or be killed by suicide bombers. I've thought about these things and made up my mind. I'll listen to you. I'll be cautious about whatever I do."

And so I got Ms. Takato to agree first. After that, my mother and grandmother gave me the OK. My 84-year-old grandmother said, "Noriaki, you want to be a journalist, and you'll be with Ms. Takato, so go, and get the experience." I was moved by these words, thinking how strong she was, my grandmother who was born in the Taisho era.

My big brother Yosuke—the guardian of the family—said, "You have no reason to be going to Iraq. Why should you be the one to go?" My father was totally opposed. He was like, "Do whatever you want!" I think he might have given up on me because I wouldn't listen to him.

On March 13th Ms. Takato gave a talk called "Iraq Through a Volunteer’s Eyes: A Message from the Children of Iraq." There again I spoke with her and reaffirmed my desire to go to Iraq.

I was even prepared to die

In the end my decision to go to Iraq had my family’s full support, which made me feel both grateful and relieved.

Of course, the decision was mine alone. Not only was there the risk of dying in a suicide bombing or being caught in a crossfire, but there was also the chance that I would be exposed to radiation from DU shells, as I knew from talking with people who had experience covering Iraq. To tell the truth, I was worried about whether things would be okay if I had children five or ten years down the road. But the only thing for it was to make the effort. I would take the risk and go.
I planned to investigate the adverse effects of depleted uranium bombs and go on a JVC [Japan International Volunteer Center] tour of the hospitals during my ten days in Iraq. I’d learn about the Iraqis’ culture and way of life under Ms. Takato’s guidance. I had not planned to go to Basra since it was too far and too dangerous. But thinking back now, I see that no matter where you went, Iraq was dangerous. Ms. Takato said, "You might die, too, so you had better prepare yourself for that possibility.

I understood this well enough myself, and argued about it with my parents before making my decision. What I couldn’t foresee was the possibility of being taken hostage ...

Once I’d made up my mind to go I took a part-time job to supplement the thousand dollars I’d been saving annually. I also got some money from fundraising, and I borrowed some from my parents. A round-trip flight to Amman (Jordan): seventy-eight thousand yen [around $750]. The airline: Russia’s Aeroflot (famous for cheap flights, bad service, and inconvenient stopovers). I thought three hundred dollars would be enough for ten days’ travel expenses. In addition, there was the cost of film, so I estimated needing around fourteen hundred dollars altogether. Given the scale of my economy, this was about the limit.

I spent three days in Tokyo before my departure. I went to meetings for the Campaign for Abolition of Depleted Uranium, met media figures to tell them of my plan to go to Iraq and take photos for our picture book. To keep costs down, I looked for a cheap hotel.

Chapter 3
Eight Days of Being Held "Hostage" (And I Have No Bitterness)

Amman via Moscow

April fourth, a twelve o’clock flight from Narita Airport to Amman, Jordan. My first trip abroad alone, so I’m nervous. I’m flying Aeroflot Airlines and they don’t speak much English. When I stay overnight in Moscow to change planes, my passport is taken away, which makes me really nervous.

"So what happens to me if I lose my passport? Probably get deported immediately. That would be just great."

When I go down to the hotel lobby, they immediately tell me to go back to my room. I’ve gotta say, Moscow sucks.

In a waiting room in the Moscow airport I get to know a Ukrainian who speaks practically no English. I think he says he’s going to Amman to do construction-related work. We talk (?) for two hours and swap watches. He said his watch was given him by the president of Turkmenistan; it stopped working right away. My watch cost me nine hundred eighty yen [under ten dollars] so it’s no big loss. Maybe this counts as "international exchange."

My plane touches down in Amman on the evening of the fifth at 8:40 p.m. They’ve lost one of the bags I checked. It’s the bag that had the paper on which I’d written the address of the hotel where I’d be staying, the Farah Hotel, so that’s a problem. Right away I hail a cab and tell the driver the name of the hotel before I forget it. Still nervous,
though, since he could always take me to the wrong hotel. What’s more, the driver
doesn’t speak much English. On top of that I’m starting to lose my temper; but somehow
I make it to the Farah Hotel in one piece.

It’s safe if we bypass Fallujah

Meet up with Ms. Takato at the hotel. At first our plan was to leave that night. But
there’s the chance that Fallujah will be blockaded, and when the taxi driver tells us it’s
risky, we decide to wait till the following night.

On the day of the sixth, then, Ms. Takato focuses on gathering information. She checks
Yahoo News at an internet café; she listens to what the drivers are saying at the cab
stand; she gets the news from the capital, Baghdad. She buys a cell phone. Lunch is rice
with chicken—something like pilaf—and mulukhiyya soup. It all tastes incredible. At
the Cliff Hotel we happen to run into Koriyama Soichiro, a cameraman just coming in
from Bangkok, and we all decide to go to Baghdad together.

There’s a regular bus from Amman to Baghdad, a thousand kilometers away as the crow
flies. Mr. Koriyama had ridden this bus before and recommends we take it. But the ride
is long. Even under ordinary circumstances it can take more than twenty hours, but
with the detour around the Fallujah area and the long wait at the border it can take
thirty hours or more. We decide to go by taxi, and Ms. Takato asks the employees at
the Cliff Hotel, where she’s been staying, to make the arrangements.

Now, just in terms of safety, I think the bus would be the best way to go. We’d be riding
with the locals. Besides, bus fare is about the same as cab fare for three.

Mr. Koriyama said, "I’m going alone if I have to. War zones are always dangerous. If you
start worrying about safety, you’ll never go."

There were some kids who had hepatitis that Ms. Takato wanted to take to the
hospital. I felt like I wanted to go, too, but I decided to leave the final decision up to
them. Ms. Takato hesitated, but in the end she said, "Let's go to Baghdad." The biggest factor in our decision was the cab driver's saying that if we bypassed Fallujah, we'd be safe.

An easy border crossing

When we're packed and ready we go to the internet café again to check the latest news, then leave. The clock reads 10:30 p.m. Cab fare for one to Baghdad is around thirty dollars. There's a chance Fallujah will be blockaded, but even if we bypass it we'll be reaching our destination in around thirteen or fourteen hours, the driver says.

We're nervous, of course, but we're reassured when the driver says we'll be okay if we bypass Fallujah. It's like we've been given our authorization papers or something. The driver has some citrus fruit and sweets for us, but we don't stop to eat, and we make do with just water. The driver doesn't speak English so Ms. Takato speaks in Arabic with him.

We know at this point sporadic fighting has broken out in Fallujah, but we couldn't know that a real battle is taking place. Our plan is to go back if the border is blocked. We learned later that right after we left, the situation in Fallujah deteriorated rapidly.

There aren't many cars on the road and there are stretches when we don't see any cars at all. Inside Jordan there were checkpoints on the road all the time but our driver would just wave and pass on through—we never had to stop once. As we approach the border, though, we start seeing more and more cars. When we get to the border, there're too many parked cars to count.

Strangely, though, our taxi drives on by all the cars parked on the side of the road and eases right up to the gate. I wonder if the other drivers are napping. It's past two in the morning. The electricity is off in the border inspection office. We hand over our passports, pay ten Jordanian dinar (about fifteen hundred yen), and get through the Jordanian side of the border with no problem at all. It's almost disappointing.

From there it's a two- or three-minute drive to the Iraqi side of the border, and the American army is nowhere to be seen. Our passports are checked again and we take a few minutes to fill out a simple entry questionnaire. We've heard a rumor that there might be AIDS testing at the border, which makes us worry about possible infection from reused needles, but no AIDS testing is being done.

To lower the chances of being robbed we rest for a few hours at the Iraq border and wait for the sun to come up, and before six in the morning on April 7th we set out again. I will never forget the beauty of the sun as it rose above the horizon that morning. As far as the eye could see there was nothing except power lines far in the distance that were all bent and sagging. The scene left a vivid impression.

Filling up at a roadside gas station. There's a restaurant there, and people are gathering. We pull over and park, and Ms. Takato and Mr. Koriyama get out and talk with some children and take pictures of them. I stay in the vehicle and keep watch over our bags. I was able to take a bunch of pictures at the entrance to the restaurant, too, but the film was confiscated during our captivity.
Once we’re in Iraq we drive faster, around 160 kilometers per hour. Our spirits lift at the thought that we’ll be in Baghdad soon.

"Where are those three from?"

American army vehicles and hundreds of troops come into view as we approach Fallujah. Our taxi exits off the highway and we fill up for the third time. It’s a little before eleven in the morning. There are two lines of waiting cars; the lines must be thirty or forty meters long. There are no houses in the area.

Our taxi gets in line and right away a boy comes up and asks the driver:

"Where are those three from?"

I was surprised—I hadn’t known he was there, right by the car. The driver answers, "They’re Japanese."

Then the boy goes running headlong back up the road leading back to the highway. There’s a white car parked there, and the boy tells whoever’s inside what he’s found out. Our driver wonders aloud why the boy would ask such a question, but I don’t give the matter a second thought. Ms. Takato had left the taxi and was playing with some of the kids from the cars nearby, and now she comes back. I wave to the children and think how cute they are.

Japanese, bad

That’s when it happened. Ms. Takato gasps. When I turn around there’s a group of people standing right in front of us with rocket shells and Kalashnikov rifles. Their faces are all covered.

Their car has pulled up alongside our cab, and they make us move the taxi to the side of the road. Our cab is then surrounded by a group of about a dozen armed militiamen, who are joined by another larger group of probably several dozen who have gotten out of some of the cars waiting to gas up. They are talking loudly, but I don’t understand what they’re saying.

"Yaabaanii, muu zain! (Japanese, bad!)" one of them shouts, drawing a finger across his throat. I remember his face clearly. He was shouting as if he’d lost it. The others don’t stop him. They only look on.

Ms. Takato shouts "La! La! La! (No!)," but it’s no good.

I don’t remember anything clearly except the man who shouted "Yaabaanii, muu zain!" I was stunned.

The driver is doing everything he can to persuade them to stop. Ms. Takato is saying "Shuwaiya! (Wait!)" over and over, gesturing frantically, but they pay no attention. They tear open our bags and take our passports. Same with our cameras and wallets. Then they take the bags too. Not one of them speaks English. I’ve never witnessed anything like this before, so it goes without saying that I am utterly terrified, but I can’t look away. I lose sight of my surroundings, Ms. Takato and Mr. Koriyama included.
With a gun to his face, Mr. Koriyama gets taken to the first group’s car. Ms. Takato and I are threatened with grenades and made to get into another car. Aside from the driver, there are two masked men sitting in the passenger seat. One of the men in the passenger seat holds up a grenade for us to see. Under the seat there’s a machine gun. The men’s bodies are wrapped in machine gun shells and grenades, just like Rambo. I have no idea how much time passed as we were sitting there, terrified, not knowing what would happen to us.

Ms. Takato is crying, and I just sit there holding her hand. I do my best not to cry, but I’m shaking uncontrollably and I start sniffling. It really was terrifying. I’d rather not remember it.

And then I start to wonder if we’ve been captured by suicide bombers. Their clothes make me think of the Palestinian suicide bombers I’ve seen on TV and in the newspapers.

"Are you a spy?" "Why was the Japanese army sent here?"

Soon after, they brought Mr. Koriyama, blindfolded us, and took us somewhere. We came to a place like a warehouse, though I don’t know exactly where it was. And then the interrogation began. It lasted twenty-five or thirty minutes. The man who introduced himself as the General was asking the questions in English. It wasn’t really good English, and Ms. Takato gave almost all the answers.

I’ve forgotten practically everything they asked us. The only questions that have stayed with me:

"Are you spy?"

The other people there were asking, "Japanese army leish hon? (Why is the Japanese army here?)"

The General was also saying, "Why do you send Japanese Army?"

Ms. Takato answered, "We’re here as humanitarian aid workers," but the General didn’t seem to understand her. Then, in desperation, she explained her own actions, telling them of her affection for Iraq.

"I came to Fallujah to bring pharmaceutical supplies to the hospitals. There’re some great kebab places in Fallujah, aren't there."

I think this went on for about fifteen minutes. Little by little the conversation changed, and the General said: "We need to do a background check on you, so if you could write your home addresses and your email addresses. Your lives are secure. Sorry, sorry."

"If you check with our hotel in *Baghdad they'll tell you we aren't spies," Ms. Takato said, and the three of us wrote down our addresses for them. After the interrogation we were served a meal. Flavored rice and chicken came heaped on a big platter. They say that among Arabs if you share food from platters like this it means you are friends. Mr. Koriyama said, "Relax. We'll probably live."
But while we were eating a fight broke out between the group we were with and another group from outside. They all had furious expressions on their faces. I’d guess the other group was telling our group to kill us. All I know is that they looked furious and were yelling ferociously.

I think we were fortunate. The General was taking an interest in our activism, and while we were speaking with him we had the feeling he understood us well. Had we not been able during that first interrogation to clear ourselves of the suspicion that we were spies, without a doubt we would have been killed. I think the Iraqis who were dealing with us were people with principle.

**A frightful video shoot**

After we eat, a fat man comes in with a video camera. He says something in Arabic and starts recording. We would later find out that the images were aired all over the world via Qatari TV, the Qatar-based satellite television station of Al-Jazeera.

All three of us were blindfolded, then they singled me out. They took the blindfold off and held a knife to my throat. The point of that knife was in all truth right up against my neck. After brandishing the knife like that they held the barrel of a machine gun to my head. I was the only one they did these things to. It’s terrifying to feel you can be killed any minute. There are no words to express it.

Now some men in masks start shouting, "No Koizumi! No Koizumi!"

The whole thing lasted maybe a few minutes, but for us it felt incredibly long. As soon as they stopped recording I reflexively brought a hand up to my neck. It looked like Mr. Koriyama was doing all right, but Ms. Takato was crying.

The video shoot began so suddenly that we became even more nervous than we already were. They seemed to have asked us in Arabic to cry, but I didn’t understand it. Nor did I know that they were showing our passports; basically, I didn’t know what was going on. But since our voices had left us from fear, they didn’t think we’d seemed scared enough, so they started taping a second time.

It was said later that we’d staged this whole thing. That’s an unbearable accusation. We were helpless. I never want to see that video. Not even now. I don’t want to remember it.

When the taping was finished, the militiamen said, "Sorry, sorry."

Mr. Koriyama told us afterward that the video camera looked new, probably a Sony. The men seemed pretty used to handling a camera. We couldn’t understand this, and even now, it seems strange to me that they knew how to run a camera.
Interrogation and dialogue

Once they finished taping the second time they blindfolded us again and took us somewhere else. The first two days they treated us roughly. When they put us in the car they shoved us inside, and once we were in they hit us when we didn’t keep our heads down. The place they took us to was like a big meeting room. It might have been a part of someone’s private residence. Along the walls there were big wooden couches and on the floor, rugs.

There, another interrogation began. Even the following day various group members would come one after another asking us, “You’re spies, aren’t you?” In the first two days we must have been interrogated four or five times. They all asked the same questions; they must have believed in all seriousness that we were spies. We thought the General had understood our situation. Anxiety reared its head again.

The General showed up in the room a little while later and started talking to Ms. Takato about faith.

"What do the Japanese believe in? What religion are you?"

"I’m a Buddhist. In Japan there’s a belief that a spiritual entity resides in all the things of the natural world."

"What are you saying? There is only one god, and that is Allah."

But little by little they come to understand what Ms. Takato is saying. "It’s all right for there to be many ways of understanding God," is the conclusion they seem to have come to. During those tense hours I learned from the depths of my being the importance of mutual understanding through dialogue. In the end the General said, "We’ll release you tomorrow or the next day," and left the room.

(Of course, at this time we had no way of knowing that there was a threat to "burn us alive," or that they were offering to release the three of us in exchange for the complete withdrawal of the Self-Defense Forces within three days’ time.)
Even as these dialogues were taking place we kept hearing the sounds of trench mortars exploding. They were powerful enough to make the house shake.

Transported again at nightfall. When they removed the blindfolds we saw militiamen equipped with Kalashnikov rifles. To my surprise, many of these men were dozing. We rolled up in some blankets and slept, too. I believe it was around eleven o’clock.

**Hopes betrayed**

The second morning about ten people came to greet us one by one.

"Al-salaamu ’alaikum" ("Good day").

They seemed to be on friendly speaking terms with the militia, too. I had the impression that these armed men had the backing of the people.

The soldier standing guard over us gestured and conveyed to us that he was going to Fallujah soon. I wonder whatever became of him. The toilet was outside so the guard had to come, too, but he very kindly led me by the hand.

We were moved twice that day. They blindfolded us and drove us somewhere again, and by evening we had arrived at our second room. It was dark and cramped and musty and through the window there was just enough moonlight for us to be able to see. The room was only some fifteen feet square and filled with things, so it felt even more cramped. Usually our guard was in the room with us, but he went outside to sleep. From outside came the sound of gunshots, ta-ta-ta-ta-ta.

The three of us could talk to each other, but rather than speak in Japanese among ourselves, we tried to converse in gestures with the militiaman. One soldier said to us, "My parents and children have been killed."

Once when he came back from the toilet Mr. Koriyama said, "You can see the fighting outside. There’re flashes."

Our blindfolds had been taken off so we could see the light from the bombings when we went to the toilet. In order to see the fighting, I said, "I need to go to the toilet, too." On the road far in the distance I could see flashes that looked like they came from rifle fire. When I came back to the room Mr. Koriyama said, "It didn’t take long for them to drive us here so we must be circling around Fallujah. What we saw earlier must have been the fighting in Fallujah."

Then I thought of the soldier who had told me that morning that he was going to Fallujah.

**Taken to yet another place on the morning of the third day.** Over those eight days we went to eight different homes in all; there must have been a kind of network of farmers who had offered up their houses for the purpose. And then the day came when the General promised we would be set free.

It was a hot day. We must have ridden in the car for an hour or so. When they took off the blindfolds and we looked around we saw trees in the far distance, but nearby there was nothing but a sandy road. Before us there were about a dozen men we didn’t know,
holding pistols. They seemed to be saying that we weren’t going to Baghdad. When Ms. Takato heard this, she started crying and screamed, "Let us go! You promised you’d release us today! Give us back our things!"

Mr. Koriyama added, "Hell, ‘Muslims are good’! Isn’t what you’re doing just the same as what the Americans are doing?"

I felt hope slipping away and almost started to cry.

We walked down the road for a while and came to a lone house with nothing around it. It looked to be a southern-style house, with a shingled roof and earthen walls. Have they sold us to a different bunch?—I worried. Ms. Takato’s anger did not let up.

"They call you Mujahideen (warriors of Islam), but you’re nothing but Ali Babas (thieves)."

Seeing her explosive anger, a handful of the men had troubled looks on their faces; they said, "Wait three days," and left the room.

We made strong bonds but...

We spent five days in this room. The room itself was homier than the others, and the food was better. Twice a day they would bring us dishes made with expensive chicken. "We got it at the market," they said. An old man with deep wrinkles on his face and a young man with beautiful eyes stood guard over us and took good care of us.

There were now no militiamen in our room so we were able to speak freely to each other, the three of us. We all like music, so we sang all the time. We each had our favorite golden oldies that popped up in conversation again and again. Ms. Takato had been in a band so she knew a lot of songs. She even gave us a medley of tunes by Pink Lady. All three of us sang The Crystal King’s "Daitokai" ("The Big City") and H2O’s "Omoide ippai" ("Full of Memories") together. But I didn’t get to sing very much because there were two people in the room who hated Yutaka Ozaki, my favorite, to the point of banning him . . . .

Around this time we started calling each other by different names. In Amman she was "Ms. Takato," but now it seemed natural to call her Nahoko. Mr. Koriyama became So-ni. [Note: "So" is from the first syllable of Koriyama’s first name; "ni" means "elder brother."] They called me Nori or Norinori. It was just the three of us so we talked all the time. In the course of these long talks we formed strong bonds. If the three of us hadn’t been together, I don’t think we would have made it psychologically. When you share your lives like we did, you develop a profound intimacy.

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Pardon the strange example, but we even got to the point where we looked at each other’s crap in the toilet. The toilet was outside, and once you’d done your business in it you poured water to flush. But on the fifth day my business was too big and it wouldn’t go down the hole. We all called it the Bunkerbuster. Anyway it was big and it was nasty and I tried to push it down with an iron pipe, but it wouldn’t go in.

"That’s enough of that," I thought, fleeing the toilet. I got back to the room with a grin on my face and I told them what had happened. So-ni bravely headed for the toilet,
saying, "When I was in the Self-Defense Force my job was laying and removing land mines. I’ll go."

He gave it his best, I’m sure, but when he came back, his face was a bit puckered. When Nahoko went it must have been a huge mess. We called the older of our two guards and asked him to take a look—it was a crazy situation. He found a stick and used it to stir while he poured water into the toilet—or something like that.

Being together twenty-four hours a day, we exposed our whole lives to each, so we were more than family. On the third and fourth days we talked about our loves and So-ni talked about his experiences as a truck driver. Nahoko and So-ni talked the most. But on the fifth day it wasn’t fun anymore.

Mornings we’d wake up at eight, bedtime was eleven. In the evenings we got our light from a lamp, and we had blankets and pillows. We made a conscious effort to get up and move around, but since we didn’t really have anything to do, we ended up sitting around most of the time. We went outside only to use the toilet. Nahoko started feeling unwell. I rubbed her shoulders and So-ni rubbed her feet and hands.

Despair and dispute

On the fifth day So-ni got a migraine so bad he couldn’t move for half the day. On the sixth day, the day we were supposed to be released, no one came. Nahoko began sobbing in despair. None of us said a word. At the time we had no way of knowing why our release had been delayed.

For my part, I tried to hold out as best I could, but on the seventh day, when Nahoko recovered, I grew sluggish and despondent. I couldn’t stand up and my head hurt. It was then that our two guards started praying for me. The three of us had gone from being captives to guests. Of course we were not free to do just anything we pleased; still, we came to understand the generosity of the Muslim spirit.

On the eighth day, the fourteenth of April, they finally told us they’d take us back to Baghdad. Naturally, we were elated. But they ended up saying, "just wait two more hours," and we weren’t released that day. . . . We left the house we’d been in for these five days and were moved to another private residence. En route we were left to wait for a while in a warehouse-like building; then suddenly we were being told to move quickly and crammed into a car. Everybody looked grim. I seem to remember there was a rusted iron gate in front of the house we came to.

It was in this house that we saw pictures of our families on Al-Jazeera. They were airing images of my older brother and Nahoko’s younger brother Shuichi with their heads down. One of the militiamen pointed to us and said, "Famous people." This was the first time we realized what a stir we were causing in Japan. "Things have gotten ugly," I thought.

After dinner the things they took from us at the beginning of our captivity were returned. The cameras and computers and money were missing, though. The aid supplies we had brought had all been opened, and the pencils and pens we were to
deliver to the schools had all been broken. So-ni yelled, "You are all Ali Babas. Bring us our things by tomorrow morning, all of it."

Nahoko was even more strident. "Everything we've been doing for the Iraqi people has been undone. You're ruining your own reputation."

The argument went on for two hours. Nahoko was the only one doing the talking, and she wasn't backing down. "Isn't there some other way? Isn't there a way to fight without using weapons?" she asked. They were at a loss for an answer. Because a lot of Iraqis had in fact been dying in the war with the Americans. Their only means of fighting was the clumsy one of using weapons. I think it was only through the violent act of taking us captive that they could say to the world, "Look at what's happening in Fallujah."

The morning of the next day, the fifteenth, the man called Leader brought us the missing items. Even so, Ms. Takato's computer and the three thousand dollars gathered in Japan for donations didn't come back.

Free at last

That afternoon we were taken in an ambulance to a mosque in Baghdad and finally released. But even then I wondered whether we'd been taken captive again. Because until then, every time a door opened, we were led away somewhere. That's why I thought, not again. This time, too, we were blindfolded. When the car came to a stop, we heard strange Japanese being spoken. It sounded like "You can stop worrying."

"What is this?" I was thinking, when we were brought into a room and our blindfolds were taken off; then I saw Kider Dia [romanization unconfirmed], the Iraqi who was speaking Japanese, and a man who was videoing the scene. This reminded us of our captivity and we asked him to stop, but he kept recording. The Al-Jazeera logo was on the microphone. Meanwhile another man came in and said something. Dia translated: "You're free." Then Dia introduced us to Abdul Salam al-Kubaisi, the spokesman of the Muslim Clerics Association, explaining, "This is the man who secured your release."

But we were in a daze. We still could not believe what was happening. Meanwhile they proposed we drink a toast, but we still didn't understand why. It wasn't until we heard Ueda Tsukasa, chargé d'affaires ad interim in Iraq, say, "It's a good thing you're unharmed," that we finally realized we had been set free.

After this we were driven to the Japanese embassy. Thinking that such a nice car would be an easy target, I kept my head down. We arrived at the embassy in about twenty minutes. We went into the building under heavy guard. We were probably in high spirits; certainly we were relieved. We got to see some NHK television and once again the gravity of our situation was apparent. At the embassy all three of us called our families. I was the only one who didn't get through.

The three of us didn't know what the militant group had demanded, or that the footage they had taken had been aired. The three of us joked how bad it would have been if they'd shown the video, but in fact that is exactly what had happened.
We couldn’t understand why our captors didn’t release us once we’d convinced them we weren’t spies and they’d had a chance to give the matter a lot of thought.

"It only makes them look bad, so why do they keep us hostage?"

When we got back to Japan, we learned that the period when we were held was a time when the ceasefire agreement between the local militia and the American army was repeatedly on the verge of breaking down, and then extended. In fact, though, large-scale fighting was breaking out in Fallujah. They had probably held us captive, moving us from place to place, both for our safety and for their own. That is what I concluded once I got back to Japan.

