

Introduction

Defense of Japan versus Overseas Force Projection

While Japan has long demonstrated a commitment to militarily defending national territory, its refusal to “become a military power” that uses physical coercion overseas for foreign policy objectives has been a hallmark of Japan’s postwar military posture of defensive defense (or *senshu bōei*).¹ Indeed, Japan’s first formally announced postwar foreign policy doctrine, the Fukuda Doctrine of 1977, which became the primary pillar of its deep economic and political engagement with the rest of East Asia, is first and foremost a promise not to become a military power capable of projecting force overseas.² However, Japan’s strong support for the George W. Bush administration’s “war on terrorism” and its willingness to support this war by deploying naval (and briefly air) forces to the Indian Ocean and ground, air, and naval assets to Iraq and surrounding countries for several years has raised questions about whether Tokyo is abandoning its postwar defensive defense posture and becoming a “normal” great power, willing to use military force overseas for foreign policy objectives.

Noting that “many Japan watchers—not only foreign, but also domestic—were taken aback at both the speed and the substance”³ of Japan’s reaction to the war on terrorism, Christopher Hughes suggests Japan’s “participation in the Afghan campaign and Iraqi reconstruction has set vital precedents for JSDF [Japanese Self Defense Forces] dispatch” that could presage Japan being “drawn in radical new directions.”⁴ More boldly, other observers claim Tokyo has already crossed its security “Rubicon”⁵ or believe that Japan is emerging as the “Britain of Asia,” an ally willing to fight alongside U.S. forces just as Britain does.⁶ Richard Samuels argues that “the Japan of old is transforming itself into an increasingly muscular nation, one less hesitant to use force.”⁷ Still others suggest that Japanese public opinion is becoming increasingly nationalistic and that this is driving the country to play a more active military role overseas.⁸

Even before the war on terrorism, scholars were starting to note a shift toward realism in Japan.⁹ Michael Green argued as early as 2001 that Japan

is “reluctantly” embracing increased realism in its foreign policy. Daniel Kliman, writing after the start of the war on terrorism, suggests that Japan’s “creeping realism” is becoming a no-holds-barred realism that seemingly has more in common with American offensive realism than with the more restrained realism practiced in most other advanced industrial democracies: “In the mid to long term, scholars will no longer employ moderating adjectives to describe Japan’s national strategy.” American-based observers thus often imply that Japan’s new realism is slowly converging with American realism.¹⁰ However, these observers usually fail to note that American realism has been a moving target and that it became increasingly offensive if not revisionist in character, morphing under the George W. Bush administration into neoconservatism. Given that Japan has long demonstrated a commitment to defend national territory, claims about Japan emerging as a “normal nation” imply a shift toward exercising strategically offensive military power overseas. Overall, these claims about “becoming a normal power” have an open-ended quality to them. Little attempt is made to identify the limits of this new realism.

Does Public Opinion Have a Role?

The claim that democratic Japan is undergoing a fundamental shift in its grand strategy as the country emerges as a “normal” military power willing to deploy military force overseas raises the question of whether public opinion is causing this shift or preventing it, or whether public opinion even matters in Japanese policy making. More fundamentally, is Japanese public opinion coherent, stable, and influential? Is it an independent variable in the policy-making process or a dependent variable reflecting elite manufactured policy? If Japanese public opinion is coherent, stable, and influential, what are its attitude structures, and how are these reflected in Japan’s foreign policy? Finally, have the answers to these questions changed over time, or have the nature and role of public opinion been stable in postwar democratic Japan?

Rethinking Japanese Public Opinion and Security argues that behind Japan’s postwar defensive defense posture lay the reality of a democratic Japan where this posture was backed by public opinion, the opinion of a public who were often distrustful of the state’s ability to control or wisely wield the sword. As I argue in later chapters, Japanese public opinion was never pacifist or as opposed to all forms of military power as has often been claimed. Consequently, its recent evolution does not live up to the radical transformation many analysts see.

Many observers hail recent changes in Japanese security policy as marking the emergence of a more muscular and reliable ally,¹¹ while others see this as a dreaded counterrevolution, heralding a return to 1930s-style aggressive militarism.¹² Behind both views lay, in various guises, an elitist perspective of public opinion in Japan as unstable, moody, incoherent, or self-indulgently idealistic, moldable by self-interested elites, or, at best, irrelevant. This view stems in part from traditional ideas about the relationship between elites and the masses, ideas captured in the Meiji-era slogan of *kanson minpi*, or “revere the bureaucrats, despise the people.” Even in contemporary Japan, policy elites sometimes dismiss the idea that politicians should listen to public opinion as “mobocracy,” or *shugūseiji*.¹³ In part this view emerges from an elitist school in the American study of public opinion, the so-called Almond Lippmann consensus, which is discussed in Chapter 2 and tested in the rest of the book. In part, it reflects a self-indulgent smugness, or pervasive insecurity, among policy elites, regardless of nationality, including us academics, about the necessity of elite leadership for guiding mass opinion. One of the main findings of this book is that this elitist view of Japanese foreign policy is largely wrong. Japanese public opinion toward security is stable and coherent and evolves in intelligible and generally rational ways.