After we’d calmed down a little, Nahoko asked chief Iraq ambassador Oki Masamitsu, "Aren’t they withdrawing the Self-Defense Forces?"

We had been called "Japanese army" and "spies" so many times that we believed our captivity was directly related to the deployment of the Self-Defense Forces. The ambassador answered immediately, "There can be no question of withdrawing the Self-Defense Forces from Iraq."

When Nahoko heard this answer she burst into tears. The ambassador left the room without uttering a word.

We remembered something one of the militiamen had said right before we were released: "We’re looking for a different way to do things, too. Can you give us any advice?"

They, too, seemed hesitant. The reason we couldn’t think ill of them, no matter what, was that we had seen the reality in which every time you heard an airplane you trembled and worried about an air raid, and every time there was an air raid someone died. Had I been born in that country I might have taken up arms, too.
"When you get home, just be sure to apologize"

Around seven o'clock that evening questioning by the Japanese police began. Two hours each for Nahoko and me, one hour for So-ni. We were each questioned separately, without getting to see a doctor. "We want you to cooperate so we can apprehend the Iraqi criminals," we were told, so we complied.

Two men from the Foreign Affairs Section of the National Police Agency were in charge of the inquiry. Nahoko and I were each questioned by one of them, then they interrogated So-ni. There were times when I felt we were under suspicion of something. They asked us about the size of the room we were held in, the layout of the rooms, the arrangement of the furniture, the surroundings, and made us draw a map. Remembering such things was the last thing we wanted to be doing at that time, but absolutely no consideration was given to our feelings.

And then the officers started to ask if we hadn't staged the video, and I immediately responded in the negative. At the time, I of course didn’t know that there was a theory that it was a staged video.

The inquiry continued into the next day. Nahoko was questioned by the Hokkaido police as well, and I got additional questioning from the [Tokyo] Metropolitan Police Agency. Here too they explained that they needed our help "to get the Iraqi police to catch the criminals," but that made no sense. The Iraqi people think that the Iraqi police and the American army have joined forces, so there is no reason for them to cooperate.

We spent the night of the fifteenth in an apartment next to the embassy. I watched the BBC news there, and the top news story showed pictures of us. "What a big deal it's become" I thought, taken aback.

The next day we flew to Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates. On the plane there were the three of us, the two officers, a doctor, one official from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and someone from the Consulate.

Three hours to Dubai. We didn't see any reporters in the airport but once we got to the hospital, we were astonished to see the media waiting in full force. There were some reporters I knew, but the most striking thing was their sheer numbers. "This has really blown up," I felt.

In the hospital I was reunited with my big brother. "What a relief," he said, shaking my hand.

"Everybody's pretty stirred up back in Japan. When you get back, no matter what, just be sure to apologize."

I felt lost as to what to do. This is when I first learned what it was to be subjected to backlash. What was the crime that the three of us had committed?
The starred sentences are taken verbatim from an interview with Carol Picou. See here (accessed 28 November 2007). Picou ends her 1996 statement thus: "Come together and fight for your sons, daughters, your mothers and fathers, for the people over there now, and for the people of Iraq that are suffering from the contaminants left behind in their land." [Tr.]

*Translated by Scott Mehl, with the kind permission of the author and publisher.*

**PART 2 Appeal on Behalf of the Hostages to the Sara Al Mujahedeen**

April 9, 2004

By the name of God

Brothers of Saraya Al Mujahedeen

Al Salam Alaikum

God blesses you for what is good for our nation, our prayer for God to remove this grief from our country.

We wish that you would receive this letter. God knows that it is honest letter, this letter is for God satisfaction and to inform you, what you don’t know about your Japanese lady prisoner Nahoko. She is, as we saw that in Al Jazera station, one of the three Japanese prisoners.

We don’t have any doubt that she and the other two Japanese will have gratifying care from you. Because our religion order that. And that is what we learned from our great grandfathers.

We are not writing this letter to evaluate what you have done, or what you planning to do. And also we are not writing this letter because we are supporter for coming of
Japanese army either they are normal army or they are protect army to participate in rehabilitation of Iraq as Japanese Government is saying.

The only purpose of this letter and the photos attached is to let you know that Nahoko is last person which should be taken as a hostage, in case you must take hostages. This Japanese lady was very desirous from May 2003 to be in Baghdad voluntary and personally. And from that date she is spending her personal money to feed, clothe and treat the homeless Iraqi children. Till she spend all money she was saved for herself a long the years. In the last time she traveled to Japan her planning was to work for one and half month to make some money and to come back to Iraq to spend it for Iraqi homeless children. But she made heavy operation, therefore she couldn’t save enough money able her to bring gifts for the children, whom they are still waiting for their Japanese mother Nahoko. You took her as a hostage in the same day that so many people were waiting for her in Baghdad.

Brothers of Saraya Al Mujahedeen, in behalf of our self and many Iraqi orphan children, we entreat you to release the three Japanese hostages, specially Nahoko as she is was content with only bread to feed her self, while she was buying palatable food for our kids. She is good example for the love of Japanese people for Iraqi people.

If God wishes and you released those three Japanese you will give Japanese people good chance to do what we and you want. Japanese people were always in the friend’s side, in the Iraqi causes. While many of our brothers in religion and nation were watching only.

The imperative is for God

AL Salam Alaikum

Group of active Iraqi in orphan’s field

9/4/2004

Koriyama at time of release
PART 3 Grandmother’s Story (Hanada Chizue)

It was after 3 p.m. on April 20th when Noriaki came home. I greeted him quite calmly. That was because just at that time, Mr. Yasuda and Mr. Watanabe were still being held captive, and knowing that there were families suffering just what we had been through, I did not feel it was right to rejoice extravagantly.

"I’m so glad, welcome home."

Since he came home safe and sound, I have nothing more to ask for.

When he was taken hostage, it was hard for me to comprehend what was actually going on. I did wish, from the bottom of my heart, that I could offer myself as a substitute. I couldn’t truly believe that "Noriaki was home" until some time had passed after his return, and we had settled back into our usual life.

Before he headed out for Iraq, there were times when Noriaki, faced with family opposition, would just cry and cry. In the end, when his mother (Naoko) agreed, the others felt there was nothing more to be done. I was not opposed myself.

The night before he left, I rubbed my sobbing grandson’s body. Overcome by anxiety, regret, and self-recrimination, he didn’t know what to do with himself any more. I held his hand and said to him, "Come back alive. It’s important for you to believe that no matter what, you won’t give up on life."

And I sent him off with a smile.

We try not to let Noriaki see the TV coverage of the backlash. Why did things turn out like this?
1 Yasuda Junpei, free-lance journalist, and Watanabe Nobutaka, a human-rights activist, were also safely released.

(Interview by Koshida Kiyokazu)
from Imai Noriaki, Why I Went to Iraq, p. 102.

Translated by Norma Field

Part 4 Dialogue with My Critics

FLAMING (I): Dialogue with my critics

Having been kidnapped in Iraq in April 2004, Imai Noriaki returned home to Japan only to find countless letters and emails criticizing and slandering him. Two years after the incident, Mr. Imai decided to engage in face-to-face dialogue with his critics ....

[Staff, Nature and Humanity]

Hate mail

"Getting back to my subject, I need you to pay me 20,000 [yen]. You can fork it over from the sales or royalties of your book. Having caused all that trouble, Mr. Imai, you really ought to take responsibility for it. I work for X newspaper company. It’s ok if you confirm this with X newspaper company first. Just because you guys went [to Iraq] even
though there was a travel ban, why should I have to go to work on holidays? Try answering that one if you can. You owe me one. I need your phone number.

"You know, I’d managed to forget all about it, so why d’ya have to dig it up again? You’ve gotta be an idiot. Even celebrities get abusive comments thrown at them ("die" [shine], "gross" [kimoi]) on the net. Come to Tokyo and fork over some money. I’ll let you off with 20,000 [just under $200]."

Around 6 p.m. on February 8, when it was reported on a Yahoo website that I had released the abusive emails and letters sent to me during the hostage incident, the site was immediately swamped. In releasing these emails and letters, I intended to show the violence of anonymous verbal abuse. My weblog, which Yahoo had linked on their website, received approximately 200,000 hits within the space of three days. The sheer number of hits made it difficult to view the website with the letters. Moreover, 6,000 comments, filled with criticism and slurs, came in like a tsunami.

Within the space of three days, more than 250 messages were sent to the email address I had made public, and at the end there were up to 400. The excerpts above are from one of those emails.

In response to such criticism, I made my mobile number public and sought to engage in dialogue with my critics. As a result, I was able to speak with 13 people who called in.

Some of them were clearly angry when they called; nevertheless, they were all people with whom I could engage in reasonable discussion. Some even gave me useful advice. In contrast to the telephone conversations, there seem to be many people among those posting to the weblog who feel free to write abusively, and some of the people I talked with criticized such online comments by saying that "a lot of people are just baiting you."

Comments on the blog

Here are some of the comments that were posted on the weblog.

"You mention having some sort of communication, dialogue or interaction with the people who sent in critical letters and emails with their real names attached. I think this is something a person can’t do unless he’s prepared to listen to others. I think you resigned yourself to accepting the criticism. That’s not easy to do. This time, if you had released those exchanges instead of the anonymous letters, I think you would have gotten your message across better."

"I agree! I agree!"

"Use your head, asshole."

The first comment is a reasonable response to the idea of publishing my exchanges with critics on the blog. However, the comments to that comment are obviously intended to make a butt of my "failure."

"The kid’s blog name is ‘Underpants’
It’s all ‘Underpants,’ body and soul
You think I’m a guy who owns a ramen shop that went broke or something
You gotta be kidding
Don’t go lining up, you bastard
This is a lousy shop."
"Might as well just turn you into ‘underpants,’ Imai "
"’Underpants’ = Imai, done! "
"You a fool?
You think that Underpants is going to use
a crappy, noob [newbie] word like flame?
You better start studying, asshole "

From about this point on, the user name "Underpants " appeared almost every day, and it was sometimes used to refer to me. False posts, with people using my name, were also frequent. The following is one such example.

"472. Posted by Imai Noriaki 02/10/2006 15:12
I’m on my computer at last.
I apologize for this belated response.
I see there’re people posting comments like "die" and "get lost" again.
I have said this many times before, but please stop doing this sort of thing.
It’s pointless.
My patience is running out, and I’m going to get angry "
I hardly ever post a comment myself. If I do, it’s under the user name "Nori." I have not posted throughout the current incident, but there are multiple posts on the weblog under the name "Imai Noriaki." Why is this happening?

There have been many posts that show no intention of starting a discussion or engaging in reasonable criticism but rather take pleasure in the conflict itself. Still, from the beginning, about 40% of the posts were written from a serious standpoint, and the majority of the posts in the latter half could be described in this way.

Sociologists sometimes describe online bashing as "festivals" [matsuri]. Even in my case, there were many occasions in which people seemed to be taking recreational pleasure in the attacks. Here, I would like to write about the people who seemed to be enjoying the criticism or slander that was common in the early to middle stages of this incident.

Meeting my critics

How is it that people can enjoy slandering someone and participating in this sort of ganging up?
Since half a year ago, I have been trying to get in touch with people who sent in critical or abusive letters and emails. I have taken a look at the letters one by one, and replied to those that had a return address and a name. During the hostage incident, 104 letters arrived; less than 10 percent came with a name and a return address, and of these, only 3 addresses turned out to be real. I wonder what sort of people all the other anonymous writers are. How could they use such words as "shine" and "Kimoi"? As a human being, I was genuinely curious about this.

Before seeking out the anonymous, why not try to meet those with a "face," I thought, and began to contact those who had been willing to identify themselves.

Takeda Yukio (alias) is a 50-year-old white-collar worker from the suburbs of Sapporo. A reporter from the Hokkaido Shimbun had introduced me to him, saying that this man had written a letter to the editor asserting the applicability of the "personal responsibility" argument to the hostage incident.²

"I never thought I would really get a chance to meet you, Mr. Imai. " Mr. Takeda took a sip of beer, smiling.

"I read a little of your blog. I thought those letters were horrible, really horrible. " He seemed to be expressing a little sympathy toward me. It seems that he became aware of my blog after reading the email I had sent him.

"It wasn't so much that I was critical of the incident itself; it was the argument of the media that got to me. They were kidnapped because the government sent the Self-Defense Forces there. Since that is the government's responsibility, the Self-Defense Forces should be withdrawn' was a line of reasoning I couldn't agree with. So I wrote a letter to the editor for the first time in my life."

"It might be strange to say this right in front of you, but when a Japan Airlines flight was hijacked in 1977, Prime Minister Fukuda said that 'the weight of a single human life is greater than that of the earth.' Surely human lives are important, but I think accepting terrorists' demands like that could lead to more lives lost in the future. So, I think we had no choice but to not pull the troops at that point."

I nod over a sip of beer. Despite this, Mr. Takeda says, he was worried about us. If your family had been cool and collected, they would have been criticized for that, too, Mr. Takeda says slowly, as if choosing his words. The waitress had brought us some pasta, and we began to eat. Mr. Takeda ate a mouthful of pasta, before continuing.

"At that time, many Japanese people were truly worried for you. Although I didn't know where you came from, I was worried. I thought some boys and a girl from middle-class homes must have gone to Iraq."

I asked him why he thinks we were criticized so much.

"I think it comes from the 'toasting' scene shown right after your release. We were thinking 'they must have been hurt, not eaten anything. They must have had a hard time,' but you all seemed much better than expected, and there was Ms. Takato saying,
'I'd like to go back to Iraq again.' Obviously, this was infuriating to everybody who was worried for you."

However, Mr. Takeda began, there had been a gradual shift in his opinions about us. He looked away, and then turned back to my eyes.

"After the incident, I heard news reports about why you and Ms. Takato went to Iraq, so I started to understand something. I have an 18-year-old daughter who hasn't gone to school for more than two years, a school-refuser, so-called. She's doesn't show interest in anything. If she goes on like this, she's going to be a NEET [Not in Education, Employment, or Training]."

But, Mr. Takeda said, still looking in my eyes:

"Today, many youngsters like my daughter are said to be NEETs. If our society is going to crush young people pursuing a goal, its future can only be bleak. I'm worried that this might spell the end of Japanese society."

Kurokawa Mitsuo (alias), 25 years old. He is the man who sent me the email at the beginning of this article. As mentioned in the email, he is a newspaper delivery man. After Mr. Kurokawa sent me the email, I gave him my number, to which he responded by calling.

"Why are you bringing up that incident again? Why do you want to rehash something that's over and done with?"

These were his first words when he called me. He sounded more irritated than angry.

"I haven't sorted it all out, but I don't understand why you do things like this. I had to work holidays thanks to three people whose faces or names I didn't know. I still haven't been paid for the extra work. Are you an idiot? You ought to give me that money."

This made me irritated too, but I asked him why he was turning his anger on me.

Mr. Kurokawa is a student on scholarship funded by the newspaper distributor, so he goes to college while working as a delivery man. The company is facing financial difficulties, which means he does not get extra pay for overtime. If he were to quit the job, he could no longer pay tuition. His parents will not pay it either, he says.

"Mr. Imai, of course everyone has something like their basic human rights, so you can do whatever you want, but I would like a little consideration for other people too. Yes, I was furious back then. Why was I having to go to work because of people like them, I thought. I would like you to understand that." The anger was gone from his voice as he uttered these words.

"I don't care about taxes or anything like that. I might even have gone over-the-top in demanding payment."

Our phone conversation ended. While I was pondering what Mr. Kurokawa had just said, he called me again.
"I'm sorry about what I just said. Um, I hesitated a lot before calling. A lot of things have been sent to you anonymously, but there's something wrong with that, isn't there. There're people who're saying things like "stupid" and "die," stuff that really goes against social morals, but they must feel like it wouldn't be cool to have their identities exposed."

Comments that can't be considered "criticism"

"I had a look at the blog with the letters of criticism. When I first became aware of the blog, I trembled with rage. 'A lot of taxpayer blood money was used to help these people come home, but they didn't seem penitent at all!' When I read the letters, I wanted to applaud the writers."

This is an email sent by Tanaka Rieko (alias). I replied by giving her my number, and I was able to talk to her on the phone. Her soft-spoken manner, belied the impression I got from her email. I was surprised. Ms. Tanaka remarks that she is especially unhappy with the way tax money was used. "When I read the blog, I thought, what on earth is this guy doing? Why is he releasing this? The criticism is totally appropriate. He's just playing the victim."

She says, however, she thought some of the posts to the weblog were truly awful. "I think I can tell the people who are truly angry from those who are just having fun."

In fact, there were many serious comments, but there were also many abusive comments like "die," "stupid," "croak," and "gross."

"736. Posted by –no 02/09/2006 03:20

You think 'go and die' is a piece of abuse?

I think it's a piece of advice."

Can we call posts like this "criticism"? Why do they use words you could not say to someone's face, or, if I quote one of the people I spoke to on the phone, words that "are socially unacceptable, that cannot be used in human relationships?"

1 This post reflects the style of "2-Channel" (nichanneru) discourse. 2-Channel is said to be the largest internet forum in Japan and possibly the world.

2 "Personal responsibility" is the translation for jiko-sekinin, a neologism that gained instant popularity during the hostage crisis. The hostages had chosen to go on their own responsibility and accordingly were owed nothing by the state. Such reasoning has proven to be broadly useful in the era of neo-liberal privatization.

***

Shizen to Ningen [Nature and Humanity] 4, April 2006, Vol. 118 (17-20), translated by Ayumu Tahara with the kind permission of the author and publisher. Footnotes by the translator. Part two of this article, published in the May issue, takes up other victims of abusive treatment on the Internet.
PART 5 FROM THE DIARY OF IMAI NORIAKI
September 24, 2006

The things that won’t disappear
Now that two weeks have passed since 9/11, here are some things I’ve been thinking about.

These days, I can’t seem to remember what I did during high school. Actually, it’s not just these days. I think it started a little after the incident. Of the things that happened to me 2½ years ago and leading up to that time, I don’t have very distinct memories. I don’t even understand why. If someone told me to recount what’s happened in the past 2½ years, I probably could, even in detail. Before that, my mind goes blank. Of course, I can’t recall what I was doing on 9/11. The only thing that remains in my mind is the fact that I was against the bombing of Afghanistan.

Ever since the hostage incident and my time in England, I think I’ve been consciously trying to run away from the things I experienced in Iraq and Japan. Especially when it comes to Iraq, or news about Iraq, I’ll watch, but I never take the next step of thinking about it. Stop, stop right now, you don’t have the right to think about this any more: this is the shouting I heard inside me for quite a while. I even tried to avoid thinking about my project of working toward the abolition of depleted uranium shells. Maybe I’d begun to feel that I wasn’t supposed to think about it.

But I think I’ve really settled down since I got into college. The two years before then, doing odd jobs and what not, I was living a pretty unstable life without clear direction. Since coming to Beppu, I’ve been lucky in my friends and environment. How should I say this, I feel like I’m recovering myself bit by bit. Of course, I don’t go out of my way to remember things from the past, but I can feel myself coming back, I think.

And now, I’m thinking about Iraq. What’s going on over there, anyway? What CNN, ABC, and the BBC had to say yesterday was about how tragic the bombing of Sadr City in Baghdad was. They say that many women and children trying to buy kerosene right before Ramadan were victims of this bombing. Seeing that this sort of thing is a daily occurrence all over the country, anyone can understand that things have gotten much worse since the Iraq War began in 2003. According to a UN report, just in July and August, there were more than 6000 Iraqi deaths. Since it’s hard to grasp the situation, I’m not even sure it should be called a civil war, but just think of how many people have died. According to an article I saw two days ago in the British Independent, many of those people were lost to our world as a result of different types of torture. Electric current passed through the body, eyes gouged, and lastly, a bullet to the head--I think the article went on like this. Seeking safety, many people head for neighboring countries such as Syria and Jordan. They analyze the situation as "There’re no jobs, but it’s not as bad here." And in Japan, if you want to grasp even a little bit about a country said to be "too dangerous for journalists to enter, so we don’t know the details of what’s going on" — well, ours is a country with no choice but to rely on journalists working for foreign media. And here I am, not able to do anything about it.
America, the very party that started the Iraq War, is now writhing in agony. It's been shown that the Saddam Hussein regime did not have the chemical weapons it was said to have, and most of the grounds for war turn out to have been based on mistaken or unreliable information, but America swiftly opted for war, signaling the end of diplomacy. According to a U.S. Army report, 300 tons of depleted uranium have been used, and as to what that will cause we have no clue. To be sure, the danger of depleted uranium shells has never been proven, but even those connected with the military involved in the development of these weapons, have said they "cannot deny their danger." What a contradiction then, to have the U.S. military saying, "It's completely safe." Though at present the danger of this weapon has not been proven, does that mean it's permissible for America not to put the brakes on its use and export, despite the many people who question its safety? Indeed, it has been used in massive quantities already, twice in Iraq, and once in Kosovo. If the effect has been to contaminate the environment and all the human beings there, then I can only think that [for Americans], these are acts that will return to haunt them.

I'm going to stop here. I just want to start confronting the things that I had stopped thinking about. If you ask what I can do without actually going to those sites, then the answer is, only this.

[a tiny sampling of ] Comments

31) Posted by "A" 10/02/2006 20:35

It takes two-and-a-half years to face your own problems.

Humans are like that, aren't they.

Because they've never been to Iraq, because they were to no small degree shocked by the war, and because they don't want to change their way of thinking, there're people who want to beat up on the signifier "Imai."

For no particular reason or meaning at all, because it's easier to beat up on someone else than to change yourself.

They're just like you.

32) Posted by "Junichiro" 10/04/2006 8:16

Well it's because Imai's a loser.

Don't you feel like kicking the shit out of him sometimes?

You get it, don't you. Even you.

37) Posted by "mu" 10/05/2006 23:25

I thought you hadn't been on site recently.

So you're saying that even without going to the actual site, you can say what you want?

So you're saying that getting things through the media is enough?
Then what you did in the past was pointless after all.

39) Posted by "It's just my personal opinion" 10/05/2006 23:28
I feel like what you're fussing about is just a little off.
You're weirdly focused on "depleted uranium shells." Why not be concerned about "all arms"?
You talk about "the danger/safety of depleted uranium shells," but guess what. All weapons are basically dangerous.

66) Posted by "tns" 10/20/2006 02:49
A carefree student, huh? You lucky son of a bitch, eh?
Your book been selling well? Do something with that money so I can have another laugh. How about infiltrating the North?

67) Posted by "Norisuke" 10/20/2006 08:20
You want me to infiltrate North Korea and make a picture book showing the poverty of ordinary citizens and show it to those bastards who talk about economic sanctions and all that nonsense?
There'll be 100,000 deaths from starvation.
Damn murderers!

68) Posted by X 10/20/2006 10:59
How d'ya get to the North? D'ya hafta go through Russia?

69) Posted by Norisuke 10/20/2006 12:26
From Pyongyang by land.
You go through dangerous territory by choice.
That country's got a weakness for money, too, so they'll do anything for you.

(See here, accessed 20 December 2007)

February 17, 2007

Looking at the present, the past, and the future
I was finally able to get some sleep last night. Up until yesterday the week was insane. I had to work 9 hours a day, then do all kinds of things related to BEPPoo!! Even though it's a lot of work, I feel like we're able to give it our all because there's the pleasure of feeling like we're somehow able to create our own media. Bit by bit, I hope that our little group can do things that link up with the revitalization of the town of Beppu.
Changing the subject--I got a letter the other day from somebody I know who's a hairdresser. She's turning 30 this year, and she tells me she'll be quitting her job. The reason is that her health isn't great. I used to talk to her a lot, and she'd told me that
she’d almost died once, and that she had a chronic illness that didn’t seem to get better. And now, all of a sudden, this decision to quit her job.

In spite of it all, she says she’s going back to her hometown in eastern Hokkaido to open up her own shop. I can’t begin to grasp how hard it would be to quit your job at the age of 30 and then open your own shop, but I think it’s got to be something that takes a lot of courage. I felt that as a person with a chronic disease, she was extending a powerful "challenge."

I’ll turn 22 this year. Ordinary college students on track would be graduating this year. But I have many friends around me who came in last year as new first-year college students, ranging in age from 21 to 25. Most had jobs before coming to college; others had part-time jobs and all kinds of experience before coming to APU [Ritsumeikan Asia-Pacific University]. I had a hard time during the two years after graduating from high school, doing part-time jobs and so much else, but I finally matriculated last year. People come here for all sorts of reasons, but among them are some who come because they want to become people who can be of use to society and the world.

I want to become someone who’s useful in all kinds of situations. I’d still like to do the kind of work I used to do with an NGO. That’s because even if violence between people is inevitable, I want to contribute to decreasing the ultimate violence of war and armed conflict. If I look at what NGOs are doing, though, I can see that they aren’t able to prevent war or armed conflict but rather, they’re just dealing with things after the fact. Sure, it’s necessary to have all kinds of people go out into the world and help others in need. But we don’t seem to be able to control the violence of killing that occurs beforehand. To the question, what are we supposed to do, then, there’s no answer. The fact of the matter is I end up feeling powerless before the contradictions inside me.

But you know what? Even if my current life leads to my joining a firm or company, I want to continue doing what I believe in, even if little by little. The power of one person amounts, in the end, to something like dust. Yet, as the saying goes, "When even dust accumulates, it forms a mountain," I want to do even a little bit toward putting an end to extreme violence. Different people having different opinions is a given, but that shouldn’t lead to killing each other. This is what I’ve believed in ever since high school. It’s because I still think about that that I’m doing BEPPoo!! here with my friends.