Why Japanese Public Opinion Matters

This study finds that Japanese public opinion matters. Regarding the main focus of this book, the public remains overwhelmingly opposed to deploying the Japanese military overseas for combat operations. The ambivalent and conditional support that Japanese public opinion gave to deployments to the Indian Ocean and Iraq reflects not a change in public opinion but rather the extremely modest and noncombat nature of these deployments. Rather than hawkish elites molding public opinion, public opinion has molded and constrained the overseas deployment plans of hawkish elites.

Although much recent research has pointed to pacifist norms and anti-militarist political culture as a major constraint and influence on policy,¹⁴ very little has been published in English regarding Japanese public opinion as an independent variable affecting security policy since the 1970s.¹⁵ Given the tendency to dismiss public opinion already discussed, the omission of public opinion from studies of Japanese foreign policy is not surprising. *Rethinking Japanese Public Opinion and Security* intends to fill this void.

Although this book is primarily about how public opinion influences foreign policy in Japan, it also contributes to the nascent field of comparative

public opinion. As Ole Holsti observes, there is an unfulfilled need to place research about U.S. public opinion in “a broader comparative context.” This is especially important in terms of the “opinion-policy linkage,” which is “by far the least well developed of the areas of public opinion research.”¹⁶ In many ways this volume parallels Richard Sobel’s 2001 study examining how U.S. public opinion constrains U.S. overseas intervention, thereby helping to elucidate the impact of public opinion in democratic decision making regarding the projection of military force overseas. In one respect this book goes beyond that study by heeding Sobel’s call for future case studies “focusing on important distinctions: the types of involvement, from humanitarian relief to military conflict.”¹⁷ The sharp and enduring distinction the Japanese public draws between humanitarian and reconstruction missions on the one hand and combat missions on the other is one of the central findings of this book.

This study also has broader significance for a second reason: International public opinion regarding the war on terrorism, the use of military force, and attitudes toward the United States has been grabbing headlines and generating large multinational comparative opinion surveys, such as the Pew Center for the People and the Press polls and the Chicago Council on Global Affairs polls, the results of which often make headline news in the United States and elsewhere.¹⁸ The burning question for American policy makers and the public at large after 9/11 has been, “Why do they hate us?” Anomalously, Japan has often been omitted from these surveys, and this book aims to bring Japan back into the debate.

Although there is very little “hatred” of the United States in Japan, Japanese public opinion has often reacted in highly negative ways to the war on terrorism. Thus, in addition to shedding light on how public opinion affects Japan’s security strategy, this book also offers insights into how Japanese public opinion toward the United States and its war on terrorism diverges or converges with that found elsewhere. Japan is important for understanding global public opinion because of its distinctive mix of generally favorable views of the United States combined with strong opposition to the war in Iraq and skepticism about the use of military power to prosecute the war on terrorism or, more generally, as a foreign policy instrument. Japanese public opinion also matters in this larger context because Japan is the world’s third largest economy, a leading industrial and mature democracy, one of the world’s oldest non-Western democracies, and a leading East Asian democracy.

Finally, this book is also relevant for the debate in Washington about what the United States can expect from Japan as an ally. As noted above, many

observers see Japan emerging as a “normal” military power that will play a more significant role as a supporter of U.S. military operations throughout the world, if not as the “Britain of Asia.” This view assumes that a decline in so-called Japanese pacifism has corresponded to a rise in the ability of hawkish elites to influence public opinion and more generally have their way in policy making. This perspective has influenced Washington policy elites to place greater military demands on Japan.

During a visit in early 2007, then Vice President Dick Cheney called on Japan to “play a greater role in Iraq and Afghanistan to support the US-led war on terrorism.” This call came after the withdrawal of the GSDF (Ground Self-Defense Forces) from Samawah the previous summer following a two-year-plus deployment and on top of a then-continuing three-year-plus ASDF (Air Self-Defense Forces) transport mission between Kuwait and Iraq (this mission ended in early 2009) and a then-ongoing multiyear MSDF (Maritime Self-Defense Forces) rear-area logistical support deployment in the Indian Ocean.¹⁹ Similarly, a “new Armitage report,” issued in 2007, echoed the famous 2000 Armitage report call for Japan to emerge as the “Britain of Asia” by suggesting that Japan now seeks to play a global military role. Specifically, the 2007 report “encourages Washington to support Tokyo as a growing global power.”²⁰

Given this perspective, it is not surprising that many in Washington were blindsided by developments in 2007, when Japan, inexplicably from their view, stopped marching toward “normal nation” status and started pulling back from its overseas military support for the United States. Prime Minister Abe Shinzō led the ruling LDP (Liberal Democratic Party)–Kōmei ruling coalition to disastrous defeat in the July 2007 upper house election by making this election a referendum on constitutional reform, especially the war-renouncing Article 9, and on promoting a greater overseas military role.²¹

After the LDP-led coalition lost control of the upper house as a result of this massive defeat, Abe resigned, and his successor Fukuda Yasuo abandoned Abe’s ambitions for a larger international military role and struggled to overcome domestic opposition to maintaining even a reduced level of noncombat support for the U.S. war on terrorism. In turn, Fukuda’s successor, Asō Tarō, although a hawk like Abe, continued Fukuda’s policy of avoiding constitutional reform and deployments to conflict zones like Afghanistan. Observers in Washington were blindsided by these developments because they underestimated the influence of Japanese mass opinion and misunderstood the recent evolution in public attitudes that underlies this opinion.