If you look at BEPPoo!! from outside, it is admittedly still incomplete as a media form. Even so, in just one year, our staff of 7, 8 very busy people managed to accomplish something. I want to quit my part-time job by this summer and concentrate on this.

Although Beppu is a small town of 120,000, it has the highest ratio of foreigners to Japanese after Tokyo, and I think the place has its own appeal. I’d like to make this a space for launching all sorts of things. I also believe that the experience of creating such a space will surely be useful later on. That’s why I want to focus on this right now.

It’s hard to see into the future, and for this very reason I don’t want to avert my eyes. There are a lot of uncertainties, but nothing will get started if we stop to list all our complaints and dissatisfactions. What we can do before we start with our complaints
and dissatisfaction is to look at ourselves. Something will surely get started from that. Let’s not give up, while we look at the present and the past, and the future.

Comments

1) Posted by "Kataoka Kazuyoshi/Sukichi" 02/17/2007 21:53

Jesus is your true friend, who will help you in times of trouble. I went to Aeon Miyazaki Central Movies and watched Dream Girls.

Everybody, let's go look for a dream, let's look at the thing that only you possess, the thing that the Lord has given only to you.

It is something buried inside you like a diamond, if you were to find it, whether it be big or small, however small it is, let's believe in it. Let’s protect this diamond,

*Patience, yeah, patience, yeah, patience, patience shall take you to where you’ll be surrounded by so many people who praise you, yeah.* [Text between asterisks in English in the original.]

The seed of the sidewalk, the bird pecks at
The seed of the rocky land withers in sunlight
The seed of the thorns is crushed and sealed
The seed of the cultivated fertile lands, multiplies a hundred-fold

2) Posted by "kkkyyy" 02/18/2007 00:55

Please don’t give up and good luck.

Your trying to revive a countrified town like Beppu is Nice!!

4) Posted by "Haruhi" 02/18/2007 11:17

Get a life

Playtime is important

1 A portal website for the citizens of Beppu, Oita Prefecture, started up and maintained by Imai and a small group of fellow students.(See here, accessed 20 December 2007)

Translated by Ariya.

December 16, 2007

Even though my hand’s shaking

... For the past 3 years and more, I’ve been watching my friends go where they want, do what they want. Every time I hear their stories, I think, "Wow—that’s incredible. I couldn’t do that, though." But I’ve decided to try to be more honest with myself.

That’s because I really do want to go out into the world and see and learn a lot of things. I want to have the experiences you can only get while you’re in college. And I want to turn them into something that’ll be useful for other people in the
future. Without noticing it, I'd given up on that kind of hope, but after all, if I don't move forward, I won't know what I'm living for. After all, I survived, so I've got to move forward. This life was given to me, it's a life that was saved for me by others.

For over 3 years now, I've been restricting my freedom of action. I've tried to go only to safe places, to places where I could have fun. But in the end, I have a feeling I was avoiding looking at the big problems facing society. True, I've paid attention to what's going on, I've participated in stuff like elections and whatever concerns Japan. But I haven't been involving myself with things going on in the world.

Right now, I want to follow up on Muslim people. I want to learn what kind of people the believers of Islam are. There's a ton of stuff I want to know. I can't go on shrinking back. I have to admit that it's scary to go overseas. Just thinking about it makes my hand shake uncontrollably. But if I don't take action, I won't change and the world around me won't change.

Tomorrow's a training session for [incoming members of] BEPPoo!! It's going to be busy but I'm going to do my best and enjoy myself.

(See here, accessed 20 December 2007)

Translated by Norma Field

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Analysts in both Japan and the U.S. criticized Japan’s social insularism for this public shaming, and most of the commentators were asserting that this behavior was unique to Japan. Marie Thorsten, in “The Homecoming of Japanese Hostages in Iraq: Culturalism or Japan in America’s Embrace” takes on the claim that this kind of ordeal could happen “only” in conformist Japan and not in the more supposedly citizen-centered, individualistic West. Once again the Japanese government chose a strategy that helped its diplomatic goals but silenced democratic expression at home. By not succumbing to the captors’ demands, and by quelling domestic oppositional voices, Japan’s leaders’ handling of the hostage-taking incident and its aftermath proved to American leaders that it indeed was loyal to the U.S.-Japan alliance and “coalition of the willing.” Meanwhile, the former hostages were attacked for making their leaders’ task harder. Of course, in the early post-9/11 years, Americans who criticized the war were also attacked for making anti-Bush statements, especially if they did so in a foreign country—exactly what Japan’s own antiwar hostages in Iraq had done.

The Homecoming of Japanese Hostages from Iraq: Culturalism or Japan in America’s Embrace?
Marie Thorsten
May 25, 2009
http://apjjf.org/-Marie-Thorsten/3157/article.html

In the spring of 2004, five Japanese civilians doing volunteer aid and media work in Iraq were kidnapped, threatened and released unharmed by Iraqi militant groups in two separate, overlapping incidents lasting just over one week. On their return to Japan (16 April 2004), the hostages appeared defensively solemn, having been harshly criticized and shamed for their effrontery to travel to a government-declared danger zone and undertake anti-war actions perceived as critical of both the Japanese and U.S. presence in Iraq. More than the abductions themselves, the inhospitable homecoming seized headlines around the world and marked one of the most searing images in Japan’s controversial involvement in the American-led war.

The first, more publicized, abduction was initially seen as a test of the commitment of Japan to support America, but within one week was transmogrified in Japanese media to public shaming of the victims. The five were compelled to say they were “sorry” for their transgression and were pressured to pay back some of their repatriation expenses to the state. In the story’s moral ending, they should have been acting with “self-responsibility” (jiko sekinin).

In 2004, still at the height of faith in global market fundamentalism, critics often spoke of “self-responsibility” pejoratively to question the pervasive rationale that individuals, more than governments, must rise to the challenges of economic uncertainty. In other circumstances this would be sensible, but “self-responsibility” in quotation marks negatively insinuates that governments are preoccupied with profits obtained in global markets, and have abandoned responsibility toward their own (unwealthy) citizens. Japan’s leaders seized the hostage homecoming to rearticulate jiko sekinin back into the
embrace of cultural nationalism, but for critics of excessive governmental power, the term still retained its negative connotation.

Neoliberalism, also called market fundamentalism, conceptualizes winners and losers according to the laws of the marketplace. But it can also provide opportunities for individuals to take their interests, skills and citizenship outside their borders—which is exactly what the five persons did by asserting their freedom to work in Iraq independent of the government. But amid war, which heightens loyalties and exclusions, the individuals were redefined as subjects of a nation, even though the state, and many of their fellow citizens, did not reciprocate responsibility toward them: the five were harassed and ostracized, as if their citizenship was suspended. This is characteristic of neoliberal regimes that actively produce “disposable others,” explains Takahashi Tetsuya, who reminds us that “responsibility” entails a relationship toward others. Instead, orthodox proponents of Japanese state policies were using the concept as “a rhetorical device to discard whoever [is] in the weaker position at any given moment.” After the repatriation, Takahashi adds, parents of the hostages were also charged with inadequate *jiko sekinin*, personal responsibility, in a “feudal sort of joint [parent-child] liability.”

Many critics of the inhospitable homecoming, in Japan and abroad, also drew essential lines of distinctiveness by shaming Japan’s own shaming, implying that this could happen only in provincial Japan, not in cosmopolitan Europe or America. Japan is well known for isolating non-conformists within its culture while simultaneously being isolated in the international community. For Samuel Huntington, Japan is the “lonely state” that does not fit anywhere else in his taxonomy of clashing civilizations.

Seen only as a strategic assertion of a unitary culturalism to define the nation, the *jiko sekinin* debacle distracted from recognition of the pressures other countries felt to be “responsible” to America to support the Iraq war. The last throes of support for the “with us or with the terrorists” binary logic in which the conflict began came to an end in the spring of 2004, the time of the two incidents. Within the same month of the Japanese homecoming, the Abu Ghraib prison abuses were starkly exposed to the world, helping to unravel American claims of moral superiority that had gone unchallenged in the nationalistic atmosphere permeating the early phase of the “war on terror.”

Were the hostile homecoming incidents more about the “responsibility” of nonconformists to Japan, or about the responsibility of Japan to America? In either case, the discourses those questions generated, that of cultural distinctiveness or alliance unity, belied the many gestures of cross-national community taking place throughout the ordeal, from capture to repatriation.

**States of Exception, Alliances of Exceptionality**

It would be easiest to explain the shaming of the hostages as the result of ancient traditions. But cultures are mutable, and politics of spectacle are often unstable and unpredictable. Wars and political instability can invite arbitrary power, prompting the state itself to seize a kind of “self-responsibility” by unilaterally declaring that a “state of exception” exists. Giorgio Agamben writes that the state of exception occurs with a legitimate “standstill of the law,” when the rules and norms of a society are suspended but not eliminated; citizens lose rights, but not their bodies, in the course of being reduced to “bare life.” Though an
ancient concept, the state of exception became a dominant paradigm of the U.S. reaction to 9/11.6

In another era, de Tocqueville appraised self-exceptionalism as connected to America’s origins as a democratic nation-state, and to its roots as an exemplar of Puritanical Christianity.7 The application of self-exceptionalism to foreign policy became conspicuous after the end of the Cold War, as the United States began to exempt itself from several international agreements concerning land mines, nuclear test bans, global warming, human rights, and the creation of an International Criminal Court.8 Particularly after America invaded Iraq in March 2003—an act of aggression neither for self-defense, nor authorized by the United Nations—the question of American exceptionalism moved to the fore of global debates.9

In Japan, the discourse on unique “Japaneseness” (nihonjinron) becomes especially active during times of threat, such as during the Second World War and the economic “trade wars” of the 1980s. Japan’s culturalism is also cultivated through the external gaze, through non-Japanese analysts such as Huntington who sustain the representation of Japan as a resolutely peculiar nation.

Then-U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice also attempted to define temporal exceptionalism. In “extraordinary times,” such as World War II, the Cold War and 9/11, she explained, “the very terrain of history shifts beneath our feet and decades of human effort collapse into irrelevance.” Leaders must transform alliances to meet new purposes and “enduring values.”10 The defeated Japan of 1945 was also a special model for the current U.S. occupation of Iraq, she wrote, recalling the favorite anecdote of President George W. Bush: that his father was shot down by the Japanese as a young pilot in World War II, but later proved as U.S. president that former war enemies can become friends.11

The two rhetorics of exceptionality meet in the discourse of the U.S.-Japan security alliance. Huntington not only called Japan a "lonely state"12; he also wrote that America is a “lonely superpower”13, but together the two lonely hearts constitute a pillar of global power. America and Japan possess the world’s first- and fifth-largest defense budgets14, and the first-and third-largest economies.15 Since the 1980s, political and military leaders have institutionalized the incantation of the special relationship between the two nations, frequently quoting Ronald Reagan’s declaration, “Together, there is nothing our two countries cannot do,” or former Ambassador Mike Mansfield’s assertion that the two countries represent “the most important bilateral relationship (in the world) - bar none.”16 The media invented affectionate variations, referring to the “Ron-Yasu relationship” (Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro and President Ronald Reagan) and the “George-Jun alliance” (Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro and President George W. Bush).

Koizumi, prime minister during the hostage incidents, is a self-described “die-hard pro-American,” and an Elvis and Hollywood fan whose invitations to Bush’s Texas ranch also served the American leader well. For reasons of history even more than the “personal chemistry between leaders,” according to The Weekly Standard, Bush considered Japan “a living rebuke to critics of his pro-democracy strategy in the Middle East.”17
The Iraq war, for many security officials in both Tokyo and Washington, provided the fortuitous opportunity for Japan to finally become a militarily “normal” nation, which also opens the window for joint exceptionality. While the U.S. put aside international conventions on warfare and the treatment of prisoners, Japan made exceptions to Article Nine of its Constitution, which mandates that the nation “forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as a means of settling international disputes.” Japan has also made apparent exceptions to its Self-Defense Forces Law of 1954 which stipulates that ground, maritime and air forces (SDF) can maintain national security only by defending the nation against direct and indirect aggression, and it has made de facto exceptions to its “three non-nuclear principles” stating that the nation will not possess, produce or admit into the country any nuclear weapons. Announced in 1967, the non-nuclear principles were adopted by the Japanese parliament in 1971 and earned former Prime Minister Sato Eisaku the Nobel Peace Prize in 1974. But the naval base in Yokosuka now hosts the nuclear-powered carrier, the USS George Washington, an arrangement openly validated by leaders of both nations as if there is no contradiction.18

After 9/11, American officials pressed Japan to “show the Rising Sun” in Afghanistan, to “put boots on the ground” in Iraq, to “quit paying to see the game, and get down to the baseball diamond”.19 In 2003, public opposition to the dispatch of the SDF to Samawah, Iraq, was around seventy to eighty percent, but by early 2004 a small majority was shown to favor dispatch after the troops had been sent.20 Japan’s eventual contribution of 600 troops to the American occupation of Iraq may have constituted a symbolic peg in the “coalition of the willing.” But Japan and Okinawa have long served as a linchpin of American security efforts across Asia and the Pacific.

The five Japanese taken hostage in Iraq were critical of the American-led invasion and Japan’s supporting role in the war. Their critics and harassers failed to see this as democratic behavior consistent with their Japanese citizenry. Moreover, for their political struggles independent of the Koizumi administration, their refusal to comply with restrictions on movement, and their concern with conveying a “truth” of the Iraq situation
via the Internet and other media, the five Japanese citizens also exhibited a sort of
democratic global citizenry as well. Failing to recognize the simultaneity of national
belongingness and transborder democratic action, pundits reduced the incident to hostage
shaming, led by key Japanese government officials reversing the charges of “responsibility”
first aimed at them, and Japan-shaming, with analysts in both Japan and the U.S. criticizing
Japan’s social insularism. Below is a review of these circumstances, focusing on the more
widely reported first abduction.

The Hostage-Taking
The most conspicuous victim, Takato Nahoko, then 34 and an independent aid worker, had
lived in Iraq previously and traveled back and forth from Japan primarily to fund a shelter
for street children; she also assisted hospitals and was well-known to many of the aid
workers in the area. Imai Noriaki, an aspiring journalist who was then only 18, traveled to
Iraq only a month after graduating from high school. He had hoped to collect material for a
book about children exposed to depleted uranium to contribute to a local social movement
in Japan. Koriyama Shoichiro, then 32, entered Iraq as a freelance photojournalist
determined to present an accurate account of Iraq otherwise unavailable to Japanese
citizens. Though it was originally not widely publicized and perhaps not known to his
captors, Koriyama was a former member of the SDF. The victims, and Takato in particular,
were outraged by the American-led invasion of Iraq and critical of claims that Japan’s SDF
activities, which were described by Japanese authorities as supporting the Iraqi
people insisting instead that they merely supported the American occupation. Takato was a
former aid worker in India; Koriyama had just traveled from Palestine.

One week after Takato, Imai and Koriyama were abducted (7 April 2004), two other
Japanese civilians, Watanabe Nobutaka, then 36, and Yasuda Jumpei, then 30, were taken
captive in a separate incident (14 April) and released within three days. Watanabe, like
Koriyama, was a former SDF member and at the time of the kidnapping a peace activist.
Yasuda was working as a freelance photographer and was making his fourth trip to Iraq.
Watanabe and Takato both had websites exposing conditions under the occupation, with
summaries of local opinions they heard in Iraq particularly regarding the
deployment of Japanese troops. Though the five civilians have been collectively characterized as
humanitarian or NGO workers, only Takato, Imai and Watanabe had ties to aid work of
varying types and degrees, and the work of all five overlapped with their personal interests
in gathering and disseminating information about the Iraq War, particularly Japan’s role in
it and the impact on the Iraqi people.

The first group of three met at a hotel in Amman, Jordan, and agreed to take a taxi across
the Iraqi border. When they were abducted at a petrol station on the Jordanian-Iraqi
border in the early morning hours of 7 April, the humanitarians became typecast in their
identities as Japanese nationals; the armed captors accused them of being spies for the
Japanese government, and by implication the American government too.

The kidnapping of the Japanese, and soon, dozens of other international civilians by various
militia groups, portended a reversal of the purported imminent American victory. It
occurred just one week after the grisly murders, on 31 March 2004, of four American
contractors whose bodies were dragged through the streets of Fallujah, hung on a bridge
and beaten. The kidnappings of Japanese, Korean and other civilians not part of the original U.S.-UK-led assault on Baghdad furthered the perception that major hostilities, despite Bush’s “mission accomplished” declaration, were increasing rather than declining. Videotaped scenes of the captors holding guns and knives to the Japanese citizens’ necks and denouncing the invasion were shown widely across the world (and later featured in Michael Moore’s documentary film, Fahrenheit 9/11). In the video, the captors claimed they would execute the three civilians if Japan did not pull out its troops within three days.

The kidnapping tested the Japanese government’s resolve to defend its controversial dispatch of the SDF to Iraq as a humanitarian mission, pitched not as direct support for the U.S.-led occupation but as a broader gesture of support for the Iraqi people. During the first days of the crisis, many Japanese citizens demanded the pullout of the Self-Defense Forces in order to get the three civilians released; they wanted, then, what the kidnappers wanted. Family members of the victims made emotional pleas in several press conferences and collected 150,000 signatures on a petition urging the government to withdraw the troops. Hundreds of civilians also protested the SDF deployment outside the prime minister’s residence and in other areas around Tokyo.
By the end of the ordeal, however, when the abductees were safely released, attention turned to one aspect of this constitutionally pacifist nation. Japan’s government officials charged that the trio had failed to exercise jiko sekinin, “self-responsibility,” by venturing out to government-decreed dangerous places for no compelling reason. Family members apologized to officials for “causing trouble” and having an “impolite attitude” toward the state. Although safely released, the victims returned to Japan downcast and silenced, as if criminals, issuing only statements of apology for the trouble and financial burden they caused to tax-paying compatriots; they agreed to repay some of the expenses incurred. Some were plagued with threatening phone calls and other forms of harassment, instilling depression and post-traumatic syndrome.

This shaming and silencing was not the only way the kidnapping victims were “brought home” to their Japanese national identities. The statements below from international sources also relied on stereotypes to lend authority to their critiques.

The Los Angeles Times columnist Tom Plate wrote off the event as another round of “Asian values” that Westerners will never understand. According to Plate, the Japanese media had “downplayed” the story, in comparison to the “psychodrama” that would have unfolded had it occurred in America (referring to the hostage-taking itself, not the homecoming). Plate then deployed the oldest East-West stereotypes,

“That’s because the West nurtures a culture of individualism and entrepreneurism. That’s especially evident in our aggressive journalism (heroic correspondents “getting the story” against all danger) and in the rise of our civil-society nonprofits. In Japan, by contrast, the news media tend to react more as a group (or not overreact as a group), and the civil-society nonprofit sector is in relative infancy.

One reason for the difference between East and West is that the former’s culture still has the capacity to reflect hierarchical values: In effect, father (the authority figure) knows best.
And so when father is government, and the government strongly advises its people not to
go to Iraq, and people go anyhow, then it’s their fault and their problem.”

New York Times Asia correspondent Norimitsu Onishi similarly drew attention to the
Japanese peculiarity of o-kami, an anciently conditioned obeisance to god-like officials.

Then-Secretary of State Colin Powell, in a widely televised interview with Japan’s TBS
network, paternalistically advised,

“The Japanese people should be very proud that they have citizens like this. . . and the
soldiers that you are sending to Iraq that they are willing to take that risk. . . But, even when,
because of that, they get captured, it doesn’t mean we can say, “Well, you took the risk. It’s
your fault.” No, we still have an obligation to do everything we can to recover them
safely.”

Such reports generally fell back on dichotomies between “Japan” as an exceptional, insular
country and America and others as part of a more integrated and sophisticated global
society. Powell’s widely quoted statement and others like it overlooked the fact that the
hostages and their family members had made strongly political, anti-Bush, anti-SDF-
deployment statements, which American aid workers, despite their generally greater
numbers and longer experience, were reluctant to publicize in the early phase of the war.

Bashing

Kobayashi Masahiro’s Bashing premiered at the Cannes International Film Festival in May
2005 and offered one of the most scathing criticisms of the incident. In the prosaically
minimalist film, a young woman named Takai Yuko (Urabe Fusako) experiences derision,
hostility and ostracism in her unsociable, provincial seaside community. Crank calls to the
family’s Spartan working-class apartment reveal that Yuko has been doing aid work in an
unnamed Middle Eastern country; the anonymous voices sneer at her selfishness, her
failure to act with self-responsibility and her lack of concern for her countrymen, all of
whom are said to hate her. It does not take viewers long to realize that this is a “fictional”
portrayal of Takato Nahoko, who is also from Hokkaido (where the film is set).
Yuko’s physiognomy conveys the stages of depression with an honesty lacking in Hollywood histrionics. At one point a solitary tear roosts defiantly on the tip of her nose, creating a witchy elongation that might be satirizing her homecoming, or else, like the ocean she frequently gazes into, pointing her in a direction elsewhere.

“Elsewhere” is the only refuge in the film—either the temporal “elsewhere” of the stepmother who urges a “this too shall pass” waiting period, or the geographic “elsewhere” Yuko has just returned from. When her last tie to her hometown has been lost, she makes a flight reservation to leave Japan forever.

The loneliness the viewer experiences is not just empathy with Yuko’s suffering from the bashing, but also the total lack of connective space between the protagonist and others. Yuko’s provincial world evokes Agamben’s “bare life” and is far more desolately conformist than that of Takato Nahoko, who experienced bashing but also enjoyed support, mobility and communication denied to Yuko. Even Yuko’s computer has frozen and she has thrown the telephone out the window. In his “Director’s Notes,” Kobayashi states that the “fiction” he presents could be about Takato, or it could be universal, a story that involves you and me. And yet try as it may, Bashing failed somehow to transcend its reference to the experiences of Takato and the other abductees in 2004.

After its premiere in Cannes, Kobayashi remarked that the foreign reporters were very interested in knowing how to separate the real situation in Japan from the director’s fictionalization. They also wanted to know why such a thing could happen in Japan, and he replied that he did not have a good answer.
Though the cultural self-caricature is intended to be critical, Kobayashi has recreated the same assumptions of *nihonjinron* in its worst form of a pure cultural self: monolithic, unchanging, prone to blindly following the slogans of the leader and, indeed, frozen in time and physical geography as “*sakoku,*” Japan’s isolation policy during the feudal era. “Do you think Japan has changed in the year and a half since the kidnapping of Takato and the others?” I asked him, during his presentation following the film’s showing at Doshisha University in the fall of 2005. He responded that the tendency toward bashing noted in the film has since transformed into apathy, and the most likely response of Japanese to his film’s message would be to ignore it. Then he added, most likely in obligatory response to my very *gaijin* appearance in the audience, that Japan, after all, is a *mura shakai* (village society), *tsumaranaid* (insignificant) and it will not change (*Nihon wa kawaranai*).

It has always been disconcerting that such utterances of Japaneseness from Japanese seem to echo the very statements used by Americans during the Pacific War to create racial otherness. American propaganda of that era used such egregiously racist stereotyping as, “A Jap is a Jap is a Jap” (writings of General John DeWitt)²⁹, or Frank Capra’s infamous saying in his 1945 documentary, *Know Your Enemy: Japan,* that the Japanese were like “photographic prints off the same negative.”³⁰ Dower has called such a tendency “collusive Orientalism”: Japanese invoke their own stereotyping because in doing so they simultaneously promote the myth of uniqueness or national unity.³¹ There is still a fine line between portraying the myth of fatalistic uniqueness because one firmly believes in it, and portraying the myth to censure it while still feeling that it will never change. (In fact, Kobayashi was also bashed for making the film as it circulated in Japan.)

**Beyond Culturalism**

Of course, there was a Japaneseness about this ordeal as the hostages were made to apologize, bow deeply and reflect on the troubles they caused. The homecoming spectacle drew attention to the ostracism of Japan’s own citizens being treated as excluded outsiders despite having carried out international aid, research and reportage in a danger zone. But conflict within supposedly conformist Japan ensued. And the nuances in this event, beyond those observed in the distinction between the cultural twain of East and West that shall never meet, are more compelling when thinking about how wars generate moral panic in many societies. One can find instability beyond the unifying codes of nation-states in the following examples.

*The “graphic” videotape:* The first global exposure of the three hostages was through the videotape delivered to Al-Jazeera and the Associated Press Television News. Against a background of bullet holes, the blindfolded, kneeling trio were fuzzily seen vocalizing their terror while masked men hold guns and knives to their necks. The captors identify themselves as the Saraya al-Mujahideen and issue the statement, “We tell you that three of your children have fallen prisoner in our hands and we give you two options—withdraw your forces from our country and go home or we will burn them alive and feed them to the fighters.”³² By now this kind of hostage-taking video has become all too familiar in the Iraq conflict; this particular video, however, stands out for its dramatic elements. It was often described in the press as “graphic,” and it made this case the most conspicuous of the wave of abductions that occurred around the same time in Iraq (including seven South Koreans, one Briton, one Canadian, two Israelis and, a few days later, two more Japanese taken by
different brigades). What is conveyed in such a message is that the three citizens have become unwitting representatives of the Japanese state, and the Japanese state—even for all its rhetorical gestures to identify itself in a humanitarian capacity and not as an official member of the “coalition of the willing”—becomes just that, an aid to the American invasion and occupation.

In reverse, the implication that the captors likewise represented a unified Iraq, was also present—but belied by the fact that, at the time at least, the various abducting groups were likely to be disparate. The Japanese trio revealed after their release the extent to which their own captors were divided. What made their situation unnerving was not just that they were held captive, and believed they would lose their lives, but also that they were held in several different places, and were passed from captor to captor and given very different receptions. At times they were bound and bullied and treated with hostility, suspicion and threats. At other times they were shown family photos, served home-cooked meals, apologized to, and politely bid farewell.

As revealed in Takato Nahoko’s memoir of the captivity, one faction of kidnappers spent some time accusing them of being spies. Having the most experience in Iraq, Takato passionately defended her humanitarian work to help transport medical supplies and provide shelter for homeless children. She provided names of Iraqis who could verify her identity and character. The captors then left and returned with tobacco and food. Yet just as the conversation was turning to the tastiness of noodles and vegetables, someone came in with a hand-held video camera. The interpreter turned to the trio and repeated several times (quoting from Takato’s recollection): “Your life will be guaranteed. But in return, this is bad but, would you please cry for us?”

Takato’s memoir (source: Amazon.jp)
The three were then blindfolded and forced to kneel down on a floor. The 18-year-old Imai was apparently kicked several times, and was urged to cry out his pain (“it-te-e” in rough Japanese) while all three captives and their captors chanted, “No Koizumi,” and knives were held to the victims’ throats. The blindfolds were removed and the interpreter asked again, “This is bad, but would you cry for us now?” One captor moved his sword toward Imai and the captors shouted in English, “Cry, cry!” – moving at least Takato to actual tears. Koriyama (the journalist) asked if she was all right; then the interpreter also told her she could stop crying. Finally the captors themselves said in English, “Sorry, sorry,” and one leaned over and kissed her on the head, reminding her of the rambunctious street children she worked with.35 (The gist of this account was confirmed in press conferences with the other two victims.)

After their video performance, the captives were again blindfolded, put in a car and moved around again several times until their release. According to Takato’s memoir, it may have been the bombing around the area (especially Fallujah) putting them in danger, as well as disagreement among captors over their fate, that caused the peregrinations. In any case, none of the victims had any idea that the video with the contrived emotions was attached to a statement issuing their death threats and urging the pullout of the SDF.

After their release through intervention by the Islamic Clerics Association, Japan’s Asahi Shimbun editorialized, “In Iraqi society as a whole, the armed bands that snatch foreigners are but a tiny minority. We feel, however, that one of the factors contributing to the hostage-takings is the tacit approval that many give such acts amid growing anti-American sentiment. What really worries us is that such Iraqis have started to think the SDF came to Iraq to cooperate in the U.S. military’s occupation.”36

Takato and Imai on Al Jazeera after their release (AP photo)

*Bureaucrats and blogs*: Immediately following the news of the abduction, Foreign Minister Kawaguchi Yoriko issued her own video statement to the abductors in which she confirmed the innocence of the three citizens and the commitment, and financial generosity, of Japan to the humanitarian reconstruction of Iraq,
The three Japanese are private individuals, and friends of Iraq... The People of Japan has (sic) both respect and friendship for the people of Iraq. For many years, Japan has actively cooperated for building hospitals and schools. Even as I speak Japan is working for the reconstruction of Iraq, with a significant sum of money and personnel. Japan’s Self-Defense Forces are also dispatched for this purpose.\(^{37}\)

After releasing her video, Kawaguchi held telephone talks with the Syrian government and received assurances of their cooperation in the release of the three citizens.

Except for affirming that he would not give in to the abductors’ demands by withdrawing the troops, Prime Minister Koizumi, however, was noticeably inconspicuous; he was preparing to meet with U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney who arrived the day after the abduction (April 10). Cheney was planning to stay four days in Japan, to join in Japan’s lineup of commemorative activities surrounding the 150th anniversary of the signing of the Japan-U.S. Treaty of Peace and Amity (Treaty of Kanagawa) on 31 March 1854. The festivities would offer Cheney the opportunity to express appreciation to Japan for providing troops and engineers in Iraq. Specifically, his agenda included asking Japan to double its noncombat forces in Iraq.\(^{38}\)

While the mass media had long been planning to fete U.S.-Japan amity, what they got instead, in the immediate start of the hostage crisis, was a test of the U.S.-Japan alliance, a reality that was antithetical to the public rhetoric of binational unity that the festivities were to promote. On 31 March 2004 in Washington, D.C.—the same day that Iraqi grenades killed four American civilian contractors and a mob hung two of them from a bridge over the Euphrates—150 American dignitaries, including members of the Pentagon, the State Department, Congress and the corporate community, joined Japanese dignitaries and descendants of Commodore Matthew C. Perry, the man credited with the Treaty of Kanagawa that opened Japan to the world after its long period of isolation, to celebrate peaceful U.S.-Japan relations. The ceremonies involved presenting a facsimile of the original treaty (burned long ago in a fire), showcasing an exhibit celebrating the treaty (organized by the National Archives), and making an addition to the celebrated line of cherry trees presented as a gift from Japan in 1912. In his remarks, Ambassador Kato Ryozo stated that “over those 150 years [of U.S.-Japan amity], our two worlds have merged into one.” The ambassador went on to praise the efforts of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces to aid Bush’s war on terrorism in the Indian Ocean and Iraq, and asserted that “[N]ever has the Japan-U.S. relationship been so close, and never has there been a time when it’s required that we be so close.” The American speakers also uttered the same words of selective memory, alliance unity and praise for Japanese assistance to the Bush administration’s antiterrorism efforts.\(^{39}\)

In his widely-circulated essay, the American ambassador to Japan, Howard Baker, pitched the alliance as “the best team,”

We increasingly eat the same food, listen to the same music, and wear the same fashions. More importantly, we enjoy the same freedoms, and share the same values. As we see symbolized with Hideki Matsui playing here in Japan this month wearing a New York Yankee uniform, we are on the same team. As teammates, we work together for a common purpose, especially when the game is on the line.\(^{40}\)
In Japan, the discourse of alliance unity was quashed amid the ensuing turmoil in Iraq, since after the abductions of the first three Japanese citizens only a few days after the Washington side of the amity celebration, the press homed in on the question of whether or not the Japanese public would in fact continue to support the troops. Broadcast and print media gave blanket coverage to the hostage-taking, alternating between the video footage of the hostages and the gathering of outspoken family members in Tokyo willing to take on Koizumi for his unflinching support of Bush and the American invasion.

On 9 April, family members urged Koizumi to withdraw the troops and not send in an American-led rescue team; they also grimaced at Foreign Minister Kawaguchi’s mention of the Self-Defense Forces’ humanitarianism and Koizumi’s referring to the hostage-takers as “terrorists,” fearing such statements would stiffen the resolve of the kidnappers. And family members charged Koizumi with his “personal responsibility” in a press conference in Nagata-cho (the government area of Tokyo). Though Koizumi did not meet with the seven relatives directly, he issued a statement saying, “This is not a problem concerning myself. This is a problem concerning how the whole country should cope with stabilization and reconstruction of Iraq.” The elder brother of hostage Imai replied, “That (comment) is unforgivable, considering our current sentiment.” The mother of hostage Koriyama replied, “I really feel that (in Koizumi’s view) the state comes before human rights of the three now confined.”

Family members also made other television and public appearances, and some spoke to Al-Arabiya, based in the United Arab Emirates, and to Qatar-based Al-Jazeera.

On whether the Japanese public supported Koizumi’s affirmation to stay the course, a Kyodo News telephone poll found that 45.2 percent disagreed with the decision, and 43.5 percent supported the policy to keep the troops in Iraq. The poll also showed that 80 percent felt Koizumi would be “responsible” if a Japanese were injured in Iraq, and 36 percent felt he should resign if a Japanese were killed there. Fukushima Mizuho, leader of the Social Democratic Party, called on Koizumi to resign over his “responsibility” for the crisis, and demanded immediate withdrawal of Japanese troops from Iraq (10 April).

In 1960, massive mob protests against the U.S.-Japan security treaty were so strong that Japan had to stop President Eisenhower from making a state visit—the Japanese government having failed to meet American demands to keep the “leftists” under control. Demonstrations in 2004 in no way approached that level, but the Iraq war brought out political sentiments, both pro-Alliance/patriotic and anti-war (rarely, if ever, anti-American), that had been unseen in Japan for decades. Yet Koizumi’s ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) wasted no time throwing the discourse of “responsibility” back to the people. The following summary (mostly compiled by the Asahi Shimbun) presents key statements of government officials to blame the hostages and their families themselves as bearing “self-responsibility.”

9 April, from Environmental Minister Koike Yuriko: “Wasn’t that reckless? It is mostly their own responsibility to go to places deemed dangerous.”

12 April, from Vice Foreign Minister Takeuchi Yukio: “They must be aware of the principle of personal responsibility and reconsider how they can protect themselves.”
15 April, from Chief Cabinet Secretary Fukuda Yasuo: “They may have gone on their own but they must consider how many people they caused trouble to because of their action.”

16 April, New Komeito [an LDP coalition party] Secretary-General Fuyushiba Tetsuzo: “The government should reveal to the public how much it cost to respond to this crisis.”

16 April, Inoue Kiichi, minister in charge of disaster management: “The families should have first said they were sorry for causing trouble; was it appropriate for them to ask for SDF withdrawal first of all?”

27 April, Kashimura Takeaki, Upper House Member of Parliament: “I cannot help feeling discomfort in or strongly against spending several billion yen of taxpayers’ money on such antigovernment, anti-Japan elements.”

Under pressure, the family members issued a series of apologies to the Japanese public beginning on 12 April. When the release of the trio was announced and confirmed, Takato’s brother and some other Japanese officials traveled to Kuwait to meet them. The gesture was not just meant to be friendly; the kidnapping victims needed to know about the atmosphere in Japan and that they would be expected to apologize. In Takato’s case it was already too late: she had already issued a statement claiming she bore no ill feelings toward the Iraqi people and hoped to stay there; Imai also stated he hoped to stay on (in fact he had only just arrived when abducted).

Over the next month, interviews and blogs latched onto the “blame the victim” mentality. Predictably, reporters dished dirt by showing that Takato was a former juvenile delinquent who sniffed paint thinner, that Imai’s parents were Communists and were exploiting the naïve young man for their own politics, and that ex-SDF member Koriyama was married once and divorced, with children. The tabloid Shukan Shincho delivered perhaps the most thorough censure of the hostages, reporting that the international terrorism department of Japan’s Police Agency first analyzed the possibility that the entire kidnapping was a hoax; many blogs argued it was. The tabloid also quoted a senior LDP source as confirming that a Japan Communist Party Youth League member was present at every press conference given by the families.

The release statement: Another under-scrutinized piece of information was the release statement, loosely translated on 11 April by Kyodo News. The statement sent by the militant group Saraya al-Mujahideen (Mujahideen Brigades) to the Arabic news channel Al-Jazeera revealed the “common ground” between the victims and the captors,

- It [the Saraya al-Mujahideen] wants the friendly Japanese public, who are still suffering from the abuse by the United States, to pressure the Japanese government to withdraw its Self-Defense Forces troops from Iraq because the dispatch is illegal and contributes to the U.S. occupation.
- It has decided on the release to show the whole world that the resistance in Iraq does not target peaceful foreign civilians of whatever religion, race, political party or rank.
- It has confirmed through its own sources that the (three) Japanese have been helping Iraqi people and that they have not been contaminated by subservience to the occupying nations.
• It made the decision also out of consideration for the pain of the hostages' families and out of respect for the Japanese public’s stance on the issue. . . .
• It has heard the Japanese public say the U.S., which killed masses in Hiroshima and Nagasaki with atomic bombs, is carrying out a massacre in Fallujah using bombs banned internationally.

• It is committed to the holy war until victory.46

The gist of this partially translated statement linked the Japanese people to the Iraqi people because both were still suffering from American aggression, occupation and continued military subordination: specifically, Fallujah is mentioned as a counterpart to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This release statement was announced at a slow news moment, Saturday night, and was read again on Sunday talk shows the following day, but was rarely mentioned in major media after that. But on the famously congested “2 Channel,” an Internet bulletin board, detractors wrote that the abductors should not invoke “Hiroshima, Nagasaki” since those places were special to Japan only and the captors had no idea about their significance. [47] While there is no forgiveness implied here toward the criminal brutality of the abductors, the “Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Fallujah” reference did resonate with other anti-war citizens interested in relations with more peaceful Iraqis, and further weakens the illusion of national conformity within Japan.

With the sudden crescendo of “self-responsibility” diverting media attention from America’s war in Iraq to social wars in Japan, the Cheney visit was rendered unproblematic; the American vice president expressed his concern about the hostages, his appreciation for the SDF deployment, and his approval to Koizumi for keeping the troops in Iraq. On 13 April, just after the flames of “self responsibility” flared, Cheney gave a barely-publicized speech in Tokyo to honor the Kanagawa Treaty, calling U.S.-Japan relations “one of the great achievements in modern history.”48

Some of Koizumi’s critics doubted whether the Japanese government’s efforts led to the release of the hostages, as implied in the demand that the hostages pay the taxpayers back. Journalist Tachibana Takashi reported that Japanese officials were consistently one or more steps behind efforts undertaken by Iraqi citizens who became sympathetic to the hostages (and especially to Takato, who had worked for the Iraqi people) and were critical of the American occupation and Japanese troop dispatch. “Fundamentally the one who saved Takato was Takato herself.”49

Though the hostages and their families were silenced for several weeks, others critical of Koizumi continued to speak. On 26 April, more than sixty nongovernmental organizations urged officials and the media to stop blaming the victims personally, complaining that this in effect constituted an attack on all other aid workers and journalists in Iraq. In a joint statement signed by 3,000 individuals, the group asserted, “The notion of self-responsibility will create a misguided public sentiment that NGO members working in conflict areas are themselves responsible, even if their lives are threatened . . . and could lead to restricting NGO activities abroad.”50 Moreover, although the victims were inundated with hate mail after their repatriation, Takato noted after publishing her memoir half a
year later that she received letters of support as well as apologies for the hate mail after some time had passed and people understood the situation better.

The second pair of hostages, Watanabe and Yasuda, was actually more strident in their criticism of the media and government officials who were blaming the victims and their families for the abductions. Responding to the charge that they were “anti-Japan elements,” Watanabe responded dryly in a press conference soon after their release, “Yes, I am against Japan and thank you for recognizing my opinions.” In June, Yasuda gave candid interviews revealing that he and Watanabe, like the first three, were treated differently by rotating captors and that he (Yasuda) even arm-wrestled with the children and taught them karate. “Half of me was happy I survived,” he stated; yet “the other half wanted to spend more time with them. I wanted to see more of their lives. I wanted to see them attack the Americans. I asked them to take me with them.”

Not in America?

If journalists paid too much attention to Japan’s homogeneity, they paid insufficient attention to conformity in America. Reconsider Plate’s above-mentioned assumption that the cold hostage homecoming could only happen in the “East,” with its hierarchical values and obedience to the paternal sovereign, and its lack of heroic journalists and civil society enjoyed by the “West.” The media watch group, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), has compiled considerable evidence to show that, from 2002 until Bush’s “Mission Accomplished” putative “end of major hostilities” announcement in May, 2003, America’s mainstream media repeatedly followed the “paternal sovereign” by failing to question the Bush administration’s claims of weapons of mass destruction, its main rationale for the invasion. Major news media gave short shrift to the writers trying to expose the faulty logic of the war while putting cheerleaders in the spotlight. MSNBC’s Chris Matthews even gushed that,

We’re proud of our president. Americans love having a guy as president, a guy who has a little swagger, who’s physical, who’s not a complicated guy like Clinton ... They want a guy who’s president. Women like a guy who’s president. Check it out. The women like this war. I think we like having a hero as our president. It’s simple.

America and Britain also expected that journalists be “embedded” rather than “unilateral” in the early phase of the war. American leaders of the current Iraqi campaign invented the concept of “embedding” to refer to journalists who would be civilian members of military divisions and perhaps even train with the soldiers. Embeds theoretically have better access to military information and better opportunities to report on and photograph the war; perhaps the biggest bonus is that they get military protection and can feel safer. The trade-off, critics point out, is that embeds become less critical. A Newsweek story quoted an embed who said that any embedded journalist who didn’t feel conflicted about the thought of being pressured to write flattering stories for the government was a liar.

Warnings to the non-embedded, so-called “unilateral” journalists echoed Japan’s admonitions to the self-responsible: authorities announce that it’s too risky to be on one’s own. “Risky” may be an understatement: Reporters Without Borders reported that 225 journalists and media assistants have been killed in Iraq since fighting began there in March 2003, making that conflict the bloodiest for journalists since World War II.
Several months into the war, a few embedded reporters demonstrated their courage to write stories inconsistent with official military spin. Instead, writes Kellner, it was the U.S. broadcast networks that were “on the whole more embedded in the Pentagon and the Bush administration than the reporters and print journalists were in the field.” The television stations produced “highly sanitized views of the war, rarely showing Iraqi casualties,” and profited as “cheerleaders for the country’s war effort.”

Media diversions are common in war; the repetitions of “freedom,” “democracy” and “humanitarian action” distract from or even silence reportage on catastrophic failures and human tragedy. Japan’s moral affirmation of jiko sekinin distracted from Japanese anti-war protests, cracks in the 150-year amity between the United States and Japan, and the symbolism of the equation of Fallujah with Hiroshima and Nagasaki. America’s mass conformity at the start of the war in 2003 used heroics to distract from the illegal invasion. Kellner describes the “Jessica Lynch story” as a Pentagon-produced mythology fed into broadcast networks. Lynch was an attractive young POW for whom American troops supposedly staged a dramatic rescue, hyping the story (it was later discovered) not only to rally mass support for the U.S. troops, but also to distract media from telling the real story, which was the beginning phase of the coalition’s entry into Baghdad.

Finally, the initial disclosures of prisoner abuse in the Abu Ghraib facility in Iraq were exposed on 28 April 2004. Visual evidence of naked and hooded prisoners, placed in bizarre, stressful, painful, scatological, and sexually humiliating positions, generated protest and censure throughout the world. The exposure occurred less than one month after the Japanese hostage incident, and the Bush administration also made efforts to pin “responsibility” for the abuse to a small group of outsiders, in this case, the “bad apples” playing “Animal House on the night shift.” Such damage-controlling phrases showing the “deviance” of the Abu Ghraib prison guards attempted to distract the public from the officially sanctioned torture used throughout America’s overseas prison network. According to journalism professor Mark Danner, the majority of Americans was willing to believe the myth of “bad apples” just so that their faith in the American military project would not be disturbed.

The Abu Ghraib photos not only opened up wider investigations into communication along a military chain of command, they also led to more critical uses of media to educate Americans about abuses of authority during war. Independent media in particular have created more and more spaces for critical voices to express opposition to the unconstitutionality of the wars and associated interrogation and incarceration practices. Even in mainstream media, these topics have come to be debated almost daily, and former Bush officials, former interrogators, and former military personnel in the capacities of “winter soldiers” or resisters have also begun to air their stories.

The five former abductees continued their work after a brief hiatus of hiding from public scrutiny. They have written memoirs and made several presentations in Japan and abroad. Takato has continued her work for Iraqi schools and hospitals through several NGOs, and in particular, through her own Iraq Hope Network. According to her blog, she made a brief trip back to Iraq in April 2009, in part to put the experience of five years ago behind her.
At least two incidents offered a chance to compare American reactions to a hostage situation similar to that of Japan’s, though both occurred after the Iraq war’s first year of intense media-supported nationalism. In November 2005, four male members of the Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) were kidnapped in Iraq. One was American; two were Canadian, and one was a British member of the organization that is supported by international pacifist churches such as Mennonites and Friends, and also includes non-Christians. The group practices non-violent, non-proselytizing activism, and in Iraq had begun to document prisoner detainee abuses committed by Americans even before the Abu Ghraib disclosure. Ignoring their faith-based service, conservative radio host, Rush Limbaugh, first raised the possibility that the kidnapping might be a hoax. He then declared that he “liked” the kidnapping, or “any time a bunch of leftist feel-good hand-wringers are shown reality.” 66 Tragically, the American member was killed, and the other three released after three months.

The second incident was the kidnapping of the American journalist Jill Carroll in Iraq in January 2006. Nearly two years since the abductions of the Japanese citizens, many things had changed. Hostage-taking had become more commonplace and dangerous, and domestic and international support for the American-led war had already declined. Jill Carroll was released safely after 83 days rather than one week, and although she was a free-lance journalist, she was then on assignment with the Christian Science Monitor to interview a top Sunni Arab political leader. Still, there were important similarities. Like Takato, Carroll had studied Arabic and made many efforts to interact on friendly terms with Iraqis. While in captivity, she made statements, always appearing in hijab, critical of Bush’s “illegal war” in Iraq. Just as private efforts were made to advocate for the release of the Japanese hostages, especially owing to Takato’s network of humanitarian workers,67 Carroll’s employer, the Christian Science Monitor, according to veteran journalist Robert Zelnick, also made every effort to gain international support for her release, mobilizing a long list of individuals and organizations that included Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood, America’s Council for Islamic-American Relations and Iraq’s Muslim Scholars Association.68 Upon being freed, she stated while still in Iraq, her captors treated her well, though she had been moved around frequently and never knew what would happen.69

Echoing the backlash against the Japanese hostages in Japan, angry citizens in America also charged that Carroll had unwisely exposed herself to danger; that she had become one of the terrorists herself; and that she was an anti-American traitor. Most rants rumbled from the blogosphere 70, but some were urged on by professional commentators, including one who compared her to a “Taliban Johnny” who “may be carrying Habib’s baby.”71

Unlike the Japanese victims, when Carroll left Iraq she quickly recanted the statements she had made there as propaganda she was forced to do under threats to her life. Yet bashing against her continued, even though her abduction and release occurred after American media had become much less conformist in their support the war. The point is that demanding conformity of one’s own citizens has also occurred in America in times of heightened nationalism and compromised democracy; though America celebrates its relative free speech, tactics echoing McCarthyist red-baiting during the Cold War are not entirely in the past.
Conclusion
As for whether the Japanese hostage homecoming can be understood as an expression of Japanese cultural norms demanding obedience to the group, or geopolitical norms demanding Japanese subservience to America by keeping dissidence under control, the answer is both, and more. Beyond the myths of unchanging cultural norms, the security regimes of nations at war invariably generate increased demand for socio-political conformity, and in the case of America and Japan, the symbiosis of national feelings of unity also helps maintain the exceptionality of the U.S.-Japan alliance. Until the decline of Americans’ own support for the Iraqi invasion—during the window of grace between “Mission Accomplished” and Abu Ghraib—insufficient attention was paid to anti-war pressures within American society and to opposition in Japan to that nation’s support for the war and the alliance.72

Not only is it necessary to rethink social relations beyond nations, it is also important to recognize the democratic potential of media “common places” that give voice to a diverse citizenry within and beyond borders, preventing manipulative tactics such as changing the meaning of “self-responsibility” to “nationalist conformity.”[73] In both Japan and America, journalists and aid workers hoping to put checks and balances on abusive powers of nations were rebuffed in the early phase of the Iraq war. But such media diversity is necessary to challenge emotional reactions that coalesce around tired and uncomplicated images of nations, a reaction that in itself can become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

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Notes
1 See Aihwa Ong, Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty (Duke University Press, 2006), 5.
3 Samuel P. Huntington, “Japan’s Role in Global Politics,” International Relations of the Asia-Pacific 1(2001), 139.
4 Douglas Kellner, Media Spectacle and the Crisis of Democracy (Boulder: Paradigm, 2005), 78.
6 Agamben, State of Exception, 2-3.

8 Frequently cited rejected treaties include the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty; the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction; a protocol to create a compliance regime for the Biological Weapons Convention; the Kyoto Protocol on global warming, and the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. The United States has also signed but not ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women. When President George W. Bush took office, he ‘unsigned’ the United States from The Treaty Establishing and International Criminal Court, which had previously been signed, but not ratified, by President Clinton. See Isaac Baker, “Rogue State? US Spurns Treaty after Treaty,” *Inter Press Service*, 8 December 2005.


10 Condoleezza Rice, “Princeton University’s Celebration of the 75th Anniversary Of the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs,” lecture presentation, Princeton University, September 30, 2005 (U.S. Department of State).

11 The comparison between the Allied Occupation of Japan in 1945 that enjoyed the full support of the international community, and Iraq in the early moment of the invasion, was so dangerously flawed, according to historian John Dower, that it should have instead “stood as a warning that we were lurching toward war with no idea of what we were really getting into.” See John W. Dower, “A Warning from History,” *Boston Review* (February/March 2003).

12 Samuel P. Huntington 2001, ibid.


14 Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, “Recent Trends in Military Expenditure.”

15 CIA World Factbook, 2008 estimates of GDP (purchasing power parity).


18 See Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Record of Discussion.”

20 Cited in McCormack 2004, ibid., 9. Also, Japan pulled its troops out of Iraq in 2008 and is attempting to ease the burden of American militarism on Okinawa, but other plans show the alliance is being redefined and expanded even more along military lines. A new realignment package will have Japan and America placing their command centers on the same bases in newly defined “base towns” throughout the country, and Japan has agreed to pay 700 billion yen to help the US set up a new base in Guam. (“Japan-U.S. Relations” [editorial], Asahi Shimbun 4 May 2006, 28.) In 2004 the United States and Japan agreed to exchange information on the deployment and operations of a missile defense shield.

21 Koizumi’s ability to steer public and official opinion toward support of the troops had much to do with his linking their mission only to that of humanitarian, non-combat, reconstruction; he also assured the public “there is no security problem” in Samawah—a point later qualified into rendering Samawah as not having any hostilities conducted by “states or quasi-state organizations.” The relatively secure, isolated situation for the Japanese soldiers was also described as operating under joint command headquarters, rather than America’s requirement of “unified command.” Cited in McCormack, ibid., 2004, 5-7.