Organization

Following this introduction to the theme of this book, the remainder of this volume is divided into nine chapters. Chapter 2 presents two competing theories of public opinion and its influence on policy, elitism, and pluralism, and it shows how these two theories are tested in this book. The rest of the chapter outlines Japanese public attitudes toward security; introduces a model of elite influence on public attitudes based on demonstration effects; outlines several hypotheses about the conditions under which measurable public opinion is likely to influence, or not influence, policy; and explains the methodology used in this book.

Chapter 3 presents survey data measuring Japanese mass attitudes about the utility of military force in the abstract and in a number of real-world contexts, results that are consistent with the attitudinal defensive realism outlined in Chapter 2. This chapter also examines Japanese public perceptions of the U.S. ally, as refracted through the public's underlying security attitudes. Two aspects of public opinion toward the United States are identified as key, fear of entrapment in U.S. wars and trust or mistrust of the United States.

Chapter 4 reevaluates the extent to which Japanese public opinion was pacifist during the Cold War versus the extent to which mistrust of the state combined with fear of entrapment in American wars conspired to limit support for the SDF (Self-Defense Forces) and the U.S. alliance. It also shows how the gradual dissipation of mistrust of the state and the end of the Vietnam War caused the public to become more supportive of the U.S. alliance and more accepting of the SDF as a valued disaster-relief organization with additional value for territorial defense. This chapter also shows the influence public opinion had in limiting elite attempts to dispatch the SDF overseas or expand defense spending.

Chapter 5 provides a case study of the first Gulf War in 1990–1991 that tests the influence of public opinion on elite plans to dispatch the SDF overseas for a combat-related mission and finds that public opinion played a decisive role in quashing the planned dispatch. Chapter 6 includes a case study, examining the influence of public opinion in shaping the nature and limits of new legislation allowing SDF units to be dispatched overseas for the first time to participate in U.N. peacekeeping. The rest of this chapter considers how public opinion reacted to and influenced actual overseas deployments, its response to and influence on the 1997 U.S.–Japan Revised Defense Guidelines and the related 1999 Surrounding Areas Emergency

Measures Law, and how the public was influenced by North Korea's test launch of a Taepodong missile over northern Japan in August 1998.

Case studies in Chapters 7 and 8 demonstrate the constraints that public opinion set on SDF overseas dispatches to support U.S. combat missions in Afghanistan and Iraq, constraints that proved more robust and limiting than most observers anticipated. Chapter 9 considers whether an Iraq syndrome emerged in Japanese public opinion after the withdrawal of Japanese ground forces from Iraq in July 2006 and the implications for Japan's international security role. The concluding chapter reviews the longer-term patterns of stability and evolution in Japanese public opinion toward security and spells out the implications for Japan's evolving security strategy, its alliance with the United States, and the study of public opinion and its impact on the foreign policies of advanced democracies.

Conclusions

Does Japanese public opinion matter? Does Japanese opinion tell us something about global public opinion or at least opinion in other advanced industrial democracies? Does Japanese mass opinion matter for Japanese policy?

Rethinking Japanese Public Opinion and Security argues that Japanese public opinion matters in the context of comparative global opinion as a major advanced industrial democracy, as the oldest East Asian democracy, and as one of the oldest non-Western democracies. The primary goal of this book is to demonstrate that Japanese public opinion matters because it has a significant influence on Japanese foreign and security policies. Japanese public opinion is influential because it is stable, coherent, and, regarding beliefs about the utility of military force, not easily or quickly swayed by elite attempts to influence it. Japanese public opinion matters because, despite the image of Japan as a "one-party democracy," competition has been the reality of postwar Japanese democracy.²²

Of course, as the degree of political competition waxes and wanes over time, so will the influence of public opinion. Nonetheless, even in the late 1950s, when LDP dominance was at its height, its attempts to pursue a more activist military role overseas were stifled by public opinion. As will be demonstrated in the case study chapters dealing with the Gulf War, overseas deployments within the context of U.N. peacekeeping, and the Afghan and Iraq wars, Japanese public opinion again thwarted the ambitious plans of LDP leaders, this time the plans of hawkish leaders such as Koizumi Jun'ichirō and Abe to have Japan begin playing a military role in international politics.

Public opposition to Koizumi's and Abe's hawkish foreign policy agendas in turn played a crucial role in weakening the LDP's five-decades-long rule and in providing the opposition DPJ (Democratic Party of Japan) with the political momentum they needed to oust the LDP-led coalition from power in Japan's historic August 2009 lower house election.²³ The results of this historic election reinforced the lesson, if any reinforcement was needed, that Japanese politicians defy public opinion at their peril.