24 The first three were requested to each pay 2.37 million yen (US$21,000). “Former Japanese,” ibid.; the next two, about US$500. Tama Miyake Lung, “Former Iraq hostage Jumpei Yasuda eager to go back,” Japan Today, 7 June 2004. This author has no information on whether any of the payments were actually made. According to an interview with Takato in September, 2004, she was planning to pay only for her ticket from Baghdad to Dubai following negotiations between her lawyers and the Foreign Ministry. See Matsumoto Chie, “Bouncing Back: Former Iraq Hostage continues Humanitarian Battle,” IHT/Asahi Shimbun, 18 September 2004, also at Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus.


28 Bashing, dir. Kobayashi Masahiro (Monkey Town Productions, 2005).


30 Dower 1993, ibid., 274.

31 Dower, cited in Krauth and Parisi, ibid.
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33 The salvo of hostage-takings that began in the spring of 2004 was preceded by America’s shutdown of the Al-Hazwa newspaper, on 28 March (three days before the killing of the four American contractors and ten days before the capture of Imai, Koriyama and Takato). Coalition authorities would not tolerate the newspaper because it was controlled by the Shiite cleric, Muqtada al-Sadr, Al-Hazwa, whom Americans feared had the capacity to “incite violence.” This un-democratic action led to widespread protests and disastrous loss for the American-led coalition; nearly 40 Americans and 300 Iraqis were killed. The subsequent hostage-takings continued for the next two years to such an extent that the abductee became an icon of the war itself as well as an indication of the war’s global reach. The Hostage Working Group showed that as of May 2006, 439 foreigners of 60 nationalities and several professions were abducted; 18% of those killed. See Erik Rye and Joon Mo Kang, “Hostages of War,” International Herald Tribune, 18 May 2006, 8.

34 Takato Nahoko, Senso to heiwa: soredemo Irakijin wo kirai ni narenai [War and peace: or, why I still won’t hate the Iraqi people] (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2004), 66.

35 Takato, Senso to heiwa, ibid., 64-68.


37 Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), Message from Ms. Yoriko Kawaguchi, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to the members of the Saraya-Al-Mujahadeen. 10 April, 2004.


42 “Public is split over policy not to pull out SDF: survey,” The Japan Times, 11 April 2004, 2.


44 I am grateful for the summary of this news provided by Fumiko Halloran, [Listserve] Shukan Shincho on Japanese NBR’S JAPAN FORUM (POL), 23 April, 2004, retrieved on 1 May 2004.

45 The Islamic Clerics Committee that arranged the release said that it would occur in 24 hours, although the actual release of the hostages was a few days later. Some believed a report originally put out by Radio France that the delay was a result of Koizumi’s depiction of the hostage-takers as terrorists, when he rejected the demands of the militant group to
pull troops out Iraq by saying, “We will not bow to any despicable threat by terrorists.” Cited in Kyodo World Service, 13 April 2004; retrieved on 16 April 2004.


47 See 2channeru (2 channel) (bulletin board), comments on 11 April 2004.

48 Cited in Brad Glosserman, “U.S.-Japan Relations: Mr. Koizumi’s Payback,” Pacific Forum CSIS.

49 Tachibana, ibid., 28-29.


51 “Former Japanese Iraq Hostages Criticize Media,” ibid.


54 Chris Matthews, MSNBC, 1 May 2003, cited in Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, ibid.

55 Newsweek.com, 22 April 2003, cited in Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, ibid.

56 In a worst-imagined scenario, an Al-Jazeera correspondent, a Reuters reporter, and thirteen members of the ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) were all killed on 8 April 2003 by American fire, presumed by some critics to have been actually “targeted” because of their independent, non-embeddedness. Michel Chossudovsy, “Killing the ‘Unembedded Truth,’” Center for Research on Globalisation, 11 April 2003; retrieved from. The United States has acknowledged that three Reuters reporters were killed by their own forces, though they claim the soldiers fired with justifiable reason. Other journalists have been illegally detained or abused by American soldiers, according to Reuters Global Managing Editor, David Schlesinger, who has called on the United States to recognize the “legitimate rights of journalists in conflict zones under international law.” In his statement to the U.S. Armed Services Committee, Schlesinger states, “The worsening situation for professional journalists in Iraq directly limits journalists’ abilities to do their jobs and, more importantly, creates a serious chilling effect on the media overall.” Barry Moody, “Reuters says US Troops Obstruct Reporting of Iraq,” Reuters, 28 September 2005.

57 Reporters Without Borders (homepage).


60 Douglas Kellner 2005, ibid., 66. As CNN correspondent Tim Mintier expressed it, the American officials “buried the lead” in an attempt to manage the news that was becoming
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more and more perceptible at the time. Mintier’s views are featured in the documentary film, *Control Room*, dir., Jehane Noujaim (Magnolia Pictures, 2003).

Bush and others referred to the twelve low-ranking officers serving prison sentences for abuse as “bad apples”; the guards are now appealing their sentences. See “Abu Ghraib US Prison Guards were Scapegoats for Bush,” Lawyers Claim,” Times Online, 2 May 2009; references to “night shift” were also frequent among Bush officials, and the expression, “Animal House on the night shift” attributed to former Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger who chaired an independent panel on the prisoner abuse scandal. See “The Investigations,” PBS Frontline, *The Torture Question*, 2005.


Iraq Hope Diary.


See also the “Appeal on Behalf of the Hostages to the Sara Al Mujahedeen,” featured in Imai Noriaki, “Why I went to Iraq,” ibid.


I have no definitive information on the extent to which the release of either the Japanese hostages or Carroll was influenced by such private efforts, since governments are typically secretive about such matters, but in both cases the paper trail of private support was substantial.

Highlights from the blogosphere available at Melonyce McAfee, “Female Trouble,” *Slate*, 30 March 2006.

Bernard McGuirk, executive producer of “Imus in the Morning”, who regularly antagonizes the radio/television program’s regular host, Don Imus. Citation and video available at *Think Progress*.

A later hostage incident involving a Japanese yielded different results. Seven months after the release of the five Japanese hostages, a 24-year old Japanese ESL student in New Zealand traveled to Jordan for adventure. On a whim, or for reasons unknown, Koda Shosei crossed the forbidden line into Iraq. He was captured immediately. His captors, this time a different brigade, issued a video with a statement threatening to kill him if Japan did not withdraw its troops. Though Koda had transgressed, the Foreign Minister (Machimura) responded swiftly; while not dispatching troops, government officials claimed to do what they could to secure the release of the young man. Their efforts failed, however, and Koda was beheaded. This time, however, the issue received comparatively little coverage and
was overshadowed by Japan's worst earthquake in a decade. Koda was not known for any politically controversial actions or statements. Neither the presence of the American coalition, nor the US-Japan alliance itself, was at a crucial moment of testing.

When the Self-Defense Forces went overseas to support combat operations for the first time since 1945, this might have sparked debate among Japanese about their own wartime past. However, this did not happen much, writes Tokudome Kinue. One controversial issue in Japan, as elsewhere, was the practice known as waterboarding, a torture method used on detainees caught in Iraq and Afghanistan. As Tokudome explains in “Waterboarding: The Meaning for Japan,” Japan had used the controversial torture method during World War II on Chinese and Korean forced laborers and on American POWs. She reminds her readers that former victims have long memories and that, every time waterboarding comes back into international consciousness, people will recall Japanese wrongdoing. Japan needs to confront its past squarely, admonishes Tokudome, “achieving reconciliation with former victims, and winning the trust of the international community.” By implication, this is criticism of American use of torture too, although Tokudome does not focus on this issue.

Waterboarding: The Meaning for Japan
Kinue Tokudome
January 12, 2009
http://apjjf.org/-Kinue-TOKUDOME/3024/article.html

"If you look at the history of the use of that technique used by the Khmer Rouge, used in the inquisition, used by the Japanese and prosecuted by us as war crimes, we prosecuted our own soldiers in Vietnam, I agree with you, Mr. Chairman, waterboarding is torture."¹

The above statement made by Eric Holder during his confirmation hearing for Attorney General marked a clean break from the policy of the Bush administration on “waterboarding,”² the interrogation technique used by the CIA on at least three Al-Qaida suspects, and on the general issue of the use of torture in US interrogation.

If the Japanese people were surprised to see their country grouped together with the Khmer Rouge, medieval torturers who brutally persecuted heretics, and US soldiers during the Vietnam War, some of whom were court-martialed,³ they should not have been.
In the past few years, waterboarding by the Japanese military has often been mentioned in the discussion on this topic in Congress, the media, and among those who had unforgettable memories of experiencing it and witnessing it.

Senator Ted Kennedy, in opposing the confirmation of Michael Mukasey as Attorney General, made the following statement on the Senate floor on November 8, 2007.

It is illegal under the Geneva Conventions, which prohibit "outrages upon personal dignity," including cruel, humiliating, and degrading treatment. It is illegal under the Torture Act, which prohibits acts "specifically intended to inflict severe physical or mental pain or suffering." It is illegal under the Detainee Treatment Act, which prohibits "cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment," and it violates the Constitution. The Nation's top military lawyers and legal experts across the political spectrum have condemned waterboarding as illegal. After World War II, the United States prosecuted Japanese officers for using waterboarding. What more does this nominee need to enforce existing laws?  

Senator and presidential candidate John McCain mentioned waterboarding by the Japanese during his appearance in CBS’ "60 Minutes" on March 9, 2008. He answered when he was asked if "waterboarding" was torture:

Sure. Yes. Without a doubt...We prosecuted Japanese war criminals after World War II. And one of the charges brought against them, for which they were convicted, was that they water-boarded Americans.

Some powerful reports on waterboarding by the Japanese military appeared in major newspapers. Evan Wallach, a judge at the U.S. Court of International Trade in New York, wrote an opinion piece, "Waterboarding Used to Be a Crime," that was published in the Washington Post on November 4, 2007:

After Japan surrendered, the United States organized and participated in the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, generally called the Tokyo War Crimes Trials. Leading members of Japan's military and government elite were charged, among their many other crimes, with torturing Allied military personnel and civilians. The principal proof upon which their torture convictions were based was conduct that we would now call waterboarding.

Judge Wallach quoted the testimony of a victim:

They laid me out on a stretcher and strapped me on. The stretcher was then stood on end with my head almost touching the floor and my feet in the air. . . . They then began pouring water over my face and at times it was almost impossible for me to breathe without sucking in water.

Former British POW of the Japanese, Eric Lomax, who was waterboarded by the Japanese military police, the Kempeitai, during World War II, wrote about his ordeal for the Times of London on March 4, 2008. A lieutenant in the Royal Signals, Lomax was caught with his fellow POWs and interrogated about their secretly assembled radio.
The whole operation was a long and agonising sequence of near-drowning, choking, vomiting and muscular struggling with the water flowing with ever-changing force. . . . How long the torture lasted, I do not know. It covered a period of some days, with periods of unconsciousness and semi-consciousness. Eventually I was dumped in my cell, which was so small it offered little scope for movement. At about this time two of my colleagues were beaten to death. Their bodies were dumped in a latrine where they may well remain to this day.7

Gustavo Ingles was tortured mercilessly by the Japanese military when he was captured as a guerrilla in the Philippines. In 1992, he published a book entitled, “Memoirs of Pain”, where he described various types of waterboarding, including ones he was subjected to.8 Illustrations of waterboarding he received and witnessed were included in his book.

![Drawing of waterboarding](Illustration by Rey Rillo)

The experience of witnessing waterboarding also remains etched in the memories of those who saw it firsthand. Lester Tenney, a Bataan Death March survivor, wrote in his memoir, *My Hitch in Hell*, about witnessing his fellow American soldier waterboarded while he himself was being tortured. It happened after Tenney was recaptured by the Japanese soldiers following his escape from Camp O’Donnell and a brief stay with guerrillas. The Japanese wanted to extract information about the guerrillas from Tenney.
For what seemed like an eternity, I just stood and waited for them to say something. At last the commander gave the interpreter instruction. A few minutes later, a guard came into the room, raised his rifle, flipped it around so that the stock of the gun was facing me, and with one swift movement hit me with the butt squarely in the face. With one fell swoop, I started to bleed from each and every part of my face. I knew that my nose was broken, that a few teeth were missing, and that it hurt like hell. Blood was gushing down my shirt to my pants. Everything was getting wet from the flowing blood. All the while the Japanese were having themselves a good laugh. I guess I was truly the butt of the joke.

While I was trying to straighten up, one of the guards hit me across the back with a piece of bamboo filled with dirt or gravel, and once again I fell to my knees. I got up as fast as I was able and stood at attention in front of the guards. I was left standing there for about an hour, then three guards came in and dragged me out to the parade ground, which had been the playground of the school.

Once outside, I saw they had another American spread-eagled on a large board. His head was about ten inches lower than his feet, and his arms and feet were outstretched and tied to the board. A Japanese soldier was holding the American’s nose closed while another soldier poured what I later found out was salt water from a tea kettle into the prisoner’s mouth. In a minute or two, the American started coughing and throwing up water. The Japanese were simulating a drowning situation while the victim was on land. Every few seconds an officer would lean over and ask the prisoner a question. If he did not receive an immediate answer he would order that more water be forced into the prisoner’s mouth.

I could not believe my eyes. Torture of this nature was something I had read about in history books. It was used during the medieval times, certainly not in the twentieth century. My God, I wondered, what is in store for me?

Walter Riley was 12 years old when he witnessed waterboarding. He saw it through a hole in the fence surrounding Santo Thomas University in Manila that was converted into a civilian internees’ camp by the Japanese military during World War II. More than 4,000
civilians from the United States and other Western countries, including many children, endured more than three years of internment under harsh conditions. Walter recently wrote to this author:

One day late in 1944, some of us kids were crawling through the weeds in the field between the gym and the front gate. The weeds were so tall we were able to crawl right up to the fence without being seen. I looked through a hole in the fence and saw a young Filipino man tied in a chair with a water hose in his mouth. I got to see the "water cure" up close. Somehow, I was able to keep from making any noise and quickly crawled away from the fence. I can still see the water coming out of the Filipino’s mouth when the soldier hit him in the stomach.

Some things are hard to forget.

On his second day in office, President Obama kept his campaign promise to undo many of the previous administration’s contentious policies on war on terror. He ordered that the prison at Guantanamo Bay be closed within a year and that detainees be treated in accordance with the Geneva Conventions. The United States, he pledged, would prosecute the ongoing struggle against violence and terrorism "in a manner that is consistent with our values and our ideals."

While heated discussion of waterboarding was taking place in the US and around the world, Japan remained largely silent. The mainstream media reported on the debate in the United States, but did not report that their country’s history of waterboarding was often mentioned outside of Japan in this discussion. But didn’t the world expect Japan to contribute to the discussion by providing insight based on reflection on the nation’s past behavior?
It is not easy for any nation to revisit its dark history. But the Japanese people should note that waterboarding by the Japanese was not the only example mentioned in this discussion. Americans recalled and criticized examples of waterboarding by US troops in the Philippines-American War of 1898-1902 and by US soldiers during the Vietnam War. The point of such discussions is not to condemn past behavior for its own sake, but to learn from the past so as to find appropriate ways for nations to protect their people from contemporary threats while hewing to their highest principles.10

Japanese Prime Minister Taro Aso, under vigorous questioning in the Diet, recently admitted that 300 Allied POWs (101 British prisoners, 197 Australians and two Dutch) had worked at his family coalmine during World War II.11 Japanese Foreign Minister Nakasone Hirofumi also made this statement in the Diet about the Geneva Convention which prohibits torture:

I believe it is very meaningful to join such major agreements of international humanitarian law from the standpoint of both promoting the development of international humanitarian law as well as gaining greater trust in Japan in the international community.12

There were nearly 130 POW camps throughout Japan during World War II with some 30,000 Allied POWs who did forced labor under appalling conditions in mines, docks, and factories owned by companies such as Mitsui and Mitsubishi. More than 3,000 POWs died on Japanese soil. The Prime Minister has not yet acknowledged that the POWs at Aso Mining were forced to work, much less that they were abused. But testimonies of former POWs who worked at Aso Mining paint a grim picture of the conditions under which they were placed.13

The waterboarding that Senator Kennedy mentioned during the debate on the Senate floor took place at Fukuoka POW camp # 3, not too far from Fukuoka POW camp #26 where POWs worked for Aso Mining. POWs held in Japan were forced laborers and they were subjected to abuse and even torture such as waterboarding. There were also tens of thousands of forced laborers from the Korean Peninsula and China who were often subjected to even harsher treatment than Allied POWs.

Only after the Japanese government acknowledges these historical facts, and both government and corporations take steps to apologize and solve the issues of compensation, will the statement by Foreign Minister Nakasone on the Geneva Convention become convincing.

It is also essential for the Japanese business community to make a clean break from its World War II history of using forced laborers.14 Their German counterpart has already set an example. The international community expects no less from Japan.15

Although their memories of waterboarding are painful, some individuals are making efforts to make sense out of their experience and to come to terms with it. Former POW Eric Lomax forgave Nagase Takashi, who was the interpreter while he was waterboarded. He also met with Komai Osamu, the son of the Japanese officer who ordered the torture of Lomax and who was executed after the war as a war criminal. When Komai traveled to England and apologized for his father’s action, Lomax thanked him for traveling far to meet
him and said, “It is extremely rare for a victim of war like myself to be able to receive this kind of guest. I am very happy that you came.”

Lester Tenney visited Japan in spring 2008 and shared his POW experience with many young people there. He also asked the Japanese government and companies to acknowledge their abuse of POWs during World War II, apologize for it, and offer a reconciliation project such as inviting former POWs and their families to Japan.

This year marks the 60th anniversary of the last revision of the Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War. It is also the United Nation's Year of International Reconciliation. It is hoped that it will be a year for Japan to find a moral voice. Japan can do so by facing the past squarely, achieving reconciliation with former victims, and winning the trust of the international community.

Kinue Tokudome is Executive Director of the US-Japan Dialogue on POWs.

The following recent related texts explore issues of war crimes, atrocities, historical memory, apology and compensation, offering Japanese and American archival documentation and comparative perspectives on the legal and humanitarian issues at stake.

Notes

1 Holder video [here](#).

2 Details of the development of the Bush administration’s policy on waterboarding are [here](#).

4 Congressional Record, Senate, November 8, 2007, p.S. 14166.

5 “McCain Looks Ahead,” CBS 60 Minutes, March 9, 2008. McCain’s live comments on waterboarding are here.

6 Washington Post “Waterboarding Used to Be a Crime”

7 Here


9 Lester I. Tenney, My Hitch in Hell (Washington: Brassey’s, 1995), pp. 87-88.

10 See for example, “Water Cure: Debating torture and counterinsurgency- a century ago” by Paul Kramer, New Yorker, February 25, 2008. Kramer chronicled the debate on American soldiers’ torturing Filipinos with water during the Philippines-American War. He concluded that although some Americans at that time were outraged by the “cruelty” and “barbarities” exhibited by US soldiers, in the end the nation as a whole chose not to deal with it squarely. Kramer’s thoughts on the relevance of this century old debate on “water cure” to today’s situation can be found at Japan Focus

11 For Prime Minister Aso’s admission see Japanese PM Taro Aso’s family business used British PoWs. Prime Minister Aso also admitted that there were Korean workers at Aso Mining during the Upper House plenary session on Jan. 7, 2009.

12 Foreign Minister Nakasone Hirofumi before the Upper House Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defense, Dec. 18, 2008.

13 Former Australian POW Arthur Gigger who was forced to work at Aso Mining said that food and clothes were inadequate. (See “Proof of POW Forced Labor for Japan’s Foreign Minister: The Aso Mines” by William Underwood.) Another former POW Joe Coombs recently told the Radio Australia about the condition of the Aso Mining, “The coal mines were the worst of the lot, I’m sure the mines that we were working in were old mines that had been re-opened. And the coal that we were taking out should have been left there to hold the mine together and we had several major falls while we were working there.”


15 See Michael Bazyler’s forthcoming article at Japan Focus for discussion of many issues relevant to the present article.
Japan’s Participation in the American Led-Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq

What do Afghan citizens think of Japan’s presence in Afghanistan? C. Douglas Lummis introduces the voices of Afghani members of Afghan Peace Volunteers (APV), who fear that their country will endure “never-ending U.S. military occupation against the will of the people,” that is, become “An Afghan Okinawa.” The peace volunteers question the meaning of “enduring”—as in “Operation Enduring Freedom,” asking if this really means that Americans will “endure,” meaning that they keep their presence there in the form of U.S. bases. They point to the example of Okinawa, where U.S. bases established in 1945 “endure” to this day despite the opposition of essentially all Okinawans.

An Afghan Okinawa
C. Douglas Lummis with Afghan Peace Volunteers
May 26, 2012
http://apjjf.org/2012/10/22/C.-Douglas-Lummis/3758/article.html

A Japanese translation of the Afghan Peace Volunteers text is available here.

Reading this beautifully written appeal from the Afghan Peace Volunteers is like hearing, amid the drums and trumpets of war, the delicate sound of a flute. What is heartbreaking about the Afghan struggle is that none of the main contenders we hear about – the Karzai government, the U.S. military, NATO, the Taliban, al Qaeda – seems capable of hearing that sound. An eye for an eye, said Gandhi, and the whole world goes blind. A bomb for a bomb, it could be added, and the world goes deaf as well – in particular, deaf to the sound of peace. It is heartening, and a source of hope, to hear that sound coming from Afghanistan, despite everything.

As one who lives in Okinawa, I find it fascinating that these young people (they seem to be a group mostly of college students) have chosen Okinawa as exemplifying the situation they want to avoid. The differences are great, but on the point they want to emphasize – never-ending U.S. military occupation against the will of the people – the comparison is fair enough. It is sad to learn that Okinawa’s situation has become so notorious as to serve as a negative example to the long-suffering people of Afghanistan. On the other hand, it is encouraging to remember that it is because of the stubborn protest and resistance of the Okinawan people that their situation has become known around the world. And the Peace Volunteers are right: it indeed was Okinawan resistance to the joint U.S.-Japanese government plan to build a new base on Okinawa that cost Japanese Prime Minister Hatoyama his job. And – watch carefully – Okinawan resistance may bring down the present P.M. as well. The sound of the flute of peace may be soft, but it can generate real power.

So the Peace Volunteers are also right in hinting that, rather than the drums and trumpets of war, it might be the music of peace that brings down the Karzai government and drives the U.S. military from their country. Their manifesto comes at a time when NATO and the U.S. trumpet their announcement of the withdrawal of NATO combat forces in 2014 while continuing to plan for permanent occupation of a nation that they have left in ruins. I hope that our printing their appeal in the Asia-Pacific Journal makes a small contribution toward that end.

C. Douglas Lummis
There will be no U.S. troop withdrawal in 2014
We are ordinary Afghans wishing for peace, and we have eyes and ears and feelings of love and despair, so please read on.

*The Washington Post*, in reporting the recent signing of the "U.S. Afghan Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement", stated that "U.S. trainers and Special Operations troops that remain beyond 2014 will live on Afghan bases.” U.S. citizens should understand that there will not be a complete withdrawal of U.S. troops in 2014, whether Obama or Romney wins. As Steve Chapman of the *Chicago Tribune* wrote in ‘Every President is a war President’, "There is no Democratic or Republican Party. There is only the war party."

It is the same in Afghanistan.

**Building a global guns-and-graves culture?**
Sadly, all of the world’s Presidents and Prime Ministers today are Commander-in-CEOs that wage geopolitical and economic wars against their own and other people, leveraging hard, militarized money and power.

People in many places are protesting to change this status quo, no longer content with political lies at the people’s expense. Could this be the beautiful birth of our Human Spring? We've always known the flowering of that spring will take time.

Andrew Exum, a senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security, criticized Obama for implying that the war was winding down. "I think it is misleading to say we are winding down the war," Exum said. "The war does not stop and start according to our desires, and it will not stop for the Afghans. It will also not stop for the many U.S. special operations forces that will continue to fight by, with, and through the Afghans."

In the fortified but chronically battle-ravaged capital city of Kabul, the only city in Afghanistan where, backed by the U.S. military, Hamid Karzai actually governs, 16-year-old Ali was disappointed that a seemingly fearful Obama, arriving by night, sneaked into the unlit city with its overflowing sewage and vanishing water table to sign the "Enduring Strategic Partnership" agreement. Ali awoke that May 1st morning and got news of the deal. "What?" he asked. “They couldn't even honorably face the people they seek to rule!"

In the *Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement*, under point six of Section III which is entitled *Advanced Long-Term Security*, we read that “Afghanistan shall provide U.S. personnel continued access to and use of Afghan facilities through 2014, and beyond as may be agreed in the Bilateral Security Agreement, for the purposes of combating al-Qaeda and its affiliates, training the Afghan Security Forces and other
mutually determined missions to advance shared security interests."

Instead of plans to withdraw all U.S. troops, the '....continued access to and use of Afghan facilities through 2014, and beyond...' are plans to establish an 'Afghan Okinawa'.

**Human meaning vs. cynical semantics**
The Obama administration has cleverly assuaged concerns inside the U.S. with the *nominally* factual claim that the U.S. seeks 'no permanent military bases in Afghanistan'.

This Orwellian play with words had successfully enabled President Obama to declare in a 32-page report entitled *United States Activities in Libya* that the Libya fight is not a war', but just 'kinetic military actions,” thus allowing Obama to continue the Libyan intervention beyond 60 days without the congressional approval required by the U.S. Constitution and the *War Powers Resolution* of 1973.

'No Libya war'? 'No permanent military base in Afghanistan'?
The reality is that the U.S. bases will be "Afghan" bases, but housing as many as 20,000 U.S."trainers" and Special Ops forces, actually numbering more than the U.S. troops currently stationed at the controversial Futenma airbase in Okinawa, Japan, and double the number that will remain there after the troop withdrawal recently (and heatedly) negotiated with Japan.

Karzai should note how keeping U.S. troops at the Japanese Okinawa base has become so socially and politically unacceptable.

President Karzai is naturally concerned about his legacy and should therefore consider the possibility that even those Afghans who are now happy with U.S. military dollars will later demand an end to the 'Afghan Okinawa' just as the dignified Japanese have. To prevent a fall from grace in the history books, Karzai should also read how Japanese PM Yukio Hatoyama had to resign over the Okinawa row, just 8 months after he had come into power.

An Afghan opposition party, the National United Front, has already stated that the Strategic Partnership Agreement will be condemned by Afghanistan's present and future generations.

The majority of U.S. citizens who want the war in Afghanistan to end will be disappointed that there won’t be a complete withdrawal of U.S. troops in 2014 after all.

There will not be a complete U.S. troop withdrawal in 2014.

Not all U.S. troops will withdraw in 2014.

There were never plans to withdraw all U.S. troops in 2014.

‘Withdrawal of U.S. troops in 2014’ is Obama's ‘war of perceptions’.

In how many ways need we say this for our U.S. friends, so that they can ask for their own public opinion against the Afghan war to be democratically considered?
Civility and brutality

"We also want a functioning economy for everyone, decent livelihoods in a secure environment so that we can study, work and return home safely every day. U.S. Special Ops and drones cannot do that for us," says Shams, an Afghan Peace Volunteer.

Ordinary Afghans, like ordinary Americans, want the Afghan war to end.

But there are differences which should be openly addressed as to how we want the Afghan war to end.

Whereas both ordinary Americans and Afghans appreciate civility, their governments have become so militarized that they offer no civil options.

Using U.S. Special Ops and drones is a military option, an option amply proven over the Afghan centuries to have failed. It is not a civil option.

"I would rather have one unarmed American humanitarian teacher or worker in my village than a thousand armed Taliban or American soldiers," says Abdulhai. “I can eat bread, I can’t eat bullets. I need ways to earn a living, not ways to kill a man."

To Abdulhai, bread, education and work is defense, genuine civil defense.

There are no physical ‘terrorist havens’ in Afghanistan, Pakistan or anywhere else in the world that U.S. Special Ops forces can annihilate to ‘finish the job’ as Obama has commanded them.

The ‘terrorist’ approach here is not only the military approach adopted by Al Qaeda and its constantly sprouting affiliates, but clearly also the military approach adopted by the U.S. government in its foreign policy aim of achieving global ‘full spectrum dominance’, as described in the ‘Joint Vision 2020’ blue print of the U.S. Department of Defense.

Arriving superpower China, like the departed powers of Britain and Russia and the U.S. superpower so slow in departing, can be expected to adopt the same approach of hard, brutal force.

All of them, whether amoral philosophers, Muslim ‘jihadis’ or Augustinian ‘crusaders’, have done little but disappoint and then kill the Afghan people, just as their traditional tactics have betrayed and slaughtered so much of the human race.

Some may applaud Obama’s midnight approval of an Afghan Okinawa, but please respect our humanity when we say that we don’t. We detest the epaulettes, the weapons, the salutes, the hubris, the stealth and the Orwellian words in English and Dari that violate our yearning for truth.

From the pre-dawn darkness of Obama’s night swoop through Kabul (all to seal a ‘new day’ of perpetual war in South Asia) to the subsequent Taliban attacks on Green Village in which children on the way to school were killed, we hope you’ll hear this voice.
This voice is in you too, and it is awakening.
‘Help us with civil dignities.

Don’t applaud an Afghan Okinawa.

Withdraw your Special brutalities.

Bring ALL your troops home.’

Who We Are

We are Afghan college students and youth who started this journey in 2008.

The Afghan Peace Volunteers are a grassroots group of ordinary, multi-ethnic Afghans seeking a life of non-violence, the unity of all people, equality, and self-reliance. We seek non-military solutions for Afghanistan and do not work for the benefit of any political group or religion.

We envision Afghans from all ethnic groups uniting for a non-violent movement towards a peaceful life.

C. Douglas Lummis, a former US Marine stationed on Okinawa and a present resident of Okinawa, is the author of Radical Democracy and other books in Japanese and English.
As noted above, Japanese officials have used the war to momentum toward ending its postwar Constitutional prohibition against offensive warfare. Richard Tanter’s “The Maritime Self-Defense Force Mission in the Indian Ocean: Afghanistan, NATO and Japan’s Political Impasse,” shows how this has occurred through “mission creep.” Just as the J-MSDF (maritime self-defense forces) were unwinding their mission in the Indian Ocean, the government took steps to broaden their mission to protect sea lanes to the Middle East and strengthen Japan’s partnership with NATO. Moreover, in 2008, Japan even considered sending ground troops to Afghanistan and did send SDF officers there to plan Japan’s participation in the UN’s International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) through actions such as airlifting supplies, building roads and performing other construction activities. However, due both to escalating violence there and fierce opposition in Japan, this plan was canceled. Mission creep continued, however, when the original Indian Ocean mission acquired a new role of combatting piracy on the high seas, using a definition that included combatting the anti-whaling activities of environmental groups such as the Sea Shepard and Greenpeace.

The Maritime Self-Defense Force Mission in the Indian Ocean: Afghanistan, NATO and Japan’s Political Impasse
Richard Tanter
September 1, 2008
http://apjjf.org/-Richard-Tanter/2868/article.html

[Editors’ note: The final version of this article was received just prior to the announcement of Fukuda Yasuo’s resignation as Prime Minister. Tanter comments: Fukuda’s resignation will change nothing in the underlying domestic and alliance strains that lead to his decision to resign. The next Liberal Democratic Party leader, whether Aso Taro, Koke Yuri, or someone else, will face the same limitations, and the same demands on military policy, but with even more diminished political resources and room for manoeuvre. If the LDP moves to a general election following the selection of a new Prime Minister, the Democratic Party of Japan would be under severe pressure, on the one hand, from domestic sources to make good on its criticism of the Indian Ocean deployment, and on the other, from the United States, to recognize US understandings of Japan’s global responsibilities – and maintain the deployment - possibly as the price of power.]

Military policy is rarely an issue that wins or loses Japanese elections. Yet, for the second time in little over a year the question of whether to extend Japan’s commitment to the American-led war in Afghanistan may well decide the fate of the Japanese cabinet. A year after Prime Minister Abe Shinzo’s failure to pass legislation extending the Maritime Self Defence Force’s mid-ocean refuelling operations in the Indian Ocean led to his resignation, his successor, Fukuda Yasuo, is assailed by plunging personal unpopularity, rising public opposition to the Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) deployment, ongoing scandals in the Defense Ministry, a wavering coalition partner, and by pressures to deepen Japan’s commitment to the war in Afghanistan from both his own nationalist party rivals and by the United States.2 This latest episode of Japan’s ongoing political crisis has its roots in both
the unresolved structural blockages of Japanese politics, with their accompanying
democratic deficits, and the contradictions of Japan’s position within the United States
alliance system at a time of war. The resulting conjuncture pulls in opposite directions: at a
time when the existing MSDF deployment is under political strain, the government has
sought to deepen the commitment to the war in Afghanistan, expand the MSDF mission to
protection of sealanes to the Middle East, and link Japan into a global military partnership
with NATO.

The extension of the Indian Ocean mission beyond January 2009

During an extraordinary Diet session beginning in September, the government will attempt
to extend the MSDF mission by passing an extension of the Replenishment Support Special
Measures Law through both houses. The bill will likely fail in the Democratic Party of
Japan-controlled upper house, leaving Mr Fukuda the option of over-riding an upper house
rejection by passing the legislation through the lower house for a second time with a two-
thirds majority. There are, however, at least five problems with that scenario for Mr
Fukuda – his coalition partners, his own abysmal popularity and his party rivals, the
Japanese constitution, a dysfunctional Defense Ministry, and his country’s principal ally.

The first problem for Mr Fukuda is that the Liberal Democratic Party’s coalition partner,
the Buddhist-aligned New Komeito is under pressure from its pacifist-leaning Soka Gakkai
parent to repudiate the Indian Ocean deployment. While New Komeito has managed to
ignore such concerns during its long coalition with the ruling party as they presided over
Japan’s remilitarisation, there is some chance this time that the prospect of serious
electoral defeat under Fukuda’s leadership is concentrating their minds on the issue, if not
the principle.

Fukuda’s second problem is himself. In May, public support for his cabinet bottomed out at
20% according to a Nikkei poll, before bouncing back to 38% following a cabinet reshuffle
in early August widely thought to be his last throw of the dice. The reshuffle brought his
most important party rival, nationalist former foreign minister Aso Taro, back into the LDP
front rank as Secretary-General of the party. At 20%, Aso has the highest rating for the
position of next prime minister. Fukuda’s own rating for an extension as prime minister has
shuffled between 4 and 8% in recent months. For Fukuda’s colleagues, and most likely, for
the United States - the issue of the Indian Ocean mission extension is the key test for
assessing Fukuda’s future:

“The extraordinary session would be pointless if we can’t pass the refuelling bill,” an LDP
official says. "If he becomes unable to even convene a Diet session, at that point the Fukuda
cabinet will hit a dead end."

The third difficulty is one of time and timing. Due to New Komeito’s hesitations and the
cabinet reshuffle, the timing of the extraordinary Diet session was pushed back from early
August to late September. Under Article 59 of the Japanese Constitution, a bill cannot be
reintroduced into the House of Representatives until 60 days after the House of Councillors
has failed to take final action on it.
According to the Nikkei 5,

After passage of the budget, the LDP intends to pass a bill to extend the temporary law to extend Japan's refuelling mission after having it clear the lower house around Oct. 20, as the lower chamber will be able to hold a second vote after 60 days -- around Dec. 20 -- even if the opposition parties, which control the upper chamber, refuse to vote on it.

However, the Nikkei also reported at the same time that

The New Komeito party has said that the duration of the extraordinary session should not be decided based on the premise that the ruling bloc will resort to a second vote in the House of Representatives to pass an envisioned bill to extend Japan's antiterrorism refuelling mission in the Indian Ocean.

As a result, whatever else transpires, the Fukuda administration will face serious difficulties in passing the bill to extend the MSDF mission through the lower house a second time with a two-thirds majority in time to continue the MSDF deployment before its current authorisation expires on January 30, 2009.

The fourth problem is the Ministry of Defense and its ministerial and bureaucratic heads, which it keeps losing. The undistinguished current Minister, Hayashi Yoshimasa, is the fifth in less than two years. Of his predecessors - Kyuma Fumio, Koike Yuriko, Komura Masahiko, and Ishiba Shigeru - only Ishiba remained in the position for more than half a year. A 2007 bribery scandal led to the arrest of the most senior defense bureaucrat and the closure of the corrupt Defense Facilities Administration Agency. In March 2008, vice-ministers and many other bureaucrats were censured and the commander of the MSDF dismissed after further scandals and two collisions between MSDF vessels and civilian craft.6 The continuing turmoil and aroma of scandal at the ministry will reinforce parliamentary doubts about an extension of the MSDF mission.

Fukuda's final problem is the United States. While Thomas Schieffer, the bellicose US ambassador to Japan, was pleased with Fukuda's “crash through” resolution of the MSDF deployment crisis in January, he has been publicly harassing the Fukuda administration over what he views as its foot-dragging on both defense spending in general and an inadequate recognition of its responsibilities in Afghanistan: “We want contributions in other forms, not just refuelling.” 7 Schieffer has been an extraordinarily outspoken ambassador, pushing the government and publicly hectoring the opposition. This may reinforce the concerns of those anxious about offending the dominant ally, but equally, will rub many concerned about Japanese autonomy the wrong way.

**The 2008 MSDF deployment**

The MSDF was first dispatched to the Indian Ocean in support of coalition operations
against international terrorism in Afghanistan and the surrounding region in November 2001.\textsuperscript{8} After the expiry in November 2007 of the original legislation authorising the MSDF mission, the Replenishment Support Special Measures Law in January 2008 passed the lower house for the second time on January 11, 2008, in order to open the way to “contributions to efforts by the international community for the prevention and eradication of international terrorism.”\textsuperscript{9}

\textbf{MSDF crew watch refuelling of a Pakistani ship in the Indian Ocean on October 29, 2007}

Indicative of the LDP’s declining parliamentary capacities, the activities authorised by the Replenishment Support Special Measures Law were much narrower in scope than under its predecessor, the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law. Under the new law, the MSDF was only authorised to engage in refuelling and water supply, with the previous law’s search and rescue and relief operations authorisations having been removed.\textsuperscript{10}

After a four month hiatus as a result of the political crisis, the 13,500 ton fleet support vessel Oumi, accompanied by the destroyer Murasame, resumed MSDF refuelling of allied vessels on February 21. These two ships made up the first rotation dispatched in late January,\textsuperscript{11} with subsequent rotations dispatched in April and July.\textsuperscript{12}

In June 2008 the Ministry of Defense released a map providing limited details of the areas of the MSDF refuelling operations.\textsuperscript{13} Three operational areas covering the greater part of the western Indian Ocean were indicated:

- southern Arabian Sea, off the coast of Oman and Yemen
- Gulf of Aden, off the coast of Yemen
- Gulf of Oman, off the coasts of Oman, Pakistan and Iran.
Towards new Self Defense Force missions

With the re-authorisation of the MSDF mission, albeit somewhat constrained compared to its predecessor, accomplished by parliamentary force majeure in January, the government turned to the longer-term question of expanding the country’s military involvement in Afghanistan and the Middle East. Two options emerged: committing ground and air elements of the SDF to the war in Afghanistan proper; and, when that possibility appeared unlikely to succeed, deploying MSDF destroyers and surveillance aircraft to protect Japanese tankers from pirate attacks on the route from Middle Eastern oil terminals.
Japan’s Participation in the American Led-Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq

On May 30, the Chief Cabinet Secretary said that the government was seeking ways of both maintaining the MSDF Indian Ocean mission and widening its military involvement in Afghanistan. The following day, June 1, the Prime Minister told reporters that the government was considering sending ground troops to Afghanistan:

"If conditions on the (Afghan) ground allow, Japan can offer its cooperation in activities on the ground. I’m always thinking of that possibility. My attitude is that we should do what we can do."

In preparation for this expansion, the government sent a team of Foreign and Defense Ministry officials, accompanied by Self Defence Force officers to Afghanistan to plan an SDF mission to Afghanistan under International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) auspices. According to newspaper reports, possible missions included airlifting of supplies with CH-47 helicopters and CH-130 transports, road-building, and other construction activities. It was assumed that the government would once again attempt to justify an expanded SDF commitment on the ground in Afghanistan as an anti-terrorism deployment to avoid legal restrictions on collective defense.

However, the combat reality of the widening war, the spectre of coalition defeat, and increased Japanese public resistance to an expanded commitment combined to thwart these plans. A month later, a senior LDP official announced the abandonment of the plan, at least for the moment, since “there is no strong support by the people”, while the junior coalition partner, New Komeito, expressed deep reservations.

Piracy

Yet while attempts to deploy SDF ground and air elements to Afghanistan were put to one side, a widely reported spate of pirate attacks on Japanese shipping in the Middle East and Southeast Asia was used as a rationale for two quite different Indian Ocean missions: using
MSDF destroyers and surveillance aircraft to escort Japanese tankers from the Middle East to Japan, and deploying MSDF destroyers and surveillance aircraft to the Horn of Africa to participate in coalition anti-piracy activities.

The idea of an MSDF mission to protect sea-lanes in the Middle East and Southeast Asia – and that of sea lines of communication (SLOCs) in general - has been a long-running theme of Japanese post-war defense debate.\textsuperscript{17} The Ministry of Defense policy research arm, the National Institute of Defense Studies (NIDS), has advocated both closer cooperation with littoral states and the development of a multilateral Ocean Peace-Keeping force (OPK). In fact, both the MSDF and the substantial armed Japan Coast Guard have developed a regular presence at both ends of the Straits of Malacca through a year-round cycle of training and cooperation with India, Singapore and Malaysia in particular.\textsuperscript{18}

There were ten reported significant piracy incidents involving Japanese ships in 2007.\textsuperscript{19} In the past year attacks on major Japanese vessels in the Gulf of Aden in particular have increased in number and severity, with large commercial Japanese ships apparently targeted for ransom and theft possibilities. Although there are important variations in what is counted as a piracy incident, there is little doubt that major vessels steaming off the Somali and Yemeni coast face quite real threats of attack, hijacking, and murder.\textsuperscript{20} In October 2007, the 11,000 tonne Japanese chemical tanker Golden Nori was hijacked for ransom.\textsuperscript{21} In April 2008, the 150,000 tonne Nippon Yusen tanker Takayama was attacked by what the Japanese government described as “a small pirate ship with weapons like rocket launchers” in international waters some 440 kilometres east of Aden.\textsuperscript{22} In its weekly maritime safety report the US National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency summarized the attack on the Takayama as follows:

“VLCC [Very Large Crude Carrier] tanker (TAKAYAMA) fired upon 21 Apr 08 at 0110 UTC (reported by IMB), 0230 UTC (reported by operator), while underway in position 13:00N-049:07E, approximately 240NM east of Port of Aden, Yemen. Five speedboats chased and opened fire at the vessel, in ballast, proceeding to Yanbo, Saudi Arabia. The vessel increased its speed and enforced anti-piracy preventative measures. A rocket was shot at the vessel, damaging its hull. Crewmembers on board have confirmed the existence of a 20-millimeter hole on the port side near the stern of the ship. The master sent out a radio distress call and was received by the German warship (EMDEN) who headed straight to the scene with a helicopter to intercept the pirates. By the time the helicopter arrived, the pirates had fled in their speedboats. Yemeni coast guard forces also claimed a role in helping.”\textsuperscript{23}

For the Japanese security establishment, these attacks amounted to a major security threat justifying a military response. Minister of Defense Hayashi Yoshimasa quoted the piracy threat to Japanese oil tankers as something that is included in “the fight against terror”, and said that his staff was considering whether the extension of the Replenishment Support Special Measures Law should include measures such as destroyer escorts for Japanese tankers in areas of danger should be proposed as a new element in the bill.\textsuperscript{24} Aso Taro proposed having MSDF destroyers escort tankers carrying oil from the Middle East to Japan
Japan’s Participation in the American Led-Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq

– some 90 of which are at sea at any one time plying the route to regional oil terminals.\(^{25}\) The Yomiuri and LDP supporters of the proposal pointed out the legal limitations on both Japan Coast Guard and MSDF actions to support vessels under criminal attack, or even for the MSDF to escort non-Japanese-registered vessels. The Yomiuri and LDP supporters of the proposal pointed out that such legislation could overcome the longstanding domestic legal limitations on both Japan Coast Guard and MSDF actions to support vessels under criminal attack, or even for the MSDF to escort non-Japanese-registered vessels.\(^{26}\)

Supporters of the proposal pointed to Security Council Resolution 1816 (2008), passed unanimously on 2 June with the acquiescence of the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia, under which, for the following six months, member states may

(a) Enter the territorial waters of Somalia for the purpose of repressing acts of piracy and armed robbery at sea, in a manner consistent with such action permitted on the high seas with respect to piracy under relevant international law; and

(b) Use, within the territorial waters of Somalia, in a manner consistent with action permitted on the high seas with respect to piracy under relevant international law, all necessary means to repress acts of piracy and armed robbery;

Following on from the Security Council resolution, the United States Naval Central Command established a Maritime Security Patrol Area in the Gulf of Aden in mid-August. The MSPA is patrolled by ships and aircraft from the Djibouti-based multinational coalition Combined Task Force 150 (CTF-150).\(^{27}\)
Operations by Combined Task Force 150 (CTF-150, a multinational coalition naval force headquartered at Djibouti since 2002) have helped quell terrorist activity in the Red and Arabian Seas. The CTF-150 flotilla patrols from the Red Sea to the Gulf of Oman and comprises 14-15 vessels. A native Arab speaker accompanies CTF-150 boarding teams to talk with boat crews before intelligence is passed to the US Navy regional command center in Bahrain.28

Presumably, to be at all effective these MSDF elements would be made part of CTF-150. The Yomiuri reported that the MSDF Staff Office had begun preparations for legislative change on the basis of dispatching two more destroyers to the Indian Ocean and sending two or more of its 110 MSDF P-3C surveillance and reconnaissance aircraft to be based in Djibouti or Aden, together with up to 200 support personnel.29

However, while the threat to shipping from pirates off Somalia and Yemen is serious and urgent both for those aboard ships passing through the region and their owners and insurers, there are doubts about whether the attacks should be regard as a serious military threat or just an irritant – especially given the small number of attacks compared with the huge volume of traffic. In turn, it is doubtful whether a purely – or even largely – military response is either appropriate or effective. Certainly multilateral cooperation for protection of ships and their crews and cargoes is a key step, especially in a region where the capacity of littoral states to regulate their waters is limited, to say the least. But as the Director of the International Maritime Bureau, Pottengal Mukundan, put it:

“Whilst the intervention of coalition navies has helped in isolated cases, it is by no means a long-term solution. It is clear that the threat or presence of coalition navies has done little to stem the tide of attacks in this region.”30

This perhaps surprising conclusion by a representative of the global shipping industry is in part due to doubt that military or police actions will address what are now reasonably well-understood root causes of the rise of piracy – both in the form of sophisticated criminal groups operating in transnational networks and more simple opportunistic “sea-robbers”. Carolin Liss argues that in the Southeast Asian case the causes of the sudden eruption of attacks from both must shape the policy response:

Lax maritime rules and regulations, poverty, the impact of ecological degradation and overfishing, and the existence of organised crime groups and radical politically motivated organisations in the region are conducive to the occurrence of pirate attacks in Southeast Asia and shape the nature of such attacks. In order to be successful, responses to piracy have to address most, if not all, of these problems and issues. Combating piracy is consequently a difficult and complex task, requiring more than the patrolling of piracy-prone waters.31

Each of these factors Liss presents as shaping the Southeast Asian piracy environment are
also present in the Horn of Africa with a vengeance, compounded by the political chaos of the region, especially in Somalia itself. The proposed Japanese response follows the path that, as Liss argues, has not been successful elsewhere.

More than just continuous military force and/or operations by law enforcement agencies are needed to successfully combat organised crime and to ‘pacify’ and integrate areas in which separatists, guerrillas, or terrorists operate. In fact, it is crucial to address the root causes of such violence, which include poverty, the marginalisation of certain geographic areas or ethnic groups, and government efforts in the form of military violence that exacerbate, rather than solve, existing problems and tensions.\(^{32}\)

In such circumstances, not only would piracy appear to be a pretext for attempting to implement long-running plans to extend the mission of the MSDF and the Japan Coast Guard, but it would almost certainly result in an ineffective policy, especially given the state-destroying consequences of US policy towards Somalia.

**Whaling protest as piracy?**

Moreover, the suspicion that reports of piracy may be providing a much longed for pretext for MSDF mission creep are confirmed by another aspect of the planned legislative changes. According to newspaper reports on Japanese government intentions in proposing such “anti-piracy legislation”, it is clear that targets other than sophisticated armed criminal gangs in the Horn of Africa are also on the mind of the Japanese government. The Yomiuri reported that the government’s definition of actions to be considered criminal under the extension of the Replenishment Support Special Measures Law will at least in part target environmental activist groups such as Sea Shepherd or Greenpeace that have interfered with Japanese “scientific” whaling in the Antarctic:

The envisaged legislation, however, likely will enable authorities to arrest the captain of a vessel concerned, even if those who have carried out illegal activities are not identified.\(^{33}\)

This came several days after Chief Cabinet Secretary Machimura Nobutaka announced that Japanese prosecutors will seek international arrest warrants through Interpol for three Sea Shepherd members for their activities against Japanese whaling in the Southern Ocean in 2007.\(^{34}\)
In fact, the proposed anti-piracy rationale for an extended MSDF mission is a matter of policy on the run, aimed less at contributing to a solution to a serious international criminal problem in which Japan certainly has an interest than at diverting public opinion increasingly hostile to the Indian Ocean mission, keeping open the door to future participation in the ground war in Afghanistan, and along the way providing a domestic legal basis for criminalizing opposition to scientific whaling in international waters. The Yomiuri strongly supported the tanker escort proposal, but even it described the plan as “nothing more than a makeshift measure that is a product of domestic political circumstances.”

Afghanistan, NATO and deepening militarisation of foreign policy

There is however, a wider and more serious context to the attempts to extend and widen the SDF mission in the Indian Ocean and Afghanistan. The American-led war in Afghanistan – or as it is more correctly termed by the most authoritative strategic analyst of the war, Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the Afghanistan-Pakistan War36 – has reached a near-terminal point. Whoever wins the US presidential election, US troops will be shifted from Iraq to the Afghanistan theater, but with neither a serious chance of reversing the collapse of support for the Karzai government in Kabul nor limiting the expansion of the war into Pakistan.

Apart from applying pressure on allied countries to increase and deepen their military commitments in Afghanistan, the United States has come to emphasize the role of NATO in the Afghanistan conflict – though somewhat belatedly. Two awkwardly coordinated coalition military-political deployments are in place in Afghanistan. US forces have been engaged in “Operation Enduring Freedom” since November 2001, and are coordinated primarily through US Central command. At the same time, the International Security Assistance Force, coordinated by NATO, has had responsibility for security in much of the country since 2006. This assumption of responsibility for security in most of Afghanistan by NATO has a two-fold purpose: relieving the US burden, and providing a rationale for
NATO after the end of the Cold War.

Countries like Japan, Korea, Australia and New Zealand have been targeted by NATO as “Contact Countries” with which it intends to build partnership arrangements. New Zealand, Australia and Korea all have (or have had) substantial troop deployments in Afghanistan under ISAF/NATO auspices. A key goal of both US and Japanese government supporters of deeper Japanese militarisation of foreign policy is to link Japan in a close partnership with NATO, and thereby to provide one arm of an incipient global military alliance. “High-level policy dialogues” under former Prime Minister Abe Shinzo and continuing under Mr Fukuda have led to the appointment of a Japanese liaison officer to the Office of the NATO Senior Civilian Representative in Kabul, an agreement for civil aid cooperation with NATO/ISAF Provincial Reconstruction Teams, and SDF/MOD participation in NATO exercises and dialogues.

Even without Ground Self Defense Force deployments to Afghanistan, for NATO and the United States, these small institutional moves amount to substantial progress in the project of globalising NATO and rescuing the organisation from the threat of widely perceived anachronism after the Cold War. Yet with the real possibility of coalition defeat in Afghanistan, US pressure on the Fukuda administration and its successors to “shoulder its responsibilities” and clear away political and legal obstacles to full participation in the widening war will be unrelenting. The twin sources of Japanese remilitarisation in the Heisei era – US pressure and the preferences of those streams of elite Japanese political and bureaucratic opinion favouring nationalist and great power solutions to foreign policy problems – remain ascendant, despite occasional blockages. One of those blockages has led to the need to try to redefine the Indian Ocean MSDF mission in terms of an anti-piracy initiative. As a contribution to solving the problem of piracy in Somalian waters, this is clearly a rushed, ill-conceived policy, the real aims of which are to find new justifications for continuing the expansion of the most advanced naval force in Northeast Asia, and along the way, increasing the resources of the nationalist whaling agenda. Both are likely to be highly counter-productive. Both are deeply anachronistic responses to the real threats faced by Japan.

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Notes

1 The author thanks Arabella Imhoff and Mark Selden for a close reading of an earlier version of this paper.


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8 Richard Tanter, Japan’s Indian Ocean Naval Deployment: Blue water militarization in a “normal country”, *Japan Focus*, 541, 29 March 2006.
9 “The previous Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law was enacted in November 2005. The period of the law was limited to two years at the time of its enactment, and after this period had been extended three times (October 2003: extended by two years: October 2005: extended by one year; October 2006: extended by one year), the law became invalid on November 1, 2007.” *The Fight against Terrorism: Self-Defense Force Activities*, Ministry of Defense, June 2008.
10 “The purpose of the Law is to continue active contributions to efforts by the international community for the prevention and eradication of international terrorism, and thereby contribute to ensuring peace and security of the international community including Japan, through activities related to the provision of supplies and services of the Self-Defense Forces of Japan (limited to activities that provide fuel for vessels or rotary wing aircraft carried on vessels and water) to vessels of the armed forces or other similar entities of foreign countries which are engaged in duties related to activities that contribute to the achievement of the purposes of the Charter of the United Nations by making efforts to eradicate the threat caused by the terrorist attacks in the United States of America on September 11, 2001, and to take such necessary measures as the inspection and verification of vessels sailing the Indian Ocean with a view to interdicting and deterring the movements of terrorists, weapons or other material under international cooperation (hereinafter referred to as “counter-terrorism maritime interdiction activities”), in order to assist in the smooth and effective implementation of counterterrorism maritime interdiction activities. *Japanese Note*: Exchange of Notes concerning Supplies and Services Contributed to the Armed Forces or Other Similar Entities of New Zealand, under the Replenishment Support Special Measures Law (April 2008), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan.
12 For rotation details see 自衛隊インド洋派遣、『ウィキペディア（Wikipedia）』 [accessed 30 August 2008]
14 Japan may send troops to Afghanistan: PM, *AFP*, 1 June 2008.
15 Team off to assess SDF Afghan role, Kyodo *Japan Times*, June 10, 2008.
16 Japan Forgoes Sending SDF To Afghanistan For Worsening Security, *NikkeiNet*, July 18, 2008. But in late August the Sankei Shinbun reported that the Defense Ministry would include a 26.9 billion yen FY2009 budget request for 4 extra CH-47 helicopters with extra
armour-plating required for Afghanistan combat conditions. See 防衛省概算要求 C H 4
7 ヘリ追加購入 アフガン派遣視野 整備費用も盛る」、産経新聞、2008年8月26日
17 Euan Graham, Japan’s Sea Lane Security: A Matter of Life and Death (Nissan Institute
18 The JCG’s 6,500 tonne Shikishima patrol vessel – effectively a frigate – escorts Japanese
reprocessed plutonium from Britain and France back to Japan several times a year. The
“lightly armed” Shikishima is equipped with two twin 35 mm. cannon and a Vulcan M-61
“gatling” gun, whose six barrels fire about 100 rounds per second.
19 2007年の日本関係船舶における海賊等事案の状況及び世界における海賊等事案の
状況について、海事局外航課、国土交通省
20 Updates on piracy incidents are available at Worldwide Threats to Shipping Reports,
Office of Naval Intelligence, Civil Maritime Analysis Department.
Because most Japanese-related vessels are in fact registered under flags of convenience, it
is possible that numbers of attacks on Japanese-related vessels are under-reported. See
Graham, op.cit.
21 “US and German naval vessels shadowed the captured vessel and blockaded it from
entering the port of Bosaso. Eventually, after demanding a ransom, the pirates freed the
ship and its crew of 21 on December 12.” Golden Nori, Wikipedia.
23 Office of Naval Intelligence, Civil Maritime Analysis Department, Worldwide Threat To
Shipping Mariner Warning Information, 7 May 2008.
See also “They opened fire with machine guns and rockets’, Johan Lillkung, The
Observer, 27 April 2008. Pirates fail to hijack Japanese ship off Somalia, USA Today, 23
August 2008.
24 大臣会見概要、防衛賞、平成20年8月22日。
2008.
27 Maritime Security Patrol Area to be Established, Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Central
Command Public Affairs, 22 August 2008; and Combined Task Force 150, Wikipedia.
28 Terrorism and Piracy: The Dual Threat to Maritime Shipping, John C. K. Daly, Volume 6,
Issue 16 (August 11, 2008).
30 Office of Naval Intelligence, Civil Maritime Analysis Department, Worldwide Threat To
Shipping Mariner Warning Information, 20 August 2008.
31 Carolin Liss, The roots of piracy in Southeast Asia, Nautilus Institute, Austral Policy
32 Carolin Liss, The Challenges of Piracy in Southeast Asia and the Role of Australia,
See also Mark Valencia, “Piracy and Politics”, in Derek Johnson and Mark J. Valencia, Piracy


Targeted actions reportedly include “illegal violent activities, detention and pillage involving vessels at sea and aircraft by crew members and passengers aboard privately owned vessels and airplanes; volunteering to help run pirate ships and aircraft; agitation involving such activities”.

Japan seeks international arrest of anti-whaling activists, AFP, 17 August 2008; and 捕鯨船妨害容疑、米英3人に逮捕状 警視庁、国際手配へ、朝日、2008年8月18日。http://www.asahi.com/national/update/0818/TKY200808180042.html

“In February 2007, the anti-whaling group's boat and a Japanese whaling vessel collided twice in Antarctic waters during clashes near a pod of whales. Around the same time, Sea Shepherd activists also dumped a foul-smelling acid made from rancid butter on another whaling ship, slightly injuring two crew members and prompting Japanese officials to label them "terrorists." Japan to arrest 3 anti-whaling activists, Associated Press, International Herald Tribune, 18 August 2008.


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'With Eyes Wide Shut: Japan, Heisei Militarization and the Bush Doctrine' in Melvin Gurtov and Peter Van Ness (eds.), Confronting the Bush Doctrine: Critical Views from the Asia-Pacific
Responsibility and Remembrance

Finally, what might follow from Japan’s participation in the U.S.-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq? As Michael Penn observes, the newspaper Asahi Shimbun was one of the few media organizations continuously asking tough questions of Japan and America in the lead-up to the flawed intervention in Iraq. In “Japan On the Fifth Anniversary of the Iraq War,” Penn introduces Asahi reporter Sato Taketsugu’s commentary that Japan needs to re-evaluate its decision to send troops to Iraq before engaging in any more permanent SDF missions. Japanese leaders initially went along with America’s rationale that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction because, like other members of the “coalition of the willing,” they wanted to support the U.S.-Japan alliance. But Japan “certainly bears a part of the blame for supporting this war,” given that there were no WMDs. Sato argues that Japan should reflect on that error as well as seek cooperation with a wider range of the international community to combat terror. Penn offers his commentary next to Sato’s, written after the Japanese withdrawal from Iraq, noting that Iraqis held mostly positive impressions of Japan’s activities there. However, citing several examples of mismanagement of funds and the lack of a long-term meaningful commitment to Iraq, he concludes that the SDF mission, like Japan’s Iraq policy generally, might have been “hollow at the core.”

**Japan On the Fifth Anniversary of the Iraq War**
Michael Penn and the Asahi Shinbun
March 3, 2008
[http://apjjf.org/-Michael-Penn-Asahi/2705/article.html](http://apjjf.org/-Michael-Penn-Asahi/2705/article.html)

We have recently crossed the five-year mark since the American invasion of Iraq. President George W. Bush used the occasion to triumphantly declare that, due to his decision to invade, ‘the world is better, and the United States of America is safer.’

In Japan, the Asahi Shinbun appears virtually alone in using this occasion to reflect upon the Iraq War. For all its pro-war cheerleading, the Yomiuri Shinbun did not even see fit to produce an English-language editorial on the subject. The Foreign Ministry offered no statement either. Iraq shattered and dying? Hmm, that’s too bad -- just so long as it doesn’t die on the streets of Tokyo.

Among the political parties, only the Japan Communist Party seems to have marked the anniversary on their webpage. They also called for a small demonstration in the capital.

When a reporter asked the Ministry of Foreign Affairs press secretary to comment, he simply talked about the great political progress made in Iraq balanced against a tough humanitarian situation. He then briefly outlined the assistance that the Japanese government
has been giving to Iraq. Business as usual.

If Japan appears unwilling to accept responsibility for the horrors it helped unleash in Iraq, the honorable exception is the Asahi Shinbun. Much maligned by their enemies, at least there are a few voices left in Japan that show a little reflection, show a little conscience.

The two English-language pieces that the Asahi published are reproduced in full here. Michael Penn

SDF Mission to Iraq Still Not Properly Evaluated
March 21, 2008
Sato Taketsugu, The Asahi Shinbun

Five years ago Thursday (Japan time), U.S. bombers started pounding Iraq as part of an invasion force intended to topple Saddam Hussein, an action that would eventually embroil Japan. Yet, key questions remain unanswered over Tokyo’s decision to dispatch Self-Defense Forces to the war-torn nation. Why did Japan feel so strongly that it had to support the U.S.-led invasion by sending SDF troops? What was its significance, justification and repercussions?

Unfortunately, the government has made no serious efforts to look into these and other key questions by reviewing what has taken place.

The dispatch of SDF personnel to Iraq marked a radical shift in Japan’s diplomacy from its emphasis on working closely with the United Nations to putting priority on cooperating with the United States. Tokyo even stepped into a constitutional gray area with its decision to put Ground SDF troops in a nation where war was being waged. The government and the ruling coalition cannot afford to move ahead with proposed permanent legislation on SDF missions overseas without first reflecting on their decision to dispatch Japanese troops to Iraq.

At the outset, the government supported the U.S.-led invasion on grounds Saddam’s regime had weapons of mass destruction. When the U.S. airstrikes on Baghdad got under way in March 2003, then Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro told President George W. Bush that it was ‘natural’ for Japan to support Washington because of the WMD issue. Koizumi told the nation that Iraq was ‘not somebody else’s problem.’

But those weapons did not exist.

The government eventually dropped ‘activities to help dispose of WMDs from a draft of a special measures bill to support rebuilding Iraq. Bush himself later admitted that U.S. intelligence had erred on the issue of WMDs, which at a stroke negated the justification for the SDF dispatch.
But the miscalculations did not stop there.

'Never did we expect the Iraq situation to sink this deep into a quagmire,' says a senior Defense Ministry official. To tone down the 'military' colors in the special measures law, the government made the dispatch of civilian personnel another pillar of Japan's rebuilding assistance program. Four years since SDF personnel were first dispatched, the government has still been unable to send civilians.

Tokyo deployed troops in early 2004, prodded by Washington's call for 'boots on the ground.' The decision did not have the blessing of the United Nations. The government argued that the dispatch did not infringe on the constitutional ban on the use of the force because the SDF would work only in 'non-combat' areas for reconstruction assistance. Koizumi brandished this argument in the Diet to defend the constitutionality of the mission.

Tokyo has since stepped up its cooperation with Washington, from missile defense to the realignment of U.S. forces. 'It shows that Japan and the United States got closer because of the decision to send the SDF to Iraq,' says a senior Foreign Ministry official.
The Fukuda administration aims to enact a permanent law to enable the SDF to join a U.S.-led multinational force for peace cooperation. But discussions stalled after a series of scandals involving the Defense Ministry and the SDF, the latest being the Feb. 19 collision of an Aegis-equipped destroyer with a fishing boat. Suspicions that the SDF fuel supplied to U.S. vessels in the Indian Ocean may have been diverted to the Iraq war have also divided the public on the anti-terror mission.
Iraq War Five Years On
March 19, 1998
The Asahi Shinbun

Five years have elapsed since the start of the Iraq war, but there are people who are still trying to justify this historic blunder.

President George W. Bush asserted in his State of the Union address in late January that 'high-profile terrorist attacks are down.' He went on: 'The Iraqis still have a distance to travel. But after decades of dictatorship and the pain of sectarian violence, reconciliation is taking place -- and the Iraqi people are taking control of their future.'

According to figures released by the Bush administration, there have been fewer terrorist attacks in Iraq since the 30,000-strong U.S. troop surge last spring.

But the drop in the number of the attacks is not proof that the Iraq war has turned for the better, nor does it suggest that the U.S. invasion of Iraq was anything other than a huge mistake. About 4,000 U.S. troops have been killed in this war. The World Health Organization estimates that Iraqi civilian deaths must have reached 150,000 in June last year. How many more have been killed since then?

'Baghdad Burning,' an English-language blog by an Iraqi girl, contains this passage: 'The tears had stopped about an hour after we'd left Baghdad. Just seeing the dirty streets, the ruins of buildings and houses, the smoke-filled horizon all helped me realize how fortunate I was to have a chance for something safer.' This is her recollection of the day she and her family left Baghdad last year to seek safety in Syria.
More than 2 million Iraqis have fled their country to become refugees. Another 2 million Iraqis have become displaced. For these people, Bush’s speech must have sounded as if it came from another planet.

The U.S. military resorted to a dangerous gamble to restore stability in Iraq. By providing weapons and funds to Sunnis in anti-U.S. regions, the Americans sought to pit them against terrorist factions affiliated with al-Qaida, the international terrorist organization headed by Osama bin Laden. This setup helps to minimize U.S. troop casualties. It also makes attacks against the terrorist factions more effective because they are being mounted by Iraqis who are familiar with the situation on the ground.
But even if the gamble pays off and temporarily restores stability, experts on Iraq are increasingly voicing concern that those U.S.-supplied weapons will be eventually used in sectional conflicts that will spell even more Iraqi deaths.

Iraq is not the only country where things are going south. In Afghanistan, the fundamentalist Taliban regime, toppled in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, has regrouped, making the country unsafe again while Washington remains mired in Iraq.

Amid the turmoil in Afghanistan, the political situation in neighboring Pakistan became volatile. Former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto was assassinated last December. President Pervez Musharraf, who supported America’s ‘war against terror,’ is now on the verge of being forced out of office.

And while the Palestinian peace process grew even more uncertain, Turkish forces attacked Kurdish communities in northern Iraq. In Iran, last week’s legislative election was won by supporters of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a hard-line anti-American conservative, by a landslide.

The Middle East has always been a hot spot, which is all the more reason why Washington needs to deal with this region with utmost care. But the present reality is that the situation has effectively spun out of control since the start of the Iraq war five years ago. Anti-U.S. sentiment is escalating throughout the Middle East.

The justification for this war, which Bush used to argue fervidly, has since evaporated completely. Contrary to the Bush administration’s insistence, the weapons of mass destruction did not exist. And hardly anybody is talking anymore about the once-popular slogan of ‘democratizing the Middle East.’

Bush’s popularity back home is abysmal. In other countries that sent troops to Iraq in support of Bush’s war, not a few leaders have since been driven out of power by popular vote or due to low job approval ratings.

We believe the key reason for this disastrous state of affairs is that the United States went after the wrong enemy. What Washington should have done was to seek the support of the Arab-Islamic world to isolate and drive al-Qaida into a corner.

Instead, the Bush administration declared war on Saddam Hussein and his regime -- which had nothing to do with al-Qaida -- for the most spurious of reasons. This created a rift in the international community and made enemies of even moderate Muslims.

Bitter feelings linger in the international community, particularly in Germany and France that opposed the Iraq war. A good number of nations -- even those that did not send troops to Iraq -- still participated in Bush’s ‘war against terror’ in all sorts of ways because they valued their alliance with the United States. The battlefront expanded and the United Nations was helpless to exercise its influence. Japan certainly bears a part of the blame for supporting this war.
There is no panacea for ending this mess. So long as a large U.S. military contingent remains stationed in Iraq, anti-U.S. terrorism will continue. But withdrawing from Iraq before the situation stabilizes could trigger a civil war. This is the dilemma that Washington faces.

One cause for concern is that the longer the Iraq debacle continues, the United States could become 'worn out' not only militarily, but also economically, diplomatically, and in terms of 'soft power.' The United States is still the world's sole superpower, but its leadership could be eroded. For Japan, which has North Korea's nuclear problem to contend with, the debilitation of its key ally is certainly not desirable.

The United States must get over its major blunder in Iraq and find a way out. We hope the presidential debates before the November election will serve as a cue. But for that, the United States must first face and accept the fact that it has gone against the wrong enemy, and think once again about where its true target lies.

The international community, too, must rebuild a system that will enable all its members to work together to contain international terror. It will not be easy, but efforts must be made to ameliorate the growing hostility and distrust of the Arab-Islamic world toward the United States and the Western world.

We in Japan must think seriously what our country can do.

*This article appeared in The Asahi Shinbun on March 19, 2008.*
Kyodo News on March 29 produced a follow-up piece on GSDF reconstruction projects in Samawa. For the entire period that the GSDF was stationed in its base near Samawa, the Koizumi Administration and its camp followers repeatedly insisted that their presence was needed there in order to carry out 'humanitarian and reconstruction support activities.'

It is not easy to evaluate clearly the degree to which the local community in Samawa benefited from the GSDF activities. During the GSDF deployment itself, most news reports suggested that a majority of the local people were pleased to have the Japanese among them as they imagined that their presence would signal major improvements in the local economy and because the Japanese troops didn't shoot anybody. On the other hand, there was a minority -- apparently affiliated with the Mahdi Army of Muqtada al-Sadr -- who did not welcome the GSDF on the Iraqi nationalist grounds that they were allies of the American occupiers. These people fired mortars at the GSDF base and created a sense of threat, but never actually wounded any Japanese soldiers. The fact that the GSDF was able to complete their 2 1/2 years in Iraq without taking any casualties can be regarded as a success for the political supporters of the mission. They seem to have benefited from a combination of careful planning, risk-avoiding local strategies, and simple good luck.
Japan hired Iraqis to renovate the Samawa Secondary School for Girls and provided a mural

The total amount of money that Japan spent on Iraqi reconstruction is impressive. Tokyo pledged US$1.5 billion in grant aid and US$3.5 billion in loans at the Madrid Conference of October 2003. Since that time, MOFA has been announcing various projects on which this money would be spent. MOFA says that the US$1.5 billion in grants has already been completely distributed, and that in fact an additional US$105 million in emergency grant aid was provided to Iraq over the course of 2007 (see Shingetsu Newsletter No. 529). Beyond all of this, Tokyo has pledged to forgive 80% of Iraq’s debts from the Saddam Husain era, which totaled about US$7.6 billion (see Shingetsu Newsletter No. 123). I’m not an economist, but I wouldn’t be surprised to learn that the real cost of the Iraq adventure to the Japanese taxpayer is now well over US$10 billion.

At any rate, the point of the Kyodo News report released yesterday is that for all of this investment, the real improvements in Samawa may not be great. As they put it, ‘there are many examples of mismanaged support.’ One of the key problems seems to be that the local Iraqis don’t have the technical training necessary to complete and operate these projects. (In the 1980s, Iraq was one of the most sophisticated countries in the developing world in this respect.)

Muhammad Jordan, chairman of the construction committee of the al-Muthanna provincial council, stated that ‘it is strange to rely on others to rebuild your home. The Japanese did their best to assist the al-Muthanna people, but the problems were with those (Iraqi) people.’ Saad Rahim Salman, a manager at a large local power plant said, ‘It is the first time for the Iraqi people to embark on such a large-size project from scratch. There are no foreign engineers... There are many holidays in Islam.’

The Kyodo News report continues by noting that ‘there are precision medical devices that cannot be used due to a lack of parts, and power generators abandoned because of the delivery of secondhand ones.’

Some local people, like schoolteacher Salah Khlaif, supported the GSDF mission: ‘The
withdrawal was too early. I wanted Japan to stay longer.' Others, like the unemployed Haidar Nassir, were not impressed with the help from Tokyo: 'The Japanese support has left only vulgar rich people and corruption behind.'

Returning to the crucial power plant project mentioned above, an engineer at the plant referred to the fact that construction has been well behind schedule. Construction began in April 2006 and was scheduled for completion last November. The new target is June of this year. The engineer explained, 'The appearance is 90% complete, but the core part is still only 60% complete.'

Hmm. So it appears attractive on the face of it, but is hollow at the core, eh?

That’s not a bad metaphor for Tokyo’s entire Iraq War policy.

THE 'STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP' AND THE RECONCILIATION DIALOGUE

Did Japan Focus and the Shingetsu Newsletter change Japanese policy on Iraq? I don’t know. But since the time I wrote my critique of the concept of the 'long-term and strategic partnership' between Japan and Iraq the slogan seems to have disappeared from MOFA statements. Perhaps my essay caused them to reevaluate their message? Or perhaps they have dropped the slogan for reasons entirely unrelated to my essay in Shingetsu Newsletter No. 807? Or is the slogan still alive, but they just haven’t mentioned it in the last four months?

This past week Tokyo hosted the 'Second Seminar on National Reconciliation of Iraq.' The program saw invitations to thirteen Iraqi MPs and others (eleven actually attended) who were Shia, Sunni, and Kurdish. The only participant who was named in the press was Kurdish parliamentarian Alaa al-Talabani. As the official MOFA statement put it: 'The Seminar is held based on the consideration that the promotion of national reconciliation among different ethnic/sectarian groups is essential for a solid stabilization of Iraq, while the current security situation in Iraq showing signs of improvement. It is expected that Japan’s efforts of holding such Seminar would contribute to that end. During the period, the delegation will have meetings with the Japanese Government officials as well as the members of the Japanese parliament. The participants will also discuss among themselves on the current issues of Iraq such as Oil and Gas Law, Amendment of the Constitution and Federalism. Further, visit to Hiroshima is planned so that they can share the experiences of Japan’s post-war democratization, peace building, and reconstruction.'

However, the MOFA statement said nothing about the 'long-term and strategic partnership' between Japan and Iraq as we might have expected on such an occasion.

A somewhat similar program occurred in February. Upon the request, apparently, of the office of Iraqi President Jalal Talabani and the Iraqi Foreign Ministry (both offices currently held by Kurds), MOFA and JICA offering training programs for Iraqi diplomats.
Again, on that occasion, there was no mention of the 'long-term and strategic partnership.'

It thus seems that the 'long-term' partnership may have thus lasted all of eight months.

**RECENT JAPANESE AID TO IRAQ**

In the past four months, most reports on Japan-Iraq relations have concerned aid programs. The following is a round-up of both public and private aid stories:

-- In late December, Tokyo donated through the UNHCR 1,000 tents for Iraqi refugees.

-- At the beginning of this year, it was announced that an unnamed Japanese signed an agreement of cooperation with Iraq's Electricity Ministry. The company was to rehabilitate the gas-powered Taji electrical station located in northern Baghdad. Apparently, the awarding of this contract to the unnamed Japanese company was tied to a grant that Tokyo offered to the Electricity Ministry.

-- In January, it was announced that the next round of reconstruction loans, part of the US$3.5 billion mentioned above, would be targeted on repair of the Al-Musaib thermal power station in suburban Baghdad, the restoration of tanker mooring facilities off Basra, and the construction of roads and bridges near Samawa.

-- In February, the Yomiuri reported about a Yokohama-based NPO that was selling chocolate in the run-up to St. Valentine's Day in order to raise money for medicine and classes for Iraqi children.

-- Also in February, MOFA donated almost US$19 million through the UNDP for the establishment of a maternity and children's hospital in Falluja. This project seems to have a close relationship to the activities of the Hashida Memorial Mohammed Fund run by the wife of slain Japanese journalist Shinsuke Hashida.

-- In March, MOFA offered almost US$30,000 for another maternity and children's hospital in Sadr City, Baghdad.
David McNeill, in "Secrets and Lies: Ampo, Japan’s Role in the Iraq War and the Constitution," provides insight into efforts by Japanese citizens to investigate controversial actions on the part of Air Self Defense Forces in Iraq. Did the Japanese troops help to transport American combat soldiers and their weapons and ammunition in and out of declared war zones? If so, they violated the constitutional restriction to humanitarian involvement. Using Japanese freedom of information laws, citizens have been fighting for information on this point. McNeill is one of the few journalists in Japan to report on this topic.

Secrets and Lies: Ampo, Japan’s Role in the Iraq War and the Constitution.
[Japanese translation available.]
David McNeill
February 15, 2010
http://apjjf.org/-David-McNeill/3305/article.html

Japan marked the 50th anniversary of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty on January 19 amid calls for an inquiry into the dispatch of Japanese Self-Defence Forces to Iraq, which critics say was illegal and in violation of Japan’s no-war Constitution. But in contrast to the fierce debates over the origins and legitimacy of the 2003 Iraq invasion in both the United States and the United Kingdom, public discussion in Japan is muted and there will be no official investigation.
In the absence of official investigation, much of the digging around in the war’s darker corners has been done by grassroots activists. Kondo Yuriko recalls her surprise that the state’s democratic machinery eventually produced results.

Her three-year demand for information on how the Japanese government had spent billions of taxpayers' yen supporting a "humanitarian mission" in Iraq from January 2004 through to the end of 2008 had been partly, if belatedly, answered. And it was worth the wait.

In late September 2009 new Defense Minister Kitazawa Toshimi unexpectedly authorized the release of a short document under the Freedom of Information Act disclosing that about 67 percent of the 26,000 soldiers transported by the Air Self-Defense Forces between July 2006 and December 2008 wore U.S. uniforms. That is, the ASDF was transporting U.S. forces into and out of combat.

In case anyone missed the point, Kondo, a 60-year-old veteran peace activist from Ogaki in Gifu Prefecture, spelled it out: Japan’s Constitution bans the SDF from participating in combat activities or transporting weapons or ammunition in a war zone. For two years, the SDF had "snubbed the law," she says, and the government concealed the illegality with blacked-out documents and a standard Defense Ministry verbal firewall to the effect that releasing such information would "hamper operations" and "damage Japan's reputation."

"It was ludicrous and illegal to have sent the SDF to Iraq," she says, alluding to Japan's so-called war-renouncing Constitution. "This document proved that."

Kondo's views found support in one landmark legal ruling. In April 2008, the Nagoya High Court declared that the ASDF airlifting of coalition troops was unconstitutional, violating both the (war-renouncing) Article 9 clause in the Constitution and specifically the hastily written 2003 "Law on Special Measures for Assistance to Iraq in its Reconstruction" that provided the legal fig leaf for the SDF dispatch — on condition that Japanese forces would operate only in "noncombat" areas.
"In modern warfare, the transport of personnel and supplies constitutes a key part of combat," concluded Judge Aoyama Kunio. "The airlift of multinational forces to Baghdad . . . plays a part in the use of force by other countries."

The then Liberal Democratic Party-led government disagreed, indeed, it declared the ruling to be a victory because it rejected compensation claims by the 1,100 plaintiffs in the group action ruled on at Nagoya High Court.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Machimura Nobutaka shrugged off accusations of illegality, quixotically arguing that Baghdad was "a noncombat zone." The ASDF crews stayed on in Kuwait until December 2008, and there the issue stood until Kitazawa’s bombshell announcement — a sign, perhaps, that the Democratic Party of Japan that swept into power with a landslide election victory on Aug. 30, 2009 may choose to reverse years of official mendacity over government policies in Iraq.

Kondo agrees that the announcement was probably attributable to new DPJ pressure, but she believes that the Defense Ministry simply no longer cares what people think about the SDF. "It basically figured that the release of this information would not hurt its plans in the future," she says.

That reasoning, Kondo believes, was adopted because the government had already proved it could disregard popular opposition, flaunt the Constitution and ignore the little media flak the war generated. With the precedent set, the way is paved for more military adventures abroad, she argues. "If the government says in the future that we have done this before, Japanese citizens will accept that."

Says Kawaguchi Hajime, a lawyer lobbying for a government inquiry into the SDF dispatch: "We have to get to the bottom of this episode in Japan’s history or we will pay the price. But there is no consciousness of the need to challenge the government. Nobody appears interested."

Kawaguchi believes that the archives could tell more. Were the SDF infantry based at Samawah in southern Iraq only engaged in "humanitarian assistance" to the local population? Were local insurgents, as some believe, paid off to prevent them attacking Japanese forces? And on the financial front, how much did the entire five-year mission cost Japanese taxpayers? The Japanese government has released no estimates of the costs of its Iraq operations.

Nearly seven years after it was launched on March 20, 2003, the U.S.-led war in Iraq is widely acknowledged as an act of mendacity and an epic folly.

As everyone now knows, the weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) used as the prime justification for the invasion never materialized. Similarly, significant links to al-Qaida were never found, and the nation that was promised democracy and prosperity is now a shattered, sectarian and Balkanized state with ethnic cleansing virtually eliminating the possibility for people of the Sunni and Shiite Muslim faiths to share neighborhoods or cities. More than two million Iraqis have fled abroad, according to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees; perhaps another 2.7 million have resettled elsewhere inside the country; and the most credible total death toll ranges from 100,000 to well over a million.
The impact back in the United States of the wider "war on terror" has also been profound. That impact includes the legitimization of torture, the spread of government surveillance, the shredding of habeas corpus, Guantanamo, the institutionalization of so-called extraordinary rendition, CIA dirty tricks, and the enormous price tag — a staggering $3 trillion for Iraq and Afghanistan, and counting, according to economist and Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz, who points out that ordinary Americans will be paying the price for George W. Bush’s decision to go to war for decades.

But at least in the U.S. and its prime partner in arms, the United Kingdom, there has been a reckoning of sorts. Stemming from the continuing public debate, there has been a half-hearted mea culpa on torture and Guantanamo from President Barack Obama and a startling admission by Britain’s prime minister at the time of the Iraq invasion, Tony Blair, that he would have invaded Iraq with or without WMDs. And that came ahead of his testimony to the government’s current Iraq Inquiry announced by Prime Minister Gordon Brown in June 2009, which is due to report in June 2010.

In Japan, although the SDF was finally pulled out of Iraq in December 2008, there has been no government inquiry, no major excavation of the leadup to the war — and no interest by the mainstream media in digging around what happened, laments Takeshita Takashi, a journalist with Akahata, the Japan Communist Party newspaper.

Ocean waves: Crew members aboard the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force’s fleet-support ship Mashuu bid farewell to a Pakistan Navy vessel after a refueling operation in the Indian Ocean on Jan. 15, 2010. That day, the law authorizing such missions supporting U.S.-led antiterrorism operations in Afghanistan over the previous eight years finally expired. KYODO PHOTO

The SDF Role in Iraq
Takeshita uncovered evidence last year that just 6 percent of the 45,000 people transported by the ASDF between March 2004 and December 2008 worked for the United Nations. The vast bulk of its activities involved ferrying U.S. troops. So much for the "humanitarian and reconstruction assistance" mission on the basis of which the war was sold to the Japanese public, he concludes.

Nobody knows the final price tag for the dispatch, admits senior DPJ lawmaker Kondo Shoichi, who believes a U.K.-style inquiry — which he would support — is unlikely. His
assessment, in fact, is that "over half" of his party had problems with the decision to invade Iraq. "There would, however, be pressure against such an inquiry — ultimately, there are a lot of people who would worry about the impact on U.S.-Japan relations," he believes.

Still, Kondo says that although senior DPJ members, including Kan Naoto, the party's former leader (2000-04) and current Finance Minister, and Prime Minister Hatoyama Yukio, disagreed with the prosecution of the war in Iraq, the bureaucracy and the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty which was signed on Jan. 19, 1960, weigh heavily on the political process.

Last November, DPJ Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirano Hirofumi effectively smothered any hope of a postmortem on the Iraq adventure when he declared the SDF dispatch legal, reversing the conclusion of Kan, who, as party leader in 2004, had called it unconstitutional. "As an opposition party, we could not determine if the area where they were sent was a noncombat zone," said Hirano. "But as we (now) recognize it is a noncombat zone, we have judged that the SDF activities there were constitutional."

Peace activist Kondo Yuriko calls that statement "unbelievable" — but she blames journalists as much as politicians. "The mass media is the reason the government can dodge responsibility. They drop anything that doesn't make headlines and don't dig up information or do long-term investigative reporting. This allows Japanese citizens to forget the past," she observes.

Kondo, Takeshita and Kawaguchi, and their neoconservative opponents — such as former ASDF Chief of Staff General Tamogami Toshio — at least agree on one thing: The roots of Japan's secretive, convoluted defense policies lie in the postwar, U.S.-dominated Allied Occupation, which created the "war-renouncing" Article 9 of the Constitution.

Pacifists and anti-war activists cling to Article 9 because it helped construct what appeared to be a new type of modern state: one that explicitly rejected imperialism and war.

**General Tamogami, Article 9 and the Constitution**

Tamogami, who was sacked in 2008 for publicly arguing that Japan was not given sufficient credit for ending white European colonialism in Asia, despises Article 9 for exactly the same reason. "The aim was to weaken Japan," he says.

"That's why Japan's self-defense forces are bound by law and not allowed to move as they wish. That's why the country cannot exercise collective defense, take offensive action, or export weaponry. That's why it is bound by three basic nonnuclear principles. Since the Occupation, the country has been bound hand and foot," he stated in a December interview with the writer.

Tamogami is the latest in a long line of political and military figures with views that run counter to the Constitution. He claimed that "two-thirds" of SDF officers back his views. "I'm also supported by many politicians. I can't say their names because it would cause them trouble. (On being asked whether former prime ministers Abe Shinzo [2006-07] and Aso Taro [2008-09] were among his supporters, Tamogami indicated they were.)"

The U.S. defense establishment has long been ideologically closer to Tamogami and his ilk than to the Japanese pacifists who have fought to preserve Article 9. In 1946, almost as soon as the ink was dry on the postwar, U.S.-orchestrated "peace" Constitution, Japan's new
military ally began pressing for rearmament in the face of Chinese and Russian communism. That threat ushered in a vast expansion of U.S. power and military bases throughout the region.

**Ampo and Japan’s Three Non-Nuclear Principles**

Even Japan’s so-called three nonnuclear principles, outlined by Prime Minister Sato Eisaku in 1967 and formally adopted by the Diet in 1971 — principles that commit Japan to never produce, possess or allow the entry of nuclear weapons into the country — were not safe from the political calculations needed to maintain the facade of pacifism.

The no-nuke rule was undermined by a backroom deal struck between Washington and Tokyo that was signed by Sato and President Richard Nixon in 1969. Its origins go back at least four years to a memo signed at the US Embassy in Tokyo in July 1965 (link).

After decades of rumors, that secret pact — allowing nuclear-armed U.S. ships and aircraft to traffic anywhere through or over Japanese territory — was confirmed by a senior Japanese Foreign Ministry bureaucrat last summer. Consequently, it appears uncontestable that the LDP had lied about the existence of the pact for years. Indeed, a team Hatoyama tasked with investigating the secret pact reported last November that it had discovered files at the Foreign Ministry proving its existence.

The deal, agreed during the fraught negotiations to rewrite the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty in 1960, is said to have depended on a "misinterpretation." Tokyo claimed that it believed it would receive prior consultation before any nuclear-armed dockings or flyovers; Washington had no such understanding.

When the LDP discovered otherwise, it kept quiet — "instead of publicly acknowledging a change in position," the leading, liberal-leaning Asahi Shimbun newspaper said last year. In fact, LDP politicians repeatedly denied the deal, even after the Japanese parliament officially adopted the no-nuke principles in 1971, and former Prime Minister Sato even won the 1974 Nobel Peace Prize for his "opposition to any plans for a Japanese nuclear-weapons program."

Today, the official bureaucratic line is still that the pact doesn’t exist.

**Chipping Away at Constitutional Freedoms**

Just as for the United States, the cost to Japan of the Iraq adventure has not been limited to the financial. A series of test cases against antiwar activists has dismayed lawyers and human-rights activists, who say the post-9/11 Japanese state is attacking constitutional freedoms.

On Nov. 30, 2009, the Supreme Court declared 62-year-old Buddhist priest Arakawa Yosei guilty of trespassing for distributing antiwar fliers in a Tokyo condominium in December 2004. The court had almost nothing to say about Arakawa’s detention without trial for 23 days, or his argument that far more was at stake for everyone than the peace and tranquillity of one angry resident who apparently complained.
The previous year, the Supreme Court also ended a four-year legal battle between the state and three veteran peace activists based in Tachikawa, western Tokyo, when it ruled that they trespassed by putting antiwar fliers in the post boxes of Self-Defense Force members in February 2004. After years of peaceful and largely impotent campaigning, the arrest of the three, their detention for 75 days, and their historic conviction seemed to show that the authorities had decided to go to war against their ideological enemies.

"They need to neutralize people like us before they can get what they want: the end of Article 9," said Obora Toshiyuki, 52, a school cook who is one of the convicted activists.

Obora and campaigning lawyer Kawaguchi Hajime were among those who predicted the same techniques would be used on other targets, and so it has proved.

In January, amid rising unemployment and resentment at Japan's growing wealth disparities, a small group of anti-poverty protesters in Tokyo's central Shinjuku district were harried by police and told by them that they could be arrested for distributing fliers.
According to eyewitnesses who were quoted online on Global Voices, an international network of citizen journalists, one police officer said: "(We're doing this) to secure freedom of speech, to preserve the peace, the peace of the Japanese people."

Other activists have been similarly targeted. Lawyers say the 2009 revision of the Public Safety and Security Ordinance, introduced under the Liberal Democratic Party, is another attempt to restrain public protests.

"If you send troops abroad, freedom declines at home," says Kawaguchi.

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Finally, Richard Falk, “The 10th Anniversary of the Iraq War,” concludes this course reader. Falk, from the beginning of the interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, warned of “mission creep” to other areas of the world, and this warning has proved prophetic. While the main responsibility for the interventions lies with America and Britain, Falk sees the war as a huge disaster for everyone. He advises Japan to “soul search” the appropriateness of its decision to support America in Iraq, particularly given the way that the intervention undermined the credibility of the United Nations. His critical assessment of the war in Afghanistan is particularly noteworthy because immediately following the terrorist events of 9/11, he publicized his opinion that intervention in Afghanistan would conform to the legal definition of a “just war.”

The 10th Anniversary of the Iraq War
Richard Falk
March 13, 2013

American and British foreign policy and the peace and stability of the Middle East region, but it was also a serious setback for international law, the UN, and world order.

In the aftermath of the Vietnam War, the United States was supposedly burdened by what policymakers came to call ‘the Vietnam Syndrome.’ This was a Washington shorthand for the psychological inhibitions to engage in military interventions in the non-Western world due to the negative attitudes towards such imperial undertakings that were supposed to exist among the American public and in the government, especially among the military who were widely blamed for the outcome in Vietnam. Many American militarists at the time complained that the Vietnam Syndrome was a combined result of an anti-war plot engineered by the liberal media and a response to an unpopular conscription that required many middle class Americans to fight in a war that lacked popular support or a convincing strategic or legal rationale. The flag-draped coffins of dead young Americans were shown on TV, leading defense hawks to contend somewhat ridiculously that ‘the war was lost in American living rooms.’

The government made adjustments: the draft was abolished, reliance was henceforth placed on an all-volunteer professional military, and renewed efforts were made to assure media support for subsequent military operations.

President, George H.W. Bush told the world in 1991 immediately after the Gulf War was fought to reverse the Iraqi annexation of Kuwait that “we have finally kicked the Vietnam Syndrome.” In effect, the senior President Bush was saying to the grand
strategists in the White House and Pentagon that the role of American military power was again available for use around the world. What the Gulf War showed was that on a conventional battlefield, in this setting of a desert war, American military superiority would be decisive, and could produce a quick victory with minimal costs in American lives. This new militarist enthusiasm created the political base for recourse to the NATO War in 1999 to wrest Kosovo from Serb control. To ensure the avoidance of casualties, reliance was placed on air power, which took more time than expected, but further vindicated the war planners’ claim that the United States could now fight and win ‘zero casualty wars.’ In fact there were no NATO combat deaths in the Kosovo War.

More sophisticated American war planners understood that not all challenges to United States interests around the world could be met with air power in the absence of ground combat. Increasingly, political violence involving geopolitical priorities took the form of transnational violence (as in the 9/11 attacks) or was situated within the boundaries of territorial states, and involved Western military intervention designed to crush societal forces of national resistance. The Bush presidency badly confused its new self-assurance about the conduct of battlefield international warfare and its old nemesis from Vietnam War days of counter-insurgency warfare, also known as low-intensity or asymmetric warfare.

David Petraeus rose through the ranks of the American military by repackaging counterinsurgency warfare in a post-Vietnam format relying upon an approach developed by noted guerrilla war expert David Galula, who contended that in the Vietnam War the fatal mistake was made of supposing that such a war would be determined 80% by combat battles in the jungles and paddy fields with the remaining 20% devoted to the capture of the ‘hearts and minds’ of the indigenous population. Galula argued that counterinsurgency wars could only be won if this formula was inverted. This meant that 80% of future U.S. military interventions should be devoted to non-military aspects of societal wellbeing: restoring electricity, providing police protection for normal activity, building and staffing schools, improving sanitation and garbage removal, and providing health care and jobs.

Afghanistan, and then Iraq, became the testing grounds for applying these nation-building lessons of Vietnam, only to reveal in the course of their long, destructive and expensive failures that the wrong lessons had been learned. These conflicts were wars of national resistance, a continuation of the anti-colonial struggles against West-centric colonial domination, and regardless of whether the killing was complemented by sophisticated social and economic programs, it still involved a pronounced and deadly challenge by foreign interests to the rights of self-determination that entailed killing Iraqi women and children, and violating their most basic rights through the harsh mechanics of foreign occupation. It also proved impossible to disentangle the planned 80% from the 20% as the hostility of the Iraqi people to their supposed American liberators demonstrated over and over again, especially as many Iraqis on the side of the occupiers proved to be corrupt and brutal, sparking popular suspicion and internal polarization. The truly ‘fatal mistake’ made by Petraeus, Galula, and all the counterinsurgency advocates that have followed this path, is the failure to recognize that when the American military and its allies attack and occupy a non-Western country, especially in the Islamic world, when they start dividing, killing and policing its inhabitants, popular resistance will be mobilized. This is precisely what
happened in Iraq, and the suicide bombings to this day suggest that the ugly patterns of violence have not stopped even with the ending of America’s direct combat role.

The United States was guilty of a fundamental misunderstanding of the Iraq War displayed to the world when George W. Bush theatrically declared on May 1, 2003 a wildly premature victory from the deck of an American aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln, with the notorious banner proclaiming ‘mission accomplished’ plainly visible behind the podium as the sun sank over the Pacific Ocean.

Bush reveled in this misunderstanding by assuming that the attack phase of the war was the whole war, forgetting about the more difficult and protracted occupation phase. The real Iraq War, rather than ending, was about to begin, that is, the violent internal struggle for the political future of the country, one made more difficult and protracted by the military presence of the US and its allies. This counterinsurgency sequel to occupation would not be decided on the kind of battlefield where arrayed military capabilities confront one another, but rather through a war of attrition waged by hit and run domestic Iraqi forces, abetted by foreign volunteers, opposed to the tactics of Washington. Such a war has a shadowy beginning and an uncertain ending, and is often, as in Iraq, as it proved to be earlier in Vietnam, a quagmire for intervening powers.

The Iraq War was a war of aggression from its inception, being an unprovoked use of armed force against a sovereign state in a situation other than self-defense. The Nuremberg and Tokyo War Crimes Tribunals convened after World War II had declared such aggressive warfare to be a ‘crime against peace’ and prosecuted and punished political and military leaders of Germany and Japan as war criminals. We can ask why have George W. Bush and Tony Blair not been investigated, indicted, and prosecuted for their roles in planning and prosecuting the Iraq War. As folk singer Bob Dylan instructed us long ago, the answer is ‘blowin’ in the wind,’ or in more straightforward language, the reasons for such impunity conferred upon the American and British leaders is a crude display of geopolitics—their countries were not defeated and occupied, their governments never surrendered, and such strategic failures (or successes) are exempted from legal scrutiny. These are the double standards that make international criminal justice more a matter of power politics than global justice.
Global civil society with its own limited resources had challenged both the onset of the Iraq War, and later its actual unfolding. On and around February 15, 2003, what the Guinness Book of Records called “the largest anti-war rally in history” took the form of about 3,000 demonstrations in 800 cities located in more than 60 countries and according to the BBC involved an estimated 6-10 million persons. Although such a global show of opposition to recourse to war was unprecedented, it failed to halt the war. It did, however, have the lasting effect of undermining the American claims of justification for the attack and occupation of Iraq. It also led to an unprecedented effort by groups around the world to pass judgment on the war by holding sessions in which peace activists and international law experts alleged the criminality of the Iraq War, and called for war crimes prosecutions of Bush and Blair. As many as twenty such events were held in various parts of the world, with a culminating Iraq War Tribunal convened in June of 2005, which included testimony from more than 50 experts, including several from Iraq and a jury of conscience headed by Arundhati Roy.

There is also the question of complicity of countries that supported the war with troop deployments, such as Japan, which dispatched 1000 members of its self-defense units to Iraq in July 2003 to help with non-combat dimensions of the occupation. Such a role is a clear breach of international law and morality. It is also inconsistent with Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution. It was coupled with Tokyo’s diplomatic support for the U.S./UK-led Iraq War from start to finish. Should such a record of involvement have any adverse consequences? It would seem that Japan might at least review the appropriateness of its complicit participation in a war of aggression, and how that diminishes the credibility of any Japanese claim to uphold the responsibilities of membership in the United Nations. At least, it provides the people of Japan with a moment for national soul-searching to think about what kind of world order will in the future best achieve peace, stability, and human dignity.

Are there lessons to be drawn from the Iraq War? I believe there are. The overwhelming lesson is that in this historical period interventions by the West in the non-West, especially when not authorized by the UN Security Council, can rarely succeed in attaining their stated goals. More broadly, counterinsurgency warfare involving a core encounter between Western invading and occupying forces and a national resistance movement will not be decided on the basis of hard power military superiority, but rather by the dynamics of self-determination associated with the party that has the more credible nationalist credentials, which include the will to persist in the struggle for as long as it takes, and the capacity to capture the high moral ground in the ongoing struggle for domestic and international public support. It is only when we witness the dismantling of many of America’s 700+ acknowledged foreign military bases spread around the world, and see the end of repeated US military intervention globally, that we can have some hope that the correct lessons of the Iraq War are finally being learned. Until then there will be further attempts by the U.S.
Government to correct the tactical mistakes that it claims explain past failures in Iraq (and Afghanistan), and new interventions will undoubtedly be proposed in coming years, most probably leading to costly new failures, and further controversies as to ‘why?’ we fought and why we lost. American leaders will remain unlikely to acknowledge that the most basic mistake is itself militarism, at least until challenged by robust anti-militarist political forces not currently on the political scene.

This is the English version of an article that appeared in the March 15, 2013 edition of Shukan Kin’yobi.

Further Reading

For other scholarship related to this course reader, the following resources are recommended:


How did Japan get its “war-renouncing Constitution”? Though dated, this website provides comprehensive basics on the controversies surrounding Japan’s postwar Constitution and development of its Self-Defense Forces (SDF). Since the start of the second Abe administration, lawmakers supporting constitutional revision have been focusing on revising Article 96 rather than Article 9. Article 96 requires that any proposal to change the Constitution receive approval by two-thirds of parliamentary members in each chamber, followed by a national referendum. As a prelude to eventual revision of Article 9, Abe has been urging that Article 96 be amended to require only one half of Diet members to approve the proposal before seeking a national referendum.


Why couldn’t international law prevent the Iraq intervention? This book will be suitable for upper-division and graduate students looking for more in-depth analysis on controversies of international law. Falk’s basic thesis as elucidated in the first chapter is that America’s Iraq intervention undermined the authority of the United Nations. It also damaged the legal capacity of human rights norms such as the Geneva Conventions that were designed to encourage voluntary international protection of civil societies from actions of oppressive national governments. The final chapter of Falk’s book discusses a local and global citizen-organized “World Tribunal on Iraq” that was convened in Istanbul in June 2005. The four-day trial, based on excellent documentation, concluded that the American-led intervention flagrantly violated norms of international law by deceiving citizens, and reaffirmed legal mechanisms to check the power of governments to conduct “wars of choice” waged for strategic advantage only, as opposed to self-defense.


Frühstück’s book offers firsthand insights on gender in the SDF and how military-inspired, crisis-bound masculinity and femininity are reinforced there. Frühstück’s analysis includes interviews with men and women in the SDF and their spouses, recent popular culture, and comparisons with American military culture. The text is an excellent match with the article by Fumika Sato on Japan’s “camouflaged” military.
A shorter essay on gender in the military is provided by Fumika Sato [name order original], in, "A Camouflaged Military: Japan’s Self-Defense Forces and Globalized Gender Mainstreaming:" The Asia Pacific Journal, Vol. 10, issue 22 no. 3, May 28, 2012. Sato points out that representations of gender have helped to “camouflage” the Japanese military. Japan’s policy makers have actively used women’s images to create an impression of the Japanese military as civilian-friendly. The SDF also routinely assigns males to do (perceived) “manly” jobs and females to do (perceived) “nurturing” roles such as nursing and clerical work.


Penn’s analysis contains considerable primary source material on Japan’s participation in the “war on terror” and on the implications of this effort for the “normalization” of the Japanese military. His main contribution is to show the extent to which Japanese participation in Iraq and Afghanistan served “alliance managers” or conservatives in the United States and Japan who want to change the Constitution. Penn also introduces dissenting intellectual leaders who stressed solutions such as increasing international dialogue rather than military confrontation. Penn’s final point is that Japan, on the whole, has enjoyed good relations with the Islamic world, but that its “alliance managers” paid little attention to Japan’s strengths in this area